paul vincent rockwell, *Rewriting Resemblance in Medieval French Romance:* Ceci n'est pas un graal. New York and London: Garland, 1995. Pp. 245. isbn: 0-8153-2035-3. $55.

Paul Vincent Rockwell's *Rewriting Resemblance in Medieval French Romance* proposes that the status and significance of 'resemblance' (likeness, analogy, metaphor, the relation between words and things) undergoes a sea-change that can be mapped out in the difference between twelfth-century Old French verse romance and thirteenth-century Old French prose romance. Choosing Marie de France and Chrétien de Troyes as representatives of an attitude toward 'resemblance' that prevailed in the twelfth century, Rockwell argues that thirteenth-century texts such as *Galeran de Bretagne* and the prose *Lancelot* call that attitude into question by insisting that likeness, rather than indicating an essential identity between two entities, in fact often works to disguise differences. Rockwell suggests that the clerical authors of the thirteenth-century prose romances are to be admired for having demystified the manner in which earlier authorities buttressed their power by propagating fictional likenesses. Yet these thirteenth-century clerical authors are not celebrated as unqualified heroes, for Rockwell also suggests that their primary motivation for mounting an attack against an uncritical acceptance of 'resemblance' was to justify their attempt to reserve for an initiated elite (themselves) the right to produce interpretations of the world and its texts.

  Though Paul de Man is never explicitly mentioned, his understanding of the difference between and relative value of metaphor and metonymy is the implicit theoretical foundation of Rockwell's argument. (Rockwell himself aligns his work with Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze; but it seems to me that de Man's influence is much more pervasive.) De Man regards metaphor as the claim that language and reality, words and things, share in common an identical essence; to believe in metaphor is to believe that language can give us access to the truth. For De Man, metonymy shows that there is no real correspondence between words and things, language and nature. De Manian deconstruction aims to reveal that all metaphors are really disguised metonymies. The gist of Rockwell's project is an attempt to portray the authors of twelfth-century verse as naive believers in the power of metaphor to name real relations between words and things, while portraying the authors of thirteenth-century prose romance as deconstructors who expose the metonymic status of their predecessors' metaphors.

  Rockwell's book relies on a strategy that, although inviting critique, is rarely avoided in literary historiography: the thinking of an earlier period is deemed 'simple'— Chrétien is said to promote 'simple equations' (p. 100), and Marie's poetic project is said to be founded on a 'simple opposition' (p. 106)—while the thinking of a later period is touted as 'complex' or 'sophisticated.' It is somewhat disheartening to see a medievalist adopt this strategy, since it is the very one so often used against the Middle Ages by partisans of the postmodern. Rockwell helps reinforce the postmodernist's stereotypical view of the simplicity of medieval literature by sacrificing one medieval century for the sake of another.

  This decision to promote one era at the expense of another necessitates what is, in my view, the book's only serious flaw: a denigration and misrepresentation of the achievements of such twelfth-century writers as Chrétien and Marie. Rockwell's thesis forces him to deny any knowledge that these writers may indeed be as 'complex' or 'sophisticated' as those thirteenth-century writers whom Rockwell seems to prefer. This unwillingness to look very closely at twelfth-century romance is particularly apparent in Rockwell's handling of recent literary criticism: obviously very familiar with scholarship on medieval French literature, he represses knowledge of any criticism that would show that Chrétien and Marie may have shared those very insights that, in Rockwell's scheme, only became thinkable in the thirteenth century. Particularly glaring is the omission of any reference to Peter Haidu's *Lion-queue-coupée: l' écart symbolique chez Chrétien de Troyes* (Geneva: Droz, 1972), a book which portrays a Chrétien in stark contrast to Rockwell's. As Haidu remarks (p. 21), 'Chrétien introduit…la possibilité d'une inadéquation entre le symbole et la réalité.' Yet Rockwell's thesis is that the acknowledgment of such an 'inadéquation' is absent from Chrétien and only became possible in the discourse of thirteenth-century prose romance.

  A disturbing element of this effort to denigrate Chrétien and Marie is Rockwell's reliance on a device that can only be deemed erroneous: presenting a character's attitude or belief as if it were the author's. Marie, for instance, is said to share Gurun's (a character in her *Le Fresne*) belief in 'a simple equation' that 'fail[s] to go beyond the surface of things' (p. 32). Yet is it not more likely that rather than sharing Gurun's simplicity Marie is in fact exposing it?

  Rockwell's decision to treat twelfth-century authors merely as a foil against which to display the brilliance of thirteenth-century authors commits him to a strategy of 'underreading' the former. A case in point is his treatment of Marie's notion of the relation between poetry and history. Rockwell argues that Marie claims that her texts 'offer us a clear window on the Breton past' (p. 35); he thinks that for Marie 'the lay is deemed an adequate avenue along which to convey 'history' in poetic language (pp. 35–36). Yet one might reasonably suggest that Marie is quite suspicious of the idea that poetry's purpose is to offer an adequate presentation of the past. I have argued, for instance (in a chapter devoted to Marie's *Le Chaitivel* in my *The Death of the Troubadour: The Late Medieval Resistance to the Renaissance* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994], pp. 82–96) that Marie's aim is to challenge the idea that a literary text ought to serve as a 'clear window' to the past.

  Still, *Rewriting Resemblance in Medieval French Romance* is to be much admired for many reasons: the clarity and specificity of its provocative thesis; the coherence and pertinence of the entire book; some truly illuminating readings of thirteenth-century prose romance; for offering an interesting variation on reading intertextually; and perhaps above all, for taking seriously medieval literature's capacity to provoke thinking.

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