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Corinne Noirot-Maguire, « *Entre deux airs* »: *Style simple et ethos poétique chez Clément Marot et Joachim Du Bellay (1515-1560)*. Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2011. xx + 751 pp. Notes, figure, table, bibliography, index. \$85.00 Can. (pb). ISBN: 978-2-7637-8827-2

Review by Robert J. Hudson, Brigham Young University

Both densely erudite and systematically sound in her analyses, Corinne Noirot-Maguire's efforts to ally two traditionally incongruous poets of the French Renaissance, Clément Marot and Joachim Du Bellay, beneath a common banner of simple style represent a veritable academic tour de force. Reading beyond and confronting centuries of literary history that limit the former poet according to Boileau's damningly reductive charge of "élégant badinage" and ignore the post-1550 verse of the latter to view him as a mere disciple of Ronsard, the author convincingly argues that an adoption of the ethos of the simple style (or *style bas*) aligns each poet within the cultural and historical framework of his era. Indeed, if there is any credence to the conventional 1550 rift, it is to be found, as extrapolated at length by the author, in the espousal of a specific, individual ethos of simplicity that corresponds to the aesthetic and stylistic evolution of each poet and his place within the sphere of Renaissance French verse, an idea that the author encapsulates into the term "poétique." For Marot, this stylistic ethos is manifest as "humilité gracieuse," whereas Du Bellay is compelled into a situation of "humiliation vertueuse," with the key concepts of Grace and Virtue, respectively, at the core of the poetic *œuvre* of each. In sum, Noirot-Maguire proposes and thoroughly defends her hypothesis that a full appreciation of Marot and Du Bellay depends on an awareness of simple style.

In elucidating that simple style, however, Noirot-Maguire's approach is anything but simple. Divided into three sections, the final two of which could potentially stand alone as standard-length monographs (tallying 273 and 309 pages respectively), her prose is rich in Greek and Latin terminology and is heavily annotated. At the same time, to her credit for a book of this size, at no point does the argument flag, nor does the exposition feel tedious. In fact, the composition of this volume is quite elegant and its organization sophisticated, with each chapter offering myriad insights to the attentive reader. Neither simple nor light, the text certainly requires the full focus of its readership, whose recompense will be a much deeper understanding of these two major poets of Renaissance France and, as an unspoken corollary, their relation to the sixteenth century's chief poet Pierre de Ronsard.

After defining her term "poétique" in her preface, Noirot-Maguire opens the volume with a systematic exposition of her *plan d'étude*, followed by a synopsis of the two overarching normative traditions of the rhetorical simple style: 1) the classical, cultivated simplicity of Cicero, and 2) the reformulations of Saint Augustine to attain a sublime Christian ideal. In both cases of the *genus humile*, the categories of *docere* (explanation), *decorum* (conventions of exposition) and *delectare* (the enjoyment or pleasure derived from the above) are discussed as pertaining to each model, as is the valorization of each element. (Naturally, the Christian mode is less concerned with delighting the audience than it is with transmitting its theology clearly and directly.) Of particular interest in this preamble are the author's illustrations of *decorum*, employing Jean de Garlande's medieval *Rota Vergilii* ("La roue de Vergil," reproduced here as both a chart and a table) by which Virgil's poetic forms are displayed and classified according to his own "poétique"—especially valuable in terms of Marot forging his identity as *Maro Gallicus Ille* (The Great

French Virgil). This opening section concludes with a brief discussion of Erasmus, whose ideals of “*Sermo communicable et Decorum charitabile*” (p. 81), as one of the central theorists of the Renaissance, would have been foundational in the development of both Marot’s and Du Bellay’s “poétique.”

Turning to her discussion of Marot, Noirot-Maguire deftly works through the various genres employed by the poet (the pastoreau, rondeau, épître, élégie, psalm, etc.) to demonstrate how his claim that “Je rime en prose” is indicative of a conscious attempt to embrace the Gallic and define his poetic ethos in opposition to the gravitas of elevated genres. Most impressive is the method with which the author supports her claims: with close readings of dozens of Marot poems—both the classic, anthologized compositions and the lesser known and heretofore only marginally analyzed texts. What’s more, she does so with a certain verve and style of her own, focusing on earthy themes of salt, wine, carnality and Gascon wit that mesh exceptionally well with the simplicity espoused by Marot. Spanning the gamut of Marotic verse production, the nearly 300 pages of this text dedicated to the analysis of Marot should now stand alongside C. A. Mayer’s definitive 1972 critical biography of the poet given the ability of both to account for the biographical/ideological factors behind Marot’s choice of poetic genres.[1] The present volume deserves particular praise for effectively sustaining its thesis across discussion of these formal choices and building to a very compelling defense of the author’s idea of “humilité gracieuse.”

From the graceful humility at the heart of Marot’s poetic enterprise, Noirot-Maguire builds to a more active form of humiliation with Du Bellay, one founded in his personal rapport with the grandeur and ideals of virtue of the generation of 1550. His “poétique,” as conceived by the author, is one of “humiliation vertueuse.” Moving from Du Bellay’s 1549 *Deffence et illustration de la langue françoise*, which pigeonholed him as a disciple of the grandiose poetic vision of Ronsard, the author goes to great lengths to demonstrate that this longstanding, misinformed interpretation of the poet actually belies the central thrust of essentially all of his subsequent poetic production. Beginning with *L’Olive* and building to the *Regrets*, she develops a thesis of how the Bellayan sonnet actually avoids *hybris* and mimetically reenacts the estrangement that results from forays into passionate love. In sequence, the *Divers jeux rustiques* and verses *Contre les Petrarquistes* (in which Du Bellay adopts “le beau style bas”) are analyzed. In both of these forms, encounters with the foreign inevitably drive the poet back into a sense of acceptance of himself and his individual circumstances, hence, an active humiliation. One particularly moving section of this entire book is to be found in the author’s final analysis, in which she examines Du Bellay’s *Hymne de la Surdité* (pp. 641-672), where the poet’s onset deafness represents an ultimate form of humiliation that paradoxically both alienates the poet and leads him to the state of virtue within simple domesticity.

As discussed above, the audience of this excellent study may be limited due to its daunting size and the scope of its author’s project. However, those willing to engage with this text will discover a wealth of original information and analyses, alongside textual explications of classic poems from two iconic French Renaissance poets, all cast in a new light. Corinne Noirot-Maguire’s book belongs in the first tier of texts treating Marot and Du Bellay, individually or collectively. It should certainly become required reading for graduate students working on verse poetry in Renaissance France, and its “preamble” will be useful to anyone desiring to understand or teach the simple style. Indeed, this volume effectively draws together two poets previously considered dissimilar, even antagonistic. Thus, it opens the door to reexamining the work of other poets from the period without prejudice to determine how the “poétique” of each influences both their artistic trajectory and our critical appreciation.

#### NOTE

[1] Claude Albert Mayer, *Clément Marot* (Paris: Nizet, 1972).

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