Nienke Tjoelker

Andreas Friz's Letter on Tragedies (c1741–1744): An Eighteenth-Century Jesuit Contribution to Theatre Poetics. Drama and Theatre in Early Modern Europe vol. 4. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2015. Pp. 295. Hb, \$189, 136 euros.

In the last fifteen years, scholars like Johann Herczog, Giovanna Zanlonghi, and Bruna Filippi (among others) have made significantly new contributions to our understanding of Jesuit-related performance prior to the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773. Part of the very compelling Brill series on early modern European theatre edited by Jan Bloemendal, Nienke Tjoelker's excellent study of the heretofore unpublished *Epistola de tragaediis* by Andreas Friz, S.J., provides yet another important resource for understanding more deeply the development of Jesuit school drama.

Jesuit theatre often falls victim to broad, simplistic generalizations born from insufficient information. Tjoelker's work aims to confound "stereotypical prejudices about Jesuit theatre [...]" and offer a new insight into Jesuit drama of the eighteenth century" (3). The centerpiece of the volume is an edited English translation of the *Letter on Tragedies* written by Andreas Friz (1711–1790), who spent most of his life as a Jesuit teaching in various parts of the Habsburg empire. Written in Latin sometime between 1741 and 1744, while Friz was teaching poetry at the University of Graz, the *Letter on Tragedies* advances what Tjoelker considers an "innovative poetics [...]" inspired by French and Italian classicism" in order to "defend the use of school theatre in Jesuit colleges" (22). Although received wisdom has suggested that the Jesuit theatre of the eighteenth century was in decline, Friz's work affirms precisely the opposite: the Jesuit theatre in the decades prior to the suppression admitted a range of approaches even as it sought to remain in dialogue with contemporary performance culture.

Tjoelker begins the book with an extended introduction that provides a very useful overview of Jesuit theatre in German-speaking countries, Jesuit theatrical poetics, and the work of Andreas Friz. In response to the old chestnut that Jesuit theatre became progressively irrelevant, she asserts that the number and popularity of plays produced in places like Innsbruck attest to a vibrant "theatre practice [...]" in the German speaking towns up until late in the eighteenth century" (10). In support of Tjoelker's point, it is worth noting that the relatively late development of German-language theatre has often been explained, in part, by the continuing popularity of the Jesuit school drama deep into the eighteenth century.

In a very illuminating section of the introduction, Tjoelker prepares the reader to appreciate the genuine contribution Friz makes to Jesuit theatre his-

tory by relating the *Letter on Tragedies* to “classical sources, Jesuit poetics and French and Italian classical theatre,” laying bare in the process a “more nuanced view of eighteenth century theatre poetics” (19). This section provides a useful overview of dramatic theory and demonstrates the extent to which Friz and other Jesuits remained in lively conversation with the major producers of cultural artifacts. Most interesting to me is Tjoelker’s suggestion that Friz’s work “be seen in a context of educational reform,” that a renewed emphasis on “the moral function of theatre,” coupled with the ideals of French and Italian classicism as employed by Pierre Corneille and Jean Racine, Pietro Metastasio and Giovanni Granelli, could reinvigorate not only the Jesuit theatre but also the Jesuit educational enterprise in German-speaking lands (22). The author reminds us that the principle of accommodation remained part of the Jesuit *modus* even at the approach of the suppression.

The second major section of the book is the letter itself; the Latin text appears on the left-facing pages and the English translation on the right. In the translated and edited version Tjoelker has included headings and sub-headings that do not appear in the original, making it easier for the reader to appreciate the structure and movement of Friz’s treatise. Divided into three unequal parts, the “letter” is addressed to “an anonymous addressee, who is said to have asked Friz about the faults in tragedies and comedies of Jesuit writers” (24). The first section acknowledges that Jesuit playwrights expend too much energy in pleasing the audience, thus giving short shrift to the essential work of education. As Tjoelker notes, “there should be a balance between moral improvement and entertainment” (26). The second section affirms, in accordance with classical precedent, that for the drama to achieve its proper end of teaching and pleasing, the playwright must cultivate verisimilitude (or plausibility), which implies a respect for the unities of time and place as well as the proper representation of emotions. The third part of the letter focuses on how Jesuit playwrights should “procur[e] the attention of the audience,” namely by emphasizing clarity (i.e., the unity of action) and employing entertaining ornaments (e.g., music, dance, interludes) in ways that do not detract from the play’s subject (27). Concerned that the audience’s capacity to believe in the drama unfolding before them will be strained by theatrical inconsistencies, Friz poses questions to the Jesuit playwright that anticipate those that will be asked a century and a half later by the champions of theatrical realism. In all of this, however, Friz is committed to the Latin language as the medium for Jesuit drama, somewhat odd given that he models his poetics on the work of playwrights writing in the vernacular. Clearly, Friz’s desire to stay rooted in the pedagogical traditions of the Society remains in tension with the need to respond to a changing cultural landscape.

In a very interesting appendix to the volume, Tjoelker provides an introduction to Friz's analysis of the plays of Jean Racine (1639–1700). Though the analysis itself appears only in the original Latin, the English introduction provides a helpful orientation to Friz's appreciation of classical drama by examining his treatment of the iconic *Phèdre*. With regard to each of Racine's works, Friz takes care to describe the plot, list the characters, discuss the dramatic arc, reflect on the use of the passions "to evoke hate of vice and love of virtue," and consider the principal action in light of verisimilitude (176). The way Friz engages with classic French drama is very enlightening and the window that Tjoelker provides into his critical reading of the texts makes one wish that the *Analysis tragaediarum Racini* had been translated in full.

A few difficulties with the book are worth noting, particularly given the hefty price tag. First, there are some annoying little errors. The author's claim, for example, that "[a] brief commentary on the text is given in endnotes with the translation" is incorrect; in fact, the commentary appears in footnotes (72). One would hope that the editors would catch a mistake of this sort prior to publication. Second, some terms are employed in ways not in keeping with English usage. For example, the continual use of the word "choir" instead of "chorus" to refer to dramatic ensembles can be a bit jarring. Third, though most of the text is understandable, even when there is some English awkwardness, there are a few sections of the text that are absolutely opaque (e.g., "The love of parents for their sons is greater than for them not to prefer their sons' benefit and their praise over other ornaments, especially there, where we see the mind of our ancestors, or reason itself, and the judgements of wise men" (167)). These occasional hiccups aside, however, this volume will prove to be a great resource for those interested in Jesuit studies, theatre history, and dramatic theory.

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