

Errance et cohérence: Essai sur la littérature transfrontalière à la Renaissance. Phillip John Usher. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2010. 204 pp. €19.00. ISBN 978-2-8124-0193-0.

REVIEWED BY: Ayesha Ramachandran, Stony Brook University

Phillip Usher's insightful and probing book begins from a simple, but provocative observation: distinct national frontiers are oddly absent from sixteenth-century maps of Europe. While toponyms identify places, regions, and nascent nations, the well-established political frontier, so familiar in modern cartography, is nowhere to be seen; it remains fluid, unclear, and unimportant. This fluidity of boundaries and frontiers is the occasion and theme for *Errance et cohérence*, which explores the way in which spatial wholes (the nation, the region, the world) come into focus (*cohérence*) through movement (*errance* or wandering), through the crossing of boundaries that produces shifting relations between peoples and spaces. Joining the new scholarship on early modern literature and cartography in the wake of pioneering work by Frank Lestringant and Tom Conley, Usher's study analyzes

select travel accounts by sixteenth-century French writers as cartographies, showing how visions of spaces are shaped by particular narrative strategies. But the stakes of the book's argument extend well beyond tropes of travel literature. By investigating how individual travelers' reports affect conceptualizations of entire spaces, Usher reflects on the key philosophical question of the period: the relation between self and other, part and whole, the particular and the universal.

Unfolding through two parts that work by juxtaposition and counterpoint, *Errance et cohérence* follows two major trajectories of what Usher calls a "littérature transfrontalière": Europe's preoccupation with the Holy Land and the New World. While the frontiers between Europe and these "other" spaces remained uncertain (he notes, for instance, the peculiar confusion that existed well into the late sixteenth century about the borders separating the Ottoman Empire from Europe), it is through processes of oppositional definition as well as analogical similitude that Europeans shaped their own identities as well as their understandings of these foreign spaces. Usher investigates how familiar and unfamiliar spatialities coalesce through dynamic exchange and suggests how this interchange evolves over the course of the sixteenth century.

The first part of the book, focused on the early sixteenth century, thus follows the pilgrimage of Greffin Affagart to the Holy Land and the explorations of Jacques Cartier and Rabelais's Pantagruel (in the *Quart Livre*) to the New World, while the second part looks ahead to the turn of the century and discusses the pilgrimages of Gabriel Giraudet and Henri Castela to the Holy Land alongside Jean de Léry's account of his voyage to Brazil. Usher contends that these two distinct periods manifest distinct styles of cartographic description and comprehension with regard to the unknown and the unfamiliar. Where Affagart, Cartier, and Rabelais evoke the worlds beyond Europe's borders through insistent analogies and comparisons with Europe—a practice Usher suggestively describes in terms of a palimpsest—Giraudet, Castela, and Léry move toward a more topographic or mimetic method that aims to give voice to the foreign without a recursive turn to the familiar. Thus, the book also pairs Affagart against Giraudet and Castela, allowing the reader to glimpse how the Counter-Reformation transformed the emblematics of holy spaces from a layering of symbolic geographies (Rome over Jerusalem in Affagart's peregrinations) to an occasion for a meditation on divinity (Giraudet's and Castela's evocation of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher). Similarly, Cartier and Rabelais are counterpointed by Léry, balancing an early rhetoric of discovery against the in-depth reportage of a later observer. In these latter chapters, Usher takes on works that have become canonical and command a vast historiography, but he nevertheless presents acute, persuasive readings that accent the process of knowing the unknown.

The key interest of Usher's book is in its sustained, subtle analyses of the texts it examines; a study of Affagart's narrative opens symbolic connections with the seven churches of Rome and the stations of the cross; the interplay between Cartier's account and Rabelais's fictional voyage (which may well have been based on Cartier) is alert to both literalism and irony, showing how the *Quart Livre* deconstructs the habit of description by analogy even as it draws on it. Throughout, its analyses are learned, careful; but wide-ranging; Usher discusses discourses of pilgrimage, natural history, anatomy, church architecture, Catholic-Reformation theology, and ethnography with deceptive ease and clarity. If his critical framework and terms are well-known from the work of Michel de Certeau, Lestrin-gant, and Conley, his attentive and meticulous excavation of the workings of cartographic narrative breathe new life into those theoretical paradigms. Moreover, Usher's emphasis

on movement, border crossings, and the contingency of spatial identities participates in a wider scholarly reimagining of the early modern world in terms of shifting networks of exchange and invention rather than rigidly established structures of knowledge. This book will be of interest to literary scholars as well as others engaged in questions of early modern spatiality and geography; it offers a model for nuanced interdisciplinary analysis that cuts beyond theoretical jargon and reaches into the heart of a text.

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