

Review of Jean Tagaut. *Les Odes à Pasithée*, ed. Franco Giaccone

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Abstract:

This article is a review of *Odes à Pasithée* by Jean Tagaut and edited by Franco Giaccone.

Keywords: Book Review | Renaissance French literature | French Poetry | Jean Tagaut

Article:

Jean Tagaut. *Odes à Pasithée* Ed. Franco Giaccone. (Textes Littéraires Français, 457.) Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1995. Iiii + 313 pp. n.p. ISBN: 2-6000-0088-7.

This edition of the “exemplaire de travail” of the *Odes à Pasithée* by the Protestant author-physician Jean Tagaut (ca. 1517-1560) brings to light a long-neglected French literary achievement that might well stand as a “missing link” between the paganistic verses of the Pléiade laureates and the Christianized rhymes of the reformer poets. As we learn in the 147-page introduction, Giaccone first discovered this erst while Pléiade associate in 1978, while studying the Genevan Huguenot writers Tagaut joined in 1554. The *Odes* he has edited comprise two books. The 1550 *Livre premier* presents fourteen poems of vary- ing metrical designs, including a tour de force of 11 12 hexasyllabic verses (Ode I), a Pindaric piece in strophes, antistrophes, and epodes (Ode X), and three works in Marotic “pauses” (Odes II, XI and XIII). The 1552 Second livre offers five additional pieces of similar formal diversity. The combined nineteen odes stage the Petrarchan-style love tribulations of a poet (presumably Tagaut him- self) in amorous pursuit of an unattainable lady named “Pasithée.” From the Greek denoting either “celle qui est universellement divine” or “la propriété des Dieux” (CX), this appellation simultaneously evokes the most splendid of the mythological Graces and Tagaut's real-life beloved, the Benedictine nun (literally a “property” of God), Claude Bernard.

Giacone unquestionably renders an invaluable service in making this transitional opus available. Nevertheless, his copious introduction and textual glosses leave much to be desired. Besides the numerous copyediting lapses, there are many stylistic infelicities (e.g., a tendency to reiterate entire phrases, like “*alias Pasithée*,” slavishly appended to occurrences of Claude's name [IX, X]CM11, LVI, and passim]) and incongruous uses of certain terms (e.g., “*canzoniere*,” repeatedly employed to designate Petrarch's *Rime* despite his admonition against that practice [LXXX-LXXXI]).

The editor's unclear sense of his primary audience - scholars and students of early modern poetry - is also a source of troubles. It fosters disturbing inconsistencies throughout his commentaries. For example, the introductory “Analyses des Odes” often notes verse parallels among the odes, yet they consistently disappoint by failing to remark on the significance of those coincidences. Likewise, the textual glosses frequently swing from the redundant to the overly technical. The first fault is typified by the superfluous translation of the substantive “*sorcier*,” which requires no expertise in middle French - and certainly no gloss - to be understood as “*magicien, ensorceleur*” (168, 199). The second problem looms large in the egregiously lavish explanations of “*la chaste Levone*” (31-33), “*mon doux grave Amelin*” (1 26-28), and “*La pervence*” (130-3 1).

The failure to identify important intertextual affinities creates further frustrations. Nothing is said, for example, about Tagaut's prominent Pasithea-Minerva analogies and the one proposed by Des Autelz at the end of Tyard's *Erreurs III*; or again, about the author's recurrent appeals to the myths of Diana, Cephalus, and Medea and those appearing, with comparable distinction, in Jodelle's *Amours* and *Contr' Amours*. Nor does Giacone adequately acknowledge the Ronsardian flavor of the Pasithée portraits and the reprises of the immortality-through-poetry theme: this despite admissions of Tagaut's strong links to the Pléiade leader.

Finally, there is Giacone's unreasonable insistence that the Second livre manuscript is fundamentally defective. At issue are Odes III-V, which slightly predate Odes I-II and abruptly cease all discussion of Pasithée to announce the poet-lover's revitalized devotion to God. The editor complains that this chronological violation and shift away from the beloved create a “*queue de poisson*” structure (CXXXVIII) that Tagaut would have corrected in a subsequent (though never attempted) edition. His analysis therefore considers the spiritual poems before the first two odes, where Pasithée emerges ready to reciprocate her admirer's affection. Unfortunately, that maneuver not only accords a structural relevance to composition dates they rarely assume in the ordering of most contemporary *canzoniere*, but it also dismisses the poet-lover's well prepared critical evolution from eros to agape.

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