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Elisabeth Hodges, *Urban Poetics in the French Renaissance*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008. viii + 154. Illustrations, Notes, bibliography, and index. \$99.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN: 978-0-7546-6206-8.

Review by Michael J. Giordano, Wayne State University.

The overarching goal of this study is to “make the city speak” (p. 5) by analyzing the interactions between urban spaces and the literary expressions of individual subjects or social institutions that unfold in response to their physical environment. Brought under focus are François Villon, Joan of Arc, the anonymous fifteenth-century *Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris*, Gilles Corrozet, Maurice Scève, and Michel de Montaigne. In the past twenty years there have been highly successful theoretical and interpretative works that have animated diverse writings in dialogue with real or imaginary spaces and surroundings. In these studies, the main thrust is not to focus one environment on one subject but rather to marshal a variety of ‘mapping systems’ on many spatio-temporal phenomena. These include geography, city structure, cartography, explorations to new worlds (real or fictional), travel itineraries, and the like as starting points for revealing a virtual kaleidoscope of shifting and diverse topographies. Among the topics treated are sociology of geography, mapping and nationhood, the visual topoi of printing and epistemological order, exterior and interior landscapes, engraving and the eclogue, the social symbolisms of travel-logs and travel guides. Also studied are the event-provoking power of sites, urban anthropology, film cartographies and plot dynamics, social orders and city planning, descriptive anatomy and political order, and the lyric response to subjects and places.

In chapter one entitled “Envisioning the City”, Hodges sets the theme of her chapter by citing the words of the critic Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet who views urban literature as a literary trope or a “nouvelle matière lyrique” (a new lyric subject-matter). As Hodges states, the city is “the site in which architecture, polity, community, and individual coalesced” (p. 9), and she brings this out by careful, close reading of Villon’s *Grand Testament* (1489) and the anonymous chronicle *Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris* (1405-1444). One of her main points is that Villon used places of commercial exchange, religious ritual and architectural form to monumentalize familiar sites and everyday life. Indeed, his bittersweet pardon and release from the hardships of Mehun prison is simultaneous with the existential threat of lost time, redemption, and reinvention. Villon’s literary shifts from Paris to Notre-Dame Cathedral to Fat Margot’s brothel renew real roving and peregrinations that offer a temporary palliative to the fate of all “Frères humains” (p. 14). The fragile, corruptible body serves as the intersection of an exchange where the *Testament* converts material poverty into the affirmation of reason and lucidity and the posterity of future readers who will become his heirs.

Villon’s poetics creates a subjective anthropology of ever-inspiring sites starting from contemporary places to ancient Rome, timeless nature and “the drive to bring back nature to French soil” (p. 15). The result of this nostalgia is a distillation of the French national character that consoles the depredations “of time, forgetting, and loss” (p. 16). Returning to the well-traveled literary and artistic tradition of assessing the relative advantages of city versus country life, Villon opts for the former because it increases the “aise” (ease) of satisfying pleasure, given the multitude of opportunities in a circumscribed space for love making, eating, and voyeuristic curiosity (p. 19). Villon’s trope on city life celebrates the imbibing of intense, rare, and vivid sensations capable of making him return to his infancy and rekindle

memories that in effect are “forms of psychogenesis” (p. 21). Among these sensations are the sounds and idioms of Parisian women’s voices in the marketplace, especially the “cauquetieres” (saleswomen or wheelers and dealers, p. 24) to whom Villon attributes absolute mastery and superiority in mercantile skills. The echoes of their voices in Villon’s mind and their singing jargon allow him to bring together distant parts of Paris together in his memory and poetry.

Hodges summons a valuable source of Paris history in the anonymous, fact collecting chronicle titled *Journal d’un bourgeois de Paris*. She uses this work to decipher the underlying attitudes of a Bergundian sympathizer in relation to the vilification of Joan of Arc. Here she makes good use of De Certeau’s observation that Joan’s indictment is pressed all the more convincingly by her enemies’ *precise* use of damning discourses, such as black magic and teratology, to mime verisimilitude and ‘seal the facts’ as it were (p. 30). In the last section of chapter one, “Death and the City,” Hodges cites the *Journal* as unique document in virtue of its juxtaposing extraordinary events like the Joan of Arc narrative and ordinary life routines where plays and mercantile hubbub stood along side of plagues, heat waves, public executions, and wars (p. 39).

Chapter two is one of the gems of Hodges’ research and it is entitled “Corrozet and the Sense of Place.” Gilles Corrozet was one of the foremost French humanists of the sixteenth-century, a *véritable homme de la Renaissance*, who in addition to being a highly successful bookseller, produced sumptuous emblem books (one bi-lingual), histories, poems, a moralized Old Testament picture book, and an illustrated *Vies et motz dorez des sept sages de Grèce*. The subject of this chapter bears on another of Corrozet’s successful enterprises, the production of two guidebooks, one published in 1532 titled *La Fleur des antiquitez, singularitez et excellences de la plus que noble et triomphante ville et cité de Paris, capitale du royaume de France*, the other appearing in 1539 called *Le Cathologie des villes et citez assises et troys Gaules, avec ung traicte des fleuves et fontaines*. Especially noteworthy is the fact that Corrozet is one of the first authors of the century to develop the genre of urban history combining narrative and illustration. Just as interesting is the fact that both books provided a model for producing cosmographies and national atlases for such figures as Sebastian Münster, Antoine du Pinet, Georg Braun, and Franz Hogenberg. As Hodges’ abundant footnotes make clear, there was close collaboration among authors, printers, and book sellers. Without doubt Corrozet helped to make and benefited from what could be called the golden age of the illustrated, printed book in France (1530s-1550s), and such printers of pictorial literature such as Denis Janot in Paris could have supplied woodcuts for his *Cathologie*.

The value of Hodges’ analysis is that she is supremely aware of the many imaginative uses made of guidebooks, and she supplies a cornucopia of critical concepts strongly anchored in the archives of cartography, book production and dissemination, and political history. What functions did Corrozet’s works fulfill? Certainly the guidebooks bound individuals to places in order to crystallize a national identity firmly rooted in the growth of the nobility and the monarchy. Similarly, by guiding the reader from location to location marked by toponyms, the urban history constructed a prestigious, mythic genealogy of French civilization as heir of Athens and Rome. This was especially necessary considering that since there were so many lacunae in French history, the urban narratives could create a more coherent trajectory of past to present by relating place names to political development. Paul Zumthor has shown that such unions of praise, place, and genealogy derive from the rhetorical tradition of *laudatio* subsequently injected into urban history. Moreover, the guidebook tends to consolidate relatively independent regions by monumentalizing the various achievements of individuals tied to sites as properly French accomplishments. Such imaginary consolidation served state purposes as did the circulation of French guidebooks as propaganda on the international level; but just as easily, the impulse to urban exemplarity and sophistication could be imitated by other nations and turned against France by similar means.

Other telling historical observations abound of which only a few can be mentioned. There is the distinction between two general cartographical practices called “geography” and “chorography” thought

by Ptolemy (p. 45) to be irreconcilable procedures but nevertheless carried into the sixteenth-century. The first is the scientific plotting of spatial coordinates by empirical observation and mathematical measurement proportionally displayed in the diagrammatic relation of *part to whole*. On the other hand, “chorography,” as in the work of Peter Apian’s *Cosmographia* (1551), casts a more subjective eye on the canvas of space much as the point of view of the painter who selects certain *details* (“cities, seaports, peoples, countries, the routes of rivers ... buildings, houses, towers,” p. 48)” to give a qualitative image and feeling of the site. In contrasting the two practices, one may say that scientific measurement is to geography as physiognomy is to topographical facial features and character. Needless to say, in selecting the finest details of a singular place, chorography overlaps with another descriptive genre, the blazon, which is an illustration of a part of an organic series. Also of interest is that guidebooks such as Corrozet’s *Antiquitez et singularitez de Paris* join with emblem books in the practice of pictorial description and moral gloss. Corrozet, one of the primary producers of emblematic literature, organizes his guidebook around the similar aesthetic of the pictorial narrative of a site followed by a short recap in a didactic poem. On a third point more general in nature, Hodges insightfully captures the paradox of guidebooks as being reproductions of singular places, but nonetheless fully capable of making portable the means to suffuse individual place with deeply personal, compelling affect (pp. 63-64).

Hodges frames chapter three with the useful historical observation that “after Jean Lemaire de Belges and Clément Marot, Maurice Scève’s *La Saulsaye: Eglogue de la vie solitaire* is one of the first French eclogues to appear in print” (pp. 77-78). In addition, Maurice Scève holds an important place in Renaissance literary history as the author of France’s first *canzoniere* in the manner of Petrarch’s *Rime* and also the first French writer of *imprese*. Indeed, the literary historian Dorothy Coleman cites Scève as the only writer in the sixteenth century to make extensive use of devices in a sustained, serious work on love. If we are to thank such scholars as Peter Sharratt for increasing our knowledge of the history of illustrated Renaissance literature (*Bernard Salomon: Illustrateur Lyonnais*, 2005), we must also pay tribute to critics such as Elizabeth Hodges for the close textual scrutiny of concrete meanings inscribed in such literature. Hodges takes the reader into a remarkable critical dimension of microscopic analysis filtering Scève’s melancholic poetic eclogue through the prismatic spectrum of two woodcuts suffusing this unsettling pastoral. One of the dramatis personae is a shepherd named Philerme (“lover of solitude”) who has fled the vertiginous whirlwind of Lyon at the height of its glory in search of the virtues of solitary life. The immediate issue is the manner in which Philerme seeks to remedy and conserve himself after the shattering depredations of two alienating loves. His friend and debating adversary, aptly named Antire, criticizes Philerme for exiling himself so far from urban society that his place of refuge is really a fall into the abyss of melancholy.

Attributed to Bernard Salomon and illustrating the *Saulsaye (Willow Grove)* are two vignettes, one placed immediately after the work’s title and before the poetry proper, and another placed at approximately the middle of the work. Both illustrations function as visual condensations and nodal points of Scève’s highly paradoxical treatment of the traditional dichotomy between city and country. In the first cut heading the *Saulsaye*, we see in the foreground two shepherds occupying what one might term a *presqu’île* near the confluence of the Rhône and Saône whose waters separate them from the rising city-scape of Lyon in the background. One of the shepherds whom Hodges presumes to be Antire captures Philerme’s attention by pointing to what is probably Mont Fourvière (“Mountain of Venus”) at the summit of Lyon which itself is surrounded at its banks by distinctive buildings and fortifications. Thus, the site of the shepherds’ debate is characterized by a location neither inside nor completely outside Lyon, “a liminal vantage point” (p. 101) that is neither wholly city nor country.

The second vignette blurs this spatial ambiguity even further by its depiction of the mythic origins of the willow grove which in appearance is consoling but in actuality is a “world denatured” (p. 91). Antire recounts the tale depicted by a woodcut which is dramatically animated by Hodges’ attentive analysis of the pictorial details and their galvanizing effects on the poem. This is a telling application of Horace’s *ut pictura poesis* and a marvel of intersemiotic translation. As if emblematically relating pictorial to verbal

gloss, Antire tells of partially clad nymphs walking along the river banks on a torrid day when they are interrupted by horned sylvan deities who beckon them to dance. Discovering all too late that familiar bucolic flutes are playing the prelude to violent lust, the nymphs attempt to drown themselves in the river to protect their virtue. In the vignette, their upward arching arms slowly become branches, for as the poem clarifies, the god of the Arar (a tributary of the Saône) saves them by a slow, painful transformation into tearful willows. Antire's de-mystification of the pastoral ideal though intended to rouse Philermé from his self-imposed exile only compounds his melancholy that merges with pictorial symbols of perpetual mourning, infertility, speechlessness, horror, implied guilt, sterility, and stasis. Hodges deftly points up Scève's particular treatment of the pastoral that is located neither in the city nor the country, and which is neither a Petrarchan consolation nor a hermetic escape, neither life nor death, but the negative side of the word utopia, "the negation of place" (p. 97).

Chapter four entitled "Montaigne's Topophilia" (p. 103) introduces the notion of relation of perspectives by contrasting the verisimilitude of Renaissance cartographers with the artists' "newly singular point of view" (p. 103). The "topophilia" of Montaigne is the visual figuration of places that "affects not only the way objects appear in relation to one another in a visual field, [but] also participates in coding how viewers direct their gaze, how they move through their own relation to space." In this respect "seeing was understood as equivalent to a form of reading" on canvases and in books (pp. 103-104). Hodges brings these concepts to bear on the Montaigne's *Journal de voyage* and makes the interesting observation that the essayist's travel poetics might be called "a parallel montage" (p. 111) between the events of historical time and their translation into the *hic* and *nunc* of anthropological experiences. She aptly likens this to Marc Augé's study of the Paris metro that "unearths the relations between self and others in transit from place to place" (p. 111).

Hodges also finds that in the Montaigne's *Journal de Voyage* the author-traveler tends to define Rome's sterility as the absence of its opposite, Paris. Moreover, she notes that while at the same time that Montaigne feels the grandeur of Rome epitomized positively as *the eternal city*, its contemporary atmosphere of infertility instills in the traveler a nostalgia that is "strangely more eternal than the 'eternal city'" (p. 113). Hodges points up another paradox, namely that *flânerie* in Rome prompts a certain *jeu de regard* that she defines as "an art of perception of being seen walking and of walking while seeing" (p. 116). While strolling through Rome's streets with the longing of total vision, Montaigne only captures meretricious fragments. This is like his view of courtesans who cunningly display only the most seductive of their physical charms, a strategy that I would term the emblazoning of erotic consumption.

Observing that in *De la vanité* Montaigne describes the *Essais* themselves as "marquetricie," Hodges is able to relate topophilia to textual style, travel, and commerce. The term "marquetricie" denotes Montaigne's numerous additions to the successive editions of the *Essais* (pp. 124-125). In terms of textual growth, the term denotes inlaid designs or ornaments that could be inserted into set pieces. From this fact Hodges infers a telling paradox of place and space. While Montaigne says "My book is always one," in the same paragraph he refers to the mobile process of "marquetricie" as his constant process of intarsia—additions, transpositions, and recombinations similar to emblematic insertions (p. 123). Linked to this idea of *marquetricie* is what Hodges calls "marketability" that is located in the bookseller's shop which for commercial exchange multiply textual intarsia through public distribution and dissemination (p. 124). Needless to say, displacement is the intarsia to journey since each step from site to site is the subjective addition to the life of affect. The play of one and many applies to another seminal concept. In *De la vanité*, Montaigne claims to be a citizen of nowhere. This allows him to imagine a contrast in subjective identification, for France (Paris) marks his temporal origins while Rome the eternal city is given atemporal status. Indeed, the fact that contemporary Romans made Montaigne an honorary citizen enhances his sense of place beyond place.

Hodges ends her study with an Epilogue titled “The Topology of the Subject” by contrasting Montaigne with Descartes. In the *Discours de la méthode*, the philosopher evinces a strong preference for the concept of the city as a rationally planned, diagrammatical charted unity. This sense of place is virtually a geometric design created (as Hodges states) by the “lone engineer” oriented to his own mathematical perfection (p. 134). It is a solitary and convergent activity. On the contrary Montaigne’s places emerge as divergent relations oriented to others in a mobile creation of subjects and subjectivities.

Hodges’ book is a welcome contribution to our knowledge of urban landscapes. It deftly deploys a wide range of methodological approaches to tap the deeper meaning of cartographic, geographic, and sociological significance of her subject. It should be read in tandem with other studies on the visual such as those of Tom Conley, Denis Cosgrove, Frank Lestringant, and Cynthia Skenazi. Certainly the useful Epilogue contrasting Montaigne and Descartes could be expanded for future research by engagement with Gilles Deleuze’s *Le Pli: Leibniz et le Baroque*. I highly recommend this book for the abundance of historical information and concepts, its helpful illustrations, well-developed notes, index, and bibliography. Hodge’s prose here and there but especially in the section on Montaigne should have been clearer in outline. Better relief should have been given to distinguish between principal and subsidiary points. The expression “what is at stake” is overused. On the other hand, Hodges provides eye-opening, close readings of urban literature that heighten our appreciation of word and image. By establishing her own critical voice, Hodges produces a well-digested study that makes a solid contribution to our knowledge of the Renaissance.

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