

The Voyage to Rome in French Renaissance Literature (Review)

By: [Robert E. Campo](#)

Campo, Roberto E. Rev. of *The Voyage to Rome in French Renaissance Literature*, by Eric Macphail. *Romance Quarterly*, 40/4 (1993): 249-50.

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Romance Quarterly on 04 Nov 2012, available online:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/08831157.1993.10545045>.

*****© Taylor & Francis. Reprinted with permission. No further reproduction is authorized without written permission from Taylor & Francis. This version of the document is not the version of record. Figures and/or pictures may be missing from this format of the document. *****

Abstract:

This article is a review of the book *The Voyage to Rome in French Renaissance Literature* by Eric Macphail.

Keywords: Book Review | Sixteenth century French literature | Rome | French Humanists

Article:

The Voyage to Rome in French Renaissance Literature Eric Macphail. (Stanford French and Italian Studies, 68.) Saratoga, Calif.: ANMA Libri, 1990. 216pp.

At one time or another nearly every sixteenth-century French humanist would document a "voyage" to Rome, geographical and/or metaphorical. An extraordinarily rich sampling of this documentation provides the material for MacPhail's book, whose goal is "to examine the various meanings of Rome for French Renaissance literature" (3). Following a "method" that combines the "close reading" of a chronologically ordered corpus of prose and poetic texts with "an informed interpretation of the political and historical context in which this literature evolved" (3), MacPhail finds that his subject undergoes three major stages defined by two historical turning-points: the 1527 sack of Rome and the 1559 treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis.

Sections 1-2 of chapter 1 summarize the principal writings of the initial stage. For MacPhail, this is the literature of the first quarter of the sixteenth century that expresses the earliest French reactions against the clichés of Italian cultural primacy and imminent Roman "renovatio" (or renewal) promulgated since the fourteenth century. Its foremost spokesmen are Bude, Longuiel, Champier, and Lemaire; its central themes are "translatio imperii" and "translatio studii," which represent France as the inevitable inheritor of the political and intellectual hegemony of classical Rome.

Chapters 1.3-3.3 investigate the literature of the second stage: the new, more virulent (if at times ambivalent) anti-Italian writings that emerge after Charles V's sack of Rome in 1527. In the author's view, this event furnished French humanists with the first tangible proof that "translatio" was either fully under way or, paradoxically, wholly unrealizable. Contributors to this "counter-voyage" (103) and its "Rome n'est plus Rome" topos include Erasmus, Dolet, Magny, and Grévin.

Joachim Du Bellay, however, is the focus of MacPhail's discussion. Chapters 1.3-2.6 present one of the most expansive examinations of Du Bellay's work to appear in years. In addition to the *Deffence et illustration*, MacPhail studies the *Antiquitez de Rome*, the *Regrets*, the *Divers jeux rustiques* and the Latin *Poemata*. Although deeply indebted to Margaret Ferguson and Thomas Greene for his comments on the ambivalent treatment of Rome in the *Deffence*, the author breaks important new ground by identifying similar cases of ambivalence in the other works and by relating these instances to changes in the "renovatio" and "translatio" ideals or, on a biographical level, to the poet's experience of Franco-Italian politics during the 1550s.

The last two chapters (4-5) consider examples of the third stage: the literature of Roman "rehabilitation," which, "through an appeal to history" (especially Tacitus's *Annals*), attempts "to show that 'Rome est toujours Rome'" (128). MacPhail relates this new thematic direction to a growing French desire for political and religious stability first reflected, on the international scene, in France's Counter-Reformation alliance with Spain and Rome under the 1559 treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis.

Leading this rehabilitation are Muret and Montaigne. For Muret, MacPhail highlights the militant Counter Reformation propaganda of 1571-72 and the pro-Roman 1580 lectures promoting Tacitean "prudencia." In Montaigne's case, the author traces Tacitus's role in the *Essais* "as a chronicler of Rome's private heroism" (165), and he exposes Rome's significance as a "haven for relativism" (179) in the *Journal de Voyage* and a model of "triumphant vanity" (181) in essay III.9, "De la vanité."

MacPhail's book has many obvious merits. It is broad-reaching and learned, yet concise and unpretentious. Flawless, however, it is not. For example, never is the precise nature of the two turning-points fully explained. Do they bear causally on the changes from one stage to the next, or are they mere historical milestones in a literary evolution with its own internal momentum? Nor is any attempt made to account for Ronsard's reprise of the "translatio" ideal in his 1572 *Franciade*, so long after that ideal was supposed to have faded. And why does the author devote only three pages (143-45) to d'Aubigne's *Tragiques* and, further, consider this work only in relation to Muret's writings, hence apart from the anti-Roman literature of the second stage? These and other less serious objections aside, this book represents an important addition to scholarly criticism on the theme of Rome in French Renaissance literature.

Roberto E. Campo

University of North Carolina Greensboro