

Black Sea, Caucasus, and Balkans starting in the mid-1600s. Thanks to Ágoston's quiet but quite forceful revisionist study, historians may now begin to take up such worthy comparative projects in what we can only hope will be a new "post-Orientalist" perspective.



Poétique de Georges Chastelain (1415–1475): "Un cristal mucié en un coffre."

Estelle Doudet. Paris: Champion, 2005. 880 pp. €120.00. ISBN 2-7453-1103-4.

REVIEWED BY: Bas Jongenelen, Fontys University of Professional Education, Tilburg

At first I was a bit disappointed when I got this book in hand, having expected more texts by Chastelain himself and fewer comments by the editor. But when I started reading, my objections were quickly gone. Estelle Doudet has produced a great and profound study on this forgotten author, or, to say it in the words of the title: a great and profound study on "a moldy crystal in a chest." The book reads almost like a novel; it would seem that Doudet took courses in creative writing. Of course, it is a matter of rhetoric, but that is what *Poétique de Georges Chastelain* is all about.

Chastelain was one of the *Grands Rhétoriciens* who were famous in the fifteenth and the first half of the sixteenth century. The *Rhétoriciens* included Eustache Deschamps, Olivier de la Marche, Philippe de Commynes, and Jean Molinet. These writers tried to realize the ideal of the *noble rhétorique*, as Deschamps put it. They wanted to found a new aristocracy of literature, based in the confidence of the power of language and the flamboyant mastery of an ancient tradition. In other words, in a flowery language they used old themes and motives. Modern readers have problems with the numerous *ornemens* which are in the center of the *Rhétoriciens'* literature, but in those days the art of the *ornatus* was part of the identity of the author.

Perhaps Georges Chastelain was the cradle of the *Grand Rhétorique*; in a way, he founded this movement. At the Burgundian court, Chastelain got the opportunity to set the example for his contemporaries, and his writing showed other authors a new style. His work is like a hermeneutic system which calls for an interpretation and analysis.

Chastelain became writer and historiographer at the Burgundian court in 1455. He wanted to create a new kind of literature which corresponded with the prestige of the Burgundian Duke Philip the Good. In order to achieve that task, he had to invent a myth about his own person: he made himself into a knight and writer; he changed his name into George the Adventurer; and he gave himself the title *l'orateur*. Now the writer was upgraded and fit for the official function. He studied theological issues with the result that his own texts were imbued with a sense of the profound and that his rhetoric developed a sacred tone. He sought transcendent literature for a Duke Philip with transcendent qualities. Princes were sent by God to govern the country, and Chastelain was sent by God to write about Philip. The texts he wrote were not only chronicles to glorify the duke and the house of Burgundy, but they were semisacred texts themselves—to be read as a mixture of history and theology. This was not typical of medieval thought since most medieval writers were considered as modest.

The association with his duke raised Chastelain's reputation among the cadre of European writers (the Duke of Burgundy was one of the most important noblemen of Europe—Chastelain was thus one of the most important writers of Europe). Chastelain had the power of words, while Philip had the power of politics. Every act of Philip was noble, in war or in peace, and Chastelain had to make sure that he wrote those noble acts in his own noble lit-

erature. In 1473 Chastelain was knighted because of his political and moral engagement. It seems that this opportunity inspired him to great deeds; it gave the occasion to make a synthesis of all the genres in which an official writer should be able to write. From this day Chastelain mingled lyrics, history, political pamphlets, didactical writings, and official letters into one genre—the rhetoric. The historiographer and poet Chastelain fused into one new person—the *Rhétoricien*.

The *Rhétoricien* wants to say a lot in each text, or maybe better: he wants to say everything in one text. Therefore, he uses allegory—with one metaphor he shows a complete world, a lyrical world, a political world, a historical world, and a theological world, and so on and on. The poetics of the *Grands Rhétoriciens* are such that the reader has to have knowledge about all these worlds to understand completely the meanings of the text. Estelle Doudet's work has explored the allegorical world of the *Rhétoriciens* and leaves them a bit more revealed.



The Renaissance Portrait in France and England: A Comparative Study. Dana

Bentley-Cranch. Paris: Champion, 2004. 271 pp + 78 plates. €29.00. ISBN 2-7453-0931-5.

REVIEWED BY: Thomas F. Mayer, Augustana College

It is a little startling to be told that a comparative study has failed because there is, after all, nothing to compare. A narrative framework of the vicissitudes of Anglo-French diplomacy for a book about portraiture may also seem a little odd. Both are not really explained until page 165, where Dana Bentley-Cranch discusses one of the most famous sixteenth-century English paintings, Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors*. This portrait of two French diplomats taken in England does indeed throw up useful comparative insights and is certainly well set within the author's suggested context. But even this moment quickly becomes eccentric, above all because Holbein never succeeded in securing a place in the English court and thus had no imitators in England. According to Bentley-Cranch, this is also because the painting was immediately spirited away to France where, she speculates, it was probably kept under wraps. Why? She is at least candid about labeling her answer speculation, an inveterate, pronounced, and disturbing propensity throughout the book. Although she never actually spells it out, she offers the (not implausible) theory that the painting became a sort of homosexual love token from the patron, Jean de Dinteville, to his friend and the other subject, Georges de Selve. The author's contention that Holbein was a remarkably quick worker, completing his painting between 23 May and 18 November 1533 without benefit of an atelier, may raise more eyebrows.

The study begins in 1422 and traces the development of "the Renaissance portrait" out of its late medieval predecessors, the effigy and the history. The first of these was essentially supplanted by the new mode of portraiture, while the second, especially popular for its "pluritemporality" or representation of its subject at various moments of his or her life, survived right into the seventeenth century and even later, albeit with a different species referent (the author adverts to one of George Stubbs's horse portraits as evidence). Bentley-Cranch stresses the political function of portraits as tokens of one-upmanship in diplomatic relations. In common with older modes of doing art history, the author focuses on particular exemplars in portraiture, especially the Clouets in France and Nicholas Hilliard in England, and the nearly distinctively English form of the miniature portrait. Attention is also directed to techniques, materials, and, perhaps most interestingly, costume, even if it seems a bit