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**Mannerism and Baroque in Seventeenth-Century French
Poetry: The Example of Tristan L’Hermite.** James C.
Shepard. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press,
2001. 188 pp. \$30.00. ISBN 0-8078-9273-4.

REVIEWED BY: Russell Ganim, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Interest in Tristan L’Hermite has not only been sustained, but has grown considerably since 1955, when Amédée Carriat published *Tristan ou L’Eloge d’un poète* and his *Bibliographie des oeuvres de Tristan L’Hermite*. Carriat’s work on the *Cahiers Tristan L’Hermite*, as well as the scholarship of Claude Abraham, Catherine Grisé, and Jean-Pierre Chauveau among others, has laid the groundwork for a number of new inquiries into Tristan’s oeuvre. Colloquia on Tristan have been organized in France and the U.S. in recent years, and the Tristan “revival” reached an apex of sorts in 1999 with Champion’s publication of his *Oeuvres complètes* under the direction of Roger Guichemerre. It is against this backdrop that specialists would seemingly welcome James C. Shepard’s *Mannerism and Baroque in Seventeenth-Century French Poetry: The Example of Tristan L’Hermite*. Nonetheless, while Shepard’s monograph does represent an earnest effort, the book is largely unsuccessful because it reads far too much like the 1997 dissertation on which it is based.

The work’s principal chapters deal with the mannerist and baroque aspects of Tristan’s lyric. While this approach has not been previously undertaken, it is reasonable to ask why Shepard decided on it in the first place. Chapters 3 and 4, entitled “Mannerism” and “Baroque” respectively, provide long histories of the controversies surrounding the definitions and applications of these terms. Shepard himself admits the difficulty scholars have experienced in forming a consensus on when these movements took place and what traits actually characterized them. From a historical perspective, the debate itself has intrinsic value, but many critics have abandoned the idea of strict classification because of the palpable overlap between these two currents as well many others (the *précieux*, the Metaphysical,

the neo-Classical) that developed at roughly the same time. Shepard gives little explanation as to why the debate should be renewed or how his application of it to Tristan yields new insight into the question. While Shepard apparently agrees with Frank Warnke's (33) and Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani's (36–38) perceptive arguments on this issue, he does little to integrate their approaches into his thesis. One could imagine, for example, how Shepard could have used Mathieu-Castellani's distinctions between a *discours maniériste* and a *discours baroque* to formulate his own version of how the mannerist and the baroque (if indeed we accept these currents as valid points of departure) render Tristan a unique poet of his era. What occurred instead are truncated conclusions that mannerism represents the “ludic” while the baroque conveys *le sérieux* (60). Most of the subsequent textual analysis is reduced to locating passages where tone or theme shifts between these two poles. Such a payoff is dubious given that Shepard devotes over a third of the book (64 pages) to material that should have been redistributed in much smaller amounts to accompany the direct examination of Tristan's poetry.

The dissertation-like format continues in a more modified form in chapter 5. Ostensibly, the chapter is devoted to mannerist and baroque readings of the *Plaintes d'Acante*. However, Shepard spends a significant amount of time giving “a survey of prior criticism of Tristanian poetry” (65). While the author is right to acknowledge the valuable contributions of previous scholars, his tone borders on the reverential and the result is a lack of engagement with the body of research on Tristan. Given that the critics Shepard cites (Guichemerre, Philip Wadsworth, Abraham, Gris  to name a few) refrain from discussing mannerist and baroque influences on Tristan in any great detail, this chapter would have provided the author with an excellent opportunity to justify his theoretical framework. However, the reader is left with little understanding as to why Shepard feels compelled to spend so much time reading Tristan as a mannerist and/or baroque poet when his predecessors did not perceive such an obligation. Shepard correctly points to the Petrarchan and Marinistic influences on Tristan but in so doing mostly follows the example of other critics, and adds little to the existing in-

terpretation of Marino-inspired poems. His discussion of important sonnets such as “La Belle en deuil” (87–88) is cursory at best, while in chapter 8, Shepard's assertion that the “Belle Gueuse” (*Vers H roïques*) is “totally ludic” (150) is extremely difficult to accept. Similarly, the contention that “L'Extase d'un baiser” “is laughable in its comic expression of passion” (150) is as arbitrary as it is surprising given the problematic nature of the sonnet's imagery and its overall sense of *pathos*.

Indeed, it is Shepard's unwillingness to problematize both Tristan's poetry and Tristan criticism that presents the major obstacle of this book. Shepard's approach tells much more than it shows. Too often, his study follows the formula of (1) discussing the predominant, if not obvious thematic elements of a given poem, (2) quoting one or two selected passages, and (3) providing a short conclusion linking the poem to either the mannerist or baroque movements. Shepard's effort would have been improved by a more definite explanation of Tristan's originality within the context of the early seventeenth-century lyric. Unlike other authors of his day, Tristan's oeuvre extends to the genres of drama and the novel, yet Shepard opts not to explore their relation to the lyric in any significant detail. Additionally, the search for structural coherence in the various *recueils*, as well as reading Tristan alongside his most important contemporaries, Theophile de Viau and Saint-Amant, could serve to extend and deepen the discussion. The bibliography is mostly complete, although recent key articles by Catharine Randall and Martha Houle are missing. While one would want to recommend this monograph in view of the subject matter and the author's enthusiasm, the outcome does not lend itself to such an endorsement.

