

Mireille Habert. *Montaigne traducteur de la "Théologie naturelle": Plaisantes et saintes imaginations.*

Études Montaignistes 57. Paris: Éditions Classiques Garnier, 2010. 323 pp. index. bibl. €48. ISBN: 978-2-8124-0117-0.

This book aims to expound the earliest example of Montaigne's fideism. In the first section of the book, Mireille Habert begins by comparing all the different versions of Raymond Sebond's *Theologia Naturalis* with the goal of identifying the one that Montaigne had in hand. Habert observes that Montaigne did not translate *Scientia libri creaturarum sive naturae et de homine*, the text that is the original manuscript (1436). Only the first anonymous French translation (1519) remains fairly close to the original text, while Montaigne's version is at numerous points very similar to the edition of Richard Paffroed as shown by the passages where Montaigne reproduces the changes effected in 1480 by that editor of the Latin text.

The second part is devoted to examining Montaigne's translation of Sebond's text as a critical exercise. Habert describes the historical context that separates Sebond, still under the influence of scholasticism, from Montaigne who, to comply with his father's wishes, produced a translation that would serve the Catholic Counter-Reformation. Through a series of examples, Habert demonstrates that Montaigne intentionally eliminates phrases linked to impersonal scholastic thought in favor of the personal pronoun *we*. He makes the style simpler and more vivid in order to be more persuasive and to encourage the reader's adherence to the faith. And yet Habert notes that these modifications are not limited to stylistic improvements, but rather indicate the translator's decision to minimize Sebond's scholasticism in order to promote faith rather than religious reasoning. For example, in comparing man to other creatures, Sebond justifies human intelligence and man's resemblance to God through the concept of *dignitas hominis*. He argues that this intelligence is what permits man to understand the perfection of God. Montaigne, however, modifies the text in his French version not only to undermine the authority of the theologian on this point, but because he is convinced that the imagination is a source of error illustrating the weakness of human reason. Hence, for example, Montaigne weakens the infallible character of "the science of man" translating "regula infallibilis" ("infallible rule") by "tres-belle consideration" ("sound observation": 162). Elsewhere, when Sebond contrasts the successes of the Christian church with the misfortunes of the Jewish people, Montaigne eliminates the name of the "guilty" people in the French version in order to diminish the pretentious character of the Christians who believe that they are the chosen ones (227). Leaving aside the appendices, Habert rather boldly concludes that Montaigne's position is not absolutely one of fideism but rather describes a path to greater lucidity. In fact, what the author does not say but seems to imply is that Montaigne upholds a moral position that derives less from theology than from ancient philosophy, and from an Erasmian position with regard to an inner faith. In this sense, Montaigne reveals that Christian faith is a promise of happiness less in the afterlife than in an inner truth.

Unfortunately, Habert will have a tough time convincing non-Latinists to accept her conclusions. She rarely translates the Latin text that she compares to Montaigne's French version. This choice may please enthusiastic Latinists, who can profit from the necessary translation exercises. It would have been preferable for other readers, however, to offer a literal translation of Sebond's text reinforcing the bases on which her argument is founded. In this work, Habert confines herself to considering the Montaignian "desire" (50, 184) to distort, amplify, and modify Sebond's thinking. As a result, her arguments lack the reinforcement that would have been provided by a diachronic and synchronic study of the Latin vocabulary translated into Middle French (e.g., *cogitatio*). Such a study would have clarified the extent to which certain of Montaigne's translation choices may be due to unconscious acceptance of contemporary parlance and ideological assumptions rather than to his particular partiality, something which Habert takes for granted. Despite these omissions, this book is a goldmine of information about Montaigne's resistance to the dominant theological view of his time.

VALÉRIE M. DIONNE
Colby College