

BOOK REVIEWS

Edited by Kathleen Clark

Foigny, Gabriel de.

La Terre australe connue. Edition établie, présentée et annotée par Pierre Ronzeaud. Paris: Société des Textes Français Modernes, 1990. Paper. xcvi + 242 pp. ISBN 2-8650S-191-8.

The Southern Land, Known. Translated and edited by David Fausett. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1993. I + 152 pp. ISBN 0-8156-2571-5.

A new French edition and a modern English translation of the original 1676 printing of this unusual utopian novel make this work accessible to the wider audience it deserves. Pierre Ronzeaud's meticulous treatment of the text has retrieved it from the number of neglected books in that large and loosely-defined genre which includes travel fiction, imaginary voyages, and travel accounts of all types. Ronzeaud's almost 100-page introduction opens with the troubled life story of Foigny. A section then discusses bibliographic details and analyses the spurious revisions of the 1692 edition and the later printings and translations based on it. Glosses to textual variations in later editions, along with further interpretive work and references to scholarship are included in the extensive annotating footnotes to the text.

After this meticulous, if dry, show of scholarship, the second section of Ronzeaud's introduction, "éléments pour une lecture de *La Terre australe connue*," discusses the main themes of the novel with such scope that it could serve as a starting point for a general evaluation of utopian literature of the time. For example, Ronzeaud here succinctly describes the utopian structure invoked by Foigny as contrasted with more conventional contemporary thought:

... l'histoire racontée par Foigny n'était que l'envers de notre Histoire, reconstruite à partir d'une lecture hétérodoxe d'un verset de *Genèse* I, de façon à remplacer la division des sexes par le

maintien de l'androgynie primordiale, la Chute par l'immobilisation de la perfection originelle, la béance du désir par la plénitude conservée, la culpabilité et l'angoisse par la sérénité assurée, la caducité de la création par le retour à l'éternel, la disparition individuelle par la fusion dans le tout, la division par l'unanimité, Babel par l'uglossie, et la folie de la Croix par le vertige de la raison (lxxix).

This interesting mix of themes, describing the society of the then mythical Australia, is embedded in a first-person travel account which includes travel to the Congo and Madagascar. It is developed, according to the commentary, without direct reference to better-known traditions of utopian literature including Plato, More, or Bacon. However, one of this work's salient features, Foigny's "modèle hermaphrodite" and his presentation of androgynous creatures, is linked by Ronzeaud almost exclusively to antique precedents or historical contexts of religious and cultural criticism, leaving aside interesting questions on representations of sexuality, Foigny's *La Terre australe connue* is a unique example of innovative conceptual approaches to alternative societies. It invites comparisons between utopian concepts and the abundant narratives of voyages, some fantastic and imaginary, which fill the large travel collections in our research libraries. These are the narratives and utopian societies which fill the massive volumes published by the de Bry family from 1593-1627, or the 18th century 20-volume *Histoire générale des voyages* collected by the abbé Prévost, or the *Bibliothèque des voyages imaginaires*, which republished the 1692 Foigny edition.

David Fausett's introduction to a very readable and accurate translation does discuss connections to such collections. His interpretive essay uses the critical language of recent studies of travel literature. His key concept is "boundaries" as defined in terms of space, culture, representation, reason, etc. This conceptual framework allows for many insights into Foigny's narrative, though at times the topic organization stretches the limits of an understandable argument. Fausett points out in his footnotes to the text of the

translation many subtleties of the original French and notable changes in the 1692 edition. However, the footnotes also contain some rather superfluous interpretive comments obviously targeted at unsophisticated readers. Both of these editions have bibliographies showing the growing amount of scholarship on Foigny, including full-length studies from both Ronzeaud and Fausett. With a restored original edition and a fine translation, perhaps after years of neglect this work will also become known.

Rex Clark