

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

reader to the “mise en scène” and a “correspondance entre cette nuit tombante de l’action et la fin de ce quatrième jour de représentation” (1012). The editor has added *didascalies* throughout the text to help us see just who is on stage. When both armies are ready to fight and the scene switches from one to the other, it is good to have the cue that we are “Du côté des Romains” or “Du côté de Samos” (241). Along with theatrical and dramatic techniques, the edition accounts for numerous lyrical forms that highlight the action. Major characters introduce themselves with a monologue in a *ballade*. Departures and other significant moments of the action, notably battles and tortures, are signaled by *rondeaux* and other techniques of *la Grande Rhétorique*. The grammar of the text is well accounted for in the introduction, and the wealth of popular language that characterizes the play throughout is thoroughly referenced in footnotes and in a welcome “liste des proverbes et expressions” in an appendix. Other appendices include a helpful glossary buttressed by numerous footnotes to the slang in the text, an index nominum, and a *dramatis personae*. The edition is very carefully done. I note a missing *didascalie* (934) and wonder why we have two distinct interpretations of the onomastics of the executioner’s name Morgalan (148 and 247), but these are very minor concerns.

Typical of the genre, the world of this play is populated by a series of foolish and clownish pairs, including *le fol* and *la folle*, *jongleurs*, and some *tyrans* that easily recall the Three Stooges, if not the Marx Brothers. One villain is so stupid that when he is asked “Est ce le chemyn de Surie?” he answers “Nenny, c’est le chemin publicque” (104). When Satan loses Christofle to God, Lucifer has Proserpine spank him with a hot pan. The blind man sends his valet to beg but when the valet announces that his master lost his sight “[à] la taverne pour trop boyre,” he interrupts: “Mais ta forte fiebvre quartayne! / Tu me porte bien peu d’honneur!” maintaining that he should be presented as “ung grant seigneur / Adveuglé par tyrannye / Des Turcs” (626). As the editor notes, the *fatiste*, or playwright, must have known farces well, and these earthy scenes are genuinely funny.

Folkloric and popular aspects of the play are framed by the initial and final actions of a war between the Emperor Dioclétien and a vassal king named Danus (Damned), who experiences a miracle while putting Christofle to death and becomes a Christian. The political chaos mirrors the upside-down and scatological tone of the comic characters, creating what must have been a fine and varied spectacle while at the same time figuring the fallen world to be redeemed through the equally exciting sight of the blood of martyrs. The introduction convincingly suggests the political background of the Italian Wars and the struggle against the Hapsburgs, but the play is primarily a demonstration of religious action in (and against) the world. Many martyrs precede Christofle by going willingly to torture and death but each prays to Mary who intercedes for them, and Dieu sends his angels to recuperate the souls. Comic, brutal, edifying: this is a fine play, well presented.

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