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La poétique de François Villon by David Kuhn

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The rise and *rise* of this ecclesiastical adventurer still remains to be analyzed. Miss Ady's biography stands as a valuable guide for those searching out the ideas and thoughts of this key Renaissance figure. Few men in pre-modern times have gained such status as Aeneas and left such an abundant record of their sentiments as they climbed. Yet no serious effort has been made to fuse the thought and emotion of this man. In this particular study we have an able introduction to his critical thinking on matters of law and jurisprudence — theories concerning the nature of the public world. How tempting to ask that this familiar terrain be combined with the seldom reconnoitered inner continents of this *quattrocento* pope of such baffling simplicity. So much of the disjuncture of his own times lives in his voluminous writings. Any such attempt should include important monographs by the Italians G. Paparelli and F. Battaglia.

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DAVID KUHN, *La poétique de François Villon*. Paris: Armand Colin, 1967. Paper. Pp. 508.

THE author's point of departure is revealed in his conclusion:

L'antiquité n'avait pas légué à Villon une poétique cohérente. Villon en a eu une, mais aucun écrit théorique ne l'a léguée à nous non plus. Son époque hérita des auteurs latins une rhétorique. Son époque hérita aussi, des rhéteurs latins et des Pères de l'Église, un souci esthétique. L'esthétique et la rhétorique encadrent à l'époque la poétique sans la toucher (p. 465).

Of course, the peculiar poetry of François Villon has evoked profound research by literary critics for decades. Nevertheless, *la poétique* is not treated specifically in any one of the extensive monographs starting with that of Thuasne in 1923 via those of Siciliano, Rice, Ziwès, Brunelli up to that of Fox in 1962.

The ideological part of the presentation derives primarily from the original studies by J. M. Parent, *La doctrine de la création dans l'École des Chartres* (Paris, 1938): R. Klibansky, *The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition during the Middle Ages* (London, 1939): A. M. F. Gunn, *The Mirror of Love* (Lubbock, 1952). This philosophic doctrine emanated from the Platonic naturalism in the Middle Ages. Its thought-pattern commonly receives the label School of Chartres. It left traces throughout Europe; in France, its chief proponents were Alain de Lille, Jean de Meun, and François Villon. Here we encounter

l'une des présuppositions de la pensée morale et, par conséquent, de la poétique du XV^e siècle: que la société des hommes s'est exclue de la loi, de la logique, et du langage qui font l'unité de l'univers et qui assurent son existence même. . . . L'aliénation de la nature ressentie par celui qui se sait plus naturel que les autres constitue le dilemme classique du poète au temps de Villon (p. 266).

David Kuhn intends to blaze a new trail in *la poétique* while profiting constantly by the valuable publications dealing with other aspects of Villonianana. He is eager to let the poet speak for himself because, as he admits candidly, "le sens de maint vers et d'une foule de mots nous échappe" (p. 8). Two-thirds of the book under review deal with "La Fable, la Fonction et la Forme du Testament" by presenting a syntactical-structural-stylistic synthesis. Signifi-

cant expressions lead to a broad commentary with tangential comparisons which yield numerous pornographic innuendoes. The documentation here — and elsewhere — is ample for literary references, but for these key-words it can be supplemented by consulting the bibliographical alphabet in the *Revue de linguistique romane*, xxx (1966), 390–414.

The first chapter analyzes in great detail the twenty-six autobiographical words of the *Quatrain*. The deduction made by Kuhn is that the *Quatrain* permits Villon “d’accuser la perversion de l’ordre actuel en la juxtaposant à un ordre idéal qu’il trahit et dont il témoigne par son éloignement” (p. 20). The second chapter offers a minute explication of the *Ballade de la Grosse Margot*, which ordinarily provokes a violent reaction. This ballad of the prostitute is earthly and coarse juxtaposing clothing, utensils, food, parts of the body, pieces of wood, domestic animals with *bordeau* (used four times), *ordure*, *ung gros pet*. Kuhn does not find it far-fetched to attribute to the ballad the three unities: “Ce drame-ci semblerait plus proche du théâtre classique que de la farce populaire” (p. 27).

La Ballade de Notre Dame, which reveals the name of the author in an acrostic, transports us into a quiet, spiritual atmosphere. Villon’s mother, now absorbed in prayer, “n’a pas eu la chance de pouvoir enfanter sans péché comme la Vierge portant sans rompure encourir.” The mother, given the epithets *pecheresse*, *jangleresse*, *povrette*, *humble*, repeats the refrain: “En ceste foy je vueil vivre et mourir.” Consequently, Villon felt no need to make any other contrast between the real and the ideal (p. 58).

Questions de Neige (pp. 76–97) illustrate best the perceptive acumen of Kuhn. They are rhetorical apparently allowing us to “participer à un débat logique sans que nous puissions arriver à d’autres conclusions que celle qui est déjà présumée comme logique et universelle.” Woman incarnates the traditional image of the human body as it passes from life to death in a gradual manner or in a hectic manner. Villon’s cumulative *ubi sunt* questions go up and up, via Thaïs, Heloise, and Blanche de Bourgogne, until they reach the Virgin, “la femme la plus fertile que le monde ait connue puisqu’elle enfanta Dieu et opéra une transformation universelle.”

Kuhn enumerates possible definitions of the title *Lais* without arriving at a choice:

(1) poésie lyrique; (2) contrat légal; (3) chose laissée ou léguée par dernière volonté; (4) une distribution de biens personnels qui progresse comme les alluvions d’une rivière; (5) injure, outrage, offense, tort; (6) chose qui cause du déshonneur; (7) fiente de bête sauvage (p. 109).

I would choose without hesitation the third definition by recalling the mediaeval *je lais* in the sense of “je lègue, je fais un legs.” *Le Lais*, which is dated 1456 and which offers many choice bits of literary eroticism, is said to indicate creativity which will endow the objective world with a magic power.

A few details call for comment.

Kuhn prefers Clément Marot’s 1533 edition to the recent C. F. M. A. edition of Longnon-Foulet. Many readers will be shocked to read that the latter effort ‘a été d’édulcorer ce

texte, de lui ôter son amertume raisonnée qui est son sel' (p. 21). Rather than sink between Scylla and Charybdis, Kuhn presents the text on pages 13, 24, 42, 99, etc., very diplomatically devoid of punctuation (except on page 76). The elusive term *jambot* (p. 41) is explained in my *Contribution à la lexicographie française selon d'anciens textes d'origine juive* (Syracuse, 1960), 400–403. The notes for chapter III carry the pertinent literature up to the year 1959; subsequent studies have been published by F. Lecoy, *Romania*, LXXX (1959), 493–514; J. Mariès, *Revue ling. rom.*, XXVI (1962), 165–169; R. Terdiman, *PMLA*, LXXXII (1967), 622–633. The discussion on mythology in Jean Molinet (p. 79) was written before that of F. Joukovsky-Micha, *Rom. Phil.*, XXI (1968), 286–302, but the precise definition for *essoyné* (p. 82) had been given by L. Cons, *Mod. Lang. Notes*, LVII (1942), 527. Anent 'l'auteur du premier roman de *Berte au grant pié*, un nommé Adenès' (p. 94), Kuhn mentions the 1832 edition of Paulin Paris; the best edition is that of Albert Henry, *Les Oeuvres d'Adenet le Roi: Berte aus grans piés* (Bruxelles, 1963). Kuhn notes the symbolic connotations of terms such as *escouvillon* used in *Le Lais* 316 (pp. 122–129). He overlooks "chevaucheur d'escouvetes" in *Le Testament* 668 with reference to a witch purported to set out astride a broom on the Sabbath. This legend was perpetuated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as is related in Henry Havard's *Dictionnaire de l'ameublement et de la décoration*, II (Paris, 1894), 311.

Kuhn's enthusiastic appreciation of 3300 lines of fascinating poetry reaches its apogee by his making Villon into another national monument (p. 316). This reviewer of *La poésie de François Villon* hesitates, however, to subscribe to the exhortation:

Son désordre, l'absence de suite dans les idées, l'allure primesautière de la voix, la violence des retournements — cela séduit et convainc le lecteur au lieu de le rendre perplexe. . . . Sachons gré à Villon d'avoir tenté, dans sa vision du réel, une vision totale qui résiste — par sa complexité qui inclut l'indicible — aux schémas faciles (pp. 344, 345, 253).

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MARTIN LEVEY, *Medical Ethics of Medieval Islam with Special Reference to al-Ruhāwī's Practical Ethics of the Physician*. (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, New Series, 57, 3, 1967.) Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The American Philosophical Society, 1967. Paper. Pp. 100. \$3.

It is interesting to note that an important book on "the ethics of the physician" such as this one by al-Ruhāwī (completed in the late ninth century) should have been neglected for some time, and then, suddenly receive enthusiastic attention. Of course, I am referring here to this excellent work by Professor Levey, and the interesting and penetrating studies made recently by Dr Christoph Bürgel (see for example his article, "Die Bildung des Arztes, eine arabische Schrift zum 'ärztlichen Leben' aus dem 9 Jahrhundert, 1. Das 'ärztlichen Leben' innerhalb der islamischen Kultur und seine Erforschung," *Sudhoffs Archiv*, 50 (1966), 37–360).

At the Zahirīyah Library, I found another text (ms no. 4883, pt. 2) with a closer connection than al-Ruhāwī's to the teaching and practice of medicine to deontology. It has another advantage of being a concise and brief treatise. It is bound with an incomplete copy of '*Uyūn al-Anbā*' by Uṣaybi'ah who was well acquainted with the Rahāwī's work. Like that of al-Ruhāwī, this thirteenth century treatise (in five chapters), describes the virtues of the healing art and the fine qualities the physician should possess. Noteworthy is the chapter devoted