

***Chateaubriand, The Paradox of Change.* By Malcom Scott. Oxford: Peter Lang, 'Romanticism and after in France', vol.25, 2015. 269 pp. £35 (hbk).**

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To embrace Chateaubriand's work in its entirety and produce 'a new overarching account of his literary and political achievements' (p.2) was Malcom Scott's ambition. Mission accomplished! This book is set to become a reference work for students wishing to go beyond the traditional accounts of Chateaubriand's eventful life and times and understand the complex personality of the man and the artist behind the public persona. Through a close reading of the writer's complete works, Scott manages to trace the subtle evolution of Chateaubriand's views on literature, religion and politics throughout his life. Specialists of Chateaubriand and the period in which he lived will probably not learn anything new about the man and his works but will nevertheless read this well-written *synthèse* with pleasure. The originality of Scott's essay lies in the lens through which the scholar has chosen to revisit Chateaubriand's works: the lens of change. 'The phenomenon of change', says Scott, 'was Chateaubriand's central intellectual preoccupation, a major theme in his writings and an obsessive concern of his personal life' (p.3). What Scott demonstrates with talent in his essay is that Chateaubriand's attitude towards change was eminently paradoxical (hence the title). The writer's fascination with change was indeed not the sign of an irrepressible desire for it, but rather that of a life-long effort to study and understand it and, finally, to domesticate it. It was only in his fifties (if we may trust the chronology of the 1846 revised version of his *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*) that Chateaubriand came to accept what might be called his 'paternal responsibilities' with regard to the rise of romanticism — a paternity that had been attributed to him following the publication of *René* and which he had always rejected thus far. The truth is that he had created *René* as a negative example, an illustration of the ravages and dangers of inconstancy that was intended to convince his readers of the necessity

to return to the right path of Christianity. In fact, as Scott puts it, for the most part of his life, ‘this inspirer of Romanticism was [...] the greatest defender of neo-classicism’, of which he ‘cherished the artistic fixity’ (p.147). Readers of Scott’s essay will find detailed summaries of Chateaubriand’s works as well as an illuminating section on Blaise Pascal’s influence on the writer (pp.64-74) and a clever comparative analysis of Chateaubriand’s own comparative readings of Homer, Virgil, Dante, Tasso, Milton, Racine, Fénelon and Voltaire in the second part of his *Génie du Christianisme*. Overall, what emerges from Scott’s monograph is his infectious passion for Chateaubriand’s writings, a passion which has enabled him to uncover the common thread running through an entire work: the tension between change and fixity.