Barbara C. Bowen. *The Age of Bluff: Paradox and Ambiguity in Rabelais and Montaigne*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972. Illinois Studies in Language and Literature 62. Pp. viii, 168. \$9.

Professor Bowen has written this admittedly tentative but most welcome study to help a fairly broad audience of "friends, students and scholars of French Renaissance literature" appreciate, rather than disparage, the disorderliness they will find in the works of Rabelais, Montaigne and their contemporaries. She opposes what she sees as the continuing tendency, especially of French critics, to consider the literature of the period as an imperfect preparation for the symmetry, order and balance of classicism. She is, of course, not alone in this opposition, as her references to a number of recent critics, some of them French, indicate. (Absent, surprisingly, are Auerbach and Pouilloux.) What is new is her attempt at a synthesis and her contention that the aesthetic unity of the period is to be found in the widespread use of the technique of "bluff," "the result of one or more of the techniques mentioned – paradox, enigma, argument, antithesis and ambiguity – used in a conscious effort to disconcert the reader."

Professor Bowen first looks at techniques of bluff in a number of minor writers, paying particular attention to the tension between apparently serious subject matter and frequently playful tone in the *Dialogues de Guy de Brués*..., to the "discrepancy between external appearance or language and internal reality" in the *Dialogues du Démocrite* of Jacques Tahureau du Mans and to the extreme exploitation of contemporary taste for ambiguity in the *Cymballum Mundi* of Des Periers.

The two major chapters are devoted to detailed analyses of episodes from the first four books of Rabelais, taken in order of their publication, and from Montaigne's *Essais* in their 1595 order. The author finds that Rabelais' bluff techniques changed in emphasis in successive books, from the lighthearted and straightforward bluff of *Pantagruel* through the more subtle, persuasive and integrated paradoxes of *Gargantua* to the *Tiers Livre*, a sort of "theory and practice of bluff." The *Quart Livre* is the most successfully ambiguous (it makes the least sense), as Rabelais excels in the creation of "action" episodes out of nothing or out of words. For Professor Bowen, Montaigne is, primarily, neither a moralist nor a self-portraitist, nor is his a "livre de bonne foi"; rather, he is "the creator and user of paradox, ambiguity and *boutade*," a preoccupation which is evident from the beginning to the end of his work. The significant development is in his ability, by the third book, to link the moral, intellectual and aesthetic planes in a coherent metaphorical structure (cf especially "Sur des vers de Virgil"). Montaigne is "using ambiguity himself in a constantly entertaining manner to make us aware and ashamed of our own ambiguity in thought and action."

For the moment, the author has limited herself to the treatment of technical, stylistic aspects of a vast subject and to the raising of "fruitful questions" (among others, her use of the word "ashamed" with reference to Montaigne's reader). As for Professor Bowen's reader, he will want to inquire further as to how, and why, so many writers of the period (though by no means all) thought their asymmetrical, disordered, paradoxical and ambiguous representations of reality might please and/or instruct their disconcerted readers.

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