

‘Le Véritable Champ du Sublime’? The Ode in France in the Seventeenth Century

The question of the sublime in literature was, in its consequences, the most important single topic of literary theory to be debated in France in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. It is impossible now to consider the controversies that surrounded the adoption of this term into the French critical vocabulary without an awareness of its subsequent role in the permanent transformation of European sensibility. In the course of the eighteenth century the concept of the sublime was developed by Du Bos and Diderot, Burke and Kant, in ways that expand it almost beyond recognition from its modest beginnings in the *Peri Hypsous*, where it is used exclusively in a literary context. The evolving critical theory on the sublime has been extensively studied, together with its increasingly important role in cultural history and aesthetics.¹ Relatively little attention, though, has been devoted to one of the most important aspects of the subject for those actively engaged in the seventeenth-century debate: that is, the interrelationship between the critical theory and contemporary literary production in France, particularly in poetry.

Longinus's treatise is full of illustrations and analysis, but it is also intended to give specific help to an aspiring writer; the author not only provides copious examples, but also offers much detailed advice as to how the effects are to be achieved. However this aspect of the work is almost entirely lost in the seventeenth-century debate, which is basically descriptive rather than prescriptive. This was inevitable, since for most of the critics the sublime ultimately is decided according to subjective criteria: it is something that is *felt*, and thus by its very nature it almost defies analysis. Boileau, as usual, puts it most memorably, in the Préface to his translation of Longinus, where he distinguishes the true sublime from the 'stile sublime'. The 'stile sublime' is the pompous and self-consciously noble; but the true sublime has 'cet extraordinaire et ce merveilleux qui frappe dans le discours, et qui fait qu'un ouvrage enleve, ravit, transporte'.² Boileau returned to this theme nearly forty years later in the tenth of his *Réflexions critiques sur quelques passages du rhéteur*

Longin, which dates from 1713: 'le Sublime n'est pas proprement une chose qui se prouve et qui se demonstre; mais ... c'est un Merveilleux qui saisit, qui frappe, et qui se fait sentir'.³ Thus the particular fascination of the debate on the sublime can be understood as in some respects a continuation of two perennial seventeenth-century preoccupations: the relationship between genius and the rules, and the analysis of the features in literature from which the greatest pleasure is to be gained, but which ultimately elude exact definition – the famous *je ne sais quoi*, that turns competence into genius.⁴ The near-impossibility of providing an objective definition of the sublime, though, makes it even more problematic to suggest how it is to be attained. The uncertainties are reflected in La Bruyère's question of 1689: 'Qu'est-ce que le sublime? Il ne paraît pas qu'on l'ait défini. Est-ce une figure? Naît-il des figures, ou du moins de quelques figures? Tout genre d'écrire reçoit-il le sublime, ou s'il n'y a que les grands sujets qui en soient capables? ... Qu'est-ce que le sublime? Où entre le sublime?'.⁵

The seventeenth-century critics found the sublime in a fairly wide range of literature: in the Bible, eloquence, epic, tragedy, and lyric poetry; but in their discussions there is a conspicuous absence of illustrative examples from French authors. As far as epic is concerned, the only comments made about French epic poets are purely negative ones: Scudéry's *Alaric* is too pompous, Saint-Amant's *Moïse sauvé* too trivial.⁶ Tragedy is the one case where modern examples of the sublime are given to complement the copious references to the Greeks, and even these appear relatively late in the day. It was in the 1701 edition of the Préface to his *Traité du sublime* that Boileau quoted le Vieil Horace's 'Qu'il mourût!' from Corneille's *Horace* (III. 6. 1021); and in the tenth *Réflexion critique* on Longinus (1713) he added the line from *Médée*: 'Contre tant d'ennemis que vous reste-t-il? – Moi' (I. 5. 320), both of which are repeated *ad nauseam* in all further discussions for the next fifty years.⁷ To these two examples from Corneille, Boileau then added two from Racine: in the eleventh *Réflexion* he defended the 'Récit de Thérémène' in *Phèdre* (V. 6) as truly sublime, and in the twelfth he cited Joad's 'Je crains Dieu, cher Abner, et n'ai point d'autre crainte' from *Athalie* (I. 1. 64).⁸

In many ways, though, the most interesting aspect of the debate is that which has to do with lyric poetry: how do the critics, and especially the poets, think that the sublime can be achieved in modern terms? There is inevitably a certain variation of opinion about this. The Jesuit Dominique Bouhours finds the sublime in 'des pensées délicates et agréables', and so debates in *La Manière de bien penser* (1687) whether there might not be a category of sublime appropriate to every form of poetry, even the light genres such as sonnets and madrigals.⁹ The possibility was not taken up by other critics; quite the contrary, in fact, for almost from the outset the means of achieving the sublime in lyric poetry was seen in a quite specific way. It is achieved in the ode; the great exemplar is Pindar; and the secret of his success is the 'beau désordre'.

From the time of the first publication of a collection of odes in French, the *Quatre Premiers Livres des Odes de Pierre de Ronsard, Vandomois* of 1550, the genre had always been regarded as one of the noblest of the lyric forms,¹⁰ and it is generally placed immediately after the epic in the hierarchy of poetic expression.¹¹ The tendency to define it as the sublime genre *par excellence* is found from the start of the critical debate. When writing his *Réflexions sur la poétique*, the most authoritative of the critical works, René Rapin asked the advice of the disgraced *grand seigneur* Bussy-Rabutin, who was cultivating his reputation as an infallible judge of style while in exile on his Burgundian estates. In a letter of 22 September 1672, Rapin posed a series of questions concerned with the relationship between genius and the rules, and the final two of these questions link the sublime and the ode as illustrations of the failure of modern French poetry:

En quatrième lieu, quelle idée vous avez du genre sublime, et de cet air de majesté qui est essentiel à la belle poésie, où les petits génies ne peuvent atteindre que par de vains efforts qui vont dans le galimathias? Car tous nos poètes tombent dans ce défaut, pour être destituez de cette noblesse d'expression qui est nécessaire à la poésie. En cinquième lieu, quelle idée vous avez de l'ode françoise, où personne ne réussit? Malherbe même, qui a commencé d'en donner l'idée, me paroît foible par un air trop compassé; l'ode veut de l'emportement.¹²

It is clear that the role of the ode was a focus of the intensive debate on the sublime that took place in the élite literary circle presided over by the Premier Président de Lamoignon, to which both Rapin and Boileau belonged. The discussions bore fruit in the works which both men published in 1674, Rapin's *Réflexions* and Boileau's *L'Art poétique*, which in many ways complement each other; and also, most importantly, Boileau's rather free translation of Longinus, his *Traité du sublime*. In Rapin's *Réflexions* he particularly singles out the ode for its 'noblesse', 'élévation', and 'emportement'; everything about it must be 'grand', 'hardi', 'éclatant'. Rapin praises the genius of Pindar in the most enthusiastic terms, in spite of Pindar's 'égarements perpétuels': 'c'est l'imagination la plus dérégulée du monde. Mais ce dérèglement est une partie du caractère de l'ode qui doit avoir de l'emportement par la qualité de son génie.'¹³ We find here the principle of a necessary disorder in the ode if it is to succeed at the highest level, and the attempt to assimilate this to a kind of 'règle' of the irregular, which is given its most famous expression in *L'Art poétique*:

L'Ode avec plus d'éclat, et non moins d'énergie
 Elevant jusqu'au Ciel son vol ambitieux,
 Entretient dans ses vers commerce avec les Dieux ...
 Son stile impétueux souvent marche au hasard:
 Chez elle un beau désordre est un effet de l'art.¹⁴

The idea of the 'beau désordre' became inseparable from the sublime in lyric poetry. It is usually interpreted as representing sudden changes of subject-

matter and the lack of a logical sequence of ideas (as in Pindar); and also at times an exclamatory style, with the *grandes figures* of exclamation, imprecation, apostrophe, and interrogation,¹⁵ and even a lack of formal grammatical correctness in order to convey transports of enthusiasm. Such an apparently non-rational (and hence non-progressive) view of poetry was anathema to the 'Modernes'. Fontenelle mocked the very idea of the sublime, and Charles Perrault in particular heaped ridicule on Pindar's incoherence, in his *Poème sur le Siècle de Louis le Grand* (1687) and his *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes* (1688–97), in which he printed a deliberately absurd translation of a carefully-chosen extract from Pindar to brilliant – and of course wholly unfair – effect.¹⁶

It was in response to these attacks on the sublime that Boileau produced his *Discours sur l'Ode* in 1693, and his own essay in Pindaric enthusiasm, the notorious *Poème sur la prise de Namur*. In the *Discours* he defends Pindar, and especially praises the passages of apparent incoherence as cunningly-planned rational exercises:

Ces endroits merveilleux, où le Poète, pour marquer un esprit entièrement hors de soy, rompt quelquefois de dessein formé la suite de son discours; et afin de mieux entrer dans la raison sort, s'il faut ainsi parler, de la raison même; évitant avec grand soin cet ordre méthodique et ces exactes liaisons de sens qui osteroient l'âme à la Poésie.¹⁷

He later quotes his own *Art poétique* couplet on the 'beau désordre' and adds: 'Ce précepte effectivement qui donne pour règle de ne point garder quelquefois les règles, est un mystère de l'Art'.

Boileau's ode was supposed to provide a concrete example of these principles. In spite of its very mixed success, even at the time, its effect was immense. In writing his poem and its prefaces, Boileau had defined, for both sides, the field of the debate about the sublime in poetry, and had rehabilitated the heroic ode as a major – indeed effectively *the* major – form of serious poetry. Later writers accepted this with surprising unanimity, so that by the early eighteenth century the sublime in French poetry came to be identified almost exclusively with the ode, which was given an extraordinary new lease of life. Equally, the stanza form chosen by Boileau is seen as the natural and almost inevitable form for the genre. This was the isometric heptasyllabic or octosyllabic *dizain* – a form relatively little-used for the ode in the sixteenth century, but exploited to outstanding effect by Malherbe, and overwhelmingly predominant in the odes of his followers and subsequent poets in the seventeenth century.¹⁸

The evidence for the identification of the sublime in lyric poetry with the ode is so universal by the beginning of the new century that there is an *embarras de choix* in selecting examples, even when there is the most radical disagreement about what the sublime actually is. As Jean-Baptiste Rousseau wrote, in the preface to his *Œuvres diverses* of 1712, the ode was

‘le véritable champ du sublime’.¹⁹ When the outspoken champion of the ‘Modernes’, Houdar de La Motte, published his *Odes* in 1707²⁰ he prefaced his poems with a ‘Discours sur la Poësie en général, et sur l’Ode en particulier’ (xv–lxxx), and specifically announced at the start that the proper aim of the heroic ode should always be the sublime:

J’esposeraï ... mes conjectures sur l’Ode, et sur les beautés qui lui conviennent. J’examinerai cet Entouziastme, ce beau désordre qu’on exige sur tout dans l’Ode héroïque, et même le Sublime qui en doit être toûjours l’objet. (xv)

His section devoted to the sublime (xlv–li) opens with the straightforward statement ‘On voit assez par tous ces usages, que l’Ode tend particulièrement au Sublime’ (xlv), even though his conception of it is incomparably more limited and pedestrian than the transporting shafts of genius evoked by partisans of the ‘Anciens’ like Boileau and André Dacier.²¹ La Motte’s collection is equally significant as regards the form of the ode. It is divided into four sections, the first of odes *à la moderne*, and the subsequent three devoted to imitations or evocations of, respectively, Anacreon, Pindar, and Horace. No fewer than thirteen of the fourteen odes in the first section consist of octosyllabic *dizains*, as does the prefatory ‘Ode à Messieurs de l’Académie françoise’, the sole exception being a distinctly unheroic poem entitled ‘Les poetes ampoulés’, in *sizains* (pp. 68–72); while the *dizain* is not used at all for any of the imitations of ancient models. The publication of La Motte’s work reaffirmed the ode as the dominant genre of serious poetry in the last three decades of Louis XIV’s reign – ‘Et le Parnasse est d’odes inondé’, as the witty Jesuit Jean-Antoine Du Cerceau wryly commented in 1715.²²

In other words, over a period of two or three decades, a large number of the most talented poets are cultivating the ode in *dizains* as the vehicle for their most serious and elevated poetry. And yet one has to say that from the point of view of posterity the results scarcely live up to expectations. This is not to deny the genuine pleasure to be gained from much of this work, particularly perhaps J.-B. Rousseau’s religious odes. Nevertheless, from the accepted criterion of the sublime formulated by Boileau in his tenth *Réflexion* – that its presence must be felt, overwhelmingly and universally, through all the centuries after the poet’s own time – the odes of this period are unquestionably disappointing. A figure such as J.-B. Rousseau, despite the scandal that overwhelmed him and the extraordinary circumstances of his life, was regarded by his admirers as one of the greatest poets that France had ever produced;²³ but this reputation has not been sustained, and for the past two hundred years his works have on the whole been approached in a spirit of historical curiosity rather than aesthetic enthusiasm.

Why should this be? The answer lies in the relationship between poetic form and poetic expression. When one examines the development of the heroic ode in the course of the seventeenth century, one finds that the

structure of the *dizain* has actually evolved, almost unnoticed, but with far-reaching consequences. The greatest French model for the ode is always seen as being Malherbe, yet by the end of the century the expectations and assumptions about the form of the *dizain* are significantly different from the stanza-form found in Malherbe's own work.

The crucial point is the number of principal breaks (*coupes*) in the rhythm of the *dizain*, and their placing in the stanza. It was always usual to have a marked syntactical break after the fourth line, similar to the break after the quatrains of a sonnet; but apart from that Malherbe's patterns in his ten-line stanzas are very diverse. Around 1614, however, his talented young disciple François Maynard proposed that there should also be another fixed major *coupe*, after the seventh line, giving a regular and invariable pattern of 4 + 3 + 3. Malherbe accepted this but Racan, his other most gifted disciple, objected strongly, as he tells in his *Mémoires pour la vie de Malherbe*, and a considerable dispute ensued:

Mais quand M. de Malherbe et Maynard voulurent qu'aux stances de dix, outre l'arrêt du quatrième vers, on en fit encore un au septième, Racan s'y opposa, et ne l'a jamais presque observé. Sa raison étoit que les stances de dix ne se chantent presque jamais, et que quand elles se chanteroient on ne les chanteroit pas en trois reprises; c'est pourquoi il suffisoit d'en faire une au quatrième. Voilà la plus grande contestation qu'il a eue contre M. de Malherbe et ses écoliers, et pourquoi on a été prêt de le déclarer hérétique en poésie.²⁴

This might seem an extremely minor point to take so seriously, but in fact it is not, as the poets concerned realised. René Fromilhague, in his exhaustive study of Malherbe's poetic forms, declares that it is a 'grave divergence: car, au delà du problème particulier, c'est la conception malherbienne de la poésie qui se trouve elle-même mise en cause';²⁵ and he goes on to claim that the new uniform structure of the *dizain* represents the definitive 'subordination de l'inspiration à la technique' – a phrase which often comes to mind as one observes the earnest endeavours of poets at the end of the century to achieve sublime effects through this very stanza-form. The new pattern was not adopted straight away: Racan never followed it systematically, and even Maynard only did so after about 1630. Most revealing of all, in spite of so wholeheartedly accepting this requirement, Malherbe himself never wrote any odes in the new form. None of his earlier great odes in *dizains* follow the 4 + 3 + 3 structure regularly, and after 1614 we have only isolated stanzas and uncompleted fragments. Fromilhague concludes convincingly that it was precisely this new rule that Malherbe found impossible to satisfy to his own exacting standards, and he thus abandoned the form altogether – a suggestive indication of its inbuilt weakness.

It was not until about 1635 that the new and more rigorous demands for the structure of the *dizain* began to become generally accepted; they were never rigorously followed, for example, by Théophile de Viau (1590–

1626) in his large output of octosyllabic *dizains*. The mid-1630s was a period of intense interest in the possibility of improving the quality of literary works through the prescriptive control of form. The principal focus of this critical activity was of course drama. The year 1635 saw the production of what is accepted as the first tragedy in French to follow all the new rules and unequivocally keep to the three unities, Mairet's *La Sophonisbe*; while the first critical task assigned to the new Académie Française (also founded in 1635) was to measure how far Corneille's *Le Cid*, the most successful play ever to have been written in the language, could have been improved by a more conscientious adherence to these same rules.²⁶ In the case of lyric poetry there was no similar public controversy, and the change in expectations for the ode was never spelled out specifically. However the same principles were at work as in drama, in the overwhelming privileging of formal correctness over undisciplined inspiration as a means of achieving the finest results. This can be seen, for example, in the correspondence of Jean Chapelain, the most influential critic of the age, who composed his letters in the full consciousness of his magisterial role. In a letter to Guez de Balzac of 5 June 1639 he contrived to dismiss the early poetry of both the idiosyncratic Jesuit Pierre Le Moyne and the uneducated carpenter Adam Billaut in what, for Chapelain, was intended as a single damning phrase: 'Mais les beaux vers se font par antousiasme aussi bien que par estude'.²⁷ Instead of being relatively little followed, Maynard's rules for the *dizain* came increasingly to be accepted as the 'correct' form, and their acceptance became definitive after the publication of Maynard's collected *Œuvres* in 1646.²⁸

The effects of this significant evolution in poetic practice can be seen by comparing odes written before the mid-1630s with those of a decade or so later; one can follow how individual poets adapted their technique to meet the new requirements. A good example is provided by Georges de Scudéry, who published collections of recent work containing odes in *dizains* in 1637 (*Autres Œuvres*) and 1649 (*Poesies diverses*), and a long *Ode sur le retour de Monseigneur le Prince* in 1660.²⁹ The one such poem in the earliest collection, 'Apollon au Roy',³⁰ does not follow the 4 + 3 + 3 pattern systematically, and three of the fifteen octosyllabic stanzas have no possibility of a pause, however slight, after the seventh line; a typical example, in this case with a 4 + 2 + 2 + 2 structure, reads:

Je sçay que ton Esprit modeste,
 Au delà de tous les Esprits,
 Est fâché de se voir surpris,
 D'une louange manifeste:
 Et puis ta gloire esclatte assez,
 Dans ces Tableaux que j'ay tracez:
 Le temps n'en peut faire sa proye
 Sans devenir trop criminel;

Et plus heureux qu'aux Murs de Troye,
Je t'ay fait un Temple eternal.

In contrast the *Poesies diverses* of 1649 contains a section of seven odes in isometric *dizains*, all heptasyllabic, amounting to a total of 129 stanzas (pp. 105–73); and of these, all except five stanzas show a strongly-marked break after the seventh line. These five stanzas are all in the two earliest of the odes in *dizains*, the 'Ode à Madame la Comtesse d'Harcourt' (1639–40) and 'Les Muses. Ode à Monsieur l'Abbé de Richelieu' (1643); the other five odes, written later, are completely regular.³¹ The *Ode sur le retour de Monseigneur le Prince* of 1660 consists of 54 octosyllabic stanzas, all of which show some kind of pause after the seventh line; and it is interesting to note that in the three stanzas where this pause is weakest the printer has marked the end of the seventh line with a syntactically inappropriate colon or semi-colon to harmonise the punctuation of the stanza with all the others:

La voicy, Grand Roy, cette Reyne,
Si digne de ton digne choix,
De qui la beauté Souveraine,
Sçait regner mesme sur les Rois.
Bien que Roy, Conquerant, et Brave,
Fais gloire d'estre son Esclave,
Et malgré tes Throsnes offers:
Estime, quoy que tu luy donnes,
Ses Chaisnes plus que tes Couronnes,
Et tes Sceptres moins que ses Fers.³²

Most strikingly of all, the importance of the new regularity in stanza-structure is clearly evident in the revisions that poets made to their earlier works. There are two poets who undertook revisions to heroic odes in *dizains* over precisely this period, and their alterations exactly reflect the change in prosodic conventions. These poets are Pierre Le Moyne, whom Chapelain had so revealingly dismissed, and Guillaume Colletet. Le Moyne extensively revised his eleven early heroic odes, *Les Triomphes de Louis le Juste* and *La France guerrie*, between their first publication in 1629–31 and their reprinting in his collected *Poésies* in 1650;³³ Colletet wrote a *Chant de victoire sur la réduction de La Rochelle* in 1628, revised it for Boisrobert's compilation *Le Parnasse royal* of 1635, and revised it once more for its publication in Colletet's *Poésies diverses* of 1656.³⁴ With Le Moyne the change is startling. His early odes form one of the longest sustained sequences of isometric *dizains* of the period.³⁵ In their first version of 1629–31 they contained in all 240 stanzas, of which only 97, or under two-fifths, have a syntactical break after the seventh line; whereas by the time that they appear in the *Poésies* of 1650 they have been revised so extensively that every single stanza, without exception, now shows the required break. In Colletet's case the revisions are not quite so ruthless, but the principle is still clear. There are twenty-three

stanzas in his poem, and of these only thirteen have the break after the seventh line in 1628; while in 1635 nineteen do, and in 1656 the number has risen to twenty.

The revisions have clearly been made explicitly to introduce the break after the seventh line. Thus stanza 10 of Colletet's *Chant de victoire* reads in its first version of 1628:

O que puissant fut le Genie
 Qui sollicita nos guerriers
 D'aller conquérir des Lauriers
 En chastiant ceste manie!
 O qu'extreme fut la valeur
 Qui nous garantit du mal heur
 Dont ceste flotte vagabonde
 Nous menaçoit de tous costez!
 Enfin nous voyons hors du monde
 Ceux qui n'en estoient qu'escartez. (8)

By 1635 the sestet has been changed to read:

O qu'extrême fut la valeur
 Qui nous garantit du mal-heur
 De ceste flotte vagabonde!
 Jetons les yeux de tous costez,
 Enfin nous verrons hors du monde
 Ceux qui n'en estoient qu'escartez. (*Le Parnasse royal*, p. 46)³⁶

Colletet's revised version may conform to the new principles of prosodic correctness, but in the process it has lost much of its vigor.

In Le Moyne's case, his extensive reworking of his early verse effects a considerable improvement on the mediocrity of the originals. In the course of this, his unvarying imposition of a uniform stanza-structure can often serve as a salutary corrective to the undisciplined prolixity of his first enthusiasm. One can understand the attraction of the more rigorous form in the changes made to a description of the destruction of the English fleet in the fifth ode; in its two versions, the sestet of the *dizain* reads:

(1629)	(1650)
Certe aussi jamais les mortels	Certe aussi jamais les Mortels,
N'immolèrent sur les autels	Ne bruslerent sur les Autels,
De victime si renommée	De victime plus renommée:
Que son prix eust rien de pareil	Et le musc avec l'ambre uni,
Aux parfums dont cétte fumée	Fait une moins douce fumée,
Flattoit les Cieux et le Soleil.	Que celle de l'orgueil puni. ³⁷

The tighter form provides a guarantee against the prosodic slackness and incoherence of the first version. At the same time, though, there is a genuine loss to the poem as a whole in the complete abandonment of any variation in the stanza-structure: not only are the rhythms of each succeeding stanza

entirely predictable, but the temptation is almost irresistible to pad out the two three-line sections of the sestet with redundant verbiage. Thus Le Moyne rewrites a sestet describing conventional images of universal rejoicing, reducing them from three to two:

(1629)	(1650)
Le Dieu de Seine sous les eaux	Le Dieu de Seine sur ses eaux,
Se pare le frond de roseaux,	Tiré dans un char de roseaux,
Le Ciel pour accroistre ces festes	L'accompagne de place en place:
Prolonge les heures du jour,	Et l'Hyver, superbe et pompeux,
Et l'Hyver au lieu de tempestes	Au lieu de neiges, et de glace,
N'éclatte qu'en flames d'amour.	Est couronné de nouveaux feux. ³⁸

Even at the relatively undistinguished level of *Les Triomphes* Le Moyne's revisions, like Colletet's, illustrate both the initial attraction and the potentially serious disadvantages of an unchanging stanza-structure in a lengthy sequence of *dizains*, as they were to be abundantly illustrated over the next century.

The poets' practice is matched by the works of poetic theory. The structure of the *dizain* is not mentioned by writers in the first half of the century, but in the second half the textbooks of French prosody are unanimous in insisting on the break after the seventh line, which is accepted without question. Richelet's *La Versification françoise* (1671) takes it as an invariable principle, opening a lengthy discussion of the structure of the *dizain* with the statement: 'Il faut aussi que chaque Stance de dix ait deux repos; l'un au quatrième Vers, et l'autre au septième'.³⁹ Phérotée de La Croix says the same in *L'Art de la poésie françoise* (first published 1675, with a greatly expanded second edition in 1694): 'En chaque Stance il faut considerer deux repos, l'un au quatrième Vers, et l'autre au septième';⁴⁰ as also does Michel Mourgues in his *Traité de la poésie françoise*.⁴¹ In the eighteenth century the regular stanza-structure is taken for granted. Houdar de La Motte insisted on the meticulous observance of 'certains repos mesurés qu'on doit ménager exactement dans chaque Strophe',⁴² and the prescription is repeated by all subsequent writers on the subject.

This rigorous structural requirement subtly changes the character of the whole poem. The breaks after the fourth and seventh lines do indeed give a fine, balanced structure to individual stanzas, but cumulatively the effect is deadening. Instead of flexibility and variety we have stanza after stanza with an identical rhythmic pattern, which imposes its own constraints on the syntax and the sense, and seriously undermines any attempt by the poet to bring variety to his work, let alone convey the Pindaric exaltation. The unvarying division of the *dizain* into a quatrain and two tercets inevitably produces a pattern of repetitive syntactical structures in the last six lines, with the eighth line opening with 'Et' or 'Mais' with monotonous predictability. This is dramatically shown in the poems of Scudéry that we have considered. In the earliest,

when the break after the seventh line is not systematically enforced, only three of the fifteen stanzas of 'Apollon au Roy' have an eighth line beginning with 'Et'.⁴³ In the odes of the *Poesies diverses* (1649), nearly half of all stanzas have an eighth line beginning in this way (57 out of 129 stanzas in all); the longest poem, 'Les Muses. Ode à Monsieur l'Abbé de Richelieu', shows this in 36 of its 80 stanzas, including six stanzas in a row at one point (pp. 146–8). Finally in the *Ode sur le retour de Monseigneur le Prince* of 1660 the opening six *dizains* all follow this same pattern, of lines 8–10 repeating the structure of lines 5–7 with a linking 'Et', and in all it is found in no fewer than 31 out of the 54 stanzas. The effect of such an unvarying pattern in the stanza-structure is exacerbated by the fact that the overwhelming majority of the most ambitious odes are written in isometric stanzas of short heptasyllabic or octosyllabic lines, leaving minimal scope for variation within the lines.

The level of prosodic conformity is the most remarkable single feature of the thousands of heroic *dizains* written in the second half of the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth. Even skilled and sensitive poets, fully capable of subtleties and variations of pattern in their alexandrine couplets and heterometric *stances*, seem inhibited by the grandeur and nobility of the enterprise as they strive for the sublime in their heroic odes. This is not to say, of course, that no poet ever attempted anything different. Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, in particular, is enterprising and successful in incorporating rhythmic variations into the pattern of his *dizains*, and it is revealing that he was known to his contemporaries as 'le Pindare français'; yet even he rarely goes so far as to neglect altogether the pause after the fourth and seventh lines.

The changed conventions of the *dizain* are a crucial feature for the appreciation of the most talked-about single ode of the period, Boileau's *Ode sur la prise de Namur* of 1693, which was written, as he declares in the introductory 'Discours sur l'Ode', deliberately to recreate Pindar's effects in modern terms:

J'ay crû que je ne pouvois mieux justifier ce grand Poëte, qu'en tâchant de faire une Ode en François à sa maniere, c'est-à-dire, pleine de mouvemens et de transports, où l'esprit parust plutôt entraîné du Demon de la Poësie, que guidé par la raison. C'est le but que je me suis proposé dans l'Ode qu'on va voir.⁴⁴

Boileau later expresses his uncertainty over whether the public will be able to cope with what it is about to read: 'et je ne sçay si le Public accoustumé aux sages emportemens de Malherbe, s'accommodera de ces saillies et de ces excès Pindariques' (228). In reality, though, the work's effect has been exactly the opposite, and the poem's baffled readers have looked in vain for any trace of frenzied Pindaric incoherence amid the carefully calculated juxtapositions of register and the self-consciously exaggerated imagery. Nevertheless, though Boileau may have been ill at ease with the *furor poeticus* he was an instinctively skilful poetic craftsman, and a clue to his own sense of the *beau désordre* in his poem may be gained by considering its stanza-

structure. Two of its seventeen *dizains* are irregular in terms of contemporary prescriptions. The tenth stanza ignores the expected break after the seventh line; and the rhythm of the verse, running on when one expects a pause, effectively reinforces the evocation of explosive shells being projected high into the air before falling on to the town:

Mes présages s'accomplissent:
 Il commence à chanceler.
 Sous les coups qui retentissent
 Ses murs s'en vont s'écrouler.
 Mars en feu qui les domine
 Soufle à grand bruit leur ruine,
 Et les bombes dans les airs
 Allant chercher le tonnerre,
 Semblent, tombant sur la Terre,
 Vouloir s'ouvrir les Enfers. (232)

More irregular still is the final stanza of the poem, when Boileau, with the words 'plus hardi que vous', sails past the end of the opening quatrain, before similarly eliding the end of the seventh line in a phrase that praises his own subtle poetic skill:

Pour moy, que Phebus anime
 De ses transports les plus doux,
 Rempli de ce Dieu sublime,
 Je vais, plus hardi que vous,
 Montrer que sur le Parnasse,
 Des bois fréquentés d'Horace
 Ma Muse dans son declin
 Sçait encor les avenuës,
 Et des sources inconnuës
 A l'Auteur du Saint Paulin. (234)

Boileau's subtlety was indeed wasted on 'l'Auteur du Saint Paulin', Charles Perrault, his opponent in the controversy over Pindar and in the wider 'Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes'. Perrault published a letter in which he triumphantly pointed out the irregularity of this final stanza – the interesting point being that the principle of the double break in the *dizain* was now so deeply rooted that any exception was clearly felt necessarily to be a defect, a lapse by the poet.⁴⁵ Even when deliberate, as Boileau's stanzas clearly are, such exceptions are not numerous. To a modern reader they give a strange sense of timid boldness, as what for the poet is a moment of extreme daring, of *hardiesse*, in breaking the rules, is in fact merely doing what was normal, and stylistically neutral, for his admired models in the early decades of the century.

For an especially remarkable feature of the evolution of this stanza-form is that, when the poets and critics of the later seventeenth and early eighteenth

centuries refer to the masters of the ode in French, the poets whom they cite are invariably Malherbe and Racan – that is to say, precisely the two who never systematically follow the regular 4 + 3 + 3 pattern. Of the two poets, indeed, it is frequently Racan, who was most vehement in his opposition to the rigid stanza-structure, who is admired the most; and yet no critic ever drew what with hindsight is the obvious conclusion about the connection between his anti-dogmatic theoretical principles and the quality of his own verse. Breugière de Barante wrote in 1698:

Le genre de Poësie auquel le Marquis de Racan a le mieux réüissi sont les Odes; et encore à present, il n’y a gueres que Malherbe qui puisse lui en disputer le prix. Les Critiques ont même remarqué que M. de Racan avoit plus d’élévation que Malherbe, quoiqu’ils accordassent que ce dernier avoit plus d’érudition.⁴⁶

In view of the changes in poetic practice it is ironic to see the two earlier poets still held up as models, as when Rapin wrote in his *Réflexions sur la poétique*:

Malherbe et Racan ont eu un génie merveilleux pour l’ode: Malherbe a plus de pureté dans son air: et Racan plus d’élévation, les ouvrages de l’un et de l’autre sont encore aujourd’huy des modèles.⁴⁷

The sense of *élévation* in Racan’s verse came largely from his absolute hostility to the imposed conformity of stanza-structure; and far from his serving as a model, the more restrictive conventions meant that, however much they admired and sought to emulate his success, later poets were doomed inevitably to fail. When analysing the poetry of Malherbe and Racan, critics do not remark on the irregularity of the stanzas; on the contrary, they quote with admiration *dizains* which, had they been written by a contemporary, would have provoked comments about either their boldness or their incorrectness. Thus in Urbain Chevreau’s commentary on Malherbe, written in the mid-seventeenth century, he can write of the fifth stanza from the great ode ‘Au Roy Henri le Grand, sur l’heureux succès du voyage de Sedan’, with no further discussion:

Voicy une Stance admirable:
 Tel qu’à vagues éperduës,
 Marche un fleuve imperieux
 De qui les neiges fonduës
 Rendent le cours glorieux:
 Rien n’est seur en son rivage,
 Ce qu’il trouve il le ravage,
 Et traînant comme buissons
 Les chesnes, et leurs racines,
 Oste aux campagnes voisines,
 L’esperance des moissons.⁴⁸

The stanza is indeed admirable, but its quality derives in good part from the

powerful effect of the enjambement between the seventh and eighth lines. Ménage too, in his *Observations*, first published in 1666, calls the verses of this ode ‘extrêmement harmonieux’ and has nothing but praise for the fifth stanza, but with no comment on its form.⁴⁹ After giving a short history of the ode in France he concludes:

J’ajoute à toutes ces choses, que Malherbe après Ronsard, et Mr de Racan après Malherbe, se sont enfin élevez, en ce genre de Poësie, à un si haut degré de perfection, que non seulement ils ont laissé au dessous d’eux tous leurs prédécesseurs, mais qu’ils ont oté à leurs successeurs l’espérance de les égaler, ou du moins de les surpasser.⁵⁰

Ménage’s comment is a shrewd one when considering the effect of Malherbe and Racan’s works. In moments of prosodic *hardiesse*, the temptation was almost inevitable to shelter behind a famous model when venturing an irregular stanza. Thus the undistinguished minor poet François Boutard (1664–1729) directly copies the metrical effect achieved by Malherbe in the stanza quoted above, in an attempt similarly to convey the sense of rushing water. When describing the artificial waterfall at the Château de Marly he launches into a somewhat implausible (and, for the inhabitants, worrying) comparison with the Nile in flood:

De ses gazons dépoüllée
 La Colline offre son dos,
 Et sur la roche taillée
 Reçoit l’écume des flots.
 Dans cette route prescrite
 La Seine se precipite:
 Tel le Nil majestueux
 Sur les prochaines campagnes
 Roule du haut des montagnes
 Ses torrens impetueux.⁵¹

It was an unarguable fact that, out of the immense volume of odes in *dizains* produced in the century following Malherbe and Racan, none surpass and few even approach their great predecessors; yet the contribution made to this decline by the more tightly-regulated expectations of the stanza form after the 1640s, and the increasing prestige of prosodic textbooks in governing poetic practice, eluded even the most sensitive of critical commentators.

The critic who came nearest to an awareness of this possibility was the independently-minded Rémond de Saint-Mard, who in the 1720s attempted to analyse the failure of the ode over the previous fifty years to achieve its sublime potential. In his *Réflexions sur l’Ode* (1729) he did comment on the fact that modern odes consisted of a sequence of near-identical stanzas. Currently, he wrote, ‘l’Ode n’a plus qu’une certaine harmonie qui lui vient de l’arrangement des rimes, de l’égalité des Stances, et de certains Repos qu’on

a ménagés dans chaque Stance'. For the *beau désordre* of ideas in the poem, his proposed models are Pindar, Horace, and Malherbe (and he also has some praise for Boileau and Rousseau); but for prosody and style, he considered that the imitation of Malherbe's theoretical principles – including, that is to say, his late approval of the rigorous rules concerning stanza-structure – had led to 'sécheresse et froideur'. What is more he went on explicitly to praise Racan, whose neglect as a model had led poetry astray. 'Racan se piqua moins de correction, eut du génie, en eut à ce qu'on prétend, plus que Malherbe'; but it was Malherbe's attitude to poetry that was adopted: 'Ne seroit-ce point que nous devenons de jour en jour plus froids et plus puristes?'⁵²

So far as can be seen, with the partial exception of the relatively late Rémond de Saint-Mard, no contemporaries noticed the greater flexibility of the *dizain* as a possible contributory factor to Malherbe and Racan's success and their own mediocrity. However, what one does find frequently being voiced is an unspecific dissatisfaction with the constraints of prosodic rules. From about 1660 onwards a number of poets began to write substantial poems in *vers irréguliers*, with an irregular pattern of lines of widely differing lengths; at first such poems were always written in couplets, but soon varied rhyme-patterns came also to be used to accompany the varied line-lengths. The intention of such experiments was initially to convey a sense of greater informality in verse, and the tone aimed at was that of the verse letter. The formal stanza structures were still regarded as essential to the most serious poetry; but poems in the new form came increasingly to engage with more serious subjects. It is a striking fact that the one non-dramatic poet of the second half of the century who eclipses all others in the subtlety of his verse, La Fontaine, wrote by predilection in *vers irréguliers* with flexible rhyme-patterns, where there were no critical rules or readers' expectations to inhibit him; and having created his idiosyncratic form of the verse-fable, he maintained the conversational tone of the semi-serious paraliterary *divertissement* while developing his *Fables* into the vehicle for some of the most profound and moving poetry of the last decades of the century.

There was, however, one poet at the end of the century who showed what might be achieved through the lyric potential of the isometric *dizain*. This was Racine, La Fontaine's only equal in evocative metrical fluidity, two of whose four *Cantiques spirituels* of 1694 are in heptasyllabic *dizains*. It comes as no surprise to find that Racine did not systematically follow the prescribed 4 + 3 + 3 pattern in his stanzas. The first poem in this form is 'Cantique II: Sur le bonheur des Justes, et sur le malheur des Réprouvés', and the first stanza spreads across the seventh and eighth lines the image of the soul taking flight for Heaven. Where the reader anticipates a pause exactly the opposite occurs, with 'prenant l'essor / S'élève d'un vol rapide':

Heureux qui de la sagesse
 Attendant tout son secours,
 N'a point mis en la richesse
 L'espoir de ses derniers jours!
 La mort n'a rien qui l'étonne;
 Et dès que son Dieu l'ordonne,
 Son âme prenant l'essor
 S'élève d'un vol rapide
 Vers la demeure où réside
 Son véritable trésor.⁵³

The second of Racine's poems in this form is 'Cantique IV: Sur les vaines occupations des Gens du siècle'. The concluding stanza derives a quite different, but equally dramatic, effect from continuing the movement of the verse beyond the expected pause at the end of the seventh line, with a brilliant complement to the sense of 'courons follement / Chercher':

L'âme heureusement captive
 Sous ton joug trouve la paix,
 Et s'abreuve d'une eau vive
 Qui ne s'épuise jamais.
 Chacun peut boire en cette onde:
 Elle invite tout le monde;
 Mais nous courons follement
 Chercher des sources bourbeuses
 Ou des citernes trompeuses
 D'où l'eau fuit à tout moment.⁵⁴

As Racine's 'Cantiques' show, the potential of the isometric *dizain* as a poetic form remained as rich in the closing years of the seventeenth century as it had for Malherbe and Racan; but the fact that he chose to exploit it in the relatively unpretentious genre of paraphrastic scriptural meditation meant that his example was overlooked by poets whose sights were set on the heights of the sublime.

This, then, is the paradox of French lyric poetry in the second half of the seventeenth century. The noblest of all its forms was accepted as being the heroic ode, the true vehicle for the sublime in lyric verse with its grandeur and *éclat*, its *beau désordre* and its *enthousiasme*; and yet through the very attempt to achieve the most effective stanza-structure this form had become so disciplined, predictable and repetitive as practically to preclude any such emotions being conveyed. One should not make exaggerated claims for the change in the formal structure of the *dizain* alone, since there are no doubt other confluent contributions to the relative failure of the genre, most particularly the increasingly derivative conventions of poetic language and imagery. It is not simply one point of prosody that is at issue, but a whole attitude to poetry, of which, in the case of the ode, this is the principal symptom rather than the cause. Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630–1721), whose poetic

instincts belonged to an earlier generation altogether, wrote in one of the short late pieces collected as *Huetiana* that the summit of lyric poetry was ‘[les] Odes du genre le plus sublime’; but he summed up what he felt to be the cause of the decline of the genre when he added that at present, in France, ‘A peine peut-on s’élever à la sublimité de l’Ode, et soutenir sa longueur ... Ceux qui n’ont point le sentiment de la belle poésie, en ont renfermé toutes les règles dans celles de la versification’.⁵⁵ As the sublime grew in importance as a concept, so the failure to achieve it through lyric verse became all the more conspicuous. It is very tempting to see in this failure one contributory factor to the relative marginalisation of poetic expression of all kinds that is so striking a phenomenon of the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

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Notes

- 1 On the early development of the concept in France see particularly Théodore A. Litman, *Le Sublime en France (1660–1714)* (Paris, 1971), and Jules Brody, *Boileau and Longinus* (Geneva, 1958). There is a great deal of invaluable information on the role of the sublime in eloquence in the preceding period, and the idea of the ‘grand style’, throughout Marc Fumaroli, *L’Age de l’éloquence: rhétorique et ‘res literaria’ de la Renaissance au seuil de l’époque classique* (Geneva, 1980). The complexity of later applications of the term, and critical responses to them, is well illustrated in the highly diverse essays collected in Jean-Luc Nancy (ed.), *Du sublime* (Paris, 1988). The very extensive literature on the aesthetics of the sublime in the eighteenth century and later is for the most part not relevant here. On the sublime in Britain, including the influence of the seventeenth-century French literary debates, Theodore E. B. Wood, *The Word ‘Sublime’ and its Context, 1650–1760* (The Hague and Paris, 1972) sets out to complement and update the classic study of Samuel H. Monk, *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in Eighteenth-century England* (New York, 1935); while Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla (eds), *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-century Aesthetic Theory* (Cambridge, 1996) presents a wide selection of texts from 1701 to 1798.
- 2 *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Françoise Escal (Paris, 1966), p. 338.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 546.
- 4 In the early success of Dominique Bouhours, *Les Entretiens d’Ariste et d’Eugène* (Paris, Sebastien Mabre-Cramoisy, 1671), a whole ‘Entretien’ is devoted to the *je ne sais quoi* (Entretien V), at the end of which the two interlocutors agree that they do not know what it is.
- 5 *Les Caractères*, ‘Des ouvrages de l’esprit’, no. 55; in La Bruyère, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Julien Benda (Paris, 1951), p. 85. The work was first published in 1688, but this passage was added in the fourth edition of 1689. It must be said that La Bruyère’s own ensuing definition of the sublime is as unhelpful as anyone else’s: ‘Le sublime ne peint que la vérité, mais en un sujet noble; il la peint tout entière,

- dans sa cause et dans son effet; il est l'expression ou l'image la plus digne de cette vérité' (p. 86).
- 6 On *Alaric*, see for example the second of Boileau's *Réflexions critiques* (*Œuvres complètes*, p. 497); on *Moïse sauvé*, see the sixth and the tenth (pp. 517, 554).
 - 7 *Œuvres complètes*, pp. 340, 549.
 - 8 *Ibid.*, pp. 560, 563. In the early editions of Bernard Lamy's *La Rhétorique ou l'art de parler*, first published in 1675, there are no French examples in the chapter 'Règles pour le style sublime' (Book IV, Chapter 9); however in the last edition of 1741, published twenty-six years after Lamy's death (1640–1715), two examples have been added, both written by Racine in the 1690s: the lines from *Athalie*, and a heptasyllabic *dizain* from the fourth of his *Cantiques spirituels* of 1694. See Lamy, *La Rhétorique ou l'art de parler*, ed. Benoît Timmermans (Paris, 1998), pp. 380–6 (p. 386).
 - 9 *La Manière de bien penser dans les ouvrages d'esprit* (Paris, veuve de S. Mabre-Cramoisy, 1687). On the development of Bouhours's thought see Litman, *Le Sublime en France*, Chapter 4: 'Influence du *Traité du Sublime* sur le Père Bouhours: la synthèse du sublime et de la poésie délicate', pp. 105–20.
 - 10 For an overview of the genre during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries see Dieter Janik, *Geschichte der Ode und der 'Stances' von Ronsard bis Boileau* (Bad Homburg, Berlin, Zurich, 1968); on 'Die Blütezeit der Odendichtung (1550–1560)', pp. 25–72. Although valuable as a general survey, this work does not consider the prosodic evolution of stanza-forms in the seventeenth century. The same is true of Carol Maddison, *Apollo and the Nine: A History of the Ode* (London, 1960), Chapter 5, 'The French ode', pp. 193–285; this concludes after Malherbe, with a brief mention of Racan and Maynard, seeing the French ode as having been defined by then and not evolving any more.
 - 11 In Jean-François Sarasin's mock-epic *Dulot vaincu, ou la défaite des bouts-rimez*, first published in 1656, odes are even given precedence over tragedy. In the muster-roll of literary genres that concludes the 'Chant second', the order of precedence is: Poëme Epique, Ode, Stances, Poëme Tragique, Poëme Comique, Chœurs, Chanson, Elegie amoureuse, Satire, Madrigaux, Impromptus, Sonnet, Epigramme (Sarasin, *Œuvres* (Paris, Augustin Courbé, 1656), pp. 137–56).
 - 12 Bussy-Rabutin, *Correspondance avec le Père René Rapin*, ed. C. Rouben (Paris, 1983), p. 74
 - 13 René Rapin, S.J., *Les Réflexions sur la poétique de ce temps et sur les ouvrages des poètes anciens et modernes*, ed. E. T. Dubois (Geneva, 1970), pp. 128–9. This is the text of the 'Seconde édition, revue et augmentée' (Paris, F. Muguet, 1675). The first version of the work was published the previous year with a slightly different title: *Réflexions sur la Poétique d'Aristote et sur les ouvrages des Poètes anciens et modernes* (Paris, F. Muguet, 1674). The introduction and notes to Dubois's edition contain a great deal of valuable information about the background to Rapin's work.
 - 14 Boileau, *L'Art poétique*, Chant II; *Œuvres complètes*, p. 164.
 - 15 See P. France, *Racine's Rhetoric* (Oxford, 1965), p. 27.
 - 16 See Litman, *Le Sublime en France*, Chapters 8 (Perrault) and 9 (Fontenelle), pp. 141–72.
 - 17 *Œuvres complètes*, p. 227.
 - 18 See François Rouget, *L'Apothéose d'Orphée: l'esthétique de l'ode en France au*

16e siècle, de Sébillot à Scaliger (1548–1561) (Geneva, 1994). On the technical composition of the large number of odes written in this period, Appendix 2, pp. 353–5 establishes that by far the most commonly used stanza-forms are the *quatrain*, *sizain*, and *huitain*, with the *dizain* being chosen much less frequently. This is confirmed in exhaustive detail in Appendix 3, pp. 356–85, analysing the forms of the odes of all the poets of this period: the *dizain*, particularly the isometric *dizain*, is a relatively uncommon form at this time. On the great popularity of the isometric *dizain* after 1620 see Renée Winegarten, *French Lyric Poetry in the Age of Malherbe* (Manchester, 1954), pp. 108–9. Janik, *Geschichte der Ode*, notes the predominance of ten-line stanzas in seventeenth-century odes and the great new impetus given to this form by Boileau (p. 228); his unelaborated comment on the disadvantage of this form, ‘Die Wahl der zehnzeiligen Odenstrophe stand einer wirklichen Erneuerung der französischen Ode im Geiste Pindars, wie dies Boileau vorschwebte, als unüberwindbares Hindernis im Wege’ (p. 228), is true of its nature at the end of the century, but not as used by Malherbe, as this article will show.

- 19 *Ceuvres diverses du Sieur R*** (Soleure, 1712), p. xxviii.
- 20 *Odes de Mr. De La Motte, avec un Discours Sur la Poësie en général, et sur l’Ode en particulier* (Amsterdam, Louis Renard, 1707).
- 21 Dacier developed the idea of the nobility of the ode, the sublime, and the necessary ‘beau désordre’, in the Préface to the first volume of his edition and translation of Horace, *Ceuvres en latin et en françois*, first published in 1681; it had reached a third edition by 1709 (Paris, J.-B.-C. Ballard). In complete contrast, La Motte believed that the sublime depended on ‘élégance et précision’ (pp. xlvi, li).
- 22 ‘Apologie de l’auteur, Sur ce qu’il s’amuse quelquefois à faire des Vers, et à en faire dans le style de Marot’, in *Recueil de poésies diverses. Troisième édition* (Paris, Jacques Estienne, 1726), p. 102; the first edition was published in 1715 (Amsterdam, Pierre Humbert).
- 23 Jean-Baptiste Rousseau (1671–1741) was prosecuted for writing scandalously blasphemous, obscene and libellous satirical verses (which he vehemently denied), and in 1712 was banished from France for life. Many of the details of these scandals, which lasted for some years, remain obscure, not helped by Rousseau’s own apparently unstable and at times disreputable behaviour. He had powerful admirers and protectors, and lived out his life principally in Switzerland, Vienna, and Brussels. His reputation was based essentially on his religious poetry. A typical eighteenth-century judgement, by an ecclesiastical admirer, on his stature as the greatest of all lyric poets is found in the abbé Ladvoat’s *Dictionnaire historique-portatif*, 2 vols (Paris, Didot, 1755), II, 450: ‘Rousseau est regardé, avec raison, comme le plus excellent de nos Poètes Lyriques. Les grandes verités sont exprimées dans ses Odes avec une force, une noblesse, et une énergie qui ne se trouvent dans aucun autre de nos Poètes’. On Rousseau see Henry A. Grubbs, *Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, his Life and Works* (Princeton, 1941). On French poetry of the early eighteenth century in general, Robert Finch, *The Sixth Sense: Individualism in French Poetry, 1686–1760* (Toronto, 1966); Robert Finch and Eugène Joliat (eds), *French Individualist Poetry, 1686–1760: An Anthology* (Toronto, 1971); and notably Sylvain Menant, *La Chute d’Icare: la crise de la poésie française, 1700–1750* (Geneva and Paris, 1981), especially Chapter 6, ‘Les grands genres’, pp. 273–350.

- 24 François de Malherbe, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. L. Lalanne, 5 vols (Paris, 1862–9), I, lxxxiv–lxxxv.
- 25 René Fromilhague, *Malherbe, technique et création poétique* (Paris, 1954), p. 437. On the whole dispute and the practice of the three poets see pp. 415–41 (Malherbe, pp. 415–27; Maynard, pp. 427–35; Racan, pp. 436–9). The prosodic techniques of a very large number of seventeenth-century poets are considered from what purports to be a Malherbian perspective in Claude K. Abraham, *Enfin Malherbe: the Influence of Malherbe on French Lyric Prosody, 1605–1674* (Lexington, 1971), including comments on their handling of the *dizain*.
- 26 *Le Cid* was first performed in 1637; *Les Sentiments de l'Académie Française sur la tragédie du Cid* were published in 1638.
- 27 *Lettres de Jean Chapelain*, ed. Tamizey de Larroque, 2 vols (Paris, 1880–83), I, 428. Chapelain was pouring cold water on Balzac's enthusiastic appreciation of Le Moyne's *La Sagesse divine* (Paris, S. Cramoisy, 1639), a genuinely extraordinary work of exceptional poetic force. Adam Billaut – commonly referred to as 'Maître Adam', or 'le menuisier de Nevers' – exploited the incongruity of his situation as carpenter-poet in a way reminiscent of his older English contemporary, John Taylor the water-poet. His poems were first collected as *Les Chevilles de Maître Adam menuisier de Nevers* (Paris, Toussaint Quinet, 1644); a later collection, published immediately after his death, was entitled *Le Vilebrequin de Me Adam, menuisier de Nevers* (Paris, Guillaume de Luyne, 1663).
- 28 *Les Œuvres de Maynard* (Paris, Augustin Courbé, 1646).
- 29 *Autres Œuvres de Monsieur de Scudéry* (Paris, Augustin Courbé, 1637); *Poesies diverses* (Paris, Augustin Courbé, 1649); *Ode sur le retour de Monseigneur le Prince* (Paris, Augustin Courbé, 1660).
- 30 pp. 17–25. This ode forms the conclusion to a longer work, 'Le Temple', pp. 1–25.
- 31 These irregular stanzas are found on p. 110 ('Ode à Madame la Comtesse d'Harcourt'), and pp. 116, 119, 120, 134 ('Les Muses. Ode à Monsieur l'Abbé de Richelieu').
- 32 Stanza 46, p. 24; cf. stanza 26, p. 14 and stanza 51, p. 26.
- 33 The ode 'Au roy sur les prosperités de son regne et le bon succes de ses armes en la reduction de la Rochelle' (pp. 1–12) and the eight odes under the general title 'Les Triomphes de Louys le Juste ...' (pp. 13–100) were first published in *Les Triomphes de Louys le Juste en la reduction des Rochelois et des autres rebelles de son royaume* (Reims, Nicolas Constant, 1629); two further odes followed, entitled *La France guerrie. Odes adressées au Roy. Sur sa maladie, sa guerison miraculeuse, ses dernieres conquestes, et ses vertus heroïques*, published in a separate folio edition (Paris, S. Cramoisy, 1631), but also included, with a 1631 title-page, in the 1630 second edition of *Les Triomphes: Les Triomphes de Louis le Juste. Nouvelle edition reveüe et augmentée de plusieurs pieces* (Reims, N. Constant, 1630), 24^o. The odes were reprinted, extensively revised as described, in *Les Poesies du P. Pierre Le Moine, de la Compagnie de Jesus* (Paris, Augustin Courbé, 1650), the odes from *Les Triomphes* under the new title of 'L'Hydre defaite' (pp. 47–126). Another lengthy heroic ode in the first collection, 'Ode sur la conservation de l'Isle de Ré' (pp. 101–12) was also in octosyllabic *dizains*, but was not reprinted in the *Poesies*.
- 34 *Chant de victoire sur la reduction de La Rochelle, en l'obeissance du Roy* (Paris,

- Mathurin Henault, 1628): the ode is on pp. 3–14, with sonnets on pp. 2, 15, 16; reprinted in Boisrobert’s anthology *Le Parnasse royal, où les immortelles actions du tres-chrestien et tres-victorieux monarque Louis XIII, sont publiées par les plus celebres esprits de ce temps* (Paris, Sebastien Cramoisy, 1635), pp. 43–50; and included in the *Poesies diverses de Monsieur Colletet. Contenant des sujets heroïques. Des passions amoureuses. Et d’autres matieres burlesques et enjouées* (Paris, Louis Chamhoudry, 1656), pp. 86–93.
- 35 The *Triumphes* have even been claimed as an epic, in an unconvincing stretching of terminology; see Klára Csűrös, *Variétés et vicissitudes du genre épique de Ronsard à Voltaire* (Paris, 1999), p. 404.
- 36 This stanza was then reprinted without change in the *Poesies diverses* in 1656, p. 89. Other stanzas were revised successively, such as stanza 2 (1628, p. 4; 1635, p. 43; 1656, pp. 86–7); while in stanza 11 the break after the seventh line was only introduced in 1656 (1628, p. 8; 1635, p. 46; 1656, p. 89).
- 37 *Les Triumphes* (1629), p. 67; *Poesies*, p. 99.
- 38 *Les Triumphes* (1629), p. 48; *Poesies*, p. 82.
- 39 P. Richelet, *La Versification françoise, ou l’art de bien faire et de bien tourner les vers* (Paris, Estienne Loyson, 1671), pp. 262–3.
- 40 *L’Art de la poésie françoise et latine, avec une idée de la musique sous une nouvelle Methode* (Lyon, Thomas Amaulry, 1694), p. 153.
- 41 *Traité de la poésie françoise, seconde édition augmentée* (Toulouse, veuve J.-J. Boude, 1697), p. 228. Mourgues does also allow for a second kind of *dizain*, ‘la moins usitée’, consisting of two quatrains and a couplet; but this is extremely rare in the heroic ode; as he writes, ‘les mieux coupez consistent en un Quatrain, et deux Tercets’.
- 42 *Discours sur la Poésie en général, et sur l’Ode en particulier*, in *Odes* (Amsterdam, Louis Renard, 1707), p. xxxii.
- 43 *Autres Œuvres* (1637), pp. 17–25.
- 44 *Œuvres complètes*, p. 228.
- 45 ‘Lettre de M. P*** où l’Ode de M. D*** est comparée avec l’Ode que M. Chapelain fit autrefois pour le Cardinal de Richelieu’, in F. Granet, *Recueil de pièces d’histoire et de littérature*, 4 vols (Paris, 1731–38), IV, 196.
- 46 Breugière de Barante, *Recueil des plus belles epigrammes des poètes françois, depuis Marot jusqu’à present. Avec des Notes historiques et critiques, et un Traité de la vraye et de la fausse Beauté dans les ouvrages d’esprit; Traduit du latin de Mrs de Port-Royal*, 2 vols (Paris, Nicolas Le Clerc, 1698), II, iv.
- 47 *Réflexions*, ed. Dubois, pp. 130–1.
- 48 *Les Œuvres de François de Malherbe, avec les observations de Mr. Ménage, et les remarques de Mr. Chevreau sur les poesies*, 3 vols (Paris, Antoine Urbain Coustelier, 1722), I, 296.
- 49 *Ibid.*, II, 73, 81–2. Ménage’s commentary was first published with his edition of Malherbe: *Poésies de M. de Malherbe, avec les observations de M. Ménage* (Paris, Thomas Jolli, 1666).
- 50 *Ibid.*, II, 79.
- 51 ‘Au Roy. Description de la Riviere de Marly. Ode.’ The poem was printed in Bouhours’s seminal anthology *Recueil de vers choisis*, first published in 1693; here quoted from the revised second edition: *Recueil de vers choisis. Nouvelle Edition* (Paris, Louis Josse, 1701), pp. 338–44 (pp. 339–40). Bouhours himself wrote in

- the 'Avertissement' to the anthology: 'Il faut respecter en quelque façon les hardiesses et mesme les fautes des Grands Maistres, s'ils sont capables d'en faire; mais il ne faut pas les imiter' (sig. [â6]v).
- 52 *Réflexions ... sur l'Ode* (1729), in *La Poétique prise dans ses sources*; Rémond de Saint-Mard, *Œuvres*, 1749, V, 36.
- 53 Jean Racine, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Raymond Picard, 2 vols (Paris, 1964–66), I, 997.
- 54 *Ibid.*, I, 1001. A different stanza from this 'Cantique' was added to Bernard Lamy's *La Rhétorique ou l'art de parler* in its 1741 edition, as the only French illustration of the sublime in lyric poetry: see above, note 8.
- 55 *Huetiana, ou pensées diverses de M. Huet, Evêque d'Avranches* (Paris, Jacques Estienne, 1722); section LXXIV: 'Les bons Juges de la poésie sont plus rares que les bons Poètes', pp. 174, 176–7. Such comments curiously anticipate René Fromilhague's phrase quoted above that the adoption of the uniform 4 + 3 + 3 structure of the *dizain* represented the definitive 'subordination de l'inspiration à la technique' (*Malherbe, technique et création poétique*, p. 437).

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