

Thibaut Maus de Rolley. *Élévations: L'écriture du voyage aérien à la Renaissance*.

Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance 489. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2011. 634 pp. \$158.40. ISBN: 978-2-600-01500-4.

*Élévations* is the book version of a thesis, directed by Frank Lestringant (Paris IV), about air travel in the French Renaissance. The topic might immediately bring to mind Da Vinci's wing-flapping "ornithopters" and other early flying machines. That is what the author of the *Mélanges tirés d'une bonne bibliothèque* (1780) likely would have thought in the eighteenth century, when he wrote of how Da Vinci "searched out the art of flying" and how even, according to some, "he indeed found it." But, as Rolley's study shows, the way the French Renaissance imagined flight was generally much less technical: there would seem to have been, on the whole, little in the way of "rêverie mécanique" (mechanical dreaming, or "dreams of machines": 260). The focus of this excellent and well-written study is thus elsewhere, on the prehistory of mechanical flight, on those literary dreams of flight that would, in future centuries, come to be fulfilled first via the telescope, the hot air balloon, etc. In the thorough introduction, the author sets up three big questions: — Why fly? How does one fly? What can be believed? (19–25) — to be asked of three overlapping bodies of narratives, namely narratives of travel to the heavenly realms (*les voyages célestes*), through the air (*les voyages aériens*), and in the company of the devil (*les transports diaboliques*: 11). Little is said explicitly of literary genre, but it can be noted that, throughout the study, the author circulates with ease between romance epic, demonological literature, satire, astronomy, and many other genres and types of texts.

Part 1 contains three chapters, each of which deals with flight to heavenly realms. The first chapter summarizes four main traditions as well as their fortune and publication history in the French Renaissance: the *Dream of Scipio*, Menippus, Alexander the Great, and the Christian tradition of "winged souls" in visionary and religious ecstatic literature. The next chapter, more analytical, begins by noting that travel to the heavens is necessarily "une expérience de la transgression" ("an experience of transgression": 91), for it means going between the sublunary realm and the heavenly, then examines the "fantasme d'Alexandre" or "fantasme du cosmocrator," the dream of travelling up high to a point that allows one's gaze to look over the whole world machine (94). Chapter 3 studies "fictions créatrices de mondes" ("world-generating fictions": 167), focused on three serio-comic texts — Ariosto, Celio Secondo Curione, the *Supplément au Catholicon* — which reach back to Lucian (via Alberti, Erasmus, and Rabelais), where exploring other worlds means exploring the Earth by other means.

With chapter 4, we move into the second section, on "voyages aériens" ("flight in the air") and into quite different intellectual territory. Studied here is the history of how *chevaliers errants* became *chevaliers volants*. Chapter 5 turns to Ariosto, *Amadis de Gaule* and Aneau. We meet the hippogriff (offspring of a mare and a griffin), the "Grifaléon" (born of a griffin and a lioness) and Alector's hippopotamus.

(One of the very rare oversights is that Marian Rothstein's work on *Amadis* is not discussed.) Chapter 6 studies how the *voyage aérien* has been variously allegorized. Chapter 7, "Le Globe et le chevalier" ("The Globe and the Knight") tackles different questions. Here, the author brings fictions (Ariosto, Aneau, *Amadis*) into dialogue with contemporary geographic and cartographic representations of the world, to explore how these works relate in particular to the Renaissance coincidence of the *oikoumene* with the terrestrial sphere. The third part of the study deals with travels with the devil and the questions and method adjust accordingly. Chapter 8 looks at learned debates over diabolical transport and connects the idea of diabolic flight to that of witches to their nightly assemblies. Chapter 9 discusses works by Jean Bodin, Pierre de Lancre, Du Triez, the *Histoire du docteur Faust*, and Kepler's *Somnium*. Much terrain indeed is covered in *Élévations*. In the conclusion, Rolley reminds the reader of what is specific to Renaissance air travel: unlike the cosmological seventeenth century, Renaissance flight belongs to the domain of cosmography: "A la Renaissance, on s'élève d'abord pour se retourner, et contempler derrière soi le lieu d'où l'on est parti" ("in the Renaissance, one takes flight in order to turn around and contemplate the place one's left behind"). Flying, is not about "accéder à un ailleurs" ("reaching some other place"), it is more of a way of "prendre la mesure du monde" ("taking the measure of this world": 547).

As part of a wider disciplinary turn towards spatial questions in Renaissance literature (Conley, Hodges, Holtz, Lestringant, Tinguely, Williams, etc.), *Élévations* makes a significant contribution to our understanding of what it means to think not just about flying, but about cosmography, space and, ultimately, existing and fantasizing in the French Renaissance. This is an articulate study, likely of interest to scholars working on similar questions but also to anyone interested in some of the key texts (*Orlando Furioso*, *Alector*, etc.), as it reinscribes the Renaissance squarely within both horizontal and vertical trajectories. This volume is highly recommended.

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