Italian freedom; finally, from 1564 to the seventeenth century, the papacy was impelled by the Council of Trent to try to implement Tridentine reforms and to reassert the universalism of the Church. Prof. Prodi describes the process by which the pope gradually became the assertor of an ideology of neutrality and a mediator on the European political scene, a role that the papacy still has.

Some of the views expressed in this book had already fleetingly and sporadically appeared in von Ranke, Kantorowicz, Gregorovius and others, as the author is careful to point out. It is Prof. Prodi's merit to have gathered such views and approaches in a coherent and highly interesting historiographical statement. This work is not only illuminating *per se*, but also provides a rich source of research themes that have, so far, been mostly ignored.

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William Baldwin. *Beware the Cat: The First English Novel*. Ed. William A. Ringler, Jr., and Michael Flachmann. San Marino. California: Huntington Library, 1988. Pp. xxx, 126.

Beware the Cat is largely the three-part oration of a man named Gregory Streamer, who argues forensically that animals communicate with one another. Streamer's proof is based on his own rather dubious experiences – after having followed a recipe in the celebrated *Book of Secrets* he listened to cats talking outside his window. The work is a masterfully layered narrative, a brilliant oral performance, in which the different voices of the speaker, friends, servants, the author, and, of course, the cats all tell stories, most of which seem to be outright lies. The well-ordered jumble – of learned nonsense, jests, shrewd anti-papal satire, folk tales, even a patch of lively Skeltonics suddenly appearing in the midst of the prose narrative — proves that one must “beware the cat,” for cats not only listen to our privy secrets, they relate them to other cats.

This edition by the late Sidney scholar William A. Ringler Jr. and his former pupil Michael Flachmann is certainly most welcome. The surprising thing is that the book has not received more attention before. To anyone slogging through the mass of Elizabethan fiction in both prose and verse, *Beware the Cat* stands out as a very high point indeed. An earlier and very lightly annotated but nonetheless useful old-spelling edition by William P. Holden appeared in an obscure series published in 1963 by Connecticut College. Yet anyone who has known of the book seems to have come across it, appropriately enough, by word of mouth (I first heard of it from a former pupil of Ringler's at Chicago). *Beware the Cat* deserves attention from critics; moreover it is one of the few sixteenth-century English fictional narratives that one can recommend to non-specialists.

Pace Ringler and Flachmann or the publisher, this is not the “first English novel,” because it is not a novel. The novel did not exist in sixteenth-century England, though many works that may termed novelistic certainly did – both prose and verse contain the narrative strategies of fiction. In the huge output of drama, heroic verse, romance, chronicle histories, biography and autobiography, satire, – all ways of telling stories — lie the roots of our modern “novel.” Yet no matter how hard we look, we shall never find the first one.

Other than its sub-title and a very questionable pair of appendixes outlining and summarizing prose narratives before 1558 to prove the novelistic primacy of this text, the edition is satisfactory. The documentary background in the introduction is most helpful. Yet there are a few surprising statements. For instance we read that Sidney’s *Arcadia* is “by any measure the best piece of sixteenth-century prose fiction produced in any language.” More? Rabelais? The comments on Baldwin and his narrative method are helpful enough, though not grounded in recent theory of narrative; any notion of the parodic text, for instance, would have had a happy time with *Beware the Cat*.

The text has been modernized. It is based principally on two witnesses, an 1847 transcript (BL Ms Add 24,628) of a now lost printed text (London, 1570, John Allde for John Arnold) and a later edition (1584, Edward Allde, son of the preceding). Ringler (for it was Ringler who prepared the edition, and Flachmann who saw it through the press) has chosen as his copy-text the transcript, claiming it to be an accurate representation of the 1570 text, in turn our best guide to the work perhaps written circa 1553. I am willing to accept the judgment of such an outstanding scholar, yet I cannot see how the argument for this copy-text can be proved. There is a 4-leaf fragment of another edition (1570, William Gryffith); Ringler claims that the transcript is closer than 1584 to this 1570 fragment; yet there is no evidence that the 1570 fragment has any special authority either. I would have preferred the 1584 text, emended following the authority of the transcript. Certainly an old-spelling edition would have to go this route. Nonetheless, close comparison with 1584 shows that Ringler has made few radical emendations against the only existing witness of the period. My one principal objection in detail is to the reading of the name of a cat; Ringler has “Pol-noir,” which he explains in his notes as “black-head”; yet 1584 reads “Poilnoer” which should be rendered in modern spelling as “Poil-noir” or “black-fur.” Because the edition lacks an editorial apparatus we cannot tell if the transcript gives Ringler the authority to make the change.

The notes are in places very well done, especially the excellent source analysis for some of the tales. There are very few problems. A number of proverbs are missed in the last section. At 16.28 “a cat hath nine lives” is not Tilley W 6520 (there is no such number) but C 154, where this passage is cited. At 29.34 “chine bone” is not a “jaw bone” but the “spine.” And I believe a whole set of notes is missing from 19.8 to 23.7–8, including, I would hope, the answer to a most interesting question: who is that Bishop of Alexandria who could communicate with sparrows?

Instead of the appendixes, which never should have been allowed, the editors would have done better to have included the remarkable broadsheet poem "A Short Answer to the Boke Called: Beware the Cat" (STC 664.5/reel 1861; reprinted in Holden's edition), with some commentary. This scatological piece is an outright attack on Baldwin for having made fun of Gregory Streamer. Yet as Streamer is not known to have even existed, such an attack is quite mysterious. It is possibly a clever ruse, a false attack on Baldwin and his "bagagical boke" to lend legitimacy and an aura of truth to the untrue narrative. Perhaps William Ringler might have solved this interesting puzzle.

In spite of one's rejection of the essential premise of this edition — that *Beware the Cat* is another "first English novel" — one can be extremely grateful to the late William Ringler and to Michael Flachmann for having prepared this text and to the Huntington Library for having published it. It is a minor masterpiece now deservedly available to a wide audience of readers.

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Gérard Defaux. *Marot, Rabelais, Montaigne: l'écriture comme présence*. "Études montaignistes, II, Paris-Genève, Champion-Slatkine, 1987, 227 p.

Plus que le titre, les deux épigraphes sur lesquelles s'ouvre le recueil — l'une de B. Castiglione, l'autre de Maurice Blanchot — mettent en lumière la distance épistémologique qui sépare la conception que le siècle humaniste se faisait du rapport de l'homme à son langage et celle élaborée par la Modernité. Dans le texte jusque là inédit de l'introduction, l'auteur fait voir que, pour le seizième siècle, "(...) le langage n'a pour seule fonction légitime que de communiquer immédiatement la vérité de l'être et sa présence" (p.81). Dans cette conception, la pensée est absolument antérieure au langage, elle le précède comme la parole, elle-même miroir de l'âme, précède l'écriture; et, inversement, la lettre, image de la voix, s'efface pour laisser place à l'esprit dont l'écriture n'est que le véhicule, la nécessaire bien qu'imparfaite médiation. Prenant comme point d'appui le commentaire d'Erasmus sur l'Évangile de Jean, G. Defaux montre que ce logocentrisme se définit en regard du paradigme théologique analogiquement transposé sur le plan humain. Cette croyance en la force de représentation du discours jouit à l'époque d'un tel statut d'évidence qu'elle informe à son tour le modèle du Dieu fait Verbe.

Or, notre Modernité a bien vu qu'il y a entre les mots et les choses, la voix et l'être, un hiatus incontournable, une irréductible différence, et qu'il faut, exposant le travail du signifié à l'oeuvre, faire éclater cette illusion de la parole comme présence, ce leurre dans lequel la pensée occidentale s'est empêtrée depuis Platon. Le mérite de G. Defaux consiste justement à faire voir que, loin d'annoncer cet éclatement, le seizième siècle confirme plus que jamais la croyance au logo-