

## Ridge on Vibert, ed. (2014) and on Régnier and Jammes (2014)

Vibert, Bertrand, ed. *Henri de Régnier, tel qu'en lui-même enfin?* Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2014. Pp. 333. ISBN: 978-2-8124-2133-4

Régnier, Henri de, and Francis Jammes. *Correspondance (1893–1936)*. Ed. Pierre Lachasse. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2014. Pp. 243. ISBN: 978-2-8124-2586-8

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Henri de Régnier's life (1864–1936) is split evenly between two centuries, an important observation given that he is commonly regarded as a poet and writer rooted in the nineteenth-century literary tradition. Although his literary masters include José-Maria de Heredia and Stéphane Mallarmé, his contemporaries were not only the Decadents and Symbolists of the 1880s and 1890s, they were also the avant-garde poets, novelists, and journalists of the 1910s and 1920s. The two works reviewed here, both recently published by Classiques Garnier, seek to reevaluate Régnier's work as a poet, essayist, novelist, short-story writer, epistolary correspondent, and diarist.

The question mark punctuating the “enfin?” in the title of the first book is intentionally provocative. The authors of these eighteen collected essays pose the question of whether it is, in fact, time that Régnier's work be considered and valorized on its own terms. The answer is decidedly yes.

The collection's editor, Bertrand Vibert, guides readers by posing four questions in the introduction: “La valeur littéraire: Est-il bon? Est-il mauvais?”; “Régnier passeur, c'est-à-dire ‘classique’?”; “Régnier en vers ou en prose?”; “Tradition ou originalité?” Divided into five sections of three to four essays each, the first three sections follow chronologically, beginning with “Les Années Symbolistes” and ending with “*Flamma Tenax*, en vers et en prose,” in reference to a work published in 1928. The last two sections are thematically organized, exploring Régnier's professional and aesthetic relationships with Claude Debussy, André Gide, and Marcel Proust then touching upon Régnier's romance with the city of Venice and his role as a diarist.

It is not surprising that the title of the first essay of the collection is also expressed as a question: “Disciple de Mallarmé?” Renzo Alvarado Ruiz begins by defining a disciple as “celui qui adhère à un enseignement” (25) and then asks “qu'est-ce que le ‘mallarmisme’” (25)? Régnier's poetry and writing is considered in the context of such relationships, but greater emphasis is placed on the formal constructions of his writing and its place in the literary tradition. Ruiz notes that both Mallarmé and Régnier held similar attitudes toward Parnassian form: “Mallarmé est bien un des premiers à vouloir faire jouer auprès de la plasticité du vers parnassien [pour qui] la musicalité est soit un procédé prosodique, un élément de la versification, soit un élément extérieur au poème lui-même joué par un instrument” (32). Thus, rhyme, rhythm, and musicality form the structural bases of Régnier's verse and his prose. The success of his 1887 collection, *Poèmes anciens et romanesques*, is a testament to this sense of musicality as well as the work's ability to mend the often over-exaggerated tensions between the Parnassian and Symbolist schools of poetry.

The author of the second article, Pierre Lachasse, is also the editor of the *Correspondance (1893–1936)* between Régnier and Jammes, which clearly gives him insight into Régnier's aesthetic considerations. His article, “Le difficile art de la prose,” directly engages “le combat littéraire de la génération de 1885” (36). Limiting his study to Régnier's prose production between 1885 and 1889, Lachasse outlines the technical foundation of Régnier's prose; this will be elaborated upon by the other critics published in the collection.

These first two articles not only outline Régnier's literary form, they also evoke the themes essential to the artistic universe he created over a lifetime, one based largely on classical mythology. As Lachasse writes of Régnier's early work in prose, “[I]ls marquent la naissance dans son œuvre en prose de deux thèmes majeurs: la révélation du phénomène de la mémoire involontaire et le brouillage des frontières entre l'imaginaire et le réel” (39). It should not be forgotten that Régnier's early works were considered avant-garde for his time and were heavily criticized as being part of the “maladie de l'époque” (43). This element of Régnier's avant-gardism is what has been forgotten, or at the very least, overlooked by historians and critics. The essays by Mireille Losco-Lena and Françoise Leriche emphasize that Régnier did not constantly look back for inspiration in tradition and classic mythology; rather, he held a mirror up to his contemporaries, showing them “ce qu'ils sont” (95).

Régnier did, in fact, influence his contemporaries, particularly André Gide and Marcel Proust. Gilles Philippe's “‘J'aimerais

mieux bien écrire qu'écire bien," and Fanny Déchanet-Plantz's "À la rencontre du temps passé," analyze in detail the importance of Régnier's philosophy toward memory and psychology in the writing of Gide and Proust, thus making a welcome contribution to the voluminous body of criticism on these writers.

Pierre Lachasse's edited volume, *Correspondance (1893–1936)*, complements Vibert's edited collection of critical essays by providing a correspondence that engages literary and aesthetic questions. After all, the two poets only met eight times over a forty-two-year period, a fact that meant that their relationship was predominately literary.

Thanks to his first major publication, *Poèmes anciens et romanesques*, Régnier's reputation as the generation's *chef de file* was affirmed. Francis Jammes, four years his junior, sought the approval of an artist he viewed as an accomplished poet of his generation. Remarkably, however, the themes the two poets addressed were starkly different. Where Régnier evoked the "nostalgie d'un passé légendaire et un lexique rare," through "le vers libre ou l'alexandrin ternaire," Jammes created "un univers rustique et provincial révélé par un langage quotidien, presque familier" (10). Jammes points this difference out to Régnier in a letter dated 23 June 1894 by questioning "le rapport qui existe entre mes guêpes et tes chimères" (37).

The letters themselves, framed by Pierre Lachasse's well-organized introduction, leave the reader wondering what, in fact, united these two poets whose aesthetics and themes were so divergent. Lachasse offers a simple solution: "[T]ous deux donnent à la poésie la mission exemplaire de construire un paysage dans lequel le lyrisme personnel s'élargit en mythe" (10). Through very different means, the two poets sought to create a personal universe based on the myths they constructed in their work. For Régnier, this material was classic Greek and Roman mythology while for Jammes it was provincial and rustic (11). Lachasse returns to Jammes's evocation of the "guêpes" and the "chimères," arguing that they are not as different as they may first appear, but are, in fact, two equally personal myths of two coherent poetic universes.

The publication of these works by Classiques Garnier reflects a greater trend in historical literary studies: they underscore a renewed interest in writers often considered "secondary," or non-canonical. Among these are recent and forthcoming publications on Remy de Gourmont, Jean de Tinan, Maurice Barrès, and Paul Bourget, as well as Francis Jammes, to name a few. While popular interest in Maurice Barrès may be due to the success of the far right in the current French political mainstream, other publications such as Jean de Tinan's *Journals*, edited by Jean-Paul Goujon, show that there is still plenty of interest and avenues not yet explored in the late nineteenth-century French literary tradition. While Régnier's correspondence with Jammes may be of more interest to specialists in the field, Vibert's *Henri de Régnier, tel qu'en lui-même enfin?* is accessible to all those interested in this period.

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