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THE IDENTITY OF SOMAIZE

I

Somaize owes his standing in the literary history of France almost entirely to his testimony concerning *préciosité*. Among the immediate witnesses of that social and literary manifestation, he is the most notable because of his uncommon and special interest in it. Molière, Furetière, the abbé d'Aubignac, the abbé de Pure paid their respects to the *précieuses* by writing about them in an occasional and incidental manner: but Somaize appears to have made them his paramount study. Of the twelve works ascribed to him,¹ seven deal specifically with the *précieuses*. Three more works, *Alcippe ou du choix des Galants*, *La Politique des Coquettes*, *Le Voyageur fortuné dans les Indes du Couchant ou l'amant heureux, contenant la découverte des terres inconnues qui sont au-delà des trois villes de Tendre*,² are mainly concerned with them. From the historical investigations made by Livet and Mr. Baldensperger³ on the *précieux* and *précieuses* of Paris and Lyons, it is clear that Somaize kept an extensive and rather accurate directory of such persons. He is the only writer of the seventeenth century who seems to have realized that in *préciosité* he was observing a curious phenomenon worth recording. Whether or not he felt, as Mr. Brunot⁴ and others have done, that the *précieuses* were having a powerful and beneficial effect on the French language and on the constitution of modern grammar, it has not been possible to determine as yet with precision, owing to apparent inconsistencies in his work. However that may be, his acumen in

comprehending that something out of the ordinary was happening to the French language is undeniable.

To what extent he was serious in his evidence is a question that ought to be settled before his authority is accepted with the confidence characterizing so many of the historians and critics who have consulted him. His writings, as everybody knows, are valuable only for their substance, and not for their style. A "control" will some day have to be established over his testimony. The truth of the statement, for example, contained in the *privilege du roy* over the signature of Ballesdens⁵ regarding the connection of the *Dictionnaire des Précieuses* with *les meilleurs romans du temps* will have to be either accepted or modified. It will be obligatory to determine whether Somaize collected his specimens of *préciosité* in the way mentioned by Ballesdens or manufactured most of them on a slender basis of fact: whether he wished to put on record a phase of the civilization of his day or, as a good *bourgeois*, desired to ridicule a deplorable tendency toward affectation which he had observed in some of his acquaintances. If, along with Molière and two or three other men, he succeeded in staying the advance of what may be termed Romanticism in language, he deserves to rank among the foremost defenders of plain and homely French speech and among the pioneers in the struggle between the Classicists and the Romanticists.

His testimony, accordingly, if true, is extremely valuable. It happens, however, that the critics are by no means unanimous as to how much weight should be given to it. This uncertainty cannot be removed without a clearer understanding of the character of the man. As, unfortunately, we know next to nothing about him, his entire personality being shrouded in mystery, it would seem that criticism had entered an *impasse* and that the opinions concerning Somaize's worth would have to continue divided.

¹ Cf. *The Case of Somaize*, *MLN.*, Feb., 1913.

² Cf. Emile Roy, *Charles Sorel*, pp. 201, 260, 270.

³ Cf. Ch.-L. Livet, *Dict. des Préc.* and F. Baldensperger, *Ét. d'Hist. litt.*, 2e série, *La Société préc. de Lyon*, etc., Paris, 1910.

⁴ Cf. Brunot in Petit de Julleville, *Hist. de la litt.*, etc., Vol. IV, pp. 783-784.

⁵ Cf. *Case of Somaize*, *MLN.*, Feb., 1913, p. 38.

It is the purpose of this paper to try to open the way for a more accurate appreciation of Somaize. The mystery surrounding him is, it seems to the writer, not impenetrable. His writings afford clues to some of his relationships, to some of his tastes, to some of his ideas. Through these and other vital facts it ought to be possible to identify him. Having identified him,—for this fundamental problem has not yet been solved,—we shall have very little further trouble with Somaize's evidence. The writer, as has been indicated in a previous discussion, believes Somaize to be a fictitious character and not the actual person hitherto accepted by students of the seventeenth century. It is his conviction that the identity of Somaize can, even at this late date, be discovered: and it is as a contribution to this quest that he presents the following exposition.

If, now, assuming the non-entity of Somaize as an actual person, it can be demonstrated that most of the clues referred to lead to a particular writer of the seventeenth century contemporary with Somaize, and if the identity of that writer with Somaize can be established with practical certainty, we shall have the advantage of getting rid of an unknown quantity in the history of seventeenth-century literature: we shall be in a position to do greater justice to the reputation of a quixotic character whose varied works are a gold-mine of historical, social, and literary information: and we shall know definitely Somaize's genuine attitude toward *préciosité*, thus setting at rest the numerous conjectures as to his perfect sincerity or lack of it toward the *précieuses*.

The man for whom the claim of identity with Somaize is to be established must have, among others, the following qualifications, which are prominent in Somaize.

1. He must be a prolific and mediocre writer. Within four years—from 1657, when he first appeared, until 1661, when he disappeared from sight—Somaize produced at least 15 works, of greater or less length, in a generally clear but unfelicitous style.

2. He must be a born pamphleteer, as was Somaize.

3. He must be an adept at literary hoaxing,

since, if Somaize was a fictitious character, his creator, whoever he may have been, exhibited extreme cleverness in being able to have Somaize accepted as a real person for more than 250 years. This, too, in spite of the large amount of attention paid to him since 1856, when Livet began to investigate his work.

4. He must be dominated by an interest in *préciosité*. As I have stated, it is that interest which almost exclusively engages the attention of Somaize.

5. He must be well acquainted with the *précieuses* and *précieux*. Somaize's *Dictionnaire* deals with 600 of the tribe.⁶

6. He must be hostile to Molière. Larroumet has pointed out that Somaize was the first man to attack Molière in print.⁷

7. He must be hostile to Boisrobert. Somaize began his public career by criticising the merry abbé's *Théodore* and declaring that a certain prince had had Boisrobert caned, not by a regiment of soldiers nor even of pages, but by mere stable-boys.⁸

8. He must see in Balzac a persistent *précieux*. Somaize gives numerous examples of *préciosité* for which Belisandre—that is, Balzac—is responsible.⁹

9. He must believe the *précieux* to have begun their mannerisms at the very beginning of the seventeenth century. Somaize includes Malherbe and Corneille among the *précieux*.

10. He must be addicted to needlessly coarse expressions. Under *cul*, *chien*, and the sign & in his *Dictionnaire*, Somaize shows an evident relish in departing from conventional gentility of language.

11. He must be a partisan of simplified spelling. The caption *orthographe* in the *Dictionnaire* is followed by a discussion of simplified spelling and a list of suggested improvements, such as *tête* for *teste*, *prône* for *prosne*, *auteur* for *authieur*, *hôtel* for *hostel*.

⁶ Cf. Livet, *Précieux*, etc., p. xxviii.

⁷ Larroumet, *Ét. de litt.*, p. 8.

⁸ Cf. Larroumet, *ibid.*, pp. 5, 6, and Somaize, *Procez des Prét.*, ed. Livet, pp. 101, 102, and Somaize, *Vérit. Prét.*, p. 37.

⁹ Cf. Somaize, *Dict. des Préc.*, I, pp. 82, 101, 117, etc.

12. He must be fond of classifying and cataloguing. Somaize's two *Dictionnaires* deal methodically with the language and the history of the *précieuses* in a perfectly modern alphabetical and systematic manner.

13. He must be a close friend of the Academician Ballesdens. The recommendation of the latter, appearing over his signature in the *privilege* to the *Dictionnaire* seems to have been influential in securing the necessary permission to print. The *privilege* expressly states, "A ces causes, après avoir veu l'approbation du sieur Ballesdens, nous avons permis . . . à l'exposant de le faire imprimer, vendre et débiter."¹⁰

14. He must have rendered himself obnoxious to the Académie. Somaize's "friend" declares that our author caused the Académie to assemble two or three times because of some of his doings.¹¹ This detail may mean nothing, to be sure. As a statement of fact, it may be much exaggerated. But that this particular title to glory should be selected from among so many possible titles is of a certain significance. As to Somaize's scepticism concerning the labors of the Académie, he has left a plain record of that in his *Procez des Précieuses*:

Ah! je vois bien que c'est (*i. e.*, the Dictionary of the Académie) l'ouvrage
De Penelopes, et je gage
Que dans ce livre l'omega
Jamais place ne trouvera.¹²

It would obviously be easy to name a few authors whom several of these requirements would fit. It would not be difficult to name one or two authors whom a majority of these requirements would fit. Furetière, for example, knows *précieux* society, dislikes its affectations in speech, indulges in pamphleteering, can be coarse at times, satirizes Boisrobert,¹³ quarrels with the Académie, and has had a long experience in classifying and cataloguing in connection with his dictionary. On

the other hand, he was a friend of Molière's,¹⁴ he expresses admiration for Balzac in his epigram *Sur la Mort de Monsieur de Balzac*, he is against the efforts of the *précieuses* in the direction of simplified spelling,¹⁵ his squabbles with the Académie came in the seventies and eighties, thereby making it impossible, if he were Somaize, for him to have boasted, by 1661, of causing the Immortals to assemble on his account, and he is not obsessed by *préciosité*.

Any man whom the 14 articles mentioned above will fit may, it is fair to assume, be considered a suitable candidate for the honor of having originated Somaize. Nevertheless, they would not in a court of law prove his right conclusively. Something more is needed. It is essential that, if possible, the unknown Monsieur X be convicted of unusual conversance with the ideas and language of Somaize, whom everybody else ignores and seems totally unacquainted with.¹⁶ If, in addition to all this, it can be demonstrated that a work planned by Monsieur X and practically acknowledged by him, and for which he alone was in a position to have the material, has appeared as Somaize's chief production, and is later mentioned kindly by Monsieur X, then the possibility of their being one and the same person becomes extremely strong, and the probability of their having been two different persons becomes so slight as to be nearly negligible.

The man whom all these conditions fit is Charles Sorel, sieur de Souvigny, historiographer of the King, the friend of the good Guy Patin, the author of *Francion* and the

¹⁴ Isabelle Bronk, *Poésies Diverses of Antoine Furetière*, Baltimore, 1908, p. xv.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xxxii, note 1.

¹⁶ I take this opportunity of confirming what was said in the *Case of Somaize*, p. 34, concerning Mr. Magne's confusion of Somaize with Saumaise, the learned critic. M. Magne declares that Boisrobert submitted Gineste's *épîtres* to our Somaize, while the latter was in Bourgogne. Now, it appears that Saumaise, the critic, had interests in Bourgogne previously to 1645, and it is altogether probable that he was there again in 1647. Cf. *Lettres choisies de feu Mr. Guy Patin*, Cologne, MDCXCI, Vol. I, p. 6, date of Feb. 16, 1645.

¹⁰ Somaize, *Dict. des Préc.*, ed. Livet, II, p. 17.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, préf., p. 15.

¹² *Procez des Prét.*, ed. Livet, p. 109.

¹³ Furetière, *Rom. Bourg.*, ed. Fournier, p. 140.

Berger Extravagant, a pioneer in realistic fiction, the purveyor of substance to Molière, the foe of *préciosité*, a modern if ever there was one, a writer of advanced ideas and of a retrograde style, an important literary critic whom almost everybody has neglected, a solid *bourgeois* who riddled the aristocratic pretensions of his century and was most touchy about his own nobility,¹⁷ a curious, inquisitive, sensible sort of person who has done more to preserve the actuality of the seventeenth century for us than Molière, Corneille, Racine, and La Fontaine put together.

A systematic discussion of the points outlined by me will constitute the simplest method of proof in identifying Sorel with Somaize. The preliminary remark may be made that the mention of Somaize's name has often caused Sorel's name to be brought into play, and *vice-versa*. Thus, Mr. Roy, the biographer of Sorel, and Colombey,¹⁸ the editor of *Francion*, frequently cite Somaize to justify Sorel. If the two men are accepted as but one, this factitious corroboration will be unnecessary in the future. Perhaps, also, it may not be out of place to hazard a guess as to the adoption of the name Somaize by the original author. In 1657, Boisrobert published his *Théodore*. Somaize immediately wrote an attack on it. This was his first appearance in public. Now, Claude de Saumaise had died in 1653. It would have been entirely in accord with Sorel's practice to use a pseudonym resembling that of the great critic in order to obtain an artificial prestige for his own satire and criticism. That some persons in the seventeenth century would have mistaken Somaize or Sommaize for Saumaise is as possible as that Mr. Magne should have incurred that error in the twentieth century.¹⁹ Sorel was particularly inclined to the presentation of his own works under the names of other well-known persons. *Francion* fared forth under the name of Nicolas de Moulinet, sieur du Parc, a living author of the day. It is not unlikely that the pen-name N. de

l'Isle²⁰ was employed by Sorel for the purpose of creating confusion with the same title belonging to Thomas Corneille.

In Part II, which will appear in a later issue, all the preceding tests will be applied to Charles Sorel.

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POE AND SPIELHAGEN; NOVELLE AND SHORT-STORY

In an article in *Mod. Lang. Notes*, XXV, 67-72, on "Edgar Allan Poe and Fr. Spielhagen. Their Theory of the Short-story," Prof. Palmer Cobb has sought to show:

- (1) that Spielhagen was first to proclaim the fact that Poe's theories of lyric verse and short-story are substantially identical;
- (2) that Spielhagen's admiration for Poe was such that his own theory of the *novelle* is in its essence simply a restatement of Poe's theory of the short-story; and
- (3) that Spielhagen thus became "the first exponent in Germany of the Poe doctrine of the tale, and likewise the medium of transmission of this doctrine to German soil."

As a result of his investigation, Prof. Cobb even finds it entirely possible that "Spielhagen was not content with the acceptance and exploitation in Germany of Poe's theory of the short-story, but that he also made practical application of it in the construction of his own novels." Unfortunately a closer examination of the material used for this article taken together with deductions from other sources, with which the author does not seem to have been acquainted, must lead one inevitably to conclusions diametrically opposed to his. Let us follow his argument point by point.

It is true that "Spielhagen's interest in Poe dates from an early period." In the autobiography¹ Poe is mentioned among several

¹⁷ Cf. Furetière, *Rom. Bourg.*, pp. 217 ff.

¹⁸ Cf. Colombey, ed. of *Francion*, p. 176, n. 2.

¹⁹ Cf. *Case of Somaize*, p. 34.

²⁰ Cf. Koerting, *Gesch. des fr. Romans*, etc., II, p. 46, n. 2.

¹ *Finder und Erfinder*. 2 Bde. Leipzig, 1890. II, 288 f.