

Le "De Sensu" de Charles de Bovelles (1511): Conception philosophique des sens et figuration de la pensée. Anne-Hélène Klinger-Dollé, ed.

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The intellectually exuberant and adventurous Charles de Bovelles (1479–ca. 1567) was first a student and then a collaborator of the French arts master Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples. At the University of Paris, Bovelles's students included such notables as Beatus

Rhenanus. He traveled through the Rhineland, visited monasteries and shrines through the Alps, and debated Jewish rabbis in Rome, before retiring to his native Picardy. There he contributed to the Renaissance revival of Ramon Lull's thought while writing innovative works on number theory, practical geometry, mystical theology, exploratory studies of French proverbs and the vernacular, and philosophical method.

Now Anne-Hélène Klinger-Dollé gives us a two-fold gift: a substantial monograph, alongside an edition and translation of Bovelles's *De Sensu* (1511). The volume opens up a formative moment in early modern cultural history—a transition point for universities, print, and French humanism—and will sit next to classic studies of Bovelles by Faye, Margolin, and Victor. Two features of Bovelles's books have especially fascinated historians: the many figures Bovelles uses throughout, and his views on philosophy in making one wise. Klinger-Dollé connects these two features, arguing that Bovelles's "figural thought" and approach to wisdom share goals with the broader project in Lefèvre's circle of a renovation of university arts education. Bovelles and his colleagues were praised for eloquence and other virtues pertinent to the republic of letters, but Klinger-Dollé persuasively shows that they themselves always kept pedagogy in view. Thus the dialogues, ludic images and metaphors, and mathematical analogies are devices attuned to helping the student's mind move "upward," from simply seeing the world to seeing the rational, divine causes behind the appearances. Klinger-Dollé sensibly keeps both his philosophical and theological goals in view. Even in the dialogue *De Immortalitate Animae* (1551), written long after his teaching at Paris, Bovelles's ubiquitous figures turn out to be the "crowning of pedagogical demonstration" (169).

De Sensu (1511) is a wise choice, partly because Bovelles has novel and interesting things to say about the senses. He is one of few early modern theorists to make hearing the highest sense, departing from the usual lionization of sight. But *De Sensu* deserves more readers for other reasons too. Bovelles did not aim to overturn the traditional hierarchy of the senses. Like most, he was a rationalist, putting soul well above body. The point, Klinger-Dollé suggests, was to detail the steps between body and mind—the senses are the pivot on which Bovelles's philosophy of man turns. Thus Bovelles was keenly aware of *medium* in all its meanings. Ernst Cassirer presented Bovelles's *De Sapiente* (1511) as an archetypal work of Renaissance thought, including an edition in his *Individuum und Kosmos* of 1927, in which man is at the center of the cosmos, between earth and heaven. But Klinger-Dollé reads *De Sapiente* with its companion treatise *De Sensu*, and so shows that Bovelles puts man in this unique place as a medium, as the "eye of creation" (150; see also 348). Man is the midpoint because he senses all things from the heavens above to earth below, representing them within the intellect. Therefore, Bovelles is peculiarly interested in what engages the senses: speech, writing, and indeed all of what Klinger-Dollé calls "sensible mediations" including "the beauty of nature, images, or the figure of the incarnate Christ" (180). The perspective of *De Sensu* sets up a patient account of the diverse illustrations that characterize Bovelles's theology and philosophy in which Bovelles explains key concepts through figures as much as text. Bovelles prized mathematical figures because they most obviously serve as a medium

between matter and intellectual concepts; but Klinger-Dollé also highlights their other purposes in combinatorics, visual invention, memorization, and pleasure.

A literary angle of approach affords this study many strengths. It sidesteps some of the greatest difficulties in reading Bovelles. He rarely cites sources, preferring instead to synthesize anew. So instead of divining sources or offering philosophical reconstruction, this study closely attends to Bovelles's style of thought and language, using *De Sensu* to reinterpret the arc of his own works; there remains plenty of work to do to delineate his positions more clearly within contemporary debates. The approach also bears clear fruit in the edition and translation, for Klinger-Dollé is acutely sensitive to Bovelles's language in all its idiosyncratic glory, peppered with neologisms that are here rendered sensitively. Setting *De Sensu* within the breadth of Bovelles's remarkable oeuvre and the arts teaching of Lefèvre, this study offers text and interpretation to help us understand a key juncture in the intellectual culture of Renaissance France.

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