

Teaching the Seventeenth Century at the Graduate Level

by
Sylvie Romanowski

Several considerations influenced my approach to teaching French seventeenth-century literature at the graduate level. One is student-centered: how to interest students most of whom are in various fields of contemporary literature and theory, more specifically modern, post-colonial literature. Another is a practical circumstance, that our term is only one quarter long (10 weeks), which means that nothing like a complete overview of the century can be proposed. The course must be rather narrowly focused on an important and relevant aspect of the period. I decided that the concept of modernity would provide such a focus. The concept of modernity provides a framework that, first, links the period to its immediate context, particularly the Renaissance. Second, links can be made with our own period and the movements of contemporary thought variously named futurism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, post-modernism, and post-colonialism.

The anchoring idea is that in the seventeenth century thinkers, philosophers, writers, ranging across many cultural areas such as religion, science, government, painting, poetry, theater, and language engaged in a conscious and often aggressive work of self-definition and wanted to be new, modern, and different from the immediate past. Obviously the concept of “modern” is a slippery and highly variable one, being relational to any previous cultural mindset. Any period can think of itself in this way.¹ Not every period does. I maintain that the concept of being “modern” came to the foreground at various times in French culture but at no time more forcefully than in the seventeenth century. In other words, the concept of being “modern” became a cultural force, in the sense of wanting to separate from the immediate past. A hint of the increasing importance of being “modern” comes from a comparison of two dictionary entries. In Huguët’s dictionary of the sixteenth century French language, the word “moderne” is simply defined as “Nouveau” (article “Moderne”). In Furetière’s 1690 dictionary, however, the entry for that same word is much more fulsome:

¹ Of particular interest for seventeenth-century scholars is the discussion of various concepts of the “modern” in Marie-Florine Bruneau’s *Racine: le jansénisme et la modernité*.

Qui n'est pas ancien, qui n'est en usage que depuis les derniers siècles. C'est un usage moderne, une coutume moderne, une invention moderne, un ouvrage moderne. Le Grec moderne est celui qu'on parle maintenant en Grèce. Les Modernes ont beaucoup enchery sur les Anciens en toutes sortes d'arts et de sciences. Ce mot Moderne vient de Modernus, dont plusieurs se sont servis.

The thinkers, writers, and theoreticians of literature participated in a movement to rethink cultural productions in both a forward-looking, optimistic way (we will not do things the same way from now on and we will do them better), and in a backward-looking, oppositional and polemical way (the ways of the past must be left behind).

In other words, the seventeenth-century philosophers, statesmen, poets, dramatists, and artists self-consciously opposed themselves to their immediate past. This, I feel, is different from what the sixteenth-century writers did.² Certainly the latter knew the culture was very different from the medieval one, that civilization was changing, but the degree of change was so radical, innovative, rapid, that no energy was spent looking backwards—the innovation of print, the “discovery” and subsequent colonizing of the New World, the Protestant Reformation, the reconnecting with the Greek and Latin texts, the new practices of perspective in painting, the influx into France of Italian influences, all these factors contributed to an explosive renewal and energizing of the culture that moved ahead, separating itself from tradition inherited from the previous times.

My starting point in the course is to read two iconic Renaissance texts, excerpts from Montaigne's “Apologie de Raymond Sebon” (II.12) and Rabelais's “Gargantua.” For Montaigne: the last third of the *Essay*, from “Voyons si nous avons quelque peu plus de clarté en la connaissance des choses humaines et naturelles” to the end; for Rabelais: 14 selected chapters. I use these texts to exemplify some traits of thought and writing that are significant to keep in mind when reading the next century's texts: Montaigne's thorough-going scepticism and anti-foundationalism, and Rabelais's rich, multifaceted, freewheeling style that embraces everything from religion and high culture to the vulgar and the scatological.

² Though the seventeenth century was, in my opinion, the first one to be self-consciously modern, in the sense of different *and* better, other periods since have also defined themselves in this manner; cases could be made for the Enlightenment as well as the end of the nineteenth century's various avant-garde and futurist movements.

TEACHING THE 17TH CENTURY AT THE GRADUATE LEVEL

During the second half of the sixteenth century and in the early part of the seventeenth century, however, the cultural energies and the political situation had degenerated into the violence of the religious wars, economic and social instability. This is what Ellery Schalk calls the “shadow of the sixteenth century” which led to the erection of a strong absolutist regime to counter the fear of a return to chaos. Katherine Ibbett explores another parallel aim, establishing “a critical norm of Frenchness” (6): “what we now call French classicism was understood more generally as a resistance to the Italian” (10), a pervasive influence during the entire sixteenth century in many areas (architecture, painting, poetry, clothing, food) and into the first part of the seventeenth especially with the dominance of Mazarin. My treatment of the French seventeenth century, then, is to focus on its diligent and persistent efforts to bring order to the world and to the culture by means of principles, “rules,” “regularity,” in theater, poetry, religion, establishing of standards of speech, behavior, and organizing the state around a strong, central monarchical figure. Order means also: hierarchy, the sorting out of what is inferior and superior, better and worse, what it is better to be near to, and what is to be shunned, like ambiguity, uncertainty, relativism. One may say that it is unique in the sense of being both progressive and conservative: progressive in moving the culture to new, clearer norms, and conservative in that it wants to preserve order, stability and establish a firm, authoritative foundation.

This approach is based on analyses of the culture by several historians and thinkers who have described a decisive shift in this period. I put their books on reserve at the library, I photocopy a few significant pages, and I ask students to read them in tandem with the literary works. I start with Michel Foucault’s analysis of the classical episteme (chiefly in *Les mots et les choses*), what he calls “la science générale de l’ordre” (87)—representation, language, classification of natural beings, and wealth. Other analyses inspired by Foucault, more detailed and in a fully-referenced scholarly mode are two books by Timothy J. Reiss, who instead of “classical” uses the term “analytico-referential”: “What I will call an ‘analytico-referential’ class of discourse becomes the single *dominant* structure and the necessary form taken by thought, by knowledge, by cultural and social practices of all kinds” (*Discourse* 23, Reiss’s underlining). Also very useful, and required reading, is Stephen Toulmin’s *Cosmopolis*, which provides perhaps the most succinct description of the opposition between the old and new cultures: “In the 1580s and ‘90s, skeptical acceptance of ambiguity and a readiness to live with uncertainty were still viable intellectual policies: by 1640, this was no longer the case” (44). Toulmin

makes the case that the seventeenth century was a “counter-Renaissance”³ and that there was a “retreat from the Renaissance” in four different ways that emphasize rationalism and the need for certainty: from the oral to the written, from the particular to the universal, from the local to the general, from the timely to the timeless (30–35). He summarizes this shift as being the development of the “Cartesian program for philosophy”: a “change of attitude—the devaluation of the oral, the particular, the local, the timely, and the concrete—appeared a small price to pay for a formally ‘rational’ theory grounded on abstract, universal, timeless concepts” (75). Clément Rosset, whose analyses focus more on other periods in his *L’anti-nature*, also indicates briefly the usefulness of his concepts for understanding the seventeenth century: he opposes the “artificialisme précartésien,” and Montaigne’s *Essays* (131) to the “reconstitution d’un naturalisme moderne par Descartes, Locke et Rousseau” (128). For an overall view of both the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Robert Muchembled’s works are unparalleled, especially his *L’invention de la France moderne: Monarchie, culture et société 1500–1660* that examines “la singularité d’une aventure collective millénaire qu’a pu achever Louis XIV, sorti armé de pied en cap du sein de la monarchie absolue léguée par ses ancêtres” (9). The slightly conventional turn of this sentence does not represent the breadth and depth of this work that truly examines all facets of the period, including literature, peasant life, popular culture, the role of women, linguistic change, the court, schools, courts of law, the baroque esthetic in the arts and urbanization. A recent work by Sara E. Melzer examines another aspect of the culture’s efforts to define itself, focused not on what is to be rejected, but on what is to be remembered as the foundation of the French culture. This consists of a long and lively debate concerning what is to be accepted within the culture as its legitimate foundation, its founding myth and history: are the French descendants and inheritors of the Gauls or the Romans? The conundrum that results is that if the French identify as Gauls, they are barbarians, which is distasteful, but if they identify as Romanized Gauls, they identify both as barbarians needing to be civilized and as colonizers. According to Melzer, the resulting “memory wars” that took place in “early modern France’s massive image-making campaign” (23) were not resolved till the next century when French enterprises in the New World opened up new perspectives, when “the moderns broke out of

³ Not to be confused with another, radically opposite, use of the term by Hiram Haydn, who applies the term to writers that include Montaigne who repeal the system of universal law proposed by the Humanists.

TEACHING THE 17TH CENTURY AT THE GRADUATE LEVEL

this binary opposition” by creating a new image of the future “that improved upon the past rather than fell away from it (201).

An interesting problematization of the concept of the “modern” is provided by Bruno Latour’s provocative and polemical book, *Nous n’avons jamais été modernes*, where he lays out what he calls the “Constitution” of modernity: “Moderniser permettait de distinguer enfin nettement les lois de la nature extérieure et les conventions de la société” (178). Nature is completely other and separate from the human, and the construction of the human is completely under our control and free will. However, Latour shows that these were ideals that necessitated other practices of mediation, mixtures, interferences between these two presumably opposed domains: nature is not transcendent, but is the product of human exploration and understanding, and the conventions of society are not entirely under our control, as there are social forces that exceed our control: “la nature transcendante reste néanmoins mobilisable, humanisable, socialisable” and “la société . . . nous domine, elle a ses lois” (56). The in-between mediations remain unseen, denied: “C’est l’impensé, l’impensable des modernes (57). This concurs with what Reiss calls the “occultation that the human view of the world is necessarily a ‘perspectival’ one. It marks the assertion of such a view as absolute” (*Discourse* 37). While I agree completely with these analyses, my focus in this approach is not the “unthought” (“l’impensé”) but what was “thought,” what the “moderns” of the seventeenth century were consciously rethinking and rebuilding, what they believed in and promulgated. Indeed, I might reverse the dynamic here: what was unthought, hidden but operative had to remain so in order for the enterprise of the “thought” to continue and move forward. The superstructure matters as much as the infrastructure, and my choice in this course is to focus on the superstructure, the conscious endeavors. This does not ignore what was hidden, but instead proposes to examine what the “modern” thinkers, in their rebuilding efforts, rejected, in their terms. How the repressed, the hidden is evoked and described can be included in order to understand the process of reformation of the culture in the various works to be analyzed.

To illustrate the usefulness of this approach, I will briefly summarize some important developments in specific areas of cultural production, where the concept of “modern” as opposed to the previous period is very visible, i.e. in areas of the French seventeenth-century culture that exemplify the consciousness of being not only different (every culture thinks it is different) but also “modern” and “better.”

Philosophy with Descartes is in the forefront of these efforts, and it is useful to start with his *Discours de la méthode*, which was written to be accessible for an audience beyond philosophers and specialists and had immense influence in shaping the period, down to our time. As Descartes fights against what is erroneous, childish, confused, haphazard, and ambiguous, he establishes knowledge as based on clear and distinct ideas, univocal and unambiguous language, a strict separation of body and soul, of human from non-human. He also claims to achieve a complete understanding of the world that encompasses the entirety of creation, from God to the smallest particle then known to the human eye. For him, it is crucial to have a single, central authority located in the self in order to understand and organize the world, to separate the bodily from the immaterial, and to achieve the rationalization, the quantification of the universe, and, most important, human mastery over nature.

The most obvious and well-known literary form where the processes of self-definition can be examined is theater, especially the genre of tragedy that was being defined in opposition to other play-writing such as “tragi-comédie” or “pièce à machines.” In that domain dramatists not only produced plays according to the famous “rules,” but also a body of work in dialogue with theatrical critics who self-consciously theorized the new classical drama and the “rules” of dramaturgy. This produces what John D. Lyons calls the “culture of regularity” which he summarizes thus, enlarging it beyond the confines of dramaturgy: “By ‘culture of regularity’ we mean here the habits of a society that framed what it did and what it said with a consciousness of multiple, proliferating, normative statements about how literary and artistic production should be carried out” (42). New tragedy is being defined both negatively, against a previous mode of theatrical writing, and positively, as striving towards a new form of elegance and control: “The struggle for decorum is, in part, a battle of modernity against the horror of antiquity. . . . The project of seventeenth-century poetics was not to replicate but to correct the tragedy of the ancients” (58). What is undecorous, unseemly, untimely is not, however, entirely absent—indeed it is present as opposite behaviors and values that give the plays their plot lines and their density. This of course is not limited to tragedies, and Molière’s comedies can be included here. A few good examples of plays to study in this respect are: Racine’s *Phèdre* (incest and a monster), Molière’s *Dom Juan* (an old-fashioned nobleman who flouts the rules of society and religion) or his *Misanthrope* (rejection of the rules of courtly civility). Many other plays obviously fit into this type of analysis, such as *Britannicus* (corrupt monarchical figures), Corneille’s *Le Cid* (old

TEACHING THE 17TH CENTURY AT THE GRADUATE LEVEL

noble codes of vengeance) or his *Horace* (the murder of one's own blood necessitating the reestablishment of civil behavior by the monarch).

Going beyond this particular literary form, one can consider the attention to language and the twin endeavors of reforming language and grammar and refining poetic and general social discourse, what Alain Rey calls "l'enrégimentement du discours littéraire" from 1620–1630 on (621). The reform is exemplified by various writers who were poets, writers, and grammarians, united in a common quest for refinement, clarity of expression, dignity and elegance, often summarized in the ideal of the "honnête homme," what later developed into the language of the salons, the court, and the "préciosité" movement's efforts to purify the language from "dirty" expressions, resulting in the elimination of thousands of words permanently from the French language. The historian of the French language, Ferdinand Brunot, states it thus:

La Cour, au XVI^e siècle, comme les écrivains eux-mêmes, accepte dans son langage toutes les nouveautés.... Au contraire, depuis le siècle nouveau, les tendances vont au rebours.... Voilà ... une différence essentielle: la langue courtisane du XVI^e siècle est tout ouverte, la nouvelle est rigoureusement fermée; la première était touffue et pédantesque, celle-ci est 'gueuse et délicate' [Balzac]. Une nouvelle mode est née, celle de la pureté du langage: une nouvelle haine, celle du barbarisme. (III, 69)

The reforms of poetry by Malherbe and Boileau are well known and need no restatement here and are similar to statements by Vaugelas and other grammarians; I distribute short excerpts from all these writers.

Though it lies outside the strict purview of the course, painting is another area where the redefinition of the esthetic is at work, proceeding in both the production of works and their theorization. In the period, there was a lively battle between the partisans of drawing and line and those of color, as a battle between those who favor theoretical reason and those who favor materiality of color that escapes rational discourse. As Jacqueline Lichtenstein summarizes it:

"The debate between the partisans of drawing and those of *coloris* . . . was reborn in France and took on new forms largely determined by the politics and institutions of the age of Louis XIV. . . . the institution that defends the primacy of drawing also serves to advance the greater glory of the monarchy." (147–9)

There are other cultural domains where similar forces of ordering are at work: in religion, the Catholic Reformation sought to increase authority of the Catholic Church and the Papacy, resulting in a conflict with the French monarch, while the same monarch sought to unify his kingdom in one faith, resulting in the expulsion of the Protestants and the destruction of the Jansenists. Another signal achievement was the centralization of the state around a non-itinerant court and an absolute monarch, and the building of Versailles as the locus of power, with the concomitant design of the grounds into “French”-style landscape; socially, the strong influence of the courtly life as a model for society, what is called the “curialization” of the urban elites and nobility. On this, Norbert Elias’s *La société de cour* is the defining work. One interesting specific domain where one can see these efforts at refinement and control is the disciplining of the body. As Georges Vigarello states:

Le XVII^e siècle sera ... la systématisation de tendances nées au siècle précédent. . . . Les remarques sur la rectitude sont reprises par une large littérature pédagogique. Mme de Maintenon, dans un propos essentiellement moralisateur, ne craint pas de la mentionner. . . . Dans le monde classique la posture doit témoigner d’une domination des passions. . . . La règle et l’ordre régissent le comportement jusqu’à l’artifice. (49–52)

Vigarello’s detailed study brings together many prestigious cultural areas where such disciplinary efforts were carried out very self-consciously, such as dance, dueling, theatrical acting, and courtly behavior. What this kind of discipline did for the body, the practice of “bienséances” did for purification of language and the refinement of social mores. Some of these ideas and texts can be touched on briefly during the course, and can suggest ideas for further exploration.

My curriculum includes iconic works to illustrate the process of self-definition, and its accompanying tensions, around the concept of modernity. Apart from the works already mentioned, it might include Racine’s *Andromaque* or *Britannicus*; Corneille’s *L’Ilusion comique*; excerpts from Pascal’s *Pensées*; some poems by Viau, Régnier, and Malherbe; some *Fables* by La Fontaine; *La Princesse de Clèves* by Madame de Lafayette; selections from La Bruyère’s *Caractères* and La Rochefoucauld’s *Maximes*. These complex texts enable a discussion of the ideals of the new monarchy, science, religion, behavior, etc. as well as the critique of these very ideals by some of these very same texts, that are both instrumental in defining the culture and, at the same time, critical of it. Ross Chambers’s

TEACHING THE 17TH CENTURY AT THE GRADUATE LEVEL

detailed analyses of the oppositional nature of literature are extremely useful here. He defines *ancien régime* oppositional literature as being “covert ‘textual’ opposition readable in overt ‘narrative’ acknowledgement of seats of power—a practice of irony then” (45), and his reading of some of La Fontaine’s *Fables* is an extraordinary lesson in such close reading. In a similar vein, *La Princesse de Clèves* can be read as both a representation and an indictment of courtly ideals; Racine’s tragedies as a critique and warning about the excesses of an overly centralized and corrupt monarchy; and Pascal’s *Pensées* as an exposition and a thorough-going critique of anti-foundationalism.⁴

Some disadvantages of this approach can be mentioned at this point. Chief among them is that it necessarily simplifies the culture, focusing on its dominant elements (the court, the aristocracy, the official culture of the Académies) and leaves out the “irréguliers,” like *Cyrano de Bergerac*, the resistant poets, the libertines, the realist novelists and other non-aristocratic figures, and gives only limited space to women’s voices. This is a limited view of the century, but the point can be made that the “irréguliers” and the resistant figures are defined by what they are opposed to, i.e. to the dominant elite’s efforts as outlined above. Another large area omitted from this particular, targeted approach, but which may be included, is the situation and importance of the various artistic phenomena of the first part of the century often grouped under the name Baroque. The status of the Baroque has long been difficult to situate exactly, and for my part, I view it as an intermediary period between the Renaissance and the time when the seventeenth-century style became more generally established during the reign of Louis XIV. If I choose to include it, there is one particular work that works very well to discuss the Baroque in such a course, especially in light of later theatrical works: Corneille’s *L’Illusion comique*, and I do often include it in my courses, both graduate and advanced undergraduate. Some poems by such writers as Théophile de Viau, Boisrobert, and Saint-Amant also provide useful examples of the Baroque esthetic. A brief discussion of the Baroque as a transition period between the sixteenth century and the seventeenth can be useful for the later purpose of confronting this period with some current issues in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

There are several advantages to this approach, in my opinion. First, the seventeenth century is viewed in the context of the preceding period—of course, every culture and literature ought to be viewed in context, but the

⁴ This latter concept is what Clément Rosset calls “artificialisme.”

self-consciousness of this particular culture and its unique attempts at self-definition are highlighted as being a special moment in European culture that has long-reaching consequences. The definitions of language, drama, philosophical inquiry, poetry, appropriate behavior, hierarchization of society, all continued to have validity even as the Enlightenment rethought and questioned many of the values it inherited, for example the absolute monarchy, the central authority of the Catholic church, social stratification, and the domination of the aristocratic, curial model as a social norm. Another advantage, not yet mentioned, is that the relation between the Renaissance and the seventeenth century can be seen not only as a difference or a rupture, but also as a continuity: the absolutism of the seventeenth century Bourbon monarchy began with the Valois, and most importantly, the work of self-definition was already well understood, with attention paid to shaping one's character and life, as most fully explored in Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-fashioning from More to Shakespeare*. The goal of shaping one's individual character is now expanded into the shaping of a whole culture, that, ironically, does not value extremely individualistic behavior but rather conformity to an ideal valid for the elites, and beyond, to those aspiring to the higher ranks of society.

Another significant advantage is being able to suggest links to the modern period: as I mentioned before, most if not all of our graduate students are interested in the contemporary period, in post-modern and post-colonial literatures. This aspect of the reframing of the seventeenth century obviously lies outside the course's scope, but some suggestions can be made here. One is that the critics cited earlier (Toulmin, Reiss, Rosset, Latour) see our modern period as the breaking apart of the seventeenth century's culture. Toulmin: "The recent doubts about the value of Modernity . . . confirm that the epoch whose end we supposedly see today began some time in the first half of the seventeenth century" (11). Or Reiss: "We now find ourselves, indeed, at the nether end of the development of the analytical-referential. . . . Other kinds of discourse seek to accompany, if not to displace it [the analytico-referential]" because the latter "has controlled the forms of Western knowledge (and action) from the period we are discussing down to the present day" (*Discourse* 239). This can be viewed as a crisis: "we find ourselves . . . in a moment of 'discursive despair,' in a time of crisis when our systems of action have again lost their meaningfulness, when we have again reached the limits the discursive space that is our episteme" (*Tragedy* 300). But it is also a moment of immense liberation and creativity. In 1980, Reiss wrote somewhat cautiously: "The researches of such philosophers as Wittgenstein and Derrida

TEACHING THE 17TH CENTURY AT THE GRADUATE LEVEL

would be attempts to demarcate that crisis and to discover a way out” (*Tragedy* 300).

Ten years later, the idea that our epoch is rejecting the seventeenth-century mind-set became much clearer, as Toulmin states: “The ‘modern’ focus on the written, the universal, the general, and the timeless . . . is being broadened to include once again the oral, the particular, the local, and the timely” (186). The seventeenth century’s ideals persisted long into the eighteenth century and beyond, despite such events and movements as the French Revolution and Romanticism. I would suggest that the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and Romanticism, transformative movements though they were, did not shake the foundations of thought and culture established by the second half of the seventeenth century. It was only in the late nineteenth-century that another “modernism,” a profound contestation of all the principles elaborated during the seventeenth century, undid the classical episteme and elaborated a new and revolutionary esthetic (with such writers as Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Nietzsche, Apollinaire, etc.) that are congenial to contemporary authors writing in French. Most profoundly, the contemporary philosophical movements led by such figures as Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Guy Debord, Jean Baudrillard, Maurice Blanchot, can be considered as dismantling (or, to use a modern word, deconstructing) the elaborate civilization of the body and of the mind, of language, art, and society that the seventeenth century had so persistently and durably constructed. Perhaps it is no accident that the philosophers who are at the forefront of the contestation of what Rosset calls “naturalisme,” what I call foundationalism, come from France, what has been called in the United States “French theory.” These figures, and many others, are certainly reacting to the discourses of presence, platonism, and natural foundationalism generally dominant in Western thought, but nowhere was the weight of these ideologies felt more strongly than in the culture where they were developed during the seventeenth century.

The weight of these ideologies is felt in two domains of contemporary French culture. One, inside France itself, can be linked to the seventeenth century ideals. In her concluding chapter, “The Legacy of the Quarrel,” Melzer shows how the seventeenth-century elite’s ideals of purity, its narrow definition of cultural values still echo in contemporary debates about France’s “mission civilisatrice.” The principal efforts of France as a colonial power started with its “civilizing” mission of the New World during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, firmly anchored in the belief that its culture and religion was better than those of the “savages” it conquered. That this mission was anything but altruistic is still an argument that has to

be made as there have been recent attempts to inscribe positive descriptions of colonization into French law. From a discussion of the effect of the seventeenth-century colonization on the conquered and colonized, Joan Dayan provides a comparison between Descartes's establishment of the mind as the essence of the human and colonization, accompanying the rejection of the body as non essential: "Descartes' methodical but metaphorical dispossession becomes the basis for the literal expropriation and dehumanization necessary to turn a man into a thing" (204). This concept, going even further than the disciplining of the body described by Vigarello, is "crucial to the assumption that underlie the judicial regulation of blacks in the colonies" (Dayan 204) and is codified in the Code Noir promulgated by Louis XIV in 1685, the year of the unification of the French kingdom's religion with the Revocation of Edict of Nantes. The image that France built of itself as "a land of liberty, equality, and fraternity," as a civilization of grandeur, has nostalgic appeal but is difficult to maintain "when the nation has colonized and subjugated other peoples" (224). Witness the recent and current debates that have agitated French public opinion about immigration, French identity, "laïcité," religion, especially Islam, and the "merits" of colonization.

This last point leads me directly to the other area where the weight of the "classical" ideology is felt (it lies outside France and outside the scope of the course, but can be alluded to as it would be of interest to those studying these areas): how writers living in former French colonies (and current DOM-TOM), are, in part at least, resisting and opposing the colonizing culture.

What philosophers like Derrida and Deleuze are questioning in French philosophy and culture, the writers from Africa and the Caribbean had already started questioning even during the period of colonization, witness the "Négritude" poets of the 1920s and 30s. While these writers are dependent on French governmental, economic, and commercial structures, and are in some cases French citizens, they are not French like the metropolitan French, and not independent either. A difficulty encountered inside the métropole and outside it is the need for finding a name for the writers who use French outside of France: are they "francophone"? "post-colonial"? Several writers have proposed the term "littérature-monde" in seeking to "libérer la langue de son pacte avec la nation" (*Littérature-monde* 47).⁵ It is interesting to note that the English-speaking world does not

⁵ Michel Le Bris, "Pour une littérature-monde en français" in the book of the same title (22). Before the book *Pour une littérature-monde* was published, a manifesto with almost the same title, "Pour une 'littérature-monde' en français" appeared in *Le Monde* on

TEACHING THE 17TH CENTURY AT THE GRADUATE LEVEL

seem to have the same problem; people simply write in English, wherever they are and no one term seems necessary to include writers so diverse as Salman Rushdie or V.S. Naipaul. But then England did not pursue the same effort at centralization and control as the French culture did, at least not with the same vigor.

We can gain some understanding by seeing that what these writers are rejecting was the product of the seventeenth century. The self-conscious oppositional mind-set is expressed forcefully by Edouard Glissant: “Nous réclamons le droit à l’opacité. . . . l’élan des peuples néantisés qui opposent aujourd’hui à l’universel de la transparence, imposé par l’Occident, une multiplicité sourde du Divers” (14). By rejecting this imposed culture, might not these writers, it seems logical to ask, connect with some of the practices rejected by the seventeenth century culture? An intriguing aspect of this is indicated by the same writer who concludes his work with the proposition: “Voici bien le moment de revenir au baroque dont nous avons souvent traité ici” (795). I view the Baroque as a historical moment of struggle during the first half of the century between the Renaissance esthetic and the newly-emerging esthetic that will coalesce after the Fronde. However, it is clear that Glissant sees the baroque also as part of the seventeenth century’s disciplining and ordering thrust: “L’effort inconscient du baroque rhétorique, dans le monde colonial antillais, s’acharnait après la langue française par une exacerbation de la hantise de pureté” (796). For an example of the connection between the striving for clarity, order, and hierarchy that defined the century’s mind set, and colonization, Dominique Chancé, who studies three Caribbean authors, Alejo Carpentier, Daniel Maximin, and Edouard Glissant, considers that these authors see the Baroque as an a-historical esthetic: “le baroque n’est pas . . . le style propre à une époque donnée” (251) but “l’écriture d’une telle tension entre le désordre effrayant d’un monde sans loi et le chaos merveilleusement fécond des forêts tropicales” (12). It seems significant to me that Glissant appeals to a moment in the period where the culture was still in the process of moving toward, and resisting against, a stronger disciplinary practice. He would like to strive for “la ‘naturalité’ d’un nouveau baroque, le nôtre. La libération viendra du composite. La ‘fonction’ des langues créoles, qui doivent refuser la tentation de l’unicité, passe par une telle opération . . . si éloignée du melting-pot” (796).⁶ The differences between

March 16, 2007; four of the five co-authors of the book were among the 45 signatories of the article.

⁶ Some recent studies on the baroque in French-speaking areas, for example, Domenique Chancé’s *Poétique baroque de la caraïbe* (2001). Also see the section of *PMLA*

these interpretations illustrate, among other things, the difficulty of defining the Baroque, but also the acceptance of the multiplicity of perspectives, of languages and styles.

In conclusion, the goals of connecting the seventeenth century to the students' interests and selecting a focus for a relatively short course are met by these strategies. The first strategy is to select the focus of modernity, which was important and relevant to both the seventeenth century and to our times. The other strategy is to contextualize the century in two directions: one towards its past, the Renaissance, and the other towards its future, our modern era which questions, problematizes, and deconstructs the intellectual achievements of the past century. In this framing, the Enlightenment is the continuation of the seventeenth century achievements with the ideals of clarity, reason, order being used in the name of progress, and reform of politics, society, and religion. The first contextualization with relation to the sixteenth century highlighted the seventeenth century's efforts to make itself different and modern, and the second contextualization makes the connection with our present, which also sees itself as "modern," in opposition to the century's concept of "modern." I hope that this approach in our "post-modern" age is better understood by providing this "big picture" assessment of Western European intellectual development.

Northwestern University

"Theories and methodologies" (2009: 127–88) on the baroque for many references and discussions of the relation between the European baroque and avant-garde literature. It is interesting to note that these authors refer back to the baroque, while Toulmin refers back to the Renaissance ("The 'modern' focus on the written, the universal, the general, and the timeless . . . is being broadened to include once again the oral, the particular, the local, and the timely" (186).

TEACHING THE 17TH CENTURY AT THE GRADUATE LEVEL

Works Consulted

- Bruneau, Marie-Florine. *Racine: le jansénisme et la modernité*. Paris: José Corti, 1986.
- Brunot, Ferdinand. *Histoire de la langue française des origines à 1900*. Tome III: *La Formation de la Langue classique (1600–1660)*. Paris: Armand Colin, 1909.
- Chambers, Ross. *Room for Maneuver: Reading (the) Oppositional (in) Narrative*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991.
- Chancé, Dominique. *Poétique baroque de la Caraïbe*. Paris: Karthala, 2001.
- Cragg, G. P. *The Church and the Age of Reason, 1648–1789*. 1960. Penguin, 1970.
- Cusset, François. *French Theory: Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze & Cie et les mutations de la vie intellectuelle aux Etats-Unis*. Paris: La Découverte, 2003.
- Dayan, Joan. *Haiti, History, and the Gods*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1995.
- Elias, Norbert. *La société de cour*. 1969. Trans. Pierre Kamnitzer. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1974.
- Foucault, Michel. *Les mots et les choses: une archéologie des sciences humaines*. Paris: Gallimard, 1966.
- Furetière, Antoine. *Dictionnaire universel*. 1690. Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1970.
- Glissant, Édouard. *Le discours antillais*. Paris: Gallimard, 1997.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980.
- Harth, Erica. “Exorcising the Beast: Attempts at Rationalism.” *PMLA* 88 (1973): 19–24.
- Haydn, Hiram. *The Counter-Renaissance*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1950.
- Huguet, Edmond. *Dictionnaire de la langue française du 16^e siècle*. Paris: Didier, 1961.
- Ibbett, Katherine. *The Style of the State in French Theater, 1630–1660*. Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009.

- Latour, Bruno. *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes: Essai d'anthropologie symétrique*. Paris: La Découverte, 1991.
- Lichtenstein, Jacqueline. *The Eloquence of Color: Rhetoric and Painting in the French Classical Age*. Trans. Emily McVarish. Berkeley: U of California P, 1993.
- Lyons, John D. *Kingdom of Disorder: The Theory of Tragedy in Classical France*. Lafayette, IN: Purdue UP, 1999.
- Melzer, Sara E. *Colonizer or Colonized: The Hidden stories of Early Modern French Culture*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2012.
- Muchembled, Robert. *L'invention de la France moderne: Monarchie, cultures et société (1500–1660)*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2002.
- Reiss, Timothy J. *Tragedy and Truth: Studies in the Development of a Renaissance and Neoclassical Discourse*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1980.
- . *The Discourse of Modernism*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982.
- Rey, Alain, with Frédéric Duval and Gilles Siouffi. *Mille ans de langue française: histoire d'une passion*. Paris: Perrin, 2007.
- Rosset, Clément. *L'anti-nature: éléments pour une philosophie tragique*. 1973. 2nd ed. Paris: PUF, 1990.
- Schalk, Ellery. "The Shadow of the Sixteenth Century in Seventeenth-Century Absolutist France: The Example of Molière." *Society and Institutions in Early Modern France: Essays Presented to J. Russell Ganim Major*. Ed. Mack P. Holt. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1991.
- Toulmin, Stephen. *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1990.
- Vigarello, Georges. *Le corps redressé: Histoire d'un pouvoir pédagogique*. Paris: Jean-Pierre Delarge, 1978.