

COMIC LITERATURE IN FRANCE. Lloyd Bishop. University Press of the South, New Orleans, 2004, pp. 464.

With *Comic Literature in France* Emeritus Professor Lloyd Bishop has undertaken an academic project on a grand scale. Bishop is himself the first to recognise the size of his gamble, and his book can only be properly judged in accordance with its own objectives. From the outset Bishop makes it clear that he is targeting the generalist reader and not the specialist. As part of the latter category, I began by asking myself why somebody would want to read such a book, and whether such a hypothetical reader would be satisfied. As my specialist field is twentieth-century French literature, I found it an easy task to posit myself as an undergraduate student with an interest in the Middle Ages, the subject of the first chapter of *Comic Literature in France*. Firstly, I found Bishop's tone to be pitched at the right level, and it is in this matter of tone that I feel this book is most successful. Whilst there are some problems in the writing style (the seemingly random mixture of three quotation styles – French with no translation provided, French with translation provided and English translation only – and the frequent use of unexplained technical terms for comic techniques, in a book that is otherwise uninterested in the structural aspects of how comedy works), the overall feel is gentle and unassuming without being patronising. I found my first *sortie* into the French comic literature of the Middle Ages to be a rewarding one, telling me neither more nor less than I feel my undergraduates, with a general interest in the period, would wish to learn. In this respect, Bishop does then succeed in his gamble.

I say "in this respect" because I feel that the student whose general interest lies in comic literature, with no specific age in mind, may well be less satisfied: there is very little discussion of what comic literature is or what makes such a creature tick. The reader often finds him/herself relying on Bishop's assurance that this work is "funny". On balance, though, I myself found this approach surprisingly refreshing; I have in the past found technical explanations of comic literature to be entirely (self-)destructive: there is generally nothing drier, or more likely to kill comedy, than a book dissecting comic technique. Bishop avoids this pitfall by adopting a survey technique based on a review by historical periods. The chapter weightings are unequal because the twentieth century simply has more writing to be covered, and as such receives three separate chapters (prose, theatre and poetry) to one each on the Middle Ages and the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The subdivisions are between a general introduction to the period and a closer look at a selection of key writers of the period. The twentieth-century bias can be forgiven since the other sections remain extensive, without claiming to be exhaustive. Bishop

certainly covers all the usual suspects, and the twentieth-century specialist that I am assumes that this is the case for all chapters because I felt that I myself benefited from Bishop's treatment of my own area despite my previous knowledge. As a result of my reading I was able to put names to eras and found my desire rekindled to read certain texts.

My reservations, as I read the book, included the thought that the whole project might have been better served by an edited-book approach, which would have avoided the need for one overtaxed author to draw heavily on what Bishop calls "conventional wisdom" (as a Vianist, for example, I was not convinced by all the 'Vian wisdom' on which Bishop was forced to rely). But, on balance, the gain made in uniformity of style outweighs the gain that would have been made in specialist knowledge. I also wondered whether the two short appendices, in which Bishop makes an excursion into comic and chaos theories, might not have been better included in the body of the text or as an introductory chapter. Whilst I still think that the book would have gained from an introduction, my conclusion is that the body of the text was best left as is. Bishop's style makes this a highly readable entry into the history of comic literature in France. And given the amount of work that has gone into the elaboration of this book, Bishop may congratulate himself on the result.

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*CITIZEN LABILLARDIÈRE. A NATURALIST'S LIFE IN REVOLUTION AND EXPLORATION (1755-1834).* Edward Duyker. Melbourne University Press, The Miegunyah Press, Carlton, 2003, pp. xx + 383, 18 b & w illustrations, 12 maps.

At one time I was envious of the naturalists on the great voyages of exploration because they had the privilege of being the first to see so many new species of plants and animals. After I had read accounts of some of these voyages, which told of privations and dangers, resulting in death in many cases, I no longer wished that I could have been one of those naturalists.

In this book Edward Duyker covers all aspects of Labillardière's life, but is especially concerned with his greatest adventure as a naturalist on the voyage of D'Entrecasteaux (1791-93). The primary purpose of this voyage, financed by the new revolutionary government, was to find out what had happened to the expedition of La Pérouse, which