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Avant le Roman: L'allégorie et l'émergence de la narration
française au 16 ème siècle (review)

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Mawly Bouchard. *Avant le Roman: L'allégorie et l'émergence de la narration française au 16^{ème} siècle*.

Faux Titre 280. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006. 370 pp. index. bibl. \$96. ISBN: 90-420-2005-9.

Mawly Bouchard's book has the great merit of dealing with a subject that has been of increasing interest for specialists of the French Renaissance in recent years — *le roman avant le roman* (the novel before the novel). The beauty of the title, however, is no compensation for the letdown one feels after reading the book, even keeping in mind that this is a pioneering work written prior to recent publications on the sixteenth-century novel. The problem is that the main subject is formulated as an aporia. How, indeed, can one offer a theoretical meditation on the notion of *roman* (romance or novel) when one refuses the category of Romanesque (the word as well as the thing) as this author does, on the pretext that the idea of genre would have been a "concept inopérant" ("an inoperative concept") for the writers of the time (13)? The essential importance of the generic approach to sixteenth-century literature was established quite some time ago, in fact, in the fine collected work *La notion de genre à la Renaissance* (1984).

Actually, the only suitable approach for discussing the subject of this study is the poetics of genres that Bouchard eschews: hence, the serious methodological difficulties. In her introduction, Bouchard proposes an interesting typology, putting into play three notions to which certain authors are supposedly linked: iconoclasm (Bèze and Calvin), iconophily (Erasmus, Budé, and Rabelais), and idolatry (Dolet, Scaliger, and Bembo). Unfortunately, the rest of the study tends to ignore this typology, which, in any case, is doubtless too broad and too anthropological to account for such a thing as the novel. Bouchard's analysis of texts relies on tools that have been selected somewhat arbitrarily — the study of readerships, for example — and are poorly adapted to the period. In fact, there is so little information on the reception of texts in the sixteenth century that it seems risky to draw conclusions on the basis of such a method, particularly when the author neglects to mention the key reference on this subject, Marcel de Grève's *L'Interprétation de Rabelais au XVI^e siècle* (1961), when discussing Rabelais.

A similar arbitrariness comes through in the choice of corpus examined, which comprises such disparate texts as *Jehan de Saintré* by Antoine de la Sale (chapter 2), *Voyage de Gênes* and *Voyage de Venise* by Jean Marot (chapter 2), *Illustrations de Gaule et Singularitez de Troye* by Jean Lemaire de Belges (chapter 3), *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua* by Rabelais (chapter 4), *Les Angoysses douloureuses* by Hélisenne de Crenne (chapter 5), the *Amadis de Gaule* (chapter 5), the *Franciade* by Pierre de Ronsard (chapter 6), and the *Tragiques* by Agrippa d'Aubigné (chapter 7). For sole justification, Bouchard states her desire to bring together the largest possible number of texts having the common denominator of "narration en romant" ("narration in the popular language" [30]). Her choice appears all the more debatable in that the author insists on assigning a single meaning to the word *romant* — that of popular language — whereas the word was sometimes used as a generic category by authors of the period, either to refer to the novel of chivalry

generally held in contempt, or to define a genre that enjoyed a certain distinction at the time, as was the case for Ronsard, who called his *Franciade* a *roman* (novel). Although the boundaries of the sixteenth-century novel may well have been blurred, varying from one author and one period of time to another, the subject nevertheless needs to be clearly defined.

Furthermore, a number of misinterpretations and errors mar the text as a whole. With regard to rhetoric, for example, the author seems unaware of the meaning of *ethos* in Aristotelian rhetoric, which involves the construction of the speaking subject as the operative factor in discourse. Bouchard appears to make *ethos* an attribute of the addressee, as in “tenir compte des attentes du destinataire, de son *ethos*” (“to take into consideration the expectations of the person addressed, of his *ethos*” [200]), whereas the issue here is obviously *pathos*. Deplorable as well is a confusion vis-à-vis certain key texts, which has the author concluding that “Pour Ronsard, la poésie se distingue fondamentalement de la théologie” (“For Ronsard, poetry is fundamentally different from theology,” 264). However, the *Abbrégé de l'art poétique françois* (1566) by the same Ronsard clearly states that poetry is nothing more than a *Theologie allegorique*, or allegorical theology. We note, too, a chronological error that places the novel *Angoysses douloureuses* (1538) in “la deuxième moitié du XVI^e siècle” (“the second half of the sixteenth century” [20]).

In summary, Bouchard has presented us with a study as bold and ambitious as it is unfocussed and inconclusive. The valuable collected work, *Le Roman français au XVI^e siècle ou le renouveau d'un genre dans le contexte européen* (2005), under the direction of Michèle Clément and Pascale Mounier, has satisfactorily demonstrated that the poetics of genres can contribute to solid findings on the subject of the novel before the novel.

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Maistre Chevalet. *La vie de Saint Christofle*.

Ed. Pierre Servet. Textes Littéraires Français. Geneva: Librairie Droz S. A., 2006. 1102 pp. index. illus. gloss. bibl. CHF125. ISBN: 2-600-01018-1.

Despite both Erasmus and the Vatican, Christopher remains a favorite saint. The fearsome and boastful giant from folklore named Reprobe, who wishes simply to serve the strongest master, follows first a king, then the devil himself, before converting from classical paganism and, baptized Christofle, carries the burdens of the world across a dangerous river with the Christ child on his shoulder. The story is nowhere better presented than in this *mystère* “composée en rime françoise et par personnages” (almost 20,000 verses and 118 *personnages*) dating ca. 1510–14, produced at Grenoble in four *journées* (16–19 June 1527), and published in 1530.

With this edition, we can see that “maistre Chevalet” was indeed a master at the comic genre of the mystery play. The editor has done an admirable job in elucidating the text in a number of different lights. A footnote, when the emperor in his last, futile attempt to defeat the Christians says “il est ja tart,” points the