Interpretation in/of the Seventeenth Century

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Edited by

Pierre Zoberman

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INTRODUCTION

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This volume arose from the crossing of two series of concerns. On the one hand, it is connected to a broad inquiry into the histories and theories of interpretation.[1] On the other hand, it is centered on an exploration of the French seventeenth century.[2] There is, however, a paradox in exploring *interpretation in/of the seventeenth century*. For the first question we might ask is: what is that seventeenth century that we should interpret, or when does such interpretation take place? The seventeenth century in France is a particularly promising context, for a number of reasons, not least because of the very make-up of the culture of the period. For instance, religion lay at the core of all interpretive practices. Pascal reads Scripture with a specific hermeneutic grid where the Old Testament is seen as a figure of the New Testament. It is, as well, the time when Richard Simon established biblical criticism – a reading practice geared, not only at giving meaning to biblical stories, but at tracing the textual genealogy, and transforming a sacred object into a constructed artifact with a concrete history.[3]

The connection between a historical context, early modern France, and a concept, *interpretation*, was made precisely with a view to illuminate both the parameters of the notion and the context. By focusing on a specific *past* historical context, it is uniquely possible to explore this connection without privileging either side. 'Interpretation' is examined both as a practice and concept in the seventeenth century, as well as the reading (or readings) of the period (especially given what new theories and perspectives which have developed in today's academic fields have brought to scholarship). In other words, this collection explores interpretation *according to*, and *by*, the seventeenth century (how intellectuals and officials conceived of interpretation, and how they read their world and its relationship to the past), and *of* the seventeenth century,

which implies examining both temporal relationships (current interpretations of the 17th century or interpretation of itself and the past by the 17th century) and transversal relations: practices of reading; crossings from one genre to another; translation, etc…

Given the very meanings of *interpreter* and *interpretation* at the time, both associated with translation, the use of the words in broader senses which have become more usual since may appear as anachronistic, or at least problematic; as will be made clearer, below, however, anachronism is here embraced as a heuristic tool. If interpretation, therefore, can be viewed, first, from the perspective of translation (from one language to another or across mediums), it can also be envisioned in the perspective of performance – as giving life and meaning to a text or semiotic practice (or an embodiment of a part), and, more broadly, as a way of giving meaning *to the period itself*, whether at the time or retrospectively. Though the articles in the collection address a variety of issues, they all shed light on one or more of these main conceptual aspects.

1. Interpretation and translation

The seventeenth century appears as an emblematic period, since the promotion of the French language generated both a discourse on translation and various practices aiming at producing French versions (translation and paraphrase). Debates about translation and the stakes involved in its practice, as well as the production of texts in translation – like he phenomenon of *belles infidèles*, that is to say translations where beauty is a criterion that outweighs fidelity to the original text[4] – contribute to the understanding the *literati* have of their own culture (even of its definition) as well as that in which the original texts were born. It is, therefore, a factor of intelligibility, a hermeneutics of the present and the past as well, of the self and the other.

Translation was also viewed as a way to ensure the diffusion of the French ideas and the development of the French influence, a way to preempt, as it were, the way foreign cultures saw the French régime and its accomplishments. Thus, Pellisson's 1671 panegyric of Louis XIV[5] was translated in many languages, including Arabic. Molière's *Bourgeois gentilhomme* includes a *truchement*, that is to say, an interpreter (in actuality the cunning servant who pretends to be the interpreter of the Grand Turk's son) who brings about the *dénouement*. Verbal messages are not the only ones requiring interpretation. Indeed, at the time, numerous artistic and semiotic practices were made to serve monarchic programs, which were often thoroughly thought out. Paradoxically, though scholars

and erudites were quite adept at reading allegories and using their mythological competences to decipher the royal messages, such programs were often lost on popular audiences, , not only because they lacked the interpretive tools, but also because the physical settings and the scale of ephemeral architecture, more often than not, did not afford any global view. That, however, such programs require interpretation is made clear by the publication of booklets designed to acquaint readers with both the décor of a given ceremony and the meaning of this décor. A particularly complex example can be found in La Baune's *Éloge du Parlement de Paris*,[6] delivered at the Collège Louis le Grand in Latin, and published with a translation and an *Explication* of the décor and proceedings. Reading history, in particular, especially history in the making, becomes a momentous, loaded practice, and the monarchic authority weighs heavily upon the interpretation of events and decisions.[7] The saga of the inscriptions for the paintings of the Hall of Mirrors[8] in Versailles testifies to the regime's investment in what we would today call interpretation of events, and the personality cult around the figure of Louis XIV depended heavily on a specific image of the King and, at times, a closely controlled reading of his actions and policies.[9]

Interpreters seem to be needed not only as simultaneous translators, but as facilitators who bring (a specific) meaning to equivocal or unintelligible phenomena or situations. In *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, for instance, translating the fictitious Turkish language is also the necessary means to produce the fantasized situation where Monsieur Jourdain will become Mamamouchi. Even more remarkably, Dyrcona, the protagonist/alter ego of Cyrano de Bergerac in his *États et empires de la lune*, tells of the way he learns, through translation, that the Moon's inhabitants, both the people and the members of the upper social echelons, conjecture that he is the female of the Queen's pet animal – who turns out to be another man, who has preceded Dyrcona on the Moon. This gender confusion, which leads to the two men being housed (caged) together, so that they may produce an offspring, can be viewed as an act of interpretation, albeit misguided, on the part of the inhabitants, who draw conclusions from signs (here, presumably, the overall likeness between the two men). Though Cyrano may be warning his readers against any quick judgment (and Selenites, like anybody else, are prone to such precipitous judgments), the connection also points to a complex nexus of issues around interpretation. While the *humans* on the Moon (for whom such visitors as Dyrcona are *animals*) are presented as making wrong assumptions, these assumptions are in fact a reading of a reality de-naturalized by the distancing Cyrano's fiction effects. Defamiliarization appears as a tool for reinterpreting the

most common realities – and, in turn, the process requires translation for the protagonist to understand a foreign view. In this particular instance, sexual/gender identities are questioned. Since the status of sexuality in the definition of identity before the 19th century is a theoretical issue, an exploration of interpretation in early modern culture promises to shed light on more than the concept itself.[10]

In exploring *interpretation* as translation in and of the seventeenth century, therefore, this volume contributes to both aspects of the question, historic and theoretical. More precisely, it frames the theoretical questions in historical terms. The same holds when one considers interpretation in pragmatic terms.

2. Interpretation: Performance, and Representation

Particularly in French, *interpretation* refers to the performing arts. Performers interpret the characters they play – for themselves and for the audience. The theatrical dimension, however, also implies staging, and gestures a well as words. The polysemy of the term takes up all its significance. The written part can come alive only through an active process of interpretation, which gives meaning to the lines and behaviors the spectators hear and see, and from which they, too, can make sense of what they experience. Comedy in particular was, like comic fiction by contrast with the *galant* and *précieux* novels, often perceived as being close to reality – even though the particular cultural context resulted in attempts to link comedy to a higher social realm than, say, the farcical tradition, as evidenced by Molière. Precisely, the mirror-metaphor was used by Molière in an exemplary manner, to define a healthy way of considering his satires.[11] All his comedies, then, and not only the *Critique de l'École des femmes* or *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, participate in the interpretive process comedy is seen as bringing to the stage. As the collection as a whole will make clear in the broad spectrum of issues discussed, the various aspects evoked here function as a network, not in isolation. Theatrical delivery (and gestures in particular) are theorized in contradistinction with rhetorical *actio*, a practice which implies distinct ways of interpreting texts. Given the gender bending practices involved in dramatic (and particularly comedic or pastoral) performance (as well as in fiction in general), here again, as in Cyrano, interpretation appears as a fruitful approach to questions which have become central to our modern *episteme*. If older female roles are performed by men, and women play female-to-male cross-dressing characters (characters which also occur in

narrative fiction), interpretation literally plays a part in the construction and representation of identity. And these are only a couple of examples.

Performance, however, is based on a wider epistemological context: what are the conditions of such performance, how can the actor interpret his role,[12] how can drama, and more broadly what was called *lettres humaines*, or *bonnes lettres*, that is to say, what we would call today arts and sciences, offer an interpretation of the world – for it was a deep-seated belief that they indeed do. How should a play be performed, then, raises more questions than those relating to acting: plot and sets are also integral parts of a reflection on the conditions of dramatic representation. Representing the world in drama and performing plays are at the center of major debates, which in turn help shed light on the period and its perception of itself, as well as on the epistemic changes. Ghosts and spirits are gradually viewed with skepticism and become topoi of scary literature; optics loses its metaphysical, religious dimension to become more of a rational science…

Self-definition, however, did not depend only on such an immediate, contemporary connection between the world and the works. The *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* most strikingly brings to the fore the importance of the relationship of the present to the past in the process of identification and self-definition.

3. Interpretation of the seventeenth century

How the seventeenth-century intelligentsia viewed the productions of antiquity had a major bearing on their views of themselves. In this sense, the seventeenth century cannot be understood without an exploration of the various interpretations of past cultures that held sway at the time, and what DeJean called the culture wars of the late seventeenth century[13] are doubly relevant to the topic, that is to say, in terms of how both the past and the present were read. How ancient writers were viewed, both esthetically and ethically determined the parameters of self-definition. While the rhetorical imperative of instruction meant that the Moderns saw works produced in Louis XIV's time as morally superior to those of Antiquity and drew from that conception the notion of progress, the Ancients exempted the realm of what we call today literature from such imperatives – and could therefore admire those works unreservedly.[14] This is only one example of the way in which interpretation in and of the seventeenth century is mediated by various modes of understanding the past, in which artistic productions play a major role. Paradoxically, Ancients and Moderns, diametrically opposed as they were on the subject

of the cultural heritage of ancient, Greek and Latin cultures, seem to agree on distancing themselves from their more recent antecedents, in order to situate themselves. Ronsard, who had appeared as one of the promoters, even the emblematic figure, of a new, vernacular language and poetry, along with all the intellectuals involved in the Pléiade, was viewed with suspicion by both Boileau and Perrault (considered as the leaders and spokespeople for the Ancients and Moderns, respectively). For Boileau, Ronsard harks back to Greek and Latin ("*mais sa muse en français, parlait grec et latin*"). It seems paradoxical for us today since he was involved in the defense and illustration of the French language.[15] For Perrault, his relationship to Charles IX has to be reread – interpreted anew – since the King was a better poet than the poet himself, and his use of language much more powerful. Though the King deferred to the poet for the power to grant immortality, this relationship is questioned by Perrault, clearly in the light of the Sun-King's personality cult.[16] The *commerce d'immortalité*, a reciprocal bond in which the immortality of the Great King's exploits will ensure the everlasting glory of the orators and poets who celebrate them, just as the immortality of the latter's works will guarantee that of the King who inspired them, introduces the other temporal dimension: looking forward to posterity.

Thus, the seventeenth century identified itself in a complex temporal relationship with the past and the future. This defining, backward and forward movement, logically begs the question of our own retrospective view of the period – *our*, here, referring to twenty-first century readers and audiences, and scholars. The temporal dialectic I have just summarized points to the situatedness of the interpretive gaze.[17] How do we understand *the* seventeenth century today? Given the distance (four centuries), the object itself is not immediately available, even in the sometimes fallacious immediacy that contemporary objects are. It would be a cliché to remind ourselves that some texts, events, biographies, etc., can only be reconstructed, hypothetically recreated, and… interpreted. Even our assessments or, simply, our capacity to see objects have evolved. From Voltaire and La Harpe on, a representation of the literature of early modern France has emerged, which eventually became a body of tenets passed off as evident and real. It limited the century to an idealized period called the *Grand Siècle*, and to its classical side, eventually culminating in a reductive school-manual canon: three great playwrights, Corneille, Racine, Molière, and an a-typical female novelist, Lafayette (actually *Madame* de Lafayette), with a few appendices, the philosophers Descartes and Pascal (whose *Pensées* where completely reinvented, and who became a model of classical writing in French), and perhaps a few letters by *la*

marquise de Sévigné. Add the moralists, La Rochefoucauld and La Bruyère, and, for most of us, there was *the* seventeenth century. And that sketch could insist much more on the editorial decisions that created those canonical texts…

What are, then, the forces at play in the various readings of the seventeenth century that succeeded or competed with one another? Ideological positions (the development of a bourgeois educational system, for instance), often prejudices rather than an informed reading of the works and/or lives of the people of the time, created variants of the seventeenth century, presented as *the* seventeenth century that could be further illuminated by new discoveries – but whose implicit presuppositions were not questioned. Molière could be read as either a bourgeois author, or the spokesperson for an aristocratic ideology. In the same way as Anne Dacier, in her translation of Sappho, had cleared the poetess of all accusations of lesbianism, Cyrano de Bergerac could be endowed with a whole slew of female lovers…[18] A widespread version of historicism views the application to the past of present-day methodologies and theories as anachronistic. Looking at the past from today's perspective, however, and with instruments that were not available then, sheds light on it, producing meanings that could not be perceived before, expanding our understanding, beyond the unavoidable limitations of self-knowledge. The instruments available then were as culturally bound as in any historical context, but, precisely, made it difficult (as Foucault himself has experienced when reflecting upon the history of systems of knowledge and understanding) to step *outside* the epistemological context to know it. The twenty-first century has its own, context-bound, limitations, but is at a vantage point to read the past, with all the new epistemological breakthroughs that came from recently emerged fields, such as gender and queer studies, postcolonial studies, etc. Even not taking epistemological shifts into account, our modernity is defined by a multiplicity of media that were simply not available to d'Urfé, Scudéry, or Fénelon, and contribute to the interpretation of the culture of early-modern France. If Malherbe could paraphrase the Psalms in his poetry, if Mairet could adapt episodes of *L'Astrée* to the stage, the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are rife with film and TV adaptations of works of the past, again a way of producing meaning.

It is one of the prime interests of this collection to address the nexus between early-modern France and interpretation in a comparative perspective. Cross-medial exploration is only one approach. Along with the re-signification implied in producing works of the past in today's context (for instance, staging the *classiques* in our theaters), what happens

when seventeenth-century *French* works are translated and circulated in *other* cultural contexts? How can French texts from the seventeenth century help read works produced later in Europe? More generally, taken together, all the essays published in this volume contribute to problematize our vision(s) of the seventeenth-century in France – for the subjects of the French king, be they *les peuples* or the great, or for the King himself, for foreigners both within and without the country, and for our contemporaries, across France, Europe, and the world.

In order to address the series of issues raised above, the volume is divided into three sections. The first section, "Culture and Interpretation," is concerned with some cultural parameters of the period. It comprises two parts: I. "Ceremonies and Fêtes," conceived as a way of understanding the political and social make-up and the historical self-location of the period; II. "Science, Beliefs, and Interpretation" represents both a necessary context and an approach to potential epistemological shifts. The second section, "Interpretation and Literature," focuses the inquiry on *literature* in a broad sense, to address the main issues raised above: "Translation and Translators" (Part III), "Theater and Interpretation" (IV., "Theory" and V., "Plays: Text and Performance"), VI. "Fiction and Narrative." The last section, "Shifts and Perspectives", recenters the exploration on readings of the century and addresses various aspects of the temporal dimension, evolutions and retrospective assessments. It is divided in three parts: VII. "Interpreting One's Century," VIII. "Transfers: Re-writing and Transmediality," IX. "The Seventeenth Century Today."

Notes

[1] The inquiry into the history and theory of interpretation developed particularly in the context of a multi-year research project, "HERMES: Histories and Theories of Interpretation", funded by the Agence Nationale pour le Recherche (2009-2013). I want to thank Françoise Lavocat, who directed that project, for her support, both intellectual and financial.

[2] This choice corresponds to the interests of the Society for Seventeenth-Century French Studies, which held its 2012 conference, hosted by the Centre d'Études et de Recherches Comparatistes (CERC, EA 172) in Paris, precisely on the question of interpretation. I want to acknowledge here the grant given by the cultural services of the *Ville de Paris* for the conference.

[3] For the conference at the origin of this collection originated, contributors were invited to envision the exploration of interpretation along various lines. How did the seventeenth century conceive of interpretation (with or without the term)? How are conflicts of interpretation registered in texts and monuments of the period? The topic also implied examining the ways in which contemporaries read the present,

and the past to produce a self-definition. In the literary context, how did various genres produce interpretation? How, given the relationship of certain genres with reality in the period's aesthetics, did what we call today literature contribute to give meaning to the period in the eyes of those who read it or saw it performed? Because of its linguistic make-up, literature might indeed be viewed as a privileged site of interpretation, especially if we follow Ricœur's anthropology (see Paul Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1970). Though mimetically, literary works represent their objects through words.

[4] See Roger Zuber, *Les Belles Infidèles et la formation du goût classique*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1995; Emmanuel Bury, "Trois traducteurs français aux XVI^e^ et XVII^e^ siècles: Amyot, Baudoin, d'Ablancourt", *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France* 97/3 (1997), 361-371..

[5] Paul Pellisso,n-Fontanier, *Panegyrique du Roy Louis XIV, prononcé le 3 fevrier 1671*. In Pierre Zoberman (ed.), *Les Panégryriques du Roi prononcés dans l'Académie française*. Paris: Presses de l'université Paris-Sorbonne, 1991. 91-104.

[6] Father Jacques de La Baune, *Éloge historique du Parlement traduit du latin du P. Jacques de la Baune jésuite, prononcé au collège Louis le Grand au mois d'octobre 1684*. Sl: 1753 [transl. of *Augustissimo Galliarum senatui panegyricus dictus in regio Ludovici Magni collegio Societatis Jesu, a JACOBO DE LA BAUNE…* Paris, G. Martin, 1685]. See also the *Explication de l'appareil pour la Harangue prononcée en l'honneur du Parlement de Paris*. Paris: G. Martin, 1686 (bound with the *Pangyricus*).which provided a detailed explanation of all aspects of the event.

[7] See, among others, Zoberman, "Eloquence and Ideology: Between Image and Propaganda," *Rhetorica* XVIII, 3 (Summer 2000), 295-320.

[8] Tallemant the Younger and François Charpentier, both panegyrists of Louis XIV in the French Academy and vocal supporters of the use of French on public monuments to celebrate the King, wrote inscriptions for Le Brun's paintings, but they were deemed inadequate and erased, replaced by texts written by Boileau and Racine, who had been granted the title of historiographers royal.

[9] See, among others, Zoberman, "Public Discourse, Propaganda, and Personality Cult under Louis XIV," *The Public* 8 (2001), 3, 59-71.

[10] For the Foucault-inspired doxa, see, for instance, David Halperin, , *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality And Other Essays on Greek Love*. New York: Routledge, 1990; *How to Do the History of Homosexuality?* Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002. For a few examples of alternative re-readings, see, among others, Gary Ferguson, *Queer (Re)Readings in the French Renaissance: Homosexuality, Gender, Culture*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008; David M. Robinson, *Closeted Writing and Lesbian and Gay Literature*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006; and Zoberman, "Queer(ing) Pleasure: Having a Gay Old Time in the Culture of Early-Modern France," in Paul Allen. Miller and Greg Forter (ed.), *The Desire of the Analysts* (Albany, SUNY, 2008). 225-252; "A Modest Proposal for Queering the Past: A Queer Princess with a Space of her Own," in James Day (ed.), *Queer*

Sexualities in French and Francophone Literature and Film (*French Literature Series* XXXIV). Amsterdam et New York, Rodopi, 2007, 35-49.

[11] Larry Norman, *The Public Mirror: Molière and the Social Commerce of Depiction.* Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999.

[12] Diderot's *Paradoxe du comédien* can be seen as the prototype of the reflections on the intrications involved in such issues.

[13] See Joan DeJean, *Ancients against Moderns: Culture Wars and the Making of a Fin de Siècle*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997.

[14] On that aspect, see Larry Norman, *The Shock of the Ancient: Literature and History in Early Modern France.* Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011.

[15] See Joachim Du Bellay, *Deffence et Illustration de la langue françoyse* (1549). J. Vignes (ed.), Paris: Société des Textes Français Modernes, 1997.

[16] See, Zoberman, "Topoi of (the) Renaissance in Seventeenth-Century France: The Ambiguity of the Reference to the Past," in Michael Moriarty and Nicholas Hammond (ed.), *Evocations of Eloquence. Rhetoric, Literature and Religion in Early Modern France. Essays in Honour of Peter Bayley*, Oxford, Berne, Berlin…: Peter Lang, "Medieval and Early Modern French Studies" 10, 2012, 249-261.

[17] A situatedness that plays an important role in Hans-Georg Gadamer's approach to hermeneutics – one of the most influential contributions to recent formulations. See, for instance, *Truth and Method* [*Wahrheit und Methode*, 1960]. Transl. revised by Joel Weisheimer and Donald G. Marshall, London: Continuum, 2004.

[18] See Madeleine Alcolver, "Un *gay* trio: Cytano, Chapelle, Dassoucy." In Ralph Heyndels and Barbara Woshinsky (ed.), *L'Autre au dix-septième siècle. Actes du 4^{e} colloque du Centre International de Rencontres sur le dix-septième siècle. University of Miami 23 au 25 avril 1998.* Tübingen: Gunter Narr, "Biblio 17" 117, 1999, 265-275.

SECTION I

CULTURE AND INTERPRETATION

PART I

CEREMONIES AND FÊTES

CHAPTER ONE

D'UNE INTERPRÉTATION L'AUTRE : LES ENTRÉES PROVENÇALES DE LOUIS XIII À L'AUTOMNE 1622 ET LEURS RELATIONS

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Dans la langue de tous les jours, interpréter, c'est expliquer ce qui est obscur, le rendre clair. C'est aussi lui donner un sens. Pour E.D. Hirsch, l'interprétation, au sens de *subtilitas explicandi*, c'est-à-dire d'explication du sens, succède à l'opération préalable de compréhension, ou *subtilitas intelligendi*[1]. Tandis que la première construit silencieusement un sens, la seconde fait connaître ce sens, en rend compte de manière quasi « volubile »[2]. Mais il ne peut s'agir dans l'un et l'autre cas que de suppositions, de conjectures, qui n'ont en fait pour toute validité que d'être les plus réceptives au texte et surtout les plus plausibles de toutes celles susceptibles d'être faites.

Ce qui est vrai des textes contemporains, l'est *a fortiori* des textes du passé, qu'ils soient littéraires ou non. Mais le critère de plausibilité demande alors, pour être appliqué, l'acquisition de tout un ensemble de données culturelles, permettant la mise en contexte de ces textes et la construction de leur sens. Or, loin d'être la résultante d'un jugement, d'une évaluation sur la base de critères précis, tel celui de pertinence, ce sens apparaît bien souvent au contraire comme prédéterminé par ce que nous croyons savoir du modèle générique utilisé, de son système de conventions et aussi de son optique « idéologique »[3]. Dans le cas de documents à valeur historique, il l'est aussi par ce que nous croyons savoir des faits qu'ils relatent et dont pourtant ils ne sont eux-mêmes déjà qu'une interprétation, qui en médiatise la connaissance. L'histoire, en effet, n'est jamais qu'une « histoire-pour », comme l'a écrit Claude Lévi-Strauss dans *La Pensée sauvage*[4], avec tout ce que cela suppose d'explication autant partiale que partielle.

L'entrée royale et sa relation pendant tout le premier XVII[e] siècle sont un bon exemple de cette superposition ou « tour de Babel » des interprétations[5]. C'est que non seulement l'entrée joue de la polysémie et de l'ambiguïté de l'image pour dire, tout en le masquant, un sens que la relation se chargera par la suite d'expliquer, la relation elle-même cherche moins en fait à expliquer ce sens qu'à en jouer pour le faire entrer dans des constructions tendancieuses au service d'intérêts opposés. Si l'entrée demande bien à être interprétée, il ne saurait y avoir toutefois de lecture naïve de la relation qui en est faite, car l'interprétation qui y est proposée de l'entrée demande elle aussi à être interprétée. Se pose alors la question de l'accessibilité même du sens, dont la saisie passe inévitablement par toute une série de prismes interprétatifs, susceptibles non seulement de le déformer, mais encore de faire obstacle même à sa compréhension.

1. Une « version officielle d'une fête du pouvoir »

L'une des quatre principales cérémonies de la monarchie sous l'Ancien Régime[6], l'entrée royale est ce rituel qui met en scène et solennise le pacte unissant la ville et son roi, mais où l'exaltation de la personne royale et les marques explicites de soumission de la ville ont fini par l'emporter sur la reconnaissance par le monarque des libertés et des privilèges municipaux. Spectacle d'une communauté unie dans son rapport à lui, l'entrée est aussi un chant à la gloire du roi, où la louange ne se dit le plus souvent que sous le couvert de l'allégorie, reconnue par les contemporains comme seule à même de dire la vérité du pouvoir royal. Ainsi s'explique l'omniprésence dans la décoration d'emblèmes, devises et autres figures énigmatiques, de portraits mythologiques ou allégoriques[7], d'allusions diverses enfin jouant sur la polysémie des signes et des représentations, et qui demandent à être décodés, interprétés par les spectateurs de l'entrée. Voile qui révèle une vérité cachée plus qu'il ne la dissimule, l'allégorie est avant tout un codage qui sert à rendre l'événement évoqué, en l'occurrence l'action royale, de manière à la fois plus « frappante » et plus « sensible »[8], voire plus « intelligible ». En effet, pour César de Grand-Pré,

> [L]a raison pour laquelle ils [les Anciens] ont caché ces mystères, a esté de crainte de rendre trop communs les secrets dont ils vouloient seuls avoir la connoissance. Ce n'est pas nostre dessein d'en faire de mesme, puisque par nos exercices et les gentilles actions [...] nous taschons de les rendre *intelligibles*[9].

Dire ainsi la victoire de Louis XIII sur les protestants révoltés par le biais d'épisodes mythologiques bien connus, comme le triomphe de Persée