

## Page on Bercegol and Glaudes, eds. (2013)

Bercegol, Fabienne, and Pierre Glaudes, eds. *Chateaubriand et le récit de fiction*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2013. Pp. 498. ISBN: 978-2-8124-1716-0

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While recent studies have focused on Chateaubriand's political career, his activities as an editor and journalist, and his research as an historian, his earlier works of fiction have been neglected. The purpose of the twenty-seven articles in the book under review is to give a more complete and better balanced vision of his entire *oeuvre*. As compared with previous studies, this edition shows how Chateaubriand's works of fiction preserve, vivify, renew, and reinvigorate two literary genres: the epic and the novel.

This particular critical edition falls into four categories, each constituting a clearly defined section of the book. First, the Bercegol and Glaudes edition highlights the heritage which produced the mind of Chateaubriand: the ancients, Christianity, and the Enlightenment. While much critical work has been done on Chateaubriand and the seventeenth century, there is a definite lack of research on the rapport between Chateaubriand and the century which immediately preceded him, the eighteenth century. This work of criticism seeks to address that deficiency.

The second part of the book focuses on poetics, the narrative of Chateaubriand and his generic models, as well as his unique manner of writing historical fiction. These particular critics demonstrate how Chateaubriand legitimizes the supernatural world of wonders and miracles and thereby uses the devices of the mystical Romantic novel to defend his own personal vision of the Christian faith. In addition, these critics emphasize that Chateaubriand weds fiction to history with consummate skill and thereby creates a truly hybrid, creative, and vivacious work of art, which engages the reader in an exceptionally forceful way.

The third critical section focuses on the stylistic revolution inaugurated by Chateaubriand at the dawn of the nineteenth century. He was perceived by his contemporaries as the master of the beauties of the new Romantic style and consequently nicknamed "the Enchanter." Many authors of the Romantic School emulated Chateaubriand's style, notably Victor Hugo, one of his foremost admirers. This stylistic revolution was certainly one of Chateaubriand's most significant contributions to French literature. Indeed, this debate concerning Chateaubriand's stylistic innovations remained at the heart of French critical discussion throughout the entire nineteenth century, owing in large part to the publication in 1860 of Sainte-Beuve's course on the works of Chateaubriand, entitled *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire sous l'Empire*. Sainte-Beuve's masterful analysis of Chateaubriand's abundant use of metaphors, for example, much impressed his contemporaries, and hence they sought to imitate Chateaubriand in this regard.

Finally, the fourth part of this insightful book showcases Chateaubriand's influence upon writers from the time of his contemporaries during the Age of Romanticism until the twentieth century. The list of twentieth-century writers who have demonstrated a marked interest in Chateaubriand and whose works have clearly been influenced by his thoughts, concepts, spirit, and style is indeed impressive. It includes Marcel Proust, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, François Mauriac, Michel Leiris, André Breton, Jean Cocteau, Raymond Radiguet, Marguerite Yourcenar, Julien Gracq, Louis Aragon, and Michel Butor. The cases of Cocteau and his friend and colleague Radiguet are especially interesting in that criticism has long sought to explain why these two writers of the early twentieth century resisted assimilation into the contemporary Surrealist movement and produced literary works so important for the avant-garde, yet strangely reminiscent of the spirit of traditional Classicism. The author of this particular critical study, Fabio Vasarro, offers an explanation for this dichotomy in the works of Radiguet and Cocteau: leaders of the avant-garde movement in France, these writers were nonetheless themselves influenced by the spellbinding heritage of Chateaubriand, who had so admired French Classicism.

In sum, the book under review is important for two reasons: it contributes to our understanding of the early works of fiction of Chateaubriand, and it illuminates the many influences of his works of fiction throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

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