Formulas in the language of the French poet-dramatists of the seventeenth century..

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FORMULAS IN THE LANGUAGE
OF THE
FRENCH POET-DRAMATISTS
OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY
FORMULAS IN THE LANGUAGE

OF THE

FRENCH POET-DRAMATISTS,

OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

A DISSERTATION

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The subject of the following pages was suggested to the author by Prof. Gröber of the University of Strasburg. The author is only one of the many students of Prof. Gröber who can bear witness not only to his painstaking interest in the development of any special theme by those under his guidance, but to his unmistakable determination to impart as much genuine information as possible within the short hours of the lecture room and seminar. The work has been completed in America, and for its defects, therefore, the author alone is responsible.
FORMULAS

IN THE

LANGUAGE OF THE FRENCH POET-DRAMATISTS

OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

La perfection d'une langue se constitue par le choix, entre toutes les formes, qui pourraient indifféremment servir à l'expression d'une même pensée, de la seule forme qui convienne au temps, à la circonstance, au sujet.


Et Jupiter, père de tous,
Vomissant son juste courroux.

Garnier, Cornelle, 1274.

Que son juste courroux soit si-tost apaisé.

Mairet, L'Illustre Corsaire, I. 1.

Mon fils!

Souffrez monsieur, que mon juste courroux.

Rotrou, Laure Persécutée, III. 7.

Je triomphe aujourd'hui du plus juste courroux.

Corneille, Cinna, V. 3.

Ah! je vous reconnais; et ce juste courroux.

Racine, Androm., II. 1.

Commandez; épuisez votre juste courroux.

Voltaire, Brutus, III. 5.

These quotations with the recurring expression juste courroux, taken from French dramatists of three different centuries, present a peculiarity of the French theatre which is well known to every reader of the French classic dramatists. It appears especially striking, and calls for an explanation, inasmuch as it is not to be found, to the same extent at least, in the works of
dramatic poets of other nations. The following are about one hundred expressions which occur with marked frequency, as will be seen farther on: Allumer le feu, allumer la flamme, allumer le flambeau d’hymen, âme généreuse, à genoux, au dernier point, à (contre) un écuail (se briser), auteur de mes jours (de ma naissance), au bord du précipice, aux dépens de sa vie, beau feu, belle action, belle flamme, beaux yeux, beau trépas, belle morte, briser la chaîne, briser les fers, cent et cent, chaste amour, cœur magnanime, cœur généreux, les larmes coulent, les pleurs coulent, (faire) couler le sang, conseil salutaire, conserver le jour, coup fatal, coup mortel, couper la trame, courage généreux, dessiller or siller les yeux, doux entretiens, dures lois, en l’air, esprit flottant, flots de sang, foudre de guerre, frémir d’horreur, fruit cueillir, fumer de sang, gloire flétrie, grand dessein, grand cœur, grand courage, hauts faits, haute fortune, haut rang, haute vertu, heureux hymen, illustre rang, imprimer sur (à) un front, jusqu’au fond de mon âme, jusqu’au fond de mon cœur, jusqu’au dernier soupir, juste colère, juste courroux, laver (les mains) dans le sang, lien conjugal, lien sacré, manquer de foi, mettre au jour, mettre en peine, mettre en poudre, mille et mille, noble ardeur, nœud conjugal, nœud sacré, nœud de l’hymen, noire action, nuit éternelle, nuit et jour, parler avec franchise, percer le sein, percer le flanc, percer le cœur, percé de coups, (mettre un) poignard dans le sein, premier mouvement, prêter le bras, répandre un sang, respirer le jour, remords cuisant, secret mouvement, sous sa loi, tache noire, tant de fois, tigre altéré (de sang), tirer de peine, trancher les jours, tremper de sang, verser des larmes, verser des pleurs, verser du sang.

These expressions, which not only the same poet but dramatists of different periods employed, remind us of the so-called epic formulas of Homer and of the earlier French poetry. Far from being considered as belonging to any one person, they were looked upon as the common property of all; and the later authors, in making use of them, were not exposed to the charge of plagiarism or the lack of ability to invent new equivalents. As at the present time, when one wishes to express a moral truth
with special force, the words of Scripture are used, so in the
drama of the seventeenth century a familiar and sonorous form
once employed and bearing the sanction of a name well known
was regarded as a formula which might be used wherever approp-
riate.

Originality and fullness of vocabulary have ever been called
for in poetry. This is especially true of dramatic poetry, which-
should represent different characters, persons of different
thoughts and actions, and which in the use of the same expres-
sions incurs the risk of presenting types instead of individuals.
Each profession, each occupation in life, is apt to have its special
jargon; but that poets as a class should have a number of set
phrases to be used and re-used with monotonous frequency is
at least very noticeable.

It would be unsatisfactory to explain the repetitions to which
we refer by saying that both author and hearer took such
pleasure in hearing certain expressions that their repetition was
really in response to a demand, and not merely a matter of con-
venience. In literature, certain objects, persons, and situations
never cease to please; but it is very questionable if the same
is true of words. It cannot be granted either that “le style
soutenu” demanded the repetitions which we find in the follow-
ing pages. The French poets, like those of other nations, had
figures of speech and periphrases at their disposal, by means of
which they could have avoided the monotonous which we en-
counter.

Further, it is not an explanation of the fact we have before
us when Marty-Lavaux (Lexique de Corneille) says: “Cor-
neille fit entrer pour jamais dans le vocabulaire tragique un
grand nombre d’expressions que faisaient partie du bagage des
poètes qui l’avaient précédé. Les gens de talent, les gens d’es-
prit inventent des mots, des tours: les hommes de genie consa-
crent ceux qui sont bons, en les plaçant dans leurs chefs-d’œu-
vres.” He simply states without explaining what we are con-
sidering.

Lotheissen (Geschichte der französischen Literatur im
Formulas in the Language

XVII. Jahrhundert), in speaking of Corneille, remarks: "In der Zeit der raschen Sprachentwicklung hat er viel von dem Reichthum der früheren Epoche bewahrt und doch spricht er bereits mit der stilvollen Beschränkung der späteren Zeit. Wie seine Dramen direct und ohne Episodenbeiwerk auf ihr Ziel los- steuern, so ist auch seine Sprache knapp und entschieden. Es ist ihr mehr um die Sache zu thun, als um den Schmuck. Corneille ist im Gebrauch von Bildern und poetischen Umschreibungen mässig." These words give no explanation of our question, for "Stilvoller Beschränkung" fails to answer why we find the frequency of the following repetitions.

These views and attempts at explanation show that their authors had not sufficiently before their minds the nature and abundance of the expressions which we are considering. An examination of the same is therefore necessary to come to any satisfactory conclusions.

Under recurring expressions we understand here such combinations as grand courage, jusqu'au fond de mon âme, which on account of their frequent repetition take on the appearance of formulas; also single words used frequently, and which regularly occur instead of the "terme propre" in the works of different dramatists. In some few cases it is difficult to decide whether a single word or a combination of words may be regarded as a formula. It is possible also that in our collection there are single words which, although once used figuratively, are no longer so regarded. Where such is the case they show at least a preference of the author, though they may not come under the head of what is defined as formulas.

We shall, therefore, best consider these formulas by dividing them into two parts, the first consisting of the different word-combinations, the second of the single words. For the present we limit ourselves to the formulas of the first class. We take them from the works of Garnier (Sammlung französischer Neudrucke von Foerster, Heilbronn, 1883), of Rotron (Laplace, Sanchez & Cie., Paris, 1883), of Corneille (Laplace, Sanchez & Cie., Paris, 1888), of Racine (Laplace, Sanchez & Cie., Paris,