

Honor J. Aldred. *The Comic Genius of Clément Marot: The Function of Humor in his Poetry.*

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The question of humor is particularly relevant when dealing with Clément Marot: on the one hand his name was for a long time associated with *élégant badinage* and his more profound humanistic and religious concerns were swept under the carpet; on the other hand, more recent approaches have brought the serious Marot back to the foreground, sometimes at the expense of the court jester. Eluding this sterile opposition, Aldred's study offers a systematic and nuanced analysis of Marot's writings that places humor at the center of his creation.

The introduction offers a fast paced overview of theoretical writings on humor from the Classics, the Renaissance (Laurent Joubert's *Traité du ris*), and the modern period (Bergson, Bakhtin, Freud). Chapter 1 deals with the mocking of stock characters such as the parasite, the monk, or voracious women. Aldred shows how Marot appropriates this traditional model and transforms it for his own needs towards something more personal and subversive. Chapter 2 offers a linguistic approach: it is a systematic overview of devices used by Marot such as puns, ambiguity, onomastics, repetitions, rhyme schemes, neologisms, etc., to create humor. Chapter 3, "Spinning yarns and telling jokes," addresses narrative aspects such as traditional hard luck stories ("Pour avoir esté disrobe"), bawdy tales ("Epistles for Captains Bourgeon and Raisin"), or *étrennes* — short amusing poems with a punchline offered by Marot to different members of the royal court as New Year's presents. These first chapters may not read as well as the rest of the book; however it is a systematic, and carefully done study that underlines the variety and richness of Marot's humor, its sources, its pervasiveness.

The second part of the study digs deeper into the nature and functioning of Marot's humor. In chapter 4 the author brings in the classical character of the wise fool, *ieron* in Greek (whence the word "irony"), and uses it to analyze some well-known pieces such as "Marot prisonnier escript au roy," "Le valet de Marot contre Sagon," "Epistre aux Dames de Paris," "L'Enfer," the "Coq-à-l'asne," etc. The *ieron* persona allows Marot, like a court's fool, to develop an amusing and naïve (therefore innocent) discourse, while at the same time denouncing clerical or judicial hypocrisy. Irony relies on the reader's ability to separate what is said from what is meant; it is a good illustration of how ambiguous Marot's poetry often is. Aldred demonstrates this point further in chapter 5: ambiguity through irony and wordplay (in particular sexual innuendo) allows Marot to develop satirical messages, while keeping the ability to deny any misbehaving, since the subversive reading can only be attributed to the reader. At the same time, this type of coded poetry brings initiated readers (the reformation sympathizers) closer together and creates a feeling of solidarity among them. Finally, chapter 6 shows how Marot, like Villon, successfully mixes pathos and comedy, for example in his anti-war poetry and in

“L’Enfer,” despite theoreticians’ assertion that humor requires the suspension of feelings. For Aldred, Marot’s humor in the context of torture, war, or religious persecution allows for a bond between author and audience that a straightforward call for pity would not achieve.

In her conclusion Aldred sketches an evolution in Marot’s attitude from court poet trying to make a living by making his patron and audience laugh, to a more corrective use of humor through satire. Despite this evolution in use, she argues that the tools of Marotic humor, subtle, diverse, and complex, remain globally the same.

The careful readings developed in this book are always insightful and, although they are on occasion not entirely convincing, or entirely new, they offer, as a whole, an excellent perspective on Marot’s comic poetry, its richness, its ubiquity, and its various uses. In particular, the multiple identifications of humor by Aldred in less-known, seemingly innocent passages, based on her philological competence and attention to phonic games, makes us want to reread Marot with an ear open for humorous wordplay.

The only important reservation that this reviewer has to express is in regards to the scholarship that this study is based upon. The edition quoted by the author is Mayer’s, which predates Defaux’s and Rigolot’s, and none of the references are more recent than the mid-1990s. An updating of some of the analyses, in particular the taking into account of Bernd Renner’s works on satire in the early Renaissance, would have been welcome.

FLORIAN PREISIG  
Eastern Washington University