

Ancient or Modern? Bérardier de Bataut's Essai sur le récit (1776)

Christof Schöch

► **To cite this version:**

Christof Schöch. Ancient or Modern? Bérardier de Bataut's Essai sur le récit (1776). Romance Studies, Maney Publishing, 2012, 30 (1), pp.25-35. <10.1179/174581512X13221535571777>. <halshs-00859856>

HAL Id: halshs-00859856

<https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00859856>

Submitted on 9 Sep 2013

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Christof Schöch

“Ancient or Modern? Bérardier de Bataut’s *Essai sur le récit* (1776)”

Romance Studies, 30.1, Jan. 2012, p. 25-35.
DOI 10.1179/174581512X13221535571777

This is a post-print version of the article. For more information, see <http://www.maney.co.uk/>.
For access to the original version, please visit: <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/maney/ros>.

Abstract

When François-Joseph Bérardier de Bataut first published his *Essai sur le récit, ou entretiens sur la manière de raconter* in 1776, the book received enthusiastic reviews and was praised for being an instructive account of the art of storytelling. This fact has not, however, prevented the book from being all but forgotten today. The present contribution proposes an examination of this text, aiming to reflect on the reasons for the *Essai sur le récit*'s oblivion and to demonstrate the various respects in which this oblivion appears to be unjustified. It does so by showing that while the *Essai sur le récit* remains strongly influenced by the classicist period, especially in the range of authors quoted and in some of the core values attributed to narrative, it also contains quite a few more innovative aspects, especially in the very definition of narrative given and in the treatment of narrative circumstances. Attention to Bérardier's text thus promises to contribute to a growing interest in the persistence of the classical heritage during the Age of Enlightenment, at the same time as it proves relevant to our understanding of the poetics of narrative in the French eighteenth century.

In 1776, François-Joseph Bérardier de Bataut published his *Essai sur le récit, ou entretiens sur la manière de raconter*. He makes use of the tradition of the platonic philosophic dialogue: there is a brief narrative frame, in which two friends, Timagène and Euphorbe, meet at the latter's house situated in the countryside, a place proper to reflection and reasoned debate. While Euphorbe has lived there for many years in a retreat devoted mostly to books and study, Timagène has only recently retired from an important post in the military. In twelve conversations, they speak about the proper way of telling stories in both fictional and non-fictional works. It is possible to distinguish three major parts of the text: after a short preface, the first five conversations concern above all the qualities of narrative in general, especially the place and function of narrative circumstances. The following six conversations are concerned with questions specific to storytelling in different narrative genres, both fictional and non-fictional, separately addressing historiographical writing, public speaking, fable, narrative in verse, and jest. The twelfth and last conversation, somewhat distinct from the others, concerns the merits of and rules applicable to the novel.

The scope of the *Essai sur le récit*, then, when compared to contemporary writing on narrative, can be described as follows: on the one hand, it encompasses narrative in general and discusses principles of storytelling in a wide range of genres and therefore has a considerably wider scope than well-known and important texts on the history, merits and vices of the novel, such as the seminal 'Traité sur le roman' by Huet (2005) written in 1670 or the *De l'usage des romans* by Lenglet Du Fresnoy (1970), first published in 1734. On the other hand, because Bérardier restricts himself to theorizing narrative and is primarily using rather than specifically discussing categories such as 'intérêt', 'vraisemblance' or 'goût', the *Essai sur le récit* does not wholly form part of the emerging discipline of aesthetics to which texts like Dubos' *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et la peinture* (1993) published in 1719 or Batteux' *Les Beaux-Arts réduits à un meme principe* (1989) published in 1746 pertain. That Bérardier de Bataut published a quite unique, book-length study solely devoted to narrative, then, is in itself a noteworthy fact, although it is difficult to establish how successful and widely known the book was at the time. While there appears to have been only one edition, there were two extensive reviews in important journals in the year of its publication. The first was published in the successful and very conservative *Année littéraire*, the second in the much more progressive *Journal encyclopédique*. The first critic applauds Bérardier's treatment of narrative 'avec justesse & avec méthode' (Anonymous 1776a: 122). The second critic presents a very detailed analysis of the text and praises its 'style pur, élégant, facile, une lecture réfléchie des auteurs de tous les siècles, & beaucoup de jugement' (Anonymous 1776b: 286). Both insist on the completeness and usefulness of the work for readers and writers alike. Despite this fact, however, the book is all but forgotten today. Until recently, it was only occasionally and selectively quoted, usually in the context of research on the poetics of narrative in the eighteenth century or on the history of narrative theory.¹ A recent, otherwise very complete study of the 'dialogue d'idées' does not even mention the *Essai sur le récit* (Pujol 2005), whereas the few more recent and more developed comments on the *Essai sur le récit* do not seem to agree on its status. On the one hand, Jean Sgard, while acknowledging that Bérardier de Bataut 'est celui qui s'est préoccupé le plus de la nature du récit et de ses différentes modalités', argues that 'il ne se pique pas d'originalité' and that he keeps to the 'doctrine traditionnelle' (2008:37). On the other hand, Jean-Michel Adam argues that the *Essai sur le récit* can be considered to be one of the most important historical sources of modern narratology (1990:7). Rather than agreeing from the start with either one of these two positions, my contention in the pages that follow is that Bérardier de Bataut is both an Ancient and a Modern, to use an opposition widely used since the famous 'Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes'. More precisely, Bérardier de Bataut can be seen as being 'Ancient' by conviction and self-declaration at the same time as being 'Modern' in a more implicit way. To show this, and in the aim of more clearly situating the *Essai sur le récit* in the theoretical landscape of its time, I would like to discuss some of the key aspects of the text and examine their classicist or traditional and more modern or innovative tendencies. In the remainder of this paper, I shall therefore be looking into several aspects relevant to this question, including the authors and texts that serve as frequent reference in the *Essai sur le récit*, some of the key normative values Bérardier de Bataut is appealing to, the definition of narrative and the category of narrative circumstances he operates with, and the stance he takes on the merits of the novel.

The few bio-bibliographical facts that are known about François-Joseph Bérardier de Bataut, who was born in Paris in 1720 and died there in 1794 (and who should not be confused with Denis Bérardier),

can be seen as a first indicator of his position. After having studied theology, he became a professor of rhetoric at the Collège du Plessis, which was later incorporated into the Sorbonne. He is the author of a *Précis de l'histoire universelle* (1766) which was much appreciated at the time, as is apparent from its three editions. The *Essai sur le récit*, published in 1776, is Bérardier's second major work. Finally, in 1786, Bérardier published one of several translations of Melchior de Polignac's *Anti-Lucrèce*, a work in Latin verse directed against the materialist philosophers. The stance of the original work and Bérardier's choice of a translation into French verse instead of prose clearly position him in the camp of the Ancients.ⁱⁱ

Similarly, upon reading Bérardier de Bataut's 'Préface' to the *Essai sur le récit*, one may very well come to the conclusion that he positions himself firmly in the classicist, anti-modern, even anti-enlightenment field:

On ne trouvera point ici de ces traits piquants, de ces réflexions hardies, empruntés de la prétendue philosophie moderne, si fort à la mode. C'est pourtant là, dira-t-on, le vrai moyen pour qu'un livre fasse fortune. Sans cet assaisonnement, il sera peu goûté : vous serez renvoyé dans la classe des hommes crédules ; et ce terme est devenu synonyme avec celui d'imbécile. Je sens tout le poids de cette réflexion. Néanmoins je puis encore douter, (car qu'est-ce que ces Messieurs ne nous ont pas permis de révoquer en doute ?) je puis douter que ce goût soit celui du public, c'est-à-dire, de la plus saine partie de la littérature ; et dans ce doute, qui me paraît assez bien fondé, je ne veux pas acheter les suffrages d'un certain genre de lecteurs, au prix de tout ce qu'il y a de plus respectable. (Bérardier 2010: vii-viii)ⁱⁱⁱ

This self-positioning, although it should be taken seriously, should not deter from looking into what references, values and principles Bérardier de Bataut actually deploys and develops in his lengthy discussion of narrative.

The range of authors that is used for theoretical reference and as a source of examples, for instance, is very telling. For Bérardier de Bataut, the constant reference to Antiquity arises necessarily from the nature of the human mind. He quotes Cicero to make his point: 'Ignorer, dit Cicéron, ce qui s'est fait avant nous, c'est être toujours enfant' (Bérardier 2010: iv). However, Roman antiquity is much more prevalent in the *Essai sur le récit* than Greek Antiquity. For instance, one of the most important references in the *Essai sur le récit* is Horace's *Ars poetica*, referred to in a variety of contexts. Authors of rhetorical guidebooks like Cicero or Quintilian are frequently quoted as well. In a similar way, Bérardier's literary preferences are clearly traditional and classicist, for instance when, while valuing the stoic philosopher Seneca, he lays blame on the roman epicurean Lucretius, an important source for eighteenth-century materialist philosophy (Bérardier 2010: 127).^{iv}

Another important source of references and examples is the French seventeenth century. Authors like Boileau or La Fontaine are frequently quoted, and the Père Bouhours, author in 1687 of *La Manière de bien penser dans les ouvrages d'esprit*, is not only called 'un auteur ingénieux' (Bérardier 2010: 33); his book, written in dialogue form, can also be considered to be one of the models for Bérardier's own *Essai sur le récit*, as much on the level of content as on that of the dialogue form. By contrast, the eighteenth century is clearly underrepresented in the *Essai sur le récit*, and the authors most frequently mentioned in a positive light are not the most progressively minded ones. For instance, Bérardier likes to quote historians like Paul Rapin or Aubert de Vertot and authors of fables

or stories like Henri Richer or Marmontel, but mentions the more innovative Abbé Dubos with a predominantly critical stance.

Some of the normative principles Bérardier uses when talking about narrative are perfectly aligned with this position. He sees as the main objective of narrative, for instance, the horatian principle of *delectare et prodesse* (to instruct and to delight).^v Similarly, two of the main qualities he values in narrative are derived from roman Antiquity: clarity and brevity. Euphorbe says about La Fontaine: 'J'y trouve toutes les qualités que l'on peut désirer dans un excellent récit ; une clarté qui le met à la portée de tous ses lecteurs ; une brièveté qui ne laisse aucun lieu à l'ennui' (Bérardier 2010: 27). These two qualities are prominent, for example, in the *Rhetoric ad Herennius* as well as in Cicero's and Quintilian's writings.^{vi}

A question treated in a more ambivalent manner is that of the relation between truth and verisimilitude. In classicist thinking, verisimilitude is more important than truth: in Corneille's *Le Cid*, Chimène should not have married Le Cid because, although it might be true to the historical facts, it is not admissible insofar as the play is an *exemplum* of more general meaning. This view evolves and in the Abbé Dubos' influential *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*, first published in 1719, the normative force of historical truth is stronger than the moral and aesthetic necessity for verisimilitude; more precisely, adhering to historical truth becomes a condition of verisimilitude, at least in those cases where the public must be supposed to know the historical truth.^{vii} In a similar manner, Euphorbe in the *Essai sur le récit* affirms that in all those cases where the circumstances of a historical fact are either essential to that fact or are known by the readers or listeners, the truth has to be favoured even if it should be in conflict with verisimilitude. Euphorbe says: 'Cependant, lorsque les circonstances sont essentielles au fait qu'on raconte, ou qu'elles sont connues, je ne doute point qu'on ne doive préférer celles qui sont véritables, quand elles choqueraient la vraisemblance' (Bérardier 2010: 172; see also p. 301). It is true that this statement applies only to historiographical writing. Elsewhere, Bérardier gives preference to verisimilitude as opposed to truth, just as Chapelain and Scudéry did in the 'Querelle du Cid'. However, Bérardier treats verisimilitude as a concept subject to a relativity of values, whose contents depend on the cultural and historical context in any given society. This relativity of aesthetic concepts is also a novelty in relation to the normative, ideal values of the 'doctrine classique'.

Moreover, one important quality Bérardier repeatedly attributes to narrative is historically more progressive: that of 'intérêt'. Although Bérardier generally takes a critical stance on the Abbé Dubos, his views on 'intérêt' remain inspired by the change of perspective Dubos introduced: that of taking the reader's or listener's aesthetic experience into account.^{viii} In this context, Bérardier points out that, above all, any narrative needs to capture the reader's or listener's interest, in the sense of eliciting strong emotional reactions in them, and establishing an emotional link between them and the narrative events: '[L'intérêt] est un penchant secret du cœur qui nous rend sensibles aux événements heureux ou malheureux que nous entendons raconter, ou dont nous sommes les témoins' (Bérardier 2010: 105). This emotional link can be established, according to Bérardier, by appealing to the reader's emotions rather than by an exaggerated display of imagination or stylistic ingenuity. The importance of emotions is also an occasion for Bérardier to limit the validity of normative rules. Euphorbe explains: 'Il est des occasions, où c'est une espèce de règle de négliger les règles. Une grande passion, un mouvement violent doit porter dans le style le trouble dont l'âme est agitée' (Bérardier 2010: 238). To

neglect the rules is certainly not a classicist's stance, even if for Bérardier, this is clearly a matter of exceptional circumstances.

Besides such qualities valued in stories, the nature of narrative is also discussed by the two friends, in characteristic double voice. Timagène starts: 'je pense que le récit n'est autre chose que l'exposition détaillée d'un fait véritable ou inventé. J'ajouterais, dit alors Euphorbe, dont le but est d'instruire ses lecteurs, ou ses auditeurs' (Bérardier 2010: 23). As we have already seen, this very broad definition, and the primary qualities associated with narrative, such as clarity and brevity, are of little originality. It appears clearly, however, that for Bérardier, the rhetorical dimension of persuasion is not prevalent, in contrast to Marmontel, for example, who in the same years maintains the persuasive dimension of narrative and derives from this the necessity for clarity and verisimilitude.^{ix} The innovation in Bérardier's definition lies elsewhere. He speaks of the 'detailed exposition of a fact' as the core element of narrative. Although this does not seem spectacular at first sight, it is notable in a period dominated by the idea that narrative discourse should reply to the principles of brevity, unity and absence of digressions, an idea which has been summed up by Randa Sabry in the definition of narrative discourse as a 'vector', i.e. propelled by a constant progressive and linear dynamic (Sabry 1996:136-137). Bérardier underlines this important redefinition of narrative. He lets Euphorbe speak about the necessity of indicating all the circumstances of a fact that are necessary to capture, inform and touch the reader. He explains that this is impossible without indicating many circumstances in addition to those defining the bare fact and concludes: 'Présenter rapidement les parties les plus essentielles d'un fait, ce n'est donc pas proprement raconter' (Bérardier 2010: 9). Here, Bérardier comes closest to a structuralist view of narrative. His view of narrative as composed of facts and circumstances can be seen as an anticipation of the early structuralist distinction, introduced by Roland Barthes (1966) between two basic types of narrative units, 'fonctions' and 'indices'. While functions are distributive in nature, correspond to events and may be core functions (making up the skeleton of narrative structure) or catalysts (contributing additional, minor events), indices are integrative in nature and correspond to elements such as descriptive details or full-fledged descriptions. The structuralist preference for core functions over indices motivated the extraordinary development of narratology, but for a long time hindered a comparably differentiated study of descriptive writing in narrative texts. In contrast, as far as the poetics of narrative in the eighteenth century is concerned, Bérardier sees facts and circumstances as equally essential to narrative, therefore reducing the normative force of narrative discourse as a 'vector'.

However, what is it that Bérardier means exactly when he speaks of 'circonstances' and of 'exposition détaillée'? In fact, these categories do not exclusively concern descriptive details, but may also refer to any kind of fine-grained, detailed account of a fact or event.^x This means that Bérardier, in fact, in a manner characteristic of his time, conflates two concepts separated by modern narratology: that of catalysts and that of indices. In fact, Bérardier elsewhere speaks of the 'récit circonstancié' (Bérardier 2010: 187), clearly showing that for him, facts and circumstances are in many cases indistinguishably connected in narrative. To what degree, then, is Bérardier's concept of 'circonstances' tributary to the rhetorical category of the same name? The term may refer mainly to two things, in the French classical age. First, it translates Latin *adjuncta*, designating the immediate circumstances of a fact, those that respond to the questions of who, what, where, by what means, why, how, and when. Second, it can be used as a more general term covering latin *adjuncta*, just mentioned, as well as *antecedentiae* and *consequentiae*, that is, all the circumstances preceding,

accompanying, and following the fact in question (see Le Guern 1998 for details). The first are considered essentially rhetorical or persuasive, the second are more general in nature. To Bérardier, it comes naturally to understand circumstances in the second, extensive sense. Again, however, the central reason why the circumstances are important to Bérardier is not because they persuade, but because they raise the interest of the listener. This responds to the new way of perceiving the importance of reception, by way of the notion of interest already discussed, and it is more adapted to all kinds of narrative than to judicial or deliberative contexts alone.

In this context, Bérardier develops a novel and rather differentiated typology of narrative circumstances, which does not follow the rhetorical types of *adjuncta* nor their temporal or causal relation to the fact, but depends on the nature and degree of necessity or usefulness to the story that is being told. These distinctions are exemplified, by Bérardier de Bataut, in an analysis of the treatment of the *Fable du chat et des souris* by three different authors: Aesop, Phaedrus, and La Fontaine. Euphorbe first comments on Aesop's version: 'Rien de si clair et de si naturel que ce récit ; mais aussi rien de si simple. Tout y est nécessaire. L'auteur ne se permet d'autres détails que ceux dont dépend l'action qu'il raconte. Il s'en tient aux circonstances principales' (Bérardier 2010: 14). Aesop's version is a narrative and not the simple exposition of an event, but the circumstances are limited to what is strictly necessary for the proper understanding of the story.

In Phaedrus' version, the opposition between the rats, rapid and alert, and the cat, weakened by old age and somewhat torpid, is underlined; then, the fourth rat is distinguished by its age and experience. Euphorbe comments: 'Le mot *retorridus*, qui caractérise le rat déifiant et précautionné, est un coup de pinceau qui fait seul un portrait achevé, et que l'auteur rend encore plus frappant, en ajoutant, *que souvent il était échappé aux pièges et aux souricières*' (Bérardier 2010: 15-16, emphasis in the original). Euphorbe, then, underlines the efficiency of mentioning one small but telling descriptive detail represented by this one word 'retorridus'.

As for the version of La Fontaine, it is the most rich in circumstances added to the pure sequence of facts or events. Timagène notes that this author 'a certainement [le mérite] de l'embellissement et de la richesse', but Euphorbe points out to him that 'le récit pouvait s'en passer, sans rien perdre de sa nature' (Bérardier 2010: 19). In this case, then, the circumstances are not constitutive for the story in particular or strictly necessary to its understanding, nor are they a type of circumstances which is constitutive of narrative in general. Although they may be seen as adding some interest to the narrative, they also threaten the principle of the narrative discourse as a 'vector' to which Bérardier's attitude is ambivalent.

To sum up Bérardier's reasoning, circumstances can be either essential, that is necessary for a basic understanding of the fact, or ornamental, that is raising interest in the reader and/or making reading or hearing the story an aesthetic pleasure (see Bérardier 2010: 12-13). These two classes of circumstances are constrained by their need to have both usefulness and verisimilitude. The third, excluded category is that of illegitimate circumstances, a negative category defined by not being endowed with any of the functions of the first two types.

The last aspect of the *Essai sur le récit* I would like to look into is the position Bérardier formulates on the novel. This aspect is particularly relevant for determining his stance as an Ancient or a Modern, because it is a frequently discussed and highly controversial issue at the time. The 'dilemme du roman' described by Georges May (1963) for the beginning of the eighteenth century – in which the categories of moral and aesthetic merit are central for the novel's status – remains formative for much

of the debate in this area.^{xi} Bérardier begins the twelfth conversation, which he devotes almost exclusively to the novel, with the question of its origins, following the argumentative tradition instituted by the seminal *Traité sur l'origine des romans* de Huet (2005) and equally present in similar texts of the eighteenth century, for instance in those by Bricaire de la Dixmerie or Sade.^{xii} However, instead of subjecting, as the authors just mentioned do, the history of the novel to a critical review, Bérardier's two friends concentrate, in a first step, on the question of the moral and aesthetic merits and vices of the novel. In this part, Bérardier maintains the polemical nature of this debate, particularly apparent in Lenglet Du Fresnoy's highly ironic *De l'usage des romans* (1734), by letting Euphorbe and Timagène agree less than they do in most of the remainder of the *Essai sur le récit*. In the beginning of their conversation, at least, Euphorbe is clearly not ready to grant any kind of merit to the novel as a genre. The only novel he owns is the *Don Quichotte*, because it is, as he explains, 'une critique ingénieuse des romans, et peut servir de préservatif contre l'envie même de les lire' (Bérardier 2010: 670). By and by, however, Timagène brings up more and more arguments in favour of the novel. For instance, he distinguishes older and more recent phases in the genre's development and says about its most recent phase: 'le roman est devenu honnête et poli, et s'est dégagé de ce merveilleux absurde et gigantesque, qui le défigurait autrefois' (Bérardier 2010: 673). Here, both moral and aesthetic criticisms of the novel are firmly rejected. Although Euphorbe's scepticism remains strong, it is finally directed more against a certain type of existing novels, which he claims are morally corrupting, than against the genre as such. Timagène concludes: 'Vous commencez à me rassurer [...], et je vois que nous pourrions bien un jour trouver dans votre bibliothèque une centaine de contes et une douzaine de romans à côté de celui-ci.' (Bérardier 2010: 689). Whereas Euphorbe appears as the more knowledgeable of the two friends in the remainder of the *Essai sur le récit*, Bérardier here clearly allows Timagène's more progressive position to prevail over Euphorbe's more conservative stance. Once it is established that the novel may be, after all, a respectable narrative genre, the two friends discuss the relevant rules of composition, a discussion applying some of the more general subjects from the first part of the *Essai sur le récit* to the novel: for instance, the two friends insist on the importance of verisimilitude as much in the sequence of events and in the characters, on 'intérêt' as the most important ingredient of the novel and on the style of writing which should be modelled, according to Euphorbe, on that of historical writing (Bérardier 2010: 690-697).

How can Bérardier de Bataut's position then, be summed up? I hope to have shown that, despite strong classicist influences, the *Essai sur le récit* is a unique contribution to the eighteenth century's reflection on narrative nature and structure. The classicist heritage is predominant in the literary and theoretical references as well as in some of the key values Bérardier attributes to narrative, but his views are more innovative when it comes to the notion of 'intérêt', when he acknowledges the historical and social relativity of verisimilitude, or when he lets the more progressive position in favour of the novel prevail. Above all, his treatment of narrative circumstances cautiously challenges more conventional definitions of narrative. He grants equal importance to facts and circumstances in narrative, and uses degrees of structural or functional rather than moral or rhetorical legitimacy to classify narrative circumstances. The *Essai sur le récit's* position in the theoretical landscape of its time could hence be likened to that of the Abbé Batteux' *Les Beaux-arts réduits à un même principe*. This treaty, first published in 1746, retains classicist concepts such as 'imitation' but adapts them to the context of enlightenment aesthetics. Similarly, Bérardier de Bataut in this *Essai sur le récit* takes

up many classicist concepts, but at the same time adds some more progressive positions to his poetics of narrative and puts some of the older ones in a new, structural rather than rhetorical, framework.

Is the ambivalent position the *Essai sur le récit* holds in the theoretical landscape of its own time, then, the main or only reason why this text has been, until recently, almost entirely forgotten? In my view, this is only part of the story, because this holds true only for a research perspective that, although dominant for a long time in eighteenth-century studies, has recently started to change. For many decades, the primary research interest lay on everything that opposed the enlightened eighteenth century to the classicist seventeenth century, as well as on the more innovative and exceptional authors. In this context, the relevance of Bérardier's writing could easily be underestimated. Indeed, the more classicist aspects of this text are especially evident, and his views on narrative do not seem fit to account for the narrative practice of, say, a Diderot, who is constantly challenging, transgressing and expanding established rules of how a story should be told. However, in the context of a growing body of research interested in the continuity between the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries and in the more conventional authors of the period, Bérardier's writing becomes more relevant.^{xiii} Although the *Essai sur le récit* is, without a doubt, witness to the 'héritage classique' surviving far into the eighteenth century, this should not lead to ignoring the more innovative aspects of the *Essai sur le récit*. In any event, this ambivalence has proven to be of high explanatory value in research on why descriptive writing maintained a highly problematic level of legitimacy and was only reluctantly introduced in the novel, during the second half of the eighteenth century, at a time when description was developing into an obviously essential part of many types of writing other than the novel.^{xiv} Specifically, the poetics of narrative Bérardier de Bataut defends can account for several aspects of the narrative practice found in French novels of the eighteenth century, concerning for instance the legitimacy of descriptive passages and the various textual strategies of explicitly legitimizing or tacitly integrating descriptive writing into the narrative context. It can indeed be shown that major authors like Sade or Rétif de la Bretonne are remarkably conscious of the literary conventions regarding the limited legitimacy of digressions and descriptive details, and that, in this respect, many novels written by second-tier authors such as Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont, Claude-Joseph Dorat, Nicolas-Germain Léonard ou Louvet de Couvray respond to those same principles set forth by Bérardier de Bataut in his *Essai sur le récit*.^{xv} More generally, Bérardier's appreciation of narrative discourse as an equilibrium between facts and circumstances is also a timely reminder for contemporary narratology to take into account descriptive writing as much as narrative structure. For these reasons, it seems eminently worthwhile to rediscover Bérardier de Bataut's *Essai sur le récit* today.^{xvi}

Works Cited

- Adam, Jean-Michel. 1990. 'L'Analyse linguistique du récit : rhétorique, poétique et pragmatique textuelle', *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur*, 100: 7-24.
- Albertan, Sylviane. 1990. 'La poésie au service de l'apologétique: 'L'Anti-Lucrèce en vers français' (1786) de l'Abbé Bérardier de Bataut', *Cahiers Roucher – André Chénier*, 10-11: 137-148.
- Anonymous. 1776a. 'Lettre VI: Essai sur le récit', *L'Année littéraire*, 6: 121-137.
- Anonymous. 1776b. 'Essai sur le récit', *Journal encyclopédique*, 8: 273-286.
- Anonymous. 1954. *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, ed. by Harry Caplan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press).

- Asmuth, Bernhard. 2009. 'Der Beitrag der klassischen Rhetorik zum Thema Verständlichkeit', *Rhetorik und Verständlichkeit*, Gerd Antos (ed.). (Tübingen: Niemeyer) pp. 1-20.
- Barthes, Roland. 1966. 'Introduction à l'analyse structurale du récit', *Communications*, 8: 1-27.
- Batteux, Charles. 1989. *Les Beaux-Arts réduits à un même principe* (1746), ed. by Jean-Rémy Manton (Paris: Aux Amateurs des Lettres).
- Becq, Annie. 1994. *Genèse de l'esthétique française moderne, 1680-1814* (Paris: Albin Michel).
- Bérardier de Bataut, François-Joseph. 1766. *Précis de l'histoire universelle* (Paris: Hérissant fils). (Two more editions: Paris: C.-P. Berton, 1776 and Paris: C. Le Tellier, 1823.)
- Bérardier de Bataut, François-Joseph. 1786. *L'Anti-Lucrèce en vers français* (Paris: C.-P. Berton).
- Bérardier de Bataut, François-Joseph. 2010. *Essai sur le récit, ou entretiens sur la manière de raconter* (Paris: Berton, 1776). Electronic edition, ed. by Christof Schöch, <www.berardier.org> [accessed 8 March 2011].
- Bricaire de La Dixmerie, Nicolas. 1773. 'Discours sur l'origine, les progrès & le genre des Romans', *Toni et Clairette* (Paris : Didot l 'ainé), vol. 1, pp. v-lxxvi.
- Chartier, Roger. 2005. *Introduction aux grandes théories du roman*. Second edition (Paris: Dunod).
- Comte-Sponville, André. 1992. 'La Mettrie et le Système d'Épicure', *Dix-Huitième Siècle*, 24: 105-115.
- Dubos, Jean-Baptiste. 1993. *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (1719). (Paris: École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts).
- Huet, Pierre-Daniel. 2005. 'Traité sur l 'origine des romans' (1670), *Poétiques du roman*, ed. by Camille Esmein (Paris: Champion).
- Kremer, Nathalie. 2008. *Préliminaires à la théorie esthétique du XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Kimé).
- Lafon, Henri. 1997. *Espaces romanesques du XVIII^e siècle, 1670-1820* (Paris: PUF).
- Le Guern, Michel. 1998. 'Les antécédents rhétoriques de la notion de circonstance', *Autour du circonstant*, Sylvianne Rémi-Giraud and André Roman (ed.). (Lyon: Presses Univ. de Lyon), pp. 53-63.
- Lenglet Du Fresnoy, Nicolas. 1970. *De l'usage des romans où l'on fait voir leur utilité et leurs différents caractères* (1734). (Genève: Slatkine Reprints).
- Marmontel, Jean-François. 2005. *Éléments de littérature* (1787), ed. by Sophie Le Ménahèze (Paris: Déjonquères).
- Masseau, Didier. 2000. *Les ennemis des philosophes. L'antiphilosophie au temps des Lumières* (Paris: Albin Michel).
- May, Georges. 1963. *Le dilemme du roman au XVIII^e siècle. Étude sur les rapports du roman et de la critique, 1715-1761* (New Haven: Yale University Press).
- Moser-Verrey, Monique. 1987. 'L'émergence de la notion d'intérêt dans l'esthétique des Lumières', *Man and Nature – L'Homme et la nature*, Kenneth W. Graham (ed.). (Edmonton: Academic Printing & Publishing), pp. 193-207.
- Pujol, Stéphane. 2005. *Le dialogue d'idées au dix-huitième siècle* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation).
- Sabry, Randa. 1996. *Stratégies discursives. Digression, transition, suspens* (Paris: Éditions de l'EHESS).
- Sade, D.A.F. de. 1970. *Idée sur les romans* (1799), suivi de *L'Auteur des Crimes de l'Amour à Villeterque*, ed. by Jean Glastier (Bordeaux: Ducros).
- Schöch, Christof. 2011. *La Description double dans le roman français des Lumières (1760-1800)*. (Paris: Classiques Garnier).
- Sgard, Jean. 2008. 'Poétique des vies particulières', *Les vies de Voltaire. Discours et représentations biographiques, XVIII-XX^e siècles*, Christophe Cave and Simon Davies (ed.). (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation), pp. 29-41.
- Stalnaker, Joanna. 2010. *The Unfinished Enlightenment: Description in the Age of the Encyclopedia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press.)
- Stierle, Karlheinz. 1979. 'Diderots Begriff des Interessanten', *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte*, 23: 55-76.

- i For a more detailed account, see my 'Introduction' to Bérardier 2010.
- ii For a detailed analysis of Bérardier's version of the *Anti-Lucrèce* as an example of both didactic poetry and Christian apologetic writing, see Albertan 1990.
- iii Here and in the remainder of this paper, I shall be quoting from the edition's reading text. This electronic edition of the *Essai sur le récit* provides two alternative views of the text, a linear transcription and a modernized reading text.
- iv See Comte-Sponville 1992, who shows that, beyond La Mettrie whom he is studying, Lucretius is an important source for Enlightenment materialism.
- v Horace famously writes: 'Aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetae / aut simul et iucunda et idonea dicere uitae' (*Ars poetica*, v. 333-334).
- vi See Asmuth 2009 for a recent discussion of *perspicuitas* and *brevitas* as essential vectors of intelligibility in classical rhetoric.
- vii For a recent overview on the question, see Kremer 2008, in particular chapter II on 'Du vraisemblable au vrai', pp. 67-91.
- viii On the notion of 'intérêt', see Stierle 1979 and Moser-Verrey 1987.
- ix Marmontel writes in his *Éléments de littérature*: 'Quel que soit le sujet, le devoir de celui qui raconte est d'instruire et de persuader ; ainsi les premières règles de la narration sont la clarté et la vraisemblance' (Marmontel 2005: 755; the article 'Narration' was published for the first time in 1776 and then included in the *Éléments de littérature* in 1787). In the rhetorical tradition of Antiquity, narrative is defined in a very similar manner. The author of the *Rhetoric ad Herennius*, the oldest rhetorical transmitted to us in its entirety, written in the first century before our age, writes: 'Tres res convenit habere narrationem, ut brevis, ut dilucida, ut veri similis sit' (Anonymous 1954: section I.13).
- x See Bérardier 2010: 53-54. However, the very notion of 'description' also seems affected, in the French eighteenth century, by an ambivalence between description as a rhetorical device defined by its visual evidence and description as a specific discourse type opposed to narrative. See Schöch 2012: 25-45 for details.
- xi For a summary on the development of thinking about the novel in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Chartier 2005 and, for a discussion focused on the status of narrative and descriptive detail in the novel, Schöch 2011: 25-45.
- xii See Bricaire de la Dixmerie's 'Discours sur l'origine, les progrès & le genre des Romans' (1773) and Sade's 'Idée sur les romans' (1770) first published in 1799.
- xiii The 'héritage classique' in the area of aesthetics has been extensively covered by Annie Becq (1994), while Didier Masseur (2000) has focused on the 'anti-philosophes'. Work such as Henri Lafon's (1997) influential study of narrative texts, for instance, is witness to growing interest in the study of a spectrum of authors and works that goes beyond established canons and includes a variety of *minores*.
- xiv For a recent study of descriptive writing in the *Encyclopédie*, natural history and 'critique d'art', see Stalnaker 2010.
- xv See Schöch 2011: 90-126, which brings together better-known contemporary writings on the novel (such as the ones mentioned above) and Bérardier's account of narrative circumstances to analyze the status of descriptive writing in a wide range of French novels published between 1760 and 1800.
- xvi I would like to acknowledge funding from the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) for attending the 2009 edition of the *Romance Studies Colloquium* in Jersey City, NJ, where this research was first presented. My thanks also go to the two anonymous reviewers of this article for their thoughtful commentaries on an earlier version of this paper.