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Nicholas Hammond and Michael Moriarty, eds., *Evocations of Eloquence: Rhetoric, Literature and Religion in Early Modern France*. Berlin: Peter Lang, 2012. viii + 364 pp. Notes and index. \$73.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0343-0849-6

Review by Christopher Semk, Yale University.

This volume brings together a collection of essays in honor of Peter Bayley, perhaps best known for his seminal work on sacred eloquence before Bossuet, *French Pulpit Oratory 1598-1650*, first published in 1980 and reissued in 2011.^[1] Bayley's groundbreaking study demonstrated that sermons could be worthy objects of aesthetic and literary historical inquiry, paving the way for future scholars to examine the sermon as a literary form. In addition, his research extends to rhetoric and to religious literature more generally. It is thus fitting that the twenty-one essays in this volume deal with the relationship between religion and literature in the early modern period, broadly construed as extending from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century. Several of the essays are more intimately linked to Bayley as a scholar, teacher, and colleague. Emma Gilby's contribution, for example, is a revision of a piece she wrote for her MPhil under Bayley's direction, and Henry Phillips' essay was first given as a conference paper in a panel chaired by Bayley. All of the essays, however, represent original research that builds upon or resonates with Peter Bayley's own scholarship. The volume's five-page introduction concisely synthesizes the essays and explains their division into four thematic parts.

The first part, "Eloquence of the Pulpit," comprises three essays on Bossuet. The first, by John Lyons, dispels the popular notion that the tragic was a nineteenth-century German invention and consequently anachronistic in the seventeenth century. Lyons shows that that notion itself is anachronistic (p. 11). Putting Bossuet's funeral orations into dialogue with Aristotle's *Poetics* and the tragedies of Corneille and Racine, Lyons convincingly demonstrates that Bossuet, however fiercely opposed to tragedy as a genre, adopted "a set of philosophical conventions common [...] to the tragic drama of his day" (p. 23), in other words, the concept of the tragic. The stakes of the second essay, by Anne Régent-Susini, may be smaller in comparison, but are no less important for scholars of rhetoric. Examining legal language in Bossuet's sermons and *Logique du Dauphin*, Régent-Susini demonstrates that Bossuet's reworking of scholastic and humanist legal sources announced the significance of the emerging idea of "the public" as a source of authority in legal and theological matters. Emma Gilby also looks at authority, in particular Bossuet's authorial "I," which, she argues, may be characterized by an "aggregative dynamics" (p. 47) that allows the "I" to enact or perform multiple subjectivities simultaneously, forestalling any charge of *amour-propre* that an "I" speaking for God might attract. As a further consequence, Bossuet placed the burden of interpretation on his listeners or readers, encouraging an active engagement with the preacher's words. Taken together, the three essays suggest a Bossuet who was more modern than is usually thought.

The second part, "Religion, Culture, and Belief," contains seven essays that deal with the complicated relationship between religious and secular culture in the seventeenth century. Picking up the idea of modernity addressed in the first part, Henry Phillips' essay challenges the oversimplified narrative of progressive "disenchantment" in the face of philosophical, scientific, and cultural changes. Phillips

examines several spheres of cultural activity (printing, architecture, language, and self-examination) to show that secular and religious cultures existed side by side, in a relationship better characterized by “compatibility” than conflict (p. 67). As though putting into practice Phillips’ appeal not to divide the sacred and the profane, Richard Parish’s essay examines liturgical texts by Corneille and Racine. Parish refreshes the now commonplace comparison of the two dramatists by looking not at their dramatic output, but rather the ways in which each translated and versified the same Latin text. The result is that “we find contrasts which accord entirely with the expectations that arise from our experience of the two poets’ dramatic writing” (p. 79). The claim itself may be unsurprising, but its implications are that Corneille and Racine’s liturgical output merits the same degree of attention to form as their theater.

The next three essays turn toward Blaise Pascal. For Wetsel, Pascal’s apologetic project addressed not *libertins*, but “insiders” (p. 98), both lukewarm Christians in need of radical conversion and convinced believers who could find reassurance in Pascal’s rational argument. Wetsel’s analysis hinges upon the fact that the emphasis on the *moi haïssable* in the *Pensées* was an unlikely strategy for convincing nonbelievers. In the next essay, Moriarty returns to the eternal problem of ordering the *Pensées* by focusing on the placement of the famous “wager” argument. Moriarty does not argue for or against any particular edition of the *Pensées*, but asks us to consider how “the placing of the Wager argument affects the strength of its premises” (p. 113). Placed near the beginning of the apology, the wager’s premises are vulnerable to criticism, particularly the “many gods” objection according to which there is nothing specifically Christian about the wager argument. Placed toward the end, after Pascal has demonstrated that Christianity is rational, the wager would address those who “may still not want to believe” (p. 115), representing in this way a final apologetic gesture. While we may never know Pascal’s intentions, Moriarty’s argument draws attention to the importance of contextualizing the wager. Olivier Tonneau’s essay demonstrates how Pascal reconciled the Jansenist doctrine of predestination, generally seen as an obstacle to conversion (why convert if my fate is predetermined?), with a belief in God’s loving plan for humankind. “[N]ot everybody has shared in the grace of his resurrection, but anybody might” (p. 130). Tonneau resolves this tension by invoking, by way of Simone Weil, love: true faith comes at the moment the individual feels deserted by God, but loves and obeys nevertheless.

Edward James’ fascinating contribution argues that the Protestant Pierre Bayle was “writing less a rationalist critique of religion than a religious critique of reason” (p. 134). Central to James’s argument is the notion of *sentiment*, which, for Bayle, is different from but not necessarily in opposition to reason. *Sentiment* offers the individual “truth of fact rather than reason” (p. 141). One comes away from this essay with a more nuanced portrait of Bayle, whose thought united both unshakeable faith and rationalist inquiry. The final essay in this section, Richard Maber’s wittily titled “No Miracles Please, We’re English,” relays the curious case of a miracle that allegedly befell Thomas More’s daughter: when she went to buy a winding sheet for her father, she realized she had the exact sum of money required. That the Catholic French played up the miracle comes as no surprise, but Maber shows that the English, even English Catholics, downplayed the episode in order to portray More as “not only very Catholic, but also very English” (p. 160). This essay has the merit of complicating our view of early modern confessional and national boundaries, which, as the divergent versions of the miracle-tale show, did not always neatly align.

Three of the four essays in “Theatre and Ceremony” deal explicitly with drama, while the fourth (O’Brien) touches upon theatricality through an exploration of stilts in literature. Nicholas Hammond examines the child’s voice in Racine’s *Athalie*, arguing that there is a prelapsarian, innocent voice and a postlapsarian, corrupted voice. He concludes that a “postlapsarian postscript” continually haunts the apparent innocence of the prelapsarian voice (p. 173). Hammond convincingly argues that this is consonant with Port-Royal’s insistence on the corrupt nature of even its youngest pupils (pp. 168-69). In the next essay, Michael Hawcroft studies the use of the question (in its many forms) in Racine’s theater. Racine’s “fondness for the interrogative” (p. 182), he demonstrates, is a feature of both poetry and prose. Hawcroft ends his analysis with an intriguing juxtaposition of rhetoric and sociology, noting

that the emotional force in Racine's tragedies may result from "pushing relentlessly into those areas where [...] polite communication break[s] down" (p. 193). Noël Peacock turns our attention toward Moliere and interrogates our questioning of the ending of *Dom Juan*. Starting with Thomas Corneille's alternative ending in 1677, Peacock compares several modern reconfigurations of the play's final *deus ex machina*. Ultimately, he argues that the 1665 play boldly challenged the Church's rigorous views of retribution, a challenge that today asks directors to consider what vision of retribution (metaphysical, political, feminist, etc.) might best capture the initial shock of the play's premiere. Finally, John O'Brien's essay on stilts transforms the trivial into the serious by way of Saint-Simon's description of Monsieur on stilts, or *échasses*. Far from being a trivial observation, O'Brien reveals that Saint-Simon's remark participated in a long tradition of "stilts literature" (p. 219), including both Montaigne and Proust, that exploited the rich moral potential of stilts as an emblem of both elevation and propensity to fall.

The volume's final section, "Contexts and Intertexts," is the broadest in historical scope, with essays treating the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries. In the first essay, Philip Ford shows how Renaissance authors such as La Boétie and Dorat used examples from Homer as a means to weigh in on political questions, suggesting that this "back door" allowed authors to address sensitive political questions, such as the divine right of kings (p. 247). Whereas Ford is concerned with the Renaissance reception of Homer, Pierre Zoberman considers the seventeenth-century assessment of the Renaissance. Zoberman argues that the Renaissance was "instrumentalized" (p. 256) according to a teleological vision of history in which every reference to the past became a celebration of the present, i.e., the reign of Louis XIV. Emmanuel Bury's essay, the only contribution in French, returns to the questions of religious oratory explored in the volume's first part, but focuses on the period pre-dating Bossuet. Bury shows how Guez de Balzac, who played an important role in debates surrounding eloquence, sought to adapt religious oratory for a worldly audience without corrupting the spiritual message.

Moving into the eighteenth century, John Leigh's essay brings to light the stakes of the little-studied "catalogue" of authors that Voltaire appended to his *Siècle de Louis XIV*. Bringing religion, that is to say, canon formation and the funeral oration as a genre, to bear on this catalogue, Leigh demonstrates that Voltaire's witty and irreverent biographies of even the most celebrated authors of the seventeenth century (e.g., Bossuet, Pascal, and Corneille) painted a "rather darker" picture of the century (p. 297). Like a funeral oration, then, the catalogue becomes a kind of meditation on vanity and human foibles. In a remarkable essay linking the concept of civility to questions of globalization, Jenny Mander looks at the role of hospitality in the *Encyclopédie* and Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes*. She argues that hospitality was used both as a critique of French foreign relations, including slavery and colonization, and as a key component in a vision of civilized international commerce. The noble framework of *honnêteté*, Mander argues, "lens[es] ethical support to the economic ideology of free trade" (p. 312). Yet, she notes that the regulatory power of this system was and remains uncertain, ending with the reminder that "[f]ree trade is not necessarily fair trade" (p. 313). The next essay, Nicholas White's study of a late nineteenth-century dramatic adaptation of *La Princesse de Clèves* by Jules Lemaître, is the most eccentric in terms of chronology, but nevertheless echoes the concerns for reception studied by Peacock, Ford, and Zoberman. White examines in particular Lemaître's innovations, arguing that the epilogue Lemaître added to the story transcends historical and national nostalgia and suggests the possibility of "escaping one's personal" and collective history (p. 327). Finally, Neil Kenny's essay considers the ways in which Rabelais manipulated verb tenses, giving them an increasingly rhetorical, rather than simply grammatical function, in order to explore the possibilities of posthumous survival. Basing his analysis on close readings of episodes from the opening chapters of *Pantagruel*, including Badebec's death and Gargantua's letter to his son, Kenny argues that the skillful use of verb tenses suggests both the comforting notion of posthumous survival and the more troubling notion of its impossibility.

Although this last essay, with its focus on posthumous survival, conceptually brings the reader full-circle to the funeral orations by Bossuet examined at the volume's outset, the collection need not be read

in a linear fashion. Indeed, thanks largely to the breadth of the contributions, scholars and students interested in the early modern period, the relationship of religion and literature, theater studies, philosophy, and reception will all find something of value in this collection of essays. Taken as a whole, *Evocations of Eloquence* offers a multifarious account of the interactions between religion, literature, and rhetoric in the early modern period. As such, the volume honors Peter Bayley's scholarship not only by building upon his research, but also by bearing witness to the renewed importance of religion in the study of early modern French literature.

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NOTE

[1] Peter Bayley, *French Pulpit Oratory 15980-1650* (1980; reis.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

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