Book Reviews/Comptes Rendus

Victor Brodeau. *Poésies*. Edition critique par Hilary M. Tomlinson. Textes Littéraires Français, 312. Genève: Droz, 1982. Pp. 233. Fr.S. 50.

This volume is a critical edition of the poetry of Victor Brodeau (1500?-1540), Marguerite de Navarre's valet de chambre and secretary, and a disciple of Marot. This is the first edition ever of some of Brodeau's poetry. Most of his work was not published during his lifetime, although some appeared in various collective anthologies or in editions of the writings of his contemporaries. Professor Tomlinson has performed a valuable service for students of the sixteenth century by seeking out, collating, editing, and publishing the works of this little-known writer.

Though a minor figure, Brodeau is an interesting and typical one, even if not much is known about his life. He was not a professional but an occasional poet. He was apparently a devoted bureaucrat: Professor Tomlinson has published in an appendix the letters Brodeau faithfully wrote to Anne de Montmorency, Grand Maître and Connétable of France between 1523-1530, apprising him of the activities of the court, the well-being of the royal family, and of his own relatives.

Brodeau became valet de chambre to Marguerite de Navarre around 1520 and her secretary in 1527. He was active in Marguerite's own circle, in that of her brother, François Ier (for whom he may also have worked), and had relations with the principal poets of his time, notably Clément Marot, Claude Chappuys and Mellin de St. Gelais. He apparently thought very little of his secular poems, viewing them as mere impromptus and making no attempt to have them published. Many must have perished without a trace. It has been suggested that around 1539 Brodeau underwent a mystical crisis or evolution in his religious life which led him to write and publish the *Louanges de Jesuchrist nostre sauveur*, the longest and most interesting of Brodeau's works and the only one he ever published. Two other religious poems were published after his death.

Professor Tomlinson has diligently sought out Brodeau's remaining verse and published a critical edition of the poems she believes to be authentic (several doubtful poems are published in Appendices B, C, and D). The edition consists of twenty-nine poems, of which twenty-six are "poésies de cour," and three are "poésies religieuses." The court poetry includes rondeaux, blasons, elegies, verse epistles, epitaphs, epigrams, dizains and huitains. Most of the poems are circum-

stantial, dealing with the death of Louise de Savoie (several epitaphs), of the Dauphin François (an elegiac epistle), but more often the circumstances are obscure and cannot be fully recovered. The secular poems reveal that Brodeau was a full participant in the literary activity of his time: the "Blason de la Bouche" was written for the "concours des Blasons" initiated by Marot; other poems participate in poetic exchanges between Brodeau, Marot, St. Gelais and Chappuys. Among them are translations from Ausonius, Strato, Angeriano, Bembo, Politiano, and the Cardinal, Jean de Lorraine. Their content is also typical of the poetry of the period—Petrarchan images and metaphors, discussions of the nature of love, sensual epigrams from the Greek Anthology, lamentations on the deaths of several illustrious people. By his use of fixed forms, clichéd content and banal style, Brodeau appears to be the very image of a court poet of the 1530's.

Yet when we turn to his religious poetry, we find, at least in the *Louanges de Jesuchrist*, a work with a clearly-organized structure, a well-developed central idea and an appropriate rhetorical expression. In the *Louanges* Brodeau has found his subject and style—in a poem of much greater depth and scope. A genuine religious sentiment animates this poem which deftly combines Old Testament parallels to Christ with a brief description of His life, following this by a vision of the Last Judgment emphasizing the charity of Christ, and ending with a prayer that the mercy of Christ be extended to the poor sinner who is the speaker in the poem.

According to Pierre Jourda, in his two-part article on Brodeau (*RHLF*, 1921), this poem is one of the first major works of religious inspiration in French poetry and entitles Brodeau to a more significant place in literary history than he has generally enjoyed. Unfortunately, the other two religious poems ("Epistre d'ung pecheur à Jesus Christ" and "Rondeau à nostre saulveur Jesus Christ") do not attain the same level of inspiration or formal perfection.

The text of the twenty-nine "authentic" poems of Brodeau is accompanied by a critical apparatus that consists of a list of variants of the texts and some historical and literary notes.

The lengthy introduction preceding the text presents briefly those facts that are known about the life of Brodeau, based on Jourda's article and the editor's own research in Tours. The editor devotes the major portion of her introduction to a description of the manuscripts and printed editions in which Brodeau's poetry has been preserved. The picture she presents is complex and not always easy to decipher. For the court poetry there are seven manuscripts which contain poems directly attributed to Brodeau. There are ten printed sources (some existing in multiple editions) which contain poems attributed to Brodeau. There are also eighteen anonymous manuscripts containing poems attributed to Brodeau. After describing all these potential sources, the editor had to come to a decision concerning the authenticity of the poems. It is not always clear why the editor accepts or rejects certain poems, although her general principle is to accept the signed ones and to reject the anonymous ones.

The establishment of the text also poses a problem because of the disparate nature of the sources and the difficulty of dating them. Some poems exist in only one version, others in several versions, though without any real basis for choice

being evident. The editor was obliged to select the base text without being sure of its status or that of the variants she lists.

The three religious poems are found only in printed editions, but in several different versions, and the editor has chosen what she believes to be the "best" text, although she corrects it upon occasion. At best, then, we are dealing with poems that may be by Brodeau, and in versions that may or may not resemble the author's original, and that present a hybrid text.

Notably lacking from this edition is any critical evaluation of the poems. Are they indeed worth publishing? The answer depends not only on one's evaluation of the poetry, but on one's point of view concerning its author.

Brodeau is an interesting figure, but his poetry is not very interesting. Pierre Jourda, the only other person besides Professor Tomlinson to take an interest in Brodeau, and whose article is an indispensable complement to this edition, nevertheless admits that his poetry is "froide et ennuyeuse" (p. 210), that he "n'a jamais rencontré de grande idée poétique" (p. 210), that he lacks originality in style, language and syntax (p. 213). Add this to the uncertainty regarding authenticity and the limited number of poems that may with any certainty be attributed to Brodeau, and what we have is not much, from an aesthetic point of view, with the exception of the *Louanges*.

We do have a fleshing-out of the period, the addition of another footnote to literary history in the person of this typical minor figure. The broad canvas of literary history contains many such secondary characters. Often they help us understand a period better than the major figures. So it is with Victor Brodeau. Professor Tomlinson's edition has the merit of giving us an insight into the literary activity of the early Renaissance in France, but her careful resurrection does not succeed in turning Brodeau into an important poet.

The edition includes a Bibliography, four Appendices, a Glossary, an Index of proper names, a Table of incipits and a list of abbreviations. It is relatively free of typographical errors.

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Lucien Febvre. *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais*, translated by Beatrice Gottlieb. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1982. Pp. xxxii, 516. \$35.00.

Le Disciple de Pantagruel (Les Navigations de Panurge), éd. critique par Guy Demerson et Christiane Lauvergnot-Gagniere (Société des Textes Français Modernes). Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1982, Pp. lxxxiii, 98.

Lucien Febvre's masterpiece, although first published in 1942, is still the best introduction to Rabelais and the spiritual climate of early sixteenth-century France. Beatrice Gottlieb's expert and welcome translation is made all the more valuable by a knowledgeable and thoughtful introduction which places the founder of the *Annales* school and his work in the context of twentieth-century French historiography. Her English version has much of the conversational verve of the