

Le Romantisme
et après en France

Romanticism
and after in France

Volume 20

Naomi Segal and Gill Rye (eds)

‘When familiar meanings dissolve...’

Essays in French Studies
in Memory of Malcolm Bowie

Peter Lang

Naomi Segal and Gill Rye (eds)

‘When familiar meanings dissolve...’

Essays in French Studies
in Memory of Malcolm Bowie

Peter Lang

Oxford · Bern · Berlin · Bruxelles · Frankfurt am Main · New York · Wien

Bibliographic information published by Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

“When familiar meanings dissolve-- “ : essays in French studies in memory of Malcolm Bowie / [edited by] Naomi Segal and Gill Rye.
p. cm. -- (Romanticism and after in France ; v. 20)

“This volume of essays arose out of a conference organized by the Institute of Germanic & Romance Studies (IGRS) in May 2008 in memory of Malcolm Bowie, who had died in 2007”--Introd.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-3-0343-0108-4 (alk. paper)

1. French literature--19th century--History and criticism--Congresses.
2. French literature--20th century--History and criticism--Congresses.
3. French literature--History and criticism--Theory, etc.--Congresses.
4. Meaning (Philosophy) in literature--Congresses. 5. Art and literature--France--History--Congresses. I. Bowie, Malcolm, 1943-2007. II. Segal, Naomi. III. Rye, Gill, 1948- IV. University of London. Institute of Germanic & Romance Studies.V.Title: Essays in French studies in memory of Malcolm Bowie.

PQ281.W48 2011
840.9--dc23

2011031682

ISSN 1422-4896

ISBN 978-3-0343-0108-4

© Peter Lang AG, European Academic Publishers, Bern 2011
Hochfeldstrasse 32, CH-3012 Bern, Switzerland
info@peterlang.com, www.peterlang.com, www.peterlang.net

All rights reserved.

All parts of this publication are protected by copyright.

Any utilisation outside the strict limits of the copyright law, without the permission of the publisher, is forbidden and liable to prosecution.

This applies in particular to reproductions, translations, microfilming, and storage and processing in electronic retrieval systems.

Printed in Germany

MICHAEL WORTON

Introduction

This volume of essays arose out of a conference organized by the Institute of Germanic & Romance Studies (IGRS) in May 2008 in memory of Malcolm Bowie, who had died in 2007. The conference aimed to celebrate and commemorate the life and work of a friend and colleague who was universally regarded as one of the most influential figures in UK French Studies for more than thirty years, having held a Chair of French at Queen Mary, University of London, then the Marshal Foch Chair at the University of Oxford and finally being elected Master of Christ's College, Cambridge, from 2002 to 2007. Malcolm was a wonderfully insightful reader of both literary and theoretical texts, an exquisite writer who drew his many readers not only into the worlds of fiction and of poetry that he was analysing, but also into a humane place between 'creative' and 'critical' writing, where we could learn to read and listen in new ways. This was evident in all of his books, ranging from his study of Henri Michaux, based on his PhD thesis, to his magisterial studies of Mallarmé and of Proust, his books on psychoanalysis and the relations between psychoanalysis and literature, and the eminently readable collaborative *A Short History of French Literature* (2003), co-authored with Sarah Kay and Terence Cave.¹

Malcolm was a singular and a singularly sensitive scholar; he was also perhaps the most generous and community-minded person in modern UK French Studies. He played a crucial role in the 1980s in gradually bringing together the conservative 'establishment' of French Studies that was deeply suspicious both of the new critical theories coming out of France and of the 'young Turks' who founded the Modern Critical Theory Group (MCTG) in 1981 and then the journal *Paragraph* in 1983. That tensions and suspicions

1 Sarah Kay, Terence Cave and Malcolm Bowie, *A Short History of French Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

existed between these two wings of French Studies for well over a decade is undeniable, yet the two wings gradually grew closer together, helping to make UK French Studies the interdisciplinary, dynamic and intellectually fluid discipline that it is today. Malcolm's role in this process cannot be over-stated: in the 1980s he was general editor of *French Studies*, one of the founding members of the MCTG and one of the founding editors of *Paragraph*. He thus gave leadership to both 'factions', demonstrating loyalty to and inspiring loyalty from both, whilst also gradually eliciting greater openness and understanding from both. This was a work of exceptional and sensitive cultural diplomacy, for which we all owe him an enormous debt. This also illustrated one of Malcolm's qualities which everyone so admired: he always sought to see (and found) good in what other people were doing, whether it was in their academic writing, in their academic or other citizenship or more generally in their lives. It is for this reason that he was such an excellent editor and PhD supervisor, since he could always help others to think and write better by helping them to believe in themselves and to seek to go beyond their existing intellectual parameters.

Malcolm Bowie was also an important creator of institutions. In London, for instance, he was the founding director of the Institute of Romance Studies (IRS) in 1989 and later in 2004, he was the first chair of the advisory board of the new IGRS which was born out of the merger of the IRS and the Institute of Germanic Studies. Wherever he went, indeed, he created things. When he went to Oxford to take up the Marshal Foch Chair, he helped to launch and promote *Legenda*, the new imprint of the European Humanities Research Centre, and when he returned to Cambridge in 2002, he worked closely with Gillian Beer and Beate Perrey to establish an interdisciplinary research project 'New Languages for Criticism', which led to the foundation of the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and the Humanities (CRASSH). The creation of the IRS was one of the turning points for French Studies in London and throughout the UK, just as it was for Hispanic, Iberian, Italian and Portuguese Studies. The director of the IGRS and her colleagues thus felt it very important to hold a conference that would bring together colleagues from across the country in an act of shared remembrance which would be both an act of creative and critical community and an act of commemoration.

lit
is
ac
re
th
th
an
Cl
ne
co
Th
m
fre

or
we
to
Ar
un
to

In the Christian tradition, the Eucharist is one of the most important liturgical moments, commemorating as it does the Last Supper. However, it is much more than a remembrance; it is a making present of simple everyday acts (the shared breaking of bread and drinking of wine) that through their repetition come to represent something much greater. Commemoration thus recognizes absence, but in its assumption of both the possibility and the necessity of repetition as transformation, it makes loss easier to live with and enables creativity to emerge from remembrance. Malcolm was not a Christian, but he was acutely aware of the importance and the meaningfulness of symbols and metaphors. He was also someone who delighted in the community of scholarship, taking pleasure in listening and in conversing. Throughout the IGRS conference, as papers were given and points were made and debated, many would have seen in their mind's eye the slight frown and the pursed lips of the attentively listening Malcolm.

Many of the essays in this volume refer to his work; all were in one way or another made possible by his example of literary scholarship. This would, we hope, have given him some pleasure, in that he was always committed to what the French so marvellously call *possibilisation*. However, in *Proust Among the Stars* (1998), where he wrote tellingly about his enjoyment of undertaking literary pilgrimages, he also revealed his anxiety about going to the Cabourg that so inspired Proust's novel:

I began to know in Cabourg a fear that I had not known at any other of my literary destinations. This was the fear that I might lose a supreme work of literature and never get it back; that I would resign myself to a non-reading knowledge of the novel, a Proust of tea-parties and table-talk, of selected short quotations and haunting images that had long ago drifted free of their original textual moorings. [...]

While I have no wish to deprive Cabourg, Illiers-Combray, the boulevard Haussmann or the Père Lachaise cemetery of their status as places of pilgrimage, or as stations on Proust's own journey towards artistic triumph, I shall argue here for the superior magnetism of his writing.²

2 Malcolm Bowie, *Proust Among the Stars* (London: HarperCollins, 1998), pp. xiii–xiv.

This is quintessential Bowie. Writing personally, but with a universality that touches each of us, as well as with his usual elegance, he reminds us of the need constantly to return to and to focus ever more intently on the literary text itself. Malcolm described this book as an introductory commentary on Proust, which would be accessible to all interested readers, rather than simply to the specialist academic reader. However, it is a masterpiece of critical insight and wisdom, which not only helps us better to understand Proust, but crucially, better to understand our own potential as readers. Malcolm's own mode of reading (and writing) is an expansive one, whereby the world is drawn into the recorded act of reading and thinking – and he is especially illuminating when showing how art and music interact with literature. However, the encyclopaedic knowledge that informs all of Bowie's critical work is fundamentally different from, and even opposed to, the kind of sterile encyclopaedism characteristic of much specialist work on Proust (and, indeed, Mallarmé), which Bowie so delicately and implicitly chides in *Proust Among the Stars*.

His critical life, like his personal life, was lightly yet also profoundly humane and moral, informed by an abiding desire to illuminate and explain the specificity of a work of art and also to prevent anyone from falling into the trap of reading or seeing or listening to a work of art only from a particular, predetermined position:

we may be moved by works of art in ways that our official critical procedures make no allowance for: we may be haunted by a single chromaticism in a Mozart quintet, or by the slant of a fierce, disconsolate eye in one of the later self-portraits of Rembrandt. Something is going wrong when criticism conscientiously refuses to take heed of the singular disruptive energies which works of art possess, and quite as badly wrong when those energies are normalised by being made into a test of political acceptability.³

If one of Malcolm's greatest gifts to his community was to make criticism much more pleasurable, he also liberated scholars from the need to enter or remain in any particular camp. His innate generosity meant that he was

3 Malcolm Bowie, *Mallarmé and the Art of Being Difficult* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 154.

un
an
sit
Fo
mo
tin
sch
thi
qu
Psy
tu
of
en
ing
'bu
en
it
rat

Th
res
is
th

uncomfortable with any embedded binary oppositions: for him, fluidity and porosity were much more important. Yet he fully appreciated the necessity of understanding and recognizing individual disciplines and positions. For this reason, he was one of the best engagers with and interpreters of modern theory, notably post-Freudian and Lacanian theory. There was a time in the late 1980s and 1990s when it was almost *de rigueur* for French scholars to engage in an informed way with Lacan, Kristeva, etc. For many, this was enjoyable as well as intellectually challenging; for others, it could be quite a struggle; for yet others, it was, quite simply, inappropriate. Bowie's *Psychoanalysis and the Future of Theory* (1993), based on his Bucknell Lectures in Literary Theory, was a clarion call to sceptics to understand the value of psychoanalytic theory, just as it challenged psychoanalytic theorists to engage more (and more dialogically) with art. As always, Malcolm's writing in this book is precise but also occasionally playful, as when he writes: 'but "theory" is an education and pleasure too. Some of it, at least.'⁴ His engagement with theory as with literature was very real and committed, yet it was always deeply personal and speculative, a process to be experienced rather than a formula to be followed:

What I'm trying to do in a small way for myself is to create a fully engaged and theoretically self-aware playfulness of response to literature, which means teasing out a whole range of incompatible possibilities, speculatively, conjecturally, and not being intimidated by the injunction that seems to say 'Be coherent, have a theory, apply it, get your results, and publish them'. Perhaps I'm talking about what the French are happy to call *théorisation* rather than *théorie*. 'Theorization' is one Gallicism that English really does need – to describe a process of continuous, open-ended speculative activity playing upon the empirical data. (p. 144)

The notion of play and playfulness that he developed in this book, in response to Freud and to post-Freudian theorizings of play and pleasure, is enormously liberating, although Malcolm also repeatedly emphasized the importance of knowledge, facts and empirical data.

4 Malcolm Bowie, *Psychoanalysis and the Future of Theory* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994 [1993]), p. 143.

In its insightfulness, Bowie's critical work is always both light and profound: many critics can achieve the latter at times, but few can also attain, let alone maintain, the former as Bowie did throughout his academic life. Both in their choice of research questions to address and in the discourses they choose, the essays in this book reveal the influence that he still, happily, continues to exert on scholars in UK French Studies. As is only befitting, they respond to different moments in his many works, but they especially engage with his constant desire to celebrate tension and paradox, rather than trying to resolve them in any simplistic way. However, Bowie's work itself is ultimately a repeated sequence of reconciliations, as differences are anatomized, understood, maintained and ultimately presented as productive – productive of art, productive of meaning, productive of life. This volume seeks similarly to play with tension and reconciliation.

This book arose out of a tragic death and the need to respond to it by affirming the ongoing presence of Malcolm Bowie, friend, mentor and inspiration to all who have participated in it. In that sense, it is, we hope, a worthy and active commemoration. The word used in Greek for remembrance is *anamnesis*. However, this remembrance is much more than simply remembering in an elegiac or lachrymose way. It signifies bringing something out of the past into the present. While the focus of these essays is essentially on poetry and fiction, I would also suggest that this collection can be seen as the staging of a *représentation*, whereby something is re-presented, whereby things that were, now are (again). Each essay, which is in itself original, is also a willed repetition of what Malcolm Bowie taught us all to do: to read and see and hear better, and finally, eventually, to make better connections, to make more – and different – sense of the world.

M.

St
NU
(I
w
th

I

2