

*Prosopopée et persona à la Renaissance.* Blandine Perona.  
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The conjunction of the two concepts put forth in the title stems from Quintilian's definition of *prosopopoeia* as "fictio personarum" (9.2.29). Being a more or less fictional staging of the enunciation, prosopopoeia raises the fundamental question of the degree to

which the author as a person is indeed “im-personated” by the persona speaking in the text. The writer’s hiding behind fictional masks is the leitmotiv running through the chapters of Perona’s monograph, which are respectively devoted to Erasmus, Rabelais, Louise Labé, Montaigne, and Béroalde de Verville.

The problem of the writer’s elusive presence hints back at the wars waged by Gérard Defaux against postmodernism; yet Foucault and Deleuze are only indirectly quoted in the book (the latter without being acknowledged in the “Index des auteurs critiques”). Despite the scarcity of such allusions, the writer’s self-fashioning and control seem to still be hot issues among young French early modernists, as demonstrated by Guillaume Berthon’s *L’intention du poète: Clément Marot “auteur,”* which is another interesting dissertation turned into a monograph and published in 2014 by Classiques Garnier as the subsequent volume in the same editorial series as Perona’s book. However, the theoretical presuppositions, such as the much-alluded-to inherent deficiency of language, constitute only the background of Perona’s argument, which remains overall a solid piece of literary history, firmly grounded in sound philology, as evidenced by the judicious comparison of different editions of the *Moyen de Parvenir* or the contrasted readings of the 1595 version of the *Essais* and Montaigne’s annotations to the “Exemplaire de Bordeaux.”

Perona does not intend to circumscribe the prosopopoeia in Renaissance rhetoric and literature, a task already accomplished by Gavin Alexander and Véronique Montagne in their articles from 2007 and 2008 (the former absent from the bibliography). She wants rather to use this concept broadly in conjunction with other figures such as *ethopea*, *sermocinatio*, *enargeia*, *declamatio*, paradoxical encomium, emphasis, and irony as a gateway to the analysis of impersonations of the authorial voice in Renaissance polyphony.

The starting point of such a discussion is Erasmus and his interest in Lucan (mostly in the *Lingua*, *De Duplici Copia*, the *Ciceronianus*, and *The Praise of Folly*). The Erasmian art of dialogues distorts the rhetorical strategies inherited from Quintilian but also highlights these distortions, thus establishing a pact of familiarity with the reader. Rabelais inherits such poetics of masks and challenges the reader to search for the author’s intention among Panurge’s disguises in the *Tiers livre*. The jester’s *philautia* alienates the reader while paradoxically bringing her all the more closer to self-knowledge. In the next chapter of the monograph, Perona studies the poetic voice of Louise Labé through the prism of the Lucanesque and Erasmian *Débat de Folie et d’Amour*, an approach that builds on the suggestions of scholars such as Daniel Martin. She prudently does not take sides in the debate of whether or not the woman poet was just a literary avatar invented for the needs of a publishing venture in Lyon, but tries to show how the prosopopoeiae and *ethopeae* of Labé’s composite book negotiate the relationship between the overlapping notions of fiction, authenticity, and reality. It is, however, the chapter on Montaigne’s prosopopoeiae that is the most interesting. Perona’s inspiration here is the brilliant article by André Tournon from 1985, which demonstrates how Montaigne’s irony uses rhetorical fiction in order to point toward

truth. By considering the quotations of ancient authors as prosopopoeiae, and thanks to several very intelligent intertextual interpretations and truly remarkable close readings, Perona argues that Montaigne strives to transform his rhetorical persona into his *forme maîtresse*. The final chapter on *Le Moyen de Parvenir* concludes with the triumph of the “good intention,” which reconciles the author and the reader over the inescapably arbitrary character of language.

The book is edited with care (see, however, the faulty footnote numbering on 169), but at times is too verbose. It provides an interesting synthesis about rhetorical camouflaging of the authorial voice in Erasmus and some key French sixteenth-century authors, and will be of great use to students of the Renaissance.

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