

Evocations of Eloquence

Rhetoric, Literature and Religion in Early Modern France

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(eds)

Essays in Honour of Peter Bayley

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MEDIEVAL AND
EARLY MODERN
FRENCH STUDIES

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Introduction

Peter Bayley, Drapers Professor of French at Cambridge for a quarter of a century, has had an enormous influence on the study of early modern French literature and culture, through his research, his teaching, and his leadership of a major French department in the United Kingdom. His pioneering work on pulpit eloquence in the seventeenth century was a significant contribution to the rediscovery of rhetoric in the study of early modern literature, but his research has not been confined to the rhetorical field: religious writing more generally and memoirs have been of particular interest. His lecturing has covered a wide field of French literature from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth, including all the major texts of seventeenth-century literature: he thus had a great influence on generations of Cambridge undergraduates, who will not forget the lectures' combination of deep engagement with the subject and arresting and witty delivery. The present volume, edited by two Cambridge colleagues (one a former pupil), aims to mark his retirement in appropriate fashion. It brings together many leading scholars of early modern French literature, from France and the United States as well as Britain.

The contributions all relate in some way to the early modern period (1500–1800), though one deals with nineteenth-century responses to a seventeenth-century text. The interface between religion and literature is the subject of several of the contributions; others deal specifically with eloquence, especially the eloquence of the pulpit. But the broad range of subjects in this volume bears vivid testimony to Peter Bayley's influence as colleague, teacher and friend.

It is entirely fitting that the first section, 'Eloquence of the Pulpit', is devoted to the writer with whom Peter's research has most often been associated, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704). John D. Lyons's piece on 'Bossuet and the Tragic' encapsulates many of the core themes and genres

that are considered over the course of the book. By associating Bossuet, that well-known opponent of the theatre, with the notion of the tragic, Lyons dwells not so much on how the great churchman might have felt threatened by the popularity of the theatre as on the ways in which the major themes of pulpit oratory, and especially of funeral orations, overlap with the various categories of the tragic imagination. Anne Régent-Susini's essay shows how much of Bossuet's religious writing imbibes legal discourses of the time, before moving to what she calls the emergence of a public voice in his *Logique*, written for Louis XIV's son. She argues that references to the French legal system indicate not only reverence for the heritage of the past but also point to a much more modern authority, that of the public. Emma Gilby also considers Bossuet's relationship with his public, with an exploration of the authorial 'je' in Bossuet's funeral orations, as it mediates between the divine and the worldly, allowing for a 'transactional mode of authority' that forces the listener/reader to be actively engaged in processes of signification and contextualization.

Already the relationship between sacred and secular emerges as an issue within those chapters. The early modern period is customarily regarded as pivotal within narratives of secularization. In Part II, 'Religion, Culture and Belief', Henry Phillips's contribution casts doubt on the dominant narrative of the secular's separation from the religious realm, and highlights compatibility and convergence between secular and religious cultures. With this in mind, we are perhaps better prepared to envisage the combination of religious and poetic concerns in Corneille and Racine's verse translations from the Roman Breviary, closely studied here by Richard Parish.

But this is not to say that religion's hold on seventeenth-century minds went unchallenged. Otherwise it would be impossible to explain the strenuous apologetic efforts of Pascal (another author with whose work Peter Bayley was much concerned: his exposition of the *Pensées* in lectures was a masterly combination of intellectual sympathy and impartiality). David Wetsel's chapter focuses on Pascal's stern insistence that religion enjoins and requires self-annihilation and self-hatred, and suggests that this requires us to modify our conception of the target audience of the Apology. Questions of audience are also relevant to Michael Moriarty's discussion of the placing of the Wager in different editions of the *Pensées*, where he examines the pertinence of the so-called Many Gods Objection to our understanding

of Pascal's possible argumentative strategy. Olivier Tonneau engages with Pascal as part of a broader consideration of the Jansenist theology of predestination, with reference to what he calls a 'pedagogy of conversion' that enables the doctrine to be understood, for all its apparent harshness, as consonant with a loving God's plan of salvation.

As a Protestant, Pierre Bayle would have been brought up to believe in strict predestination, but his subsequent intellectual position has been a matter of constant debate. Edward James argues against the view that Bayle's insistence on the superiority of faith to reason was a screen for unbelief, and draws attention to the affinities between Bayle's approach to religious belief and Pascal's conception of faith as a *sentiment*. Nevertheless, there remain discrepancies, and for Bayle the opposition between faith and reason is starker even than for Pascal.

Miracles were, of course, a key plank in Pascal's apologetic platform, and attested miracles are still required by the Roman Catholic Church when considering candidates for sainthood. This requirement was suspended in the case of St Thomas More, but, as Richard Maber explains in his chapter, some sixteenth-century English Roman Catholic authors cited as a miracle an event that befell More's daughter Margaret Roper on the day of his martyrdom. The story was recycled in various continental accounts of More's death, including one by the prolific Jesuit author Le Moyne; yet later English Roman Catholic writers omitted it or played it down, and Maber carefully analyses the cultural reasons for this discrepancy.

Religion plays a central role also in the opening chapter of the third section of the book on 'Theatre and Ceremony'. Nicholas Hammond's piece, 'The Child's Voice', in which two prominent seventeenth-century theories of childhood and education are examined and then applied to the figure of Joas in Racine's *Athalie*, revolves around the assertion that two distinct kinds of voice are to be found in the character's utterances on stage, one prelapsarian, the other postlapsarian. Another side of Racine's theatre, the use of rhetorical questions, is the subject of Michael Hawcroft's chapter. Hawcroft analyses the wide range of questions not only in Racine's dramatic texts but also in his non-theatrical prose writings, and shows how the question of form is concerned not only with theatrical effect but also with notions of politeness and civility. A very different set of questions dominates Noël Peacock's chapter, namely relating to divine retribution

in Molière's *Dom Juan*, where he compares modern productions with the circumstances surrounding the first performances of the play. Saint-Simon, another of Peter Bayley's favourite writers, provides the starting point for John O'Brien's exploration of stilts. What may at first sight appear a subject of little consequence becomes an examination of much more profound matters, taking in writers as diverse as Montaigne, Jean-Pierre Camus and Proust.

Such relationships between different writers, situations, or periods are the subject of many other chapters in Part IV, 'Contexts and Intertexts'. Philip Ford shows how Aristotle's classification of forms of government is a standard point of reference for Renaissance humanist writers but also how they treat Homer as a source of political wisdom, finding, for instance, in the confrontation between Achilles and Agamemnon material for discussion, often reflecting different religious allegiances, of the rights and duties of kings. A backward look at the Renaissance itself is the subject of Pierre Zoberman's chapter, which traces how different characterizations of that period served to vindicate the all-round superiority of the age of Louis XIV and of the monarch himself. The foundations of this belief in the superiority of French language and culture had been laid in the period of Richelieu, when no one exerted a greater critical influence on linguistic and literary canons and practice than Jean-Louis Guez de Balzac, the subject of Emmanuel Bury's chapter. The Ludovician age itself then became an object of nostalgia, Voltaire's *Siècle de Louis XIV* celebrating it as a high point in French culture, a period by which all others must be judged; as John Leigh shows, it further helped to establish the canon of great writers by whom that age was to be defined. Yet a somewhat discordant message, as Leigh shows, is emitted by the catalogue of seventeenth-century writers appended to the text: 'the writers who contributed to this glory were, when viewed individually, figures to be pitied, if not mocked'. Another, perhaps unexpected, continuity between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is disclosed by Jenny Mander, who demonstrates that the handling of the theme of hospitality in the *Encyclopédie* and the *Histoire des deux Indes* applies the teaching of seventeenth-century treatises on politeness to the problem of civilizing international trade.

The capacity of canonical literature to absorb new meanings through its adaptation to other art forms is brought out in Nicholas White's study of the dramatization of *La Princesse de Clèves* by Jules Lemaître, performed in 1908. Not only does Lemaître's ending connect the seventeenth-century novel to the debates of his own time about women's sexual freedom, the press reception of the production, enthusiastic or hostile, made a clear connection between Lemaître's play, sponsored by Action française, and his anti-Dreyfusard politics. But in nothing is literature's power to connect the remote and the immediate more striking than in its capacity to evoke the ultimately absent – the dead. Neil Kenny's careful study of verb tenses in Rabelais's *Pantagruel* explores different forms of posthumous survival in text, and thus, in a sense, brings us back to the theme with which Bossuet's oratory is perhaps most especially associated, and with which this volume begins.

But these sombre overtones may seem far removed from the qualities of the man to whom this volume is dedicated, however much the chapters reflect his scholarly interests. The term *Festschrift* seems particularly appropriate for Peter, because he has the gift of appreciating the *Fest* as fully as the *schrift*: his intellectual brilliance, *joie de vivre*, and appreciation of fine food and wine have always coexisted with consummate ease. As one of the foremost scholars and teachers of rhetoric, he can be a formidable debater of ideas and opinions, but even the most trenchant of viewpoints is always accompanied by a disarming twinkle in the eye. He knows never to take himself or others too seriously.

We hope that this collection of essays will serve not only as a reflection of the esteem in which Peter is held but also as an appetizer for those who wish to explore further one of the most fascinating ages of French rhetoric, literature and religion.¹

1 The editors would like to thank firstly all those who contributed to this volume and secondly the Department of French, University of Cambridge, for its generous financial assistance.