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"Introduction" to *The Shape of Change: Essays in Early Modern Literature and La Fontaine in Honor of David Lee Rubin*

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Introduction

Since Michel Foucault's *The Archeology of Knowledge* gained widespread critical recognition in the late 1960s, the concept of change has held a privileged position in the discourse of literary and cultural studies. Concerned with disruptions, transformations, and upheavals, scholars have focused on those moments of rupture when the present breaks with the past, when originality displaces convention, when *inventio* repudiates *imitatio.* This emphasis on aesthetic and epistemic shifts has all too often resulted in the neglect of more traditional issues having to do with problems of cultural development, evolution, and influence. It has also overlooked the idea of reading and writing as self-aware cognitive and affective exercises. In this more orthodox framework, literature becomes part of a social and personal rhetoric and forms the basis for understanding authorial creation and the public's response. Not all scholars have, however, turned away from this approach and the intellectual problems to which it gives rise. In his books, articles, and lectures on the seventeenth century, on the lyric poetry of that same period, and on the *Fables* of La Fontaine, David Lee Rubin has investigated with critical rigor the constants underlying change.

Upon leaving the faculty of the University of Chicago in 1969, David Rubin joined the Department of French at the University of Virginia. Over the course of his tenure as both a scholar and teacher, David developed a critical methodology that blended undogmatic formal analysis with a pluralistic way of thinking. Interested in seventeenth-century poets such as Malherbe, Maynard, Saint-Amant, and Theophile de Viau, he applied his unique critical approach to their works and discovered that poems considered to be confused, incoherent, or fragmented were indeed informed by principles of unity. He used those findings in *The Knot of Artifice* to offer a new poetics of the early French lyric, one that not only challenged current ideas about periodicity *(la Renaissance* vs. *l'âge baroque* vs. *l'âge classique)* but also established his "differential criticism" as a valuable theoretical tool for understanding seemingly dissimilar poetic practices. But more was still to be done. In *A Pact with Silence,* David turned his attention to a crucial problem of La Fontaine studies, in particular, and of the historiography of early

modern French literature, in general: the apparent isolation of the *Fables* from lyrical works composed approximately at the same time or before. Moving from problems of genre (what is a fable?) to those of influence (what is the relation between La Fontaine's didacticism and Lucretius's epicurianism?) to those of *forme* and *fond* (what are the unifying structures in an individual book of the *Fables*?), the monograph reassessed the position of the *Fables* within the history of the French lyric, and in so doing demonstrated how this literary classic, while innovative and unorthodox, is in certain respects of a piece with the poetry of its time. These undertakings have led to David's current research in problems of translation, especially in connection with the various attempts made by poets — distinguished in their own right — to translate into English the fables of La Fontaine or the plays of Racine. In pursuing this line of inquiry, he has again formulated a fresh theoretical approach to the problem, and it is already having a notable impact on many issues central to both the practice of translating and the discipline of comparative literature.

David is also a crucial presence as a teacher. For those of us fortunate enough to have studied with him (and many of us are included in this book), his graduate seminars on baroque lyric poetry, classical dramaturgy, critical methods, genre theory, and La Fontaine were formative and transforming experiences: challenging in their subject matter, precise in their articulation of critical methodologies, and powerful in their ability to generate creative energy in and among participants. But intellectual exchange with David has always extended beyond the four walls of a classroom. Long lunches and leisurely dinners provided another forum for discussion and, in the relaxed setting of many a restaurant, ideas circulated as freely as the appetizers or dim sum carts. Students and colleagues also owe much to David for his careful, detailed comments on dissertations, articles, and book chapters. Such concern for others is only equaled by David's remarkable respect for positions different from his own; indeed, as editor from 1989-93 of the journal *Continuum: Problems in French literature from the Late Renaissance to the Early Enlightenment* and, from 1994, the journal *EMF: Studies in Early Modern France,* he has created a milieu in which dialectical exchange can take place both within and across disciplines. By dedicating the volume at hand to David Rubin, the contributors would like to imitate his model and continue this exchange while showing their appreciation, esteem, and affection.

These essays are grouped together in two sections. The essays in "Continuity and Discontinuity" focus on the ways in which seventeenth-century authors draw upon established generic conventions, earlier literary practices, or diverse artistic media to create works that reflect the aesthetic and moral values of their time, while those in "La Fontaine" are concerned not only with one of French classicism's masterpieces — the *Fables* — but also with the problem of imitation and innovation as it relates to questions of influence, genre, and reputation. As readers move from essay to essay, they will encounter a variety of critical approaches, ranging from the philological to the historical to the sociological. Yet, all the contributors share an interest in exploring the function of artistic endeavor as it shapes and is shaped by literary memory.

At the beginning of the volume we have placed two essays that underscore the continuity of theater history. Jody Enders considers how Denis Coppée re-animates the medieval Passion play while respecting the classical injunction against staging violence. She finds that the dramatist's manipulation of the art of memory allows him to conceive his theater as a speaking painting, and thus use the rhetoric of commemoration to reformulate such concepts as *utile/dulce, ut pictura poesis,* and catharsis. Continuing his work on Racine, Timothy Reiss argues that *Andromaque* offers an ideological mythography linking the French monarchy to Troy. This connection depends upon translating a Greco-Romano-Trojan history into a modern French context, and his essay reveals the ways Andromaque's rise to power, and the establishment of her unique authority, is emblematic of claims about Louis XIV's authority.

The next two essays by Russell Ganim and Twyla Meding explore the problem of relaying — or translating — meaning between different texts. Ganim analyzes the unusual relation between word and image in the forty-four stained-glass windows that recount the story of Psyche in Chantilly's Musée Condé. By situating the glass/lyric units in the sociopolitical and iconological circumstances of their genesis, he discloses the degree to which the gallery modifies the Renaissance model of *ut pictura poesis* through a constant flux and reflux of meaning among its individual components. Meding uses Scarron's adap-

tation of María de Zayas's *El Prevenido engañado* to discuss how the notion of translation evolves from the humanist concern with imitation to the seventeenth century's fascination with perspective. But Scarron's act of translation goes beyond a simple linguistic transfer from Spanish to French for, as Meding demonstrates, he undertakes to correct not only the female author's "style extravagant" but also her perspective, one lacking in "bon sens."

The last three essays in this section center around the French lyric. In considering the encomiastic poetry of Théophile, Tristan, Saint-Amant and La Fontaine, Marie-Odile Sweetser maps the ways in which these writers expand the generic topology beyond the praise of heroic or warlike deeds to include cultural and artistic accomplishments. For her, the celebration of other kinds of achievements reflects the shifting sociopolitical dynamic between poet and patron.

Anne Birberick singles out Saint-Amant's gastronomic oeuvre, treating it as though it were a "book" in his corpus. Strategically drawing upon Louis Marin's work on the culinary sign, she looks at moments of semantic plasticity where the natural becomes the mythic, metaphor becomes metamorphosis, and food becomes speech. What emerges from this reading is an understanding of how the poet's panegyric discourse evolves from the earlier to the later works as well as from the poems about wine to those about food. Robert Corum Jr. similarly examines the use of culinary metaphors in Boileau's *Satire III,* "Le Repas ridicule." Boileau subverts the traditional image of the convivial banquet by representing a feast that not only violates the speaker's five senses but also implements configurations of disgust such as the oppositions between organic/inorganic, viscid/fluid, and dirty/clean. In this way, Corum argues, Boileau extends his denunciation of bad taste into the domain of aesthetics so that he may affirm a literary credo of classical norms.

The second section brings together different critical perspectives on Jean de La Fontaine. Jules Brody and Richard Danner engage in close readings of individual texts as they study the problems of artistic originality and the fable's didactic purpose. Applying what he calls the "philological method" to "L'Alouette et ses petits" (4.22), Brody locates a resonant cluster of words from the semantic field of coupling and procreation. This clustering calls attention to a Lucretian subtext that ultimately allows the fabulist to develop a subversive form of moral commentary and thus transcend his literary forebears. Danner provides a detailed analysis of ironic structures in "Le Lion, le singe et les deux ânes" (11.5). These structures, once placed within the context of moral and cognitive relativism, show how the poet facilitates the coexistence of different didactic purposes by creating "discursive communities." Crossing generic boundaries concerns the next three contributors. In his essay, Judd Hubert contends that theatricality predominates in La Fontaine's poetry. He continues the focus on language as he illustrates the ways in which the fabulist manipulates rhetorical devices to transform characters into actors, natural settings into artificial scenes, and the constative into the performative. Catherine Grisé looks at the *Fables* through the lens of narrative theory. Taking "Les Filles de Minée" (12.28) as a test case, she plots the intersections between a linear narrative discourse and a synthetic poetic discourse and by this means articulates a theory of poetic mimesis. Michael Vincent takes an interdisciplinary approach when he reexamines the 1668 *Fables* in light of François Chauveau's illustrations. For him, the first edition reconstitutes the emblem within a new system of relations between word and image, one that not only challenges the traditional notion of the "book" but also reconfigures modes of reading and writing throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The final two essays of both this section and the volume look at how La Fontaine's work changed and was changed by following generations. Nicholas Cronk examines the poet's influence on eighteenth-century writers. For him, what is of particular interest is Voltaire's approach to the problem of imitation and innovation, and he demonstrates, through a study of *Le Dimanche, ou les filles de Minée,* that Voltaire, unlike many of his contemporaries, follows his model dynamically so as to reinvent the genre of the *conte.* Ralph Albanese, Jr. investigates how the Republican School used La Fontaine in their educational program to establish a standard of Frenchness. What emerges from his sociological study is a sense of the ways in which the school system transformed, packaged, and controlled the fabulist's image.

In the inaugural volume of *EMF*, David Rubin comments upon the journal's scholarly purpose: "to provoke, and provide a forum for dialogue — even dialectic — across period boundaries, critical frameworks, and fields of inquiry" (ix). The essays in this present collection

aim to fulfill that purpose, and by doing so follow the example of a scholar whose own work embodies a pluralistic and critical approach. As former students, as colleagues, and as friends, we wish to honor David with these essays, for while we have come to differ among ourselves in our theoretical presuppositions, each one of us would agree the encounter with his keen and passionate mind has been a transforming experience. We would like to express our gratitude for the way our critical thinking has been shaped by his *esprit critique*.