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Scott Francis, *Advertising the Self in Renaissance France: Lemaire, Marot, and Rabelais*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2019. xiii + 267pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$70.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781644530061; \$35.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9781644530078; \$70.00 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9781644530085.

Review by Timothy Hampton, University of California, Berkeley.

Advertising the Self in Renaissance France is a learned and insightful contribution to the literary history of early Renaissance French culture. Based on Scott Francis's Princeton dissertation, the book traces how three of the formative figures in early modern French literature shape their authorial personae through the manipulation of the rhetoric of address and self-description, as well as through the shifting forces that shape the emergence of print culture. These figures are among the first to confront the new technology of print, to recognize and exploit its capabilities and risks. Francis studies how certain features of their work touch on the particularities of publishing and of shaping an authorial identity in a new economy. As Francis puts it in his introduction, the book "examines case studies of how authorial or printerly personae and ideal readers are crafted in sixteenth-century printed editions of French vernacular literary works by three authors" (p. 13). These writers, he goes on, all have "particularly rich publication histories," and can teach us "how personae and ideal readers can be used to advertise for a book and for its correct reading."

The key move here is the juxtaposition of "personae" and "ideal readers," since it permits Francis to clear the conceptual space for his own project. A history of "personae" would locate us in a history of authorship and authority in print. A history of "readers" would locate the project in a history of reading that would require deep dives into the sociology of the book, the history of allegory and hermeneutics, etc. Both of these areas of inquiry are on the margins of Francis's work. He is aware of them, and they help frame the analysis. However, his focus is on the meeting point between contingent, historically based authors, constructing themselves in print, and "ideal" or abstract readers made present by the broad circulation of printed texts. Francis mediates the relationship between these two characters by mobilizing the term "self-fashioning" and the phrase "rhetoric and self-fashioning" (which occurs multiple times in the book). "Self-fashioning," as he understands it, encompasses both writer and reader; it involves these authors' construction of their authorial presences in print as well as some necessarily less defined idea of a "reader" who will take something away from the text.

It should be obvious that Francis is using a set of critical terms that have been much commented on and worked over through the past several decades. "Advertising" and "self" are already difficult to pin down. One of them calls for a history of print, and the other takes us into the very

vexed territory of the history of subjectivity. Francis argues that these terms are linked because all advertising (from the sixteenth century to the present) involves the invention of a self-as-consumer. So, it is this imagined “consuming self” that he takes as his focus. As for “self-fashioning,” one might have thought that its time had come and gone. But the phrase is useful for Francis, since it enables him to write a series of analyses of the encounter between an imagined reader and a writer involved in claiming authority for his work. Both are “shaped” in language. And because this shaping is a rhetorical process, it remains virtual, an effect or holographic projection of fictionality. In this regard, Francis’s use of “self-fashioning” is quite distinct from the detailed analyses of power in Stephen Greenblatt’s famous introduction of the phrase, many years ago. This terminology both defines the contours of the book and enables the kind of skillful close reading that is one of Francis’s strengths.

As noted, the book is a set of “case studies.” Francis makes no claim to offer a history of early modern French literature and printing, or of changes in the rhetoric of address. It opens with a chapter on Jean Lemaire de Belges. Lemaire is the author of poetic fictions, a text on the relationship between French and Italian, and a long “historiographical” account of the origins of the French, *Illustrations de Gaule et singularitez de Troye*. Many conventional literary histories set Lemaire as the first “humanist” author in France, and a crucial bridge between the relatively airless production of the fifteenth-century “Rhétoriqueur” poets and more “modern” figures such as Marot and, later, the Pléiade. Francis demonstrates an enviable mastery of Lemaire’s difficult and diverse corpus. He makes a case for placing Lemaire as one of the first exhibits in a history of printing and authorship, showing how changes in the various editions of his texts also exhibit moments of self-reflection in which he seems to be shaping how those texts should be used—as repositories of historical examples, as allegories of prudent moral action, etc. He is particularly interested in the motif of the choice of Paris as a kind of textual node against which the reader (now presumed male) must shape his “masculinity.” He shows how this topos raises issues about “masculine self-fashioning during the reign of Louis XII” (p. 25), and thus shifts focus away from the more famous figure of Francis I as the type of French heroism in the early Renaissance. This question of readerly choice is expanded across Lemaire’s work, raising questions about the reader’s relationship to a kingly image projected in the book.

Francis’s discussion of Lemaire focuses on publication history and representations of history and moral choice. His study of the poet Clément Marot takes a slightly different tack. Marot is well known and appreciated for his witty and accessible self-presentation in his poems—features that make him seem remarkably “modern” to us. Yet he is also famous for his deep engagement in the rise of Evangelical thought. His adventurous life (accusations, escapes, libel, exile, life in and out of royal favor, etc.) asks us to think about the relationship between his biography and his various literary selves—bawdy, witty, pious, etc. Francis skillfully weaves these diverse strands together by tracking the relationship between the different publications of Marot’s work, ranging from his early *Adolescence Clémentine* (with the term “adolescence” having multiple senses—from “youth,” to “apprenticeship,” to “student-life”), to his later translation of the Psalms. Francis walks us in detail through the various moments of Marot’s production—poems about illness, responses to accusations, etc.—to show how his work moves toward a merging of text and self, within the context of an emerging Reformation culture. Particularly interesting is his description of François Juste’s multiple editions (beginning in 1533), which aim to “merge the narrative of Marot’s poetic persona with the narrative of the Reformation” (p. 110).

Francis's account of Rabelais turns away from the emphasis on printing history presented in the earlier chapters and focuses mostly on the rhetoric of Rabelais's famous prologues. These notoriously ambiguous texts have, of course, been the source of much controversy among critics, some of whom argue that Rabelais is putting forth clear statements of religious doctrine, and others of whom argue that he is undermining any attempt at solid interpretation. Francis splits the difference, and argues that the point of the prologues is not Rabelais's ideology, but the fact that in each instance he turns to the reader and urges him/her to engage in a process of "self-fashioning." This culminates in his description of the prologue to the posthumous *Cinquième Livre*, where Rabelais urges his readers to read his book (instead of other, corrupt books) in order to "make yourselves good people" ("faictes vous gens de bien"). "Gens de bien" is, of course, a capacious phrase, but Francis shows how Rabelais continually projects himself as a figure with the authority to define his reader, that he defines that reader as someone in need of help, both physical and moral, and that his own books can offer the solution to the reader's ills. Thus, he is, in a sense, rhetorically creating the market for his own books. He wants to "reduce the readers to nothing so as to force them to fashion themselves through reading" (p. 180).

Advertising the Self in Renaissance France is well documented and clearly written. Francis has read much recent criticism of his authors, as well as primary sources relevant to his topic. The methodological reduction of the history of an emerging secular literary culture to the problem of an "ideal reader" projected in language keeps the project well focused. As I have hinted, it also raises a certain number of interesting questions that lie just beyond the edges of this well-defined argument. I, for one, would have liked more attention to the dramatically communitarian nature of much of this literature; Rabelais, for example, announces that *Gargantua* explores terrifying mysteries "concerning our religion as well as the political world and domestic life" ("tant en ce que concerne nostre religion que aussi l'estat politicq et vie oeconomique"). How the "ideal reader" that Francis so skillfully traces is understood to interact with these collective experiences is a fascinating question. Francis makes the strong case that the development of printing opens up authors to a public of strangers. Yet we can surmise that the "ideal reader" for Rabelais is not, say, a Turk, a woman, or even a merchant, since extraordinary violence is visited on members of those groups in the text. Thus, the "gens de bien" envisaged by Rabelais may not be as abstract as assumed, and to presume a unbounded, "ideal" reader is, in a sense, to take the bait of Rabelais's own rhetoric.

It would also be interesting to think in more specific historical terms about how Rabelais's gesture of rhetorically reducing his readers "to nothing" connects with the political and ideological upheaval of the Reformation—a movement that has at its center a crisis of the self (emblemized in Luther's own misery). This last question would seem particularly interesting, given the historical limits of the project (the reason, presumably, why a figure like Montaigne is not studied). But these are less criticisms Francis's achievement, which is impressive, than my own wonderings, stimulated by this interesting book. *Advertising the Self in Renaissance France* offers a fine account of the work of three challenging and important writers.

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