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► **To cite this version:**

Vanessa Guignery. The Destabilisation of Genre in Alain de Botton's Iconotexts. *Études britanniques contemporaines - Revue de la Société d'études anglaises contemporaines*, 2006, 31, pp.143-158. halshs-00469615

HAL Id: halshs-00469615

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00469615v1>

Submitted on 2 Jan 2025

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Études britanniques contemporaines

Revue de la Société d'études anglaises contemporaines

31 | 2006

The Infinite Dialogue

The Destabilisation of Genre in Alain de Botton's Iconotexts

La déstabilisation générique dans les iconotextes d'Alain de Botton

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<https://doi.org/10.4000/ebc.12329>

Abstracts

Français English

Cet article cherche à montrer en quoi la combinaison texte/image dans les ouvrages d'Alain de Botton contribue à la déstabilisation des genres. L'hybridité générique des textes de cet auteur, oscillant entre fiction et non-fiction, est renforcée par l'insertion d'images qui suspendent sans cesse la lecture et jettent parfois le doute sur le statut ontologique des ouvrages. L'analyse des titres de quelques livres et l'examen de l'illustration de couverture de *The Romantic Movement* révèlent combien les frontières entre les genres et entre les codes sémiotiques sont brouillées d'emblée. Si certaines images insérées dans les ouvrages se contentent d'illustrer ou de clarifier le texte et répondent à un souci didactique, d'autres déconstruisent certaines stratégies conventionnelles de genres tels que le roman, la biographie ou le récit de voyage, par le biais de la parodie, l'ironie ou le déplacement.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the ways in which the combination of text and image in Alain de Botton's works contributes to the destabilisation of genre. The generic hybridity of de Botton's texts, oscillating between fiction and non-fiction, is reinforced by the insertion of images which repeatedly suspend the act of reading and sometimes throw doubt on the ontological status of the books. The analysis of the titles of a few books and the examination of the cover illustration for *The Romantic Movement* reveal how the frontiers between genres and semiotic codes are blurred from the start. If some images within the books merely illustrate or clarify the text and serve a didactic purpose, others deconstruct some of the conventional strategies of genres such as the novel, biography or travel writing through parody, irony or displacement.



Full text

- 1 In a short piece published in the *Guardian* in July 2005, Alain de Botton confessed: ‘A few years ago, I fell in love with a girl in a photo, even though I couldn’t see her face, only her hair, which was a promise of happiness.’¹ This statement which relates to a photograph by Hannah Starkey aptly called *Untitled* (1998), is emblematic of de Botton’s fondness for enigmatic pictures. De Botton imagines that the girl in the photo is lonely and misunderstood by the world, which ‘forms the bedrock of her appeal’: ‘I imagined that I might join her at her table, that together we might watch the rain fall and be sad about everything, but happy that we had found each other to be sad with.’ The photograph has thus triggered the author’s imagination and led him to invent an embryo of fiction. The image has given birth to thoughts, hopes, romantic fantasies which have then been transcribed into words. De Botton is a master of such translations or transactions as his books intertwine words and images by the insertion of photographs, paintings, drawings, charts, tables, diagrams and graphs. His work as a whole is also characterised by a generic hybridity and an unstable ontological status. While his first three books—*Essays in Love* (1993), *The Romantic Movement* (1994) and *Kiss & Tell* (1995)—mix fiction and non-fiction, the following works—*How Proust Can Change Your Life* (1997), *The Consolations of Philosophy* (2000), *The Art of Travel* (2002), *Status Anxiety* (2004), *On Seeing and Noticing* (2005) and *The Architecture of Happiness* (2006)—belong to the genre of the essay or the philosophical disquisition. Despite their generic differences, de Botton’s books are conceived as iconotexts involving a dialogue between two semiotic codes so that the act of reading is repeatedly suspended. The image fulfils several functions in de Botton’s books: it may illustrate or supplement the text, serve a didactic purpose, repeat the text and therefore be superfluous and over-explicit, generate ekphrasis, bring comic relief or simply provide a pause, encouraging the reader’s meditation. The aim of this paper is not to provide an exhaustive list of images and their purposes, but to explore the relationship between word and image and consider the way in which it contributes to the disruption of conventional definitions of genres. The examination of titles and of the cover illustration for *The Romantic Movement* will first reveal how the frontiers between genres and semiotic codes are blurred from the start. The analysis will then focus on the way in which images inserted within the book can generate indeterminacy as to the genre to which the volumes belong. The final stage will consist in determining how images can contribute to the deconstruction of genre, already underway in the text.

Paraiconotexts

- 2 De Botton is particularly keen on playing with the frontiers between genres, and despite sometimes writing what can be classed as fiction, he explains that he identifies ‘with a certain kind of essayistic writing, as practised by Montaigne, Stendhal, Emerson, Roland Barthes: a kind of writing that is personal and abstract at the same time’ (2002b), hence the mixture of anecdotes drawn from de Botton’s private life or from his imagination, and of serious reflections based on the work of great philosophers and thinkers. The author’s playfulness with the limits of genre is announced in the very first essential paratexts: the oxymoronic titles and subtitles of his first books. *Essays in Love: a Novel* blurs the expectations of the reader as the intimation of non-fiction (‘essays’) is immediately belied by the subtitle (‘a novel’) which appears only once, on the front cover of the book, and was actually added by the publisher who thought a



novel would sell better than essays (Schnitker 74). The preposition 'in', rather than the expected 'on' (*Essays on Love*), activates the polysemy of 'essays' which could be understood as 'attempts'. De Botton's American publisher removed the ambivalence when he changed the title to *On Love*, thus obliterating the eventually off-putting dimension of 'essays' and replicating the title of Stendhal's famous study, *De l'amour* (1822). The equally misleading title of the second book, *The Romantic Movement: Sex, Shopping and the Novel*, may daunt the reader in its suggestions of literary history associated with such trivial items as sex and shopping. The content of both books confirms the hybridity of the titles as de Botton analyses the mechanisms of a love relationship drawing from his imagination, his personal experience but also from concepts of psychology and philosophy developed by great thinkers and artists. De Botton underlined the mixed dimension of these books when he remarked that they were 'sold as novels' and 'were sufficiently far from reality not to attract the attention of any ex girlfriends' (De Botton 2002b). The author also pointed that he 'felt very uncomfortable with the traditional novel form' and 'didn't feel happy with the other existing categories' such as biographies, literary criticism or history books (Schnitker 73). He explained that his real interest lay in 'a non-fiction structure but which can allow for a certain amount of personal digressions and descriptions and some of the things that tend to belong in a novel' (Birnbaum). His early texts therefore consist of a generic mixture of fiction and non-fiction, supplemented by a collage of words and images.

3 Such a combination is made clear by the cover illustrations of his books which demand attention from the reader, in particular that of *The Romantic Movement* (see Figure 1)² which, with its three arched panels, may appear as the parody of a triptych such as used to be commissioned by the Church in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. This modern triptych comes complete with its predella (the little horizontal band beneath the main panel), but the traditional hierarchies are subverted: tinfoil has replaced gold leaf, the profane stands for the sacred, and the body is substituted to the spirit. Beneath the pictures of a basket of fruit, a cherry and the front torso of a naked woman (maybe an echo of the woman's naked back on the cover of *Essays in Love*), the provocative subtitle stands out—'Sex, Shopping and the Novel'—in the form of a collage of letters of different size and colour. The originality consists in placing a noun beneath an image to which it does not correspond so as to make the two semiotic codes clash and trigger off unexpected associations of ideas. Across the woman's waist on the right-side panel is pasted the definition of the word 'novel' taken from a dictionary with the stress pattern in parenthesis, the definition of novel as an adjective, i.e. 'new', which is said to be unusual, and the beginning of its definition as a noun ('a fictitious [. . .]'). This inscription of a meaningful text within the image creates a horizon of expectation for the reader thanks to the choice of the three adjectives: new, unusual and fictitious. What follows tallies with these three notions, except that the book can be qualified as new and unusual precisely because it is not entirely fictitious but plays with the frontiers between fiction and non-fiction. To a certain extent, it is also new and unusual in its combination of text and image as the hybrid cover suggests.

4 In the second image, several pieces of white paper have been pasted on the cherry and above the cherry, from which the reader may reconstruct 'literature of the thought', in red print. This could be understood as a possible definition for philosophy or the essay, categories into which *The Romantic Movement* could be included. One may also think of the paragram of the two syllables 'liter-' which appear on their own on one part of the cherry, and the noun 'litter', a pun which has been exploited by James Joyce throughout *Finnegans Wake* (1939) with the litter/letter paronomasia, and adapted by Jacques Lacan (who scorned publication) into 'poubellication', from the French 'poubelle'



(garbage can). On the left-side panel, the shopping basket may indeed resemble a garbage can. 'Literature of the thought' is thus transformed into 'litter of the thought', which also evokes the consumer society which produces a great quantity of garbage. The cherry in the middle panel is wrapped in the yellowish paper of a dictionary that also appears in the third vignette. The words and definitions are more difficult to decipher, but one of the words is 'disarranged', defined as 'out of order', which may qualify the way in which de Botton 'disarranges' generic codes in the book by mixing heterogeneous semiotic realms. Another is 'discipleship' defined as 'the status of disciple', which might announce the narrator's position in relation to the numerous philosophers he will refer to within the book, and it is followed by 'disciplineable' which can hardly apply to the narrator's process given that the latter continuously breaks formal and generic rules in the book. Text and image thus intertwine from the start, induce the reader to examine the front illustration attentively and prepare him or her for similar movements to and fro between text and image within the book. The technique of the collage and the word 'shopping' in the subtitle, make one think of the work of British Pop artists like Richard Hamilton or Peter Blake, who denounced the excesses of consumer society, where materialistic values have replaced higher concerns. Within the book, de Botton refers to the American Pop artist Andy Warhol who gave a new dignity to consumer goods, and he includes a reproduction of a Campbell's can of soup (De Botton 1995, 20).

- 5 The cover illustration of *The Romantic Movement* (as well as *Essays in Love* and *Kiss & Tell*) is not by Alain de Botton but by Nicola Ackland-Snow, and one could therefore argue that the preceding remarks should be related to the illustrator and not to the author. However, there is no doubt that the cover has been created especially for the book and did not pre-exist. This creates a dialogue—be it virtual or real—not only between text and image, but also between author and illustrator, and questions the very notion of authority which becomes diffuse. Both intertextuality and iconotextuality challenge the sense of origin, paternity/maternity and property to paraphrase Roland Barthes in *S/Z* (Barthes 1970, 51). Whoever its creator, the cover illustration is a major paratext—or maybe 'paraiconotext' in the case of *The Romantic Movement*—which creates a horizon of expectation and gives clues to the attentive reader. Parapictoriality, as Liliane Louvel calls it in *L'œil du texte* (Louvel 1998, 157), should be examined as part of the book in its own right.

Generic Shifting

- 6 Within the books themselves, de Botton furthers 'semiotic transactions' (Louvel 2002, 147), and certain images, combined with the text, compel the reader to reconsider the genre of the volume in question. It should first be noted that there is an evolution in de Botton's literary production both in terms of genre and in terms of types of images and frequency of use. His first books to contain a fictional basis comprise a few very simple figures, diagrams, tables and drawings whose aim is to clarify the text by providing a visual and whimsical illustration of the theories developed. This iconotextuality may find its source in Laurence Sterne's highly original insertions in *Tristram Shandy* (1759–67), whose function was both demonstrative and ironic. In de Botton's early books, the effect is more modest as the insertions do not fundamentally disturb the reader's activity nor modify the generic form of the text. In his later books, however, de Botton accentuates the mixture of word and image, making the reader's activity all the more fragmented but also all the more active. De Botton's essayistic works thus contain many photographs taken by the author himself, as well as many more and larger black and white illustrations, as the length of the list of



acknowledgements at the end of books testifies. Reproductions of paintings often cover a full page or even a double page. The aesthetic sense is therefore much more called upon, even though the educational and comic dimensions are still present. De Botton explained that in *The Art of Travel*, what he tried to do 'was not to have that many pictures but to give them a lot of space to breathe and to really show them in their beauty' (Birnbaum). Sometimes however, the lavish paintings and photographs are so overwhelming that they tend to obliterate the text, relegating it to the margins and making it seem superfluous. Thus, in *Status Anxiety*, when the narrator is looking for ways of reducing his anxiety which stem from the sense of his own insignificance, the last remedy he offers is more efficiently conveyed visually—over three double pages—than verbally, given that it is resumed in only one sentence: 'A fine remedy for anxieties about insignificance may be to travel—in reality or in works of art—through the gigantic spaces of the world' (De Botton 2004, 249). This unique sentence is followed by three nineteenth-century paintings of gigantic landscapes on double pages, which certainly provoke a feeling of awe and humility. The narrator seems to suggest that, confronted with such sceneries, words are unnecessary and images speak for themselves. The higher proportion of images in de Botton's non-fiction books makes them truly original iconotexts and modifies the rhythm and mode of reading, providing readers with points of rest and contemplation and requiring them to suspend their usual activity and constantly move back and forth between text and image.

- 7 One could wonder, however, whether sometimes the reader is not overwhelmed by an excess of images, all the more so as some of them may appear as a mere facetious pretext to grant the reader a pause, which can seem amusing to some but irritating to others. For example, in *The Consolations of Philosophy*, the passing mention between dashes of 'a certain variety of American chocolate milk' (De Botton 2001, 3) at the beginning of the first chapter on Socrates is followed on the next page by the insertion of the photograph of a packet and a glass of NesQuik (4). The illustration interrupts a discussion of Socrates' suicide which had been brought about by the narrator's viewing David's painting of Socrates preparing to drink a cup of hemlock, surrounded by his friends, *The Death of Socrates* (1787), which is reproduced in the book (3). The incongruous co-presence of these two images underlines the discrepancy between two modes—low and comic with the banal, everyday reference to a common drink, and high and tragic with Socrates' major philosophical decision. Such a shifting of modes so early in the book destabilises the act of reading and throws doubt on the genre to which the volume belongs. Throughout the book, the philosophical dimension will be adulterated because of such iconic insertions. Similarly, in *The Art of Travel*, the great number of images tend to make the book deviate from what appeared to be its original genre, i.e. travel writing or essays on travel.³ The title of the book integrates not only the travel dimension but also the artistic one, and some chapters take the form of art analysis which demands the insertion of paintings. In the chapter devoted to transient places such as airports, trains, petrol stations, diners or hotel rooms, the narrator focuses on a few paintings by Edward Hopper, in a passage which is reproduced in de Botton's collection of essays, *On Seeing and Noticing*. The title of the book confirms the author's fascination for the visual sense and yet the resources of this budget collection (Pocket Penguin series published to celebrate Penguin's 70th birthday) could not stretch to cover reproductions of Hopper's paintings, which diminishes the impact of the text. In *The Art of Travel* on the other hand, de Botton can develop the strategy of ekphrasis as the text describes, analyses and interprets the paintings provided, a process which is repeated in a later chapter meaningfully entitled 'On Eye-Opening Art' and devoted to a comparison between Van Gogh's paintings and the real landscape in Provence. The act of reading is discontinuous when the reader examines the clever *mise en abyme* of



images in detail, comparing text and picture as well as Van Gogh's paintings and the photographs of the actual places, checking the relevance of the information given in the text, in the paintings and in the photographs. De Botton confided that his book was really 'an essay on aesthetics and notions of the picturesque and sublime dating from the 18th century', but he added that if he had called the book 'Aspects of the aesthetic of landscape' no one would have read it (Sam). The genre of the book is therefore sometimes closer to art criticism than to travel writing as the title had partly foretold.

- 8 *How Proust Can Change Your Life* is also generically ambiguous as it draws from the genres of literary criticism, biography and essay. It is interesting to note that the American publisher (Pantheon) added the subtitle *Not a Novel*, an ironical appendage which does not exist in the British edition and playfully announces the unusual form of the text. De Botton explained that he did not plan to write a biography but 'a self-help book based on the life *and* writings of Proust' (De Botton 1998b, 118). The instruction manual dimension is made obvious not only by the title of the book as a whole but also by the anaphoric titles of chapters such as 'How to Suffer Successfully', 'How to Be a Good Friend', etc. It appears in fact that the text draws from some of the conventions of biography and of literary criticism, while some images form the self-help dimension. Thus, the second chapter starts in a conventional chronological way with a reference to Proust's family: 'Proust was born into a family where the art of making people feel better was taken very seriously indeed. His father was a doctor, a vast, bearded man [. . .]' (De Botton 1998a, 10). De Botton describes Dr Proust's brilliant career which he compares to his son's inability to get a proper job. After quoting Marcel Proust's wish to heal people with his novels—'if I could be sure of doing with my books as much as my father did for the sick' (12)—de Botton refers to Dr Proust's books about physical fitness. This is the point when the text drifts away from the biographical dimension to encapsulate that of the self-help book in a four-page passage entitled 'How Dr Proust Can Change Your Health' (14–18) which first considers the reasons for backache, then the dreadful effects of corsets and finally the benefits of exercise. In the text, de Botton makes use of the various tools of intertextuality, paraphrasing, summing up and sometimes quoting from Dr Proust's book, *Elements of Hygiene*. He then develops what Liliane Louvel calls 'interpictoriality' (Louvel 1998, 150) by including the rudimentary drawings of the book (of sewing positions, of the consequences of wearing a corset on the spinal cord, and of aerobic exercises), whose functions are clearly illustrative of the text and pedagogic. Such an intertextual and interpictorial insertion of a self-help manual is comic in a book which presents some of the traits of biography, but de Botton exploits this amusing biographical information to ponder over 'the therapeutic qualities of the literary novel' (13) and launch into an essayistic discussion of the benefits of reading a novel, drawing from Proust's fictional and non-fictional writings. The genres of literary criticism and of the psychological disquisition mix with a playful parody of self-help books and a spattering of biographical information about Proust, so that the chapter is marked by generic discontinuity. The insertion of the illustrative drawings from Dr Proust's book serves as an unexpected and playful starting point from which the text deviates away from its biographical course towards its essayistic and self-help dimension.

The Transgression of Generic Codes



Sometimes, images go further than merely generating generic indeterminacy, and more directly contribute to the transgression of generic codes, already implemented by the text. *Kiss & Tell* may be considered as an original biography which playfully

transgresses the codes of the genre. The narrator, who has been accused of narcissism by his last girlfriend, decides to prove his ability to understand 'a human being [. . .] fully' (De Botton 1996, 7) by writing the biography of the next person to walk into his life, Isabel Jane Rogers who is in her middle-twenties: 'Why not attempt a biography myself?' he ponders (7). The result is less a biography than the metadiscursive search for a new form of biography which deconstructs the main traditional traits of the genre.⁴ One might wonder how the images included in the book also destabilise some of the codes of the biography.

10 In *Kiss & Tell*, several figures are included to validate the information given in the text and grant a pseudo serious and scientific dimension to topics which precisely cannot be contained within scientific grounds. As a consequence, some of the images, though presented as serious documents, actually parody the obsessive and impossible quest for knowledge through their very incongruity. For example, when the narrator asks Isabel about her past crushes, she confesses to having 'snogged seventeen people' and gone 'the whole hog' with nine or ten (117–118). This undeveloped information is followed by a four-column table with a list of eighteen names, accompanied by marks for those who were 'Snogged' and marks for those who were 'Whole Hogged', as well as Isabel's age when that happened. The precision of the names and dates, and the strict ordering of the data seem to validate the truth of the information and grant seriousness to a light topic. However, the excess of precision and the pointlessness of such a table create a comic and parodying effect, so that the image exposes the futility of the narrator's search for complete knowledge and, by the same token, of the biographical approach.

11 Another biographical convention consists in providing photographs of the subject, his family and friends as well as places where he or she lived. De Botton abides by this convention as 31 colour photographs of Isabel's parents, grand-parents, brother and sister, childhood friends, boyfriends, colleagues as well as pets and the young woman's house, are inserted in the middle of the book, accompanied by developed captions (124–125). De Botton dutifully follows the chronology of Isabel's life in arranging these photos which create what Barthes would call a 'reality effect' (Barthes 1982, 81). The quality of the photographs, the types of clothes and the hairdos help date the images back to the 1940s for the former and up to the 1990s for the latter. Oddly however, de Botton offers only five pictures of Isabel from her birth to the age of about five years old. A sixth photograph shows her as a teenager but her face is turned away from the camera. The author thus deprives the curious reader of a concrete visual representation of his subject, throwing doubts on the actual existence of Isabel Rogers and seemingly confirming her ontological status as a fictional character. As Roland Barthes argues in *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography* (1980), the photograph is a 'certificate of presence' (Barthes 1980, 87) which testifies to the fact that the referent truly existed. In *L'Image précaire. Du dispositif photographique* (1987), Jean-Marie Schaeffer calls it the 'thesis of existence' (Schaeffer 122). The lack of any visual trace of Isabel, while photographs of other members of her family and of her friends are provided, makes her existence all the more doubtful. On the other hand, the identity of the other people on photographs remains a puzzle as they cannot be related to Isabel if she is herself fictitious. The insertion of photographs thus further destabilises the ontological status of the text as the question of whether Isabel is real or imaginary has not been resolved, maintaining the book's oscillation between biography and fiction.

12 In *How Proust Can Change Your Life*, de Botton is also deconstructing his own code of impersonality of the author (which he seemed to have established at the start of his mixed work of biography, essay and literary criticism) when he refers to an episode from Proust's *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* (1918): 'the narrator visits the



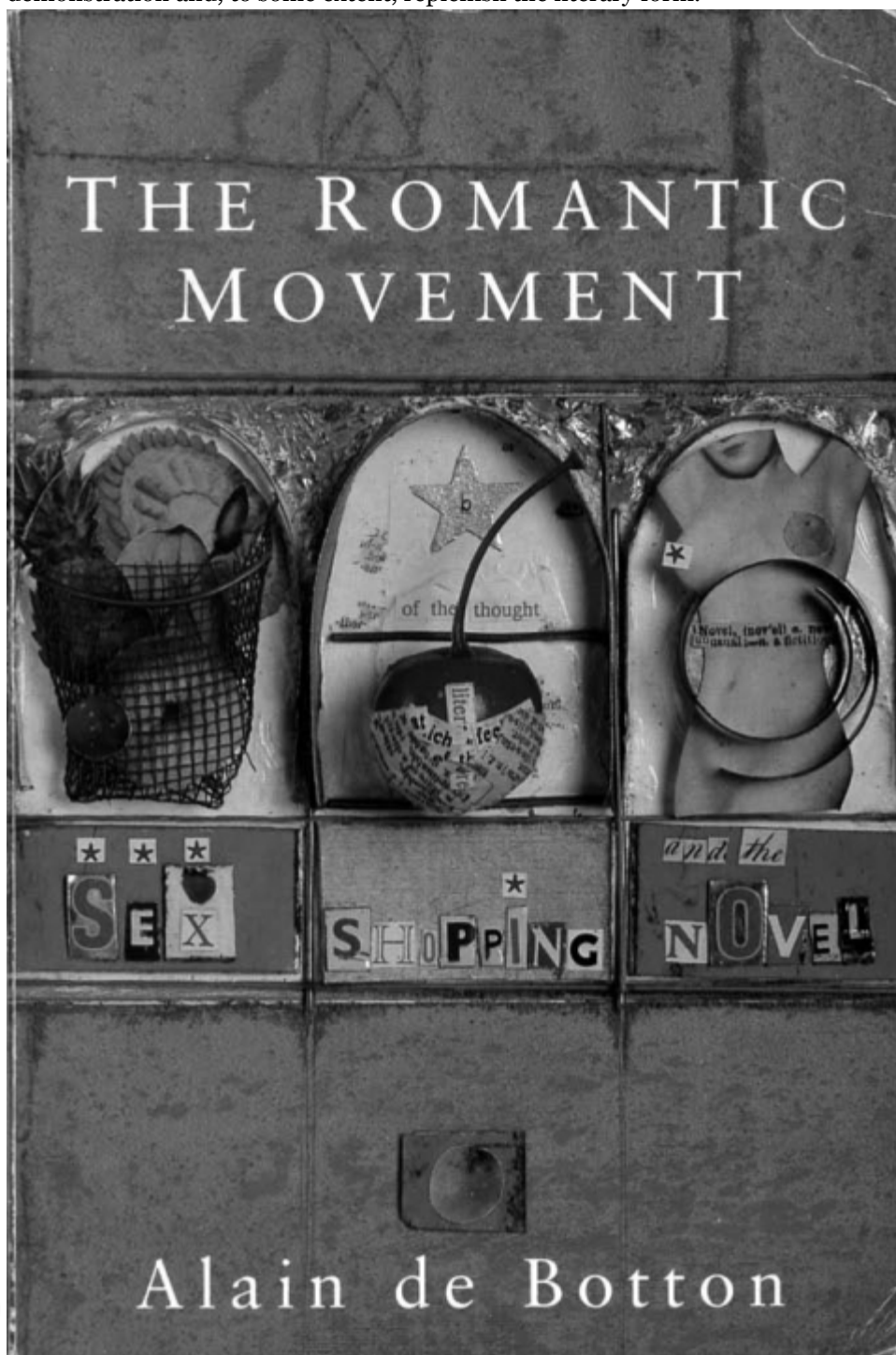
Normandy seaside resort of Balbec, where he meets and falls in love with someone I know, a young woman with an impudent expression, brilliant laughing eyes, plump matt cheeks and a fondness for black polo-caps' (De Botton 1998a, 22). The sudden and unexpected emergence of the first person pronoun in an essayistic passage in which previously only the impersonal 'we' was used to refer to universal situations, shatters the convention of invisibility and further destabilises the generic frame. The second 'ontological scandal', to use Brian McHale's terms in *Postmodernist Fiction* (McHale 1987, 85), consists in having a character of the 1920s seemingly fall in love with a real-life person of the 1990s. The 'young woman' referred to actually both applies to Proust's fictional protagonist, Albertine, and to de Botton's supposedly real-life girlfriend, Kate,⁵ as he explains on the next page: 'Albertine, last seen walking in Balbec with her brilliant laughing eyes and black polo-cap, bears striking resemblance to my girlfriend Kate' (24). The repetition of the same physical details as well as the use of the first person possessive adjective confirm the blurring of incompatible ontological realms. The violation is made even more blatant when a photograph of the narrator's girlfriend, Kate, is inserted, with the caption: 'Kate/Albertine' (24). Through both text and image, de Botton's private life—real or imaginary—intrudes upon a book about Proust and shatters all generic boundaries.

13 To conclude, the examples analysed above have shown that de Botton is neither drawn to the exclusivity of genre nor to the strict separation between the world of the book—fictional or non-fictional—and his personal life. He develops a hybrid combination of various literary genres and of different types of images, and his iconotexts neither strictly belong to the category of the novel for his early books nor to that of the philosophical essay for his later ones. Even though de Botton frequently questions the codes and modes of the genres he draws from and explores new subversive forms, his purpose is not primarily metadiscursive and deconstructive. If some images do indeed contribute to the destabilisation of genre and the blurring of ontological boundaries, others are more user-friendly in that they simply illustrate the text, clarify it and thus prove helpful to the reader. The predominantly irenic function of images in de Botton's books contrasts with a more daring and agonistic use in—for example—*Poor Things* (1992) by Alasdair Gray, in which the author, drawing his own images, makes them disturbing and destabilises more profoundly and maybe more efficiently the act of reading (Morel).

14 The recurrent verb in de Botton's writings—'understand'—may give the reader a clue as to the type of enterprise the author is mostly interested in and in the related function of images. Echoing Horace's 'prodesse et delectare', de Botton's purpose is in fact mainly didactic, using humour and irony as a major strategy. He argues that his goal consists in 'exploring human psychology' and 'trying to understand what life's about' (Schnitker 75). The blurb of *On Seeing and Noticing* is meaningful in that it describes de Botton's activity as dispensing 'advice and observations based on the works of some of history's greatest writers, artists and thinkers'. Similarly, de Botton's documentaries based on his books—*How Proust Can Change Your Life* (1998), *Philosophy: A Guide to Happiness* (2000), *The Art of Travel* (2004), *Status Anxiety* (2004) and *The Perfect Home* (2006)—are marked by an educational dimension and confirm in their form de Botton's keenness on the combination of pedagogic text and illustrative image. The author willingly claims the influence of Emerson and his 'idea of a democratic language with which to address ordinary issues' even if this has led American critics to refer to *The Consolations of Philosophy* as 'Philosophy for Dummies' (Birnbaum). Since many contemporary philosophers and critics balk at referring to de Botton's books as philosophical essays because they are aimed at the general public rather than the intellectual elite, they could be called intellectual self-help books, with a noble



connotation attached to the term. As the author explained in relation to *How Proust Can Change Your Life*, the 'self-help angle is definitely meant ironically in the surface level', but deep down, de Botton is trying to get something out of this popular form: 'essentially what I'm doing is going to a low form, the self-help book, to make what is really a quite highbrow point' (Schnitker 79). He likes 'the idea of a book with a desire to help the reader', a concept which was familiar to Seneca and Montaigne and which de Botton is trying to revive (Sam). One might concur that de Botton's iconotexts help readers cope better with, or at least understand better, their search for happiness, their status anxiety or their love relationships through an original combination of verbal explanations, examples from personal experience or everyday life, and illustrations. The images are therefore not merely a pleasant appendage, but they both illuminate the demonstration and, to some extent, replenish the literary form.



Cover illustration by Nicla Ackland-Snow (1995) for *The Romantic Movement* by Alain de Botton

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Notes



1 I would like to thank Laurent Bury for his useful help and perceptive suggestions.

2 I would like to thank Alain de Botton and Pan Macmillan, London, UK, for granting me permission to reproduce the cover of *The Romantic Movement*.

3 See Guignery 2006.

4 See Guignery 2002.

5 De Botton explains in an interview that Kate actually was his girlfriend at the time of composition of the book, which could of course be just another deception and manipulation of the reader (Briscoe).

List of illustrations



Caption

Cover illustration by Nicla Ackland-Snow (1995) for *The Romantic Movement* by Alain de Botton

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Vanessa Guignery, "The Destabilisation of Genre in Alain de Botton's Iconotexts", *Études britanniques contemporaines* [Online], 31 | 2006, Online since 13 June 2022, connection on 30 December 2024. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ebc/12329>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ebc.12329>

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