Once More with Feeling: Rhetorics of the Passions*

by
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While passion may be one of the unending texts and/or pretexts of literature, the free-standing treatise on the passions is a different matter. After years of tremendous popularity, the treatise on the passions was destined to disappear in the seventeenth century. Although the *minores* continued to produce such works until the end of the century and even beyond (van Delft 83, 135; Levi 337), in a real sense it is Descartes' thought which sounds the death knell of a form with such strong ties to the scholastic tradition. And indeed, apart from Descartes and perhaps Pierre Le Moyne, the authors of early seventeenth century treatises on the passions have not been kindly treated by history. As Boileau wrote:

> Mais sans nous égarer dans ces digressions;
> Traiter comme Senault, toutes les passions;
> Et les distribuant par classes et par titres,
> Dogmatiser en vers et rimer par chapitres:
> Laissons-en discourir la Chambre, ou Coëffeteau;
> Et voïons l'Homme enfin par l'endroit le plus beau
> (43-44)

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While the odor of the school does rise from the pages of these treatises on the passions, the texts have much to tell us about the evolution of philosophy, and the evolution of style. In this essay I would like to examine the use of image in four treatises, Nicolas Coëffeteau's *Tableau des Passions humaines, de leurs Causes et de leurs Effets* (1620), Jean-François Senault's *De l'Usage des Passions* (1641), Marin Cureau de La Chambre's *Les Caractères des Passions* (1640-1662), and Pierre Le Moyne's *Les Peintures morales* (1640-43).[1] In each text there is an intimate link between the author's conception of the passions and the rhetorical choices he makes. These treatises enact the drama of representation, whose shifting threshold marks a privileged entry into seventeenth century thought.

Nicolas Coëffeteau was admired as one of the models of French prose in the early seventeenth century.[2] His *Tableau des Passions humaines, de leurs Causes et de leurs Effets* first appeared in 1620 and was reprinted twenty times between that date and its last appearance in 1683 (Levi 142). In the epistle dedicating his treatise to the king, Coëffeteau speaks of the simplicity of his style: "C'est un tableau, où l'image des Passions...est dépeinte des pures couleurs de la Philosophie, sans que j'y aie mêlé beaucoup d'ornements étrangers" (E [ii]). This relatively straight-forward style not only pleased his contemporaries (Houston 77), but is intimately tied to Coëffeteau's understanding of human behavior, the ways in which we are led into error, and thus how one should write effectively about the passions.

Because it is reason's empire which should hold the passions in check, Coëffeteau's treatise addresses itself to reason and eschews an imaged style which would appeal to the sensual appetite. Although his prose is not devoid of images, these images are evoked briefly, and are never allowed to be more than momentary elucidatoins of the ideas being presented. None of his descriptions is much more colorful or detailed than this one of memory which is "ordonné ... pour servir comme d'archive et de trésor pour enfermer, et pour conserver les images des choses qui leur sont imprimées" (P [xv]).

Coëffeteau's prose, unlike that of the better known moralists later in the century, makes little of the play between image and abstract statement. He contents himself with examples which either allude to human behavior in general, or call up historical figures (Bertaud 109). He uses very few metaphors and does not develop them to any extent.[3] Generally speaking, in the *Tableau des Passions*, examples and similes suffice. In the case of historical examples, which are less frequent than those drawn from an atemporal and generalized fund of human experience, the mere mention of a name, and the barest outlines of an incident are all Coëffeteau provides. If the reader's imagination is sollicited, it is asked to contemplate an almost completely undifferentiated parade of passing humanity which exemplifies this or that passion. Coëffeteau favors the neutral subjects "on", "nous", or "les Princes", and not paint the kind of picture which the mind can seize, as Pascal does with his "roseau pensant."

The resulting effect is that Coëffeteau speaks to a kind of collectivity of reason in which both author and reader participate. His treatise has been stripped of the more obvious ornaments of rhetoric, and our attention is never more than briefly diverted by the academic questions which any treatment of the passions must raise. Although Coëffeteau's text is not uniformly sober, reason is the key to the text as it is to the mastery of the passions. Images which might dangerously stir the passions themselves are avoided in this tableau which contents itself with plain black pencil on white paper.[4]

As his title *De l'Usage des passions* suggests, Jean-François Senault takes what he considers a more direct approach. In the opening of his treatise he writes, "si j'ose dire mes sentiments avec liberté, et s'il m'est permis de juger de mes Maîtres, il me semble qu'il n'y a point de matière en toute la Philosophie qu'on ait traitée avec plus de pompe et avec moins de profit» (2). Senault's predecessors made two principal errors. They described the passions without offering any advice on their conduct, and the Stoics in particular confused the passions with the vices, that is to say, mistook an ungoverned will for an

inherent flaw in the passions themselves (2). The works of the ancients, of course, lack that essential Christian perspective which differentiates Senault's work from theirs (P [xiv-xv]; cf. van Delft 293-95).

In sharp contrast to Coëffeteau, Senault believes that the virtues must adapt their methods to the passions' nature (P [xv-xvi]). If he sometimes uses the methods of the "Philosophes profanes" (P [xvi]) it is precisely because the passions are so attached to the senses that they are incapable of conceiving anything which is not sensible. Only imagination can serve as the intermediary between the passions and reason. The passions' nature determines the nature of the discourse. An admixture of the sacred and the profane is required in order to make the treatise effective.

Generally speaking, Senault's images derive from the traditional rhetoric used to describe the passions. He does not develop them in any unusual way, and their fund is very small. Those few metaphors which recur constantly in his prose demonstrate the caution with which the passions, seeds of virtue though they may be, must be treated. The most persistently used of these is the figure of political economy--the proper management of the nation, and the nation in question is in an almost perpetual state of war. Reason, charity and grace must combat enemies, seditious citizens and violent natural cataclysms such as torrents, tempests, and flames.[5] In the following example, a slight mixing of metaphors has the light of one flame dissipating the smoke of another fire whose origins seem to be in a tossing storm:

> Il est vrai que comme...[la crainte] est voisine des sens, et qu'elle réside en la partie de l'âme, où se forment les orages, elle ressent toujours quelque trouble, et elle ne fait presque point de jugements, qui ne soient accompagnés d'émotion: Mais l'Esprit la peut facilement détromper, et par la clarté de son feu, il peut dissiper toutes ses fumées qui s'élèvent de l'imagination (436-37).

Senault has constant recourse to personification. The various emotions are described as acting any number of human roles. Personification is not only explicit, but implicit in almost every sentence Senault writes. Speaking of hatred for example, he says: "la Colère est son coup d'essai, ...l'Envie est son conseiller, ...le Désespoir est son ministre, et ...après avoir prononcé de sanglants arrêts comme Juge, elle les exécute elle-même comme bourreau" (276). This persistent personification is one of the ways in which Senault remains faithful to scholasticism (Miloyévitch 219; Julien-Eymard d'Angers 62). It is quite distinct from the way in which La Rochefoucauld subtly integrates personification into a number of his maxims (Weber).

Personification and images of political economy, war, and natural cataclysm are the staple of seventeenth-century treatises on the passions. These same devices have a long history in classical literature and in medieval literature as well. Senault uses these figures to suggest that spiritual and psychic life is dramatic. If he marches the common path in his choice of figures and images, it is perhaps because, in passages revealing the influence of Augustine, Sanault shows himself to be profoundly suspicious of the arts (cf. van Delft 157). Music, rhetoric, poetry and politics are all defective in the regulation of the passions because they do not call upon the precepts of ethics for aid (189-90). The theatre is dangerous, for despite all the reforms undertaken, vice still appears more agreable to most people than virtue when they see it represented on the stage (184-85). The most innocent of the arts is rhetoric which was destined to persuade people of the truth, and it is rhetoric which has served as the model for Senault's undertaking. His discussion of rhetoric makes this clear:

> les Orateurs qui veulent prendre l'âme par ses sens, joignent les belles paroles aux bonnes raisons, flattent l'oreille pour toucher le coeur, et employent toutes les figures pour émouvoir les affections; Ils attaquent les deux parties qui composent l'homme, ils se servent de la plus faible pour emporter la plus

> forte, et comme le démon perdit l'homme par le moyen de la femme, ils gagnent la Raison par le moyen de la Passion (186-187).

But rhetoric makes use of the passions, and thus runs the constant risk of overexciting the lower human faculties (187). Senault's conventionality can be seen as an effort to reconcile the twin desires to both speak to the passions and avoid the dangers with such an endeavor is fraught. His use of the rhetorical commonplace seems to arise from a suspicion of the very rhetorical strategy which he has chosen for his treatise.

Rhetorical issues which are implicit in Senault, take on a more complex cast in Marin Cureau de La Chambre's *Les Caractères des Passions* (1640-1662). Unlike Coëffeteau, Senault or Le Moyne, La Chambre (1596-1669) comes to his text not from the church but from the faculty of medicine. He was physician to Louis XIII and Louis XIV, a friend of Foucquet and Séguier, and a member of both the Académie française and the Académie des Sciences.

Like the authors of other treatises, he knows himself to be far from the first to have written on the passions. He founds the utility of his work on his alliance of medical and moral knowledge (1, [xii]), allowing one to understand both self and others (AC 3; cf. van Delft 227). This goal is the secular counterpart of Coëffeteau's and Senault's desire to bring the reader to the appropriate Christian point of view (cf. Bertaud 177).

In many parts of *Les Caractères des Passions* La Chambre takes a critical look at language. Definition plays an important role in this treatise (cf. Foerster 270), and La Chambre often seeks to correct the use of those words which have slipped from their "propre et naturelle signification:"

> notre Langue s'est donné beaucoup de líberté dans l'usage de ces mots, et...elle ne les a pas toujours retenus dans leur propre et naturelle

> signification,...dont il ne faut pas pourtant s'étonner, puisque c'est le Peuple qui est le maître ordinaire de l'usage et que la Philosophie est contrainte de s'accomoder à ses caprices (5, 230).

But, most often the kind of usage which La Chambre analyzes is figurative. In many instances, La Chambre provides an exegesis of rhetorical figures, often become clichés. The figure is frequently treated as an autonomous vehicle of truth (cf. Foerster 276). for example, in his analysis of tears, La Chambre suggest that when the poets said that Prometheus used tears in making the human body, this fable had both a moral sense--the sufferings inherent in human nature--and a physical one. Tears come from the serous humors found in the veins and arteries. The myth thus has a physical truth, since the same serous humors are constitutive parts of the blood, without which the body cannot exist (5, 25).

However there is another side to La Chambre's view of figurative language, a side intimately tied to his use of analogy as his primary heuristic tool. Throughout *Les Caractères des Passions*, La Chambre expresses a good deal of suspicion in regard to the figurative use of language. His conception of the referentiality of language is complex. Single words may be properly defined, although popular usage constantly chips away at the edifice of correct meaning. Figurative speech, however, is a double-edged sword. It may contain truth which merely requires an appropriate exegesis in order to be seen (cf. Eckhert 313). On the other hand, it may also be an obstacle to truth, to the extent that displacement and transposition of words from their "propre et naturelle signification" (5, 230) takes place. Thus, speakers unaware of proper usage may have recourse to inappropriate transposition. For example, the use of hyperbole--"ces façons de parler figurées et hyperboliques" (4, 306)--by those who are suffering has two explanations. One exaggerates one's pain in order to obtain compassion, providing some relief. In addition, the true nature of pain is unknown to most people. Thus, to express themselves, those who suffer transpose expressions

from other domains, saying for example that they are dead or being tortured:

> Pour la mettre en son jour, il faut se ressouvenir que cette Passion n'a point de différences essentielles qui la puissent diviser en d'autres espèces....Or comme l'essence de la Douleur est inconnue et principalement au peuple qui est dépositiare et le maître des paroles, il ne faut pas s'étonner s'il n'a pu trouver de mots propres pour exprimer sa nature, et s'il a été contraint d'employer ceux qui sont particuliers aux autres maux et de les appliquer à celui-ci; lequel étant un des plus grands qu'on puisse avoir, s'est approprié aussi le nom de ceux que l'on croit les plus fâcheux. Et c'est de là que dans les violentes Douleurs on dit souvent que l'on est mort, que l'on se meurt, qu'on est à la gêne, à la torture, dans les tourments et autres semblables (4, 307-308).

While exaggeration can be attributed to a valid cause--the desire for compassion--this metaphorical transposition is also due to the speaker's ignorance of the essence of pain. If we knew more about pain, La Chambre seems to suggest, we would express ourselves more appropriately when suffering. Then language would function correctly, in expressing the phenomenon exactly.

When La Chambre offers explanations of the mechanisms involved in this kind of speech, he is not only explaining symptoms, he is also attempting to bring order to language. He remains skeptical in the face of deviations from what he considers to be the norm. That which reflects a mere shadow of truth is better left aside. At best, rhetorical figures contain hidden truth. At their worst they deceive by deforming turth.

Metaphor is dangerous, precisely because it throws a critical light on the use of analogy as a primary heuristic tool. What can we know if one of the two terms of the metaphor is not as "real" as the other? As Henri Morier says in his discussion of metaphor,

> Le Philosophe métaphysicien ne peut ignorer l'analogie universelle: elle est la condition de son existence. Mais il y accède au prix d'une démonstration systématique; il fonde cette unité en raison: la métaphore représente pour sa pensée un danger, celui de substituer une illusion au travail de la logique inductive.[6]

The figures which Coëffeteau and Senault question on moral grounds pose intellectual problems for La Chambre. They reveal for him all the dilemmas of scientific thought at the time. However, if the play of image presents problems to Coëffeteau, Senault and La Chambre, quite the opposite is true of the final writer whom I will discuss, the Jesuit Pierre Le Moyne. In many ways Le Moyne serves as the bridge between the treatise on the passions in the tradition of the school and the writings of La Rochefoucauld, La Bruyère and Pascal.

At first glance, few texts would seem more dissimilar than La Chambre's *Les Caractères des Passions* and the contemporary *Peintures morales* (1640-43) of the popular and prolific Pierre Le Moyne (1602-1671). As Marc Fumaroli has so aptly suggested *Les Peintures morales* are "le roman de la théologie morale» (387). Le Moyne's text represents a gallery of paintings portraying the passions. It is constructed as a worldly dialogue, enlivened by exemplary tales and poetry and illustrated with engravings by Grégoire Huret. Facing the same issues to tradition and innovation as Coëffeteau, Senault or La Chambre, Le Moyne comes up with strikingly different answers.

Le Moyne's fundamental intention is to write a text which will be attractive to readers:

> ayant fait une Gallerie de Peintures, la Curiosité y amenera des Dévots et des Libertins, des Docteurs et des Cavaliers, des Philosophes et des Femmes; et cependant qu'ils y seront occupés à regarder des Tableaux, la Vérité prendra le temps de faire son devoir avec adresse: et selon les occasions qui se présenteront, elle convaincra les erreurs des uns et

> guérira les maladies des autres; et par les images de leur vie, qu'elle tirera artificieusement sur celle des Morts, elle les forcera doucement à se condamner eux-mêmes sous des noms supposés; et leur fera aimer la Vertu et haïr le Vice, dans les Peintures qu'elle leur montrera de l'une et de l'autre (1A, [xvii-xviii]).

The *peinture*, combining iconography (*La peinture muette*) and verbal description (*la peinture parlante*) was an important element in the Jesuit rhetorical tradition (Fumaroli 258-63, 681-83). Through its use, Le Moyne will attract the most diverse kind of public to his gallery, and the work of truth will be done painlessly (1A, [xvii-xviii]). As one of his characters, Eranthe, explains, to use fables and allegories is to practice philosophy "à la manière de Socrate et des Prophètes» (1, 238).

His thoroughgoing defense of poetic language does not, however, make Le Moyne any less concerned about potential misunderstanding than was La Chambre, although for different reasons. While the physician sought always to return words to their proper usage, making words and things coincide, Le Moyne warns against misunderstanding by reminding his readers of the distinction between verbal signs and the things those signs designate. We must understand that

> les mots ne sont reçus que par substitution dans le commerce des Esprits; qu'ils ne sont que les commis des choses et des pensées; qu'ils n'en sont que les signes et les symboles... Mais il est extrêmement étrange et encore plus injuste, de considérer les signes, et ne considérer pas les choses signifiées... (2, 3).

The separation of words and things is essential to Le Moyne's poetics.[7] He sees words as the clothing of thoughts, of things. One must thus look beyond the words in order not to be led astray by appearances. Because they are not one and the same thing as what they designate, however, words become costuming, and costuming can be

enriched upon, multiplied and complicated in order to better please the spectator.

The parts of *Les Peintures morales* which Le Moyne calls *tableaux* illustrate this approach particularly well. Le Moyne defines the *tableaux* as follows: "Les Tableaux sont des Poèmes où je décris les Peintures de quelques Histoires mémorables, par lesquelles les Passions sont représenteées» (1A, [viii]).[8] In the text itself, each engraving is preceded by a prose description and followed by a poem.[9] both the prose passage and the poem serve to explicate and expand upon the images in the engravings. The prose sections customarily begin by simply describing the elements in the engraving, but often go on to provide allegorical and/or historical explanations. The poems provide more elaborate interpretative or historical material.[10]

In all the verbal complements to the engravings, Le Moyne's penchant for multiplication of ornamentation, symbol and allegory predominates. In the first engraving of volume one, the hot country of anger, one sees a burning mountain, a bridge of corpses, a chapel of skulls, trees hung with human heads, and a temple. The preceding prose narration explains the historical sources of the various images. Going beyond a mere reproduction of what can be seen in Huret's engraving, the prose text tells the reader that the mountain is inhabited by anger, and that the temple is filled with instruments of torture. The poem rehearses much of the same material.

Another engraving depicts Actaeon in partial metamorphosis, being torn apart by his dogs. The prose description insists on the allegorical value of the image. The pack of dogs represents the passions while the scene is presented as taking place at night to show the absence of the light of reason. The poem, however, leaves the allegorical possibilities aside, while concentrating on the story of Actaeon's metamorphosis, the transformation itself clearly appealing to the baroque sensibility (cf. Hope 167). The other engravings and accompanying texts have similar characteristics. Each set mixes allegory, mythology and multiplication of rhetorical or iconographic ornamentation.

The didactic purpose of *Les Peintures morales* might well be lost if the task of "reading" the illustrative icons were left to the audience alone. The interplay of media, the multiply reflected images, are thus more than decoration. They sollicit and guide the reader's active participation (van Delft 249).

Structurally, *Les Peintures morales*'s engravings, prose and poems participate in a play of mirror effects which distinguishes them from other contemporary illustrated texts (Fumaroli 387; cf. Maber 223). Because three different media are involved, each of which represents in a slightly different way, each image reflects and illuminates the others.[11] Through their ingenuity and richness, the texts and engravings appeal to a sophisticated public whose tastes and habits are formed by the reading of poetry and novels. They provide relief from the more overtly philosophical parts of *Les Peintures morales*. They appeal to Le Moyne's audience through image rather than making demands on abstract intellection (cf. van Delft 324-25).

Les Peintures morales are the final step in this brief outline of rhetorics of the passions because they move away from the treatise *per se* and develop a form, or rather a constellation of forms, which bridges the gap between the closed world of theology and philosophy and the secular audience. Le Moyne is an important transitional figure because he combines respect for tradition with a firm allegiance to new tendencies (van Delft 247; cf. Fumaroli 382). As *Les Peintures morales* mark the conjunction of worldly and theological modes, so, by their variety do they announce the departure from the formal treatise as a significant mode of moral discourse in the second half of the seventeenth century.[12]

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Notes

[1]In Coëffeteau E and P designate the unpaged Epître and Préface respectively. Likewise P is used to indicate

Senault's unpaged preface. AC designates La Chambre's *L'Art de Connaîstre les Hommes.* In Le Moyne 1A designates the unpaged *Avertissement* to volume one. While part one of *Les Peintures morales* was originally published in 1640, the 1645 edition contains a number of changes which Le Moyne considered important, Maber 37, 252-77. All spelling has been modernized.

[2]Coëffeteau was among those who sought to tread a new path which avoided the roughness of the parliamentary style inherited form the sixteenth century, as well as the excesses of sacred eloquence, Fumaroli 273, 337, 345, 513, 543; Levi 141-42.

[3]Coëffeteau is bringing the treatise into line with contemporary literary trends, as in the early years of the seventeenth century overly-developed or overly-exotic metaphors were seen as harking back to the no longer fashionable styles of the Renaissance. See Rousset 57-71.

[4]There are occasional colorful passages, such as his accumulation of rhetorical questions in his condemnation of the Stoics, or his description of what happens when love, like a wild beast, leaves the confines of reason (145-46), but these passages are rare.

[5]These metaphors alluding to the proper governance of the state have their distant origins in the fourth book of Plato's *Republic* where the well-governed city and the well-governed soul are parallelled. The battle between various personnified internal forces is additionally informed by the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius and his many medieval followers. Senault also uses some historial examples, but they are not developed at any length, and avoid the exotic.

[6]On the controversy surrounding the use of the metaphor in the seventeenth century see Rousset. Bayley 181, writes, "It is the shift in the study of the world from an explanatory to an exploratory approach which ultimately kills the analogy and the prose style which enshrined it."

[7]Cf. Foucault's thesis that in contrast to the Renaissance conception of language, in the seventeenth century, "Les choses et les mots vont se séparer....Le discours aura bien pour tâche de dire ce qui est, mais il ne sera rien de plus que ce qu'il dit," 58.

[8]Le Moyne distinguishes himself from his predecessors, Philostratus, Achilles Tatius, Lucian and Callistratus, who wrote in prose. Furthermore, he asserts, poetry and painting complement each other particularly well, 1A, [ix-x]. On the popularity of illustrated books in the 1640's see Ranum 206.

[9]Although strictly speaking, only the poem is a *tableau* in Le Moyne's terminology, the three elements are too closely aligned to be treated separately.

[10]As Le Moyne notes at the beginning of volume one, the sources of the images are various. There are three invented countries: a hot land housing anger, hatred and related passions, a cold country for fear, flight, sadness and despair, and *l'Erotie*, land of spiritual love (the first and second engravings in in volume one, and the second in volume two repectively). Also of Le Moyne's invention is a fourth locus, the cemetery for faithful wives and husbands (the third engraving in volume two). Three other engravings depict Prometheus, Actaeon and Lais.

[11]For a concise statement of the close linking of the various kinds of representation in the early seventeenth century, see Harth 15-16.

[12]Van Delft 82-83, shows that statistically, there is not such a significant regression of the treatise. Nonetheless, the major writers of the second part of the century chose other forms.

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