

de Viau, Théophile. *Oeuvres complètes*. Volume IV: *Lettres françaises et latines*. Edition critique publiée par Guido Saba. (Paris: Nizet; Roma: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1987). Pp. 274.

Guido Saba 'a bien mérité de la République des Lettres'. He begins this fourth and final volume of the complete works of Théophile de Viau with a word of excuse for having taken a long time to come to the end of his undertaking. But everyone who has struggled to identify minor personages of the seventeenth century and discover just what their connections may have been with one another will understand the reasons for any delays and agree that there is no need for apologies. The basis of the volume is, naturally, the edition of Théophile's letters brought out in 1641, some fifteen years after their author's death, in Paris by Jean Mairet under the title *Nouvelles Oeuvres*. Five other letters by Théophile are also reprinted. Saba gives a useful chronology of the author's life and a sympathetic introduction to his letters. Great care has been taken over the establishment of the texts, and the annotation is both thorough and enlightening. Some uncertainties do remain, it is true, but it seems unlikely that many of them will be resolved unless new material unexpectedly comes to light. Mme Juliette Desjardins provides, along with translations of *Larissa* and the pamphlet *Theophilus in carcere*, French versions of the Latin letters. With a knowledge of Latin no longer a standard part of professional equipment of every serious student of French, these are, of course, most welcome. But it is unfortunate that they are consigned to an appendix; printing them 'Loeb' fashion would make consulting both the texts and their annotation decidedly more convenient. A 'lexique' offers help with problems over Théophile's vocabulary, and there is an index of the names of persons mentioned in the texts proper (though not those who are referred to only in the notes, which is a regrettable omission, since including them could well help some later scholar trying to explore networks of kinship and clientage). Finally come six pages of corrections and additions—mainly, it should be stressed, amounting to no more than very minor slips in proof reading—to the text of

the first three volumes of Saba's edition of Théophile. It is inevitable that readers will turn mainly to Théophile's letters for information about his life, and there is certainly quite a lot of material that is worth consideration, but, as Saba stresses, we can also see them in the context of the development of the letter as a literary genre from classical times, through Renaissance revivals in Europe in both Latin and the vernaculars and on into the French seventeenth century where it was cultivated with skill and urbanity. Théophile's part in the evolution of this form in which the French were to excel has long been recognized. Thanks to this fine edition there should now be an even wider awareness of his achievement.

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