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Presented to W. D. Howarth

Edited by E. Freeman, H. Mason, M. O'Regan and S. W. Taylor

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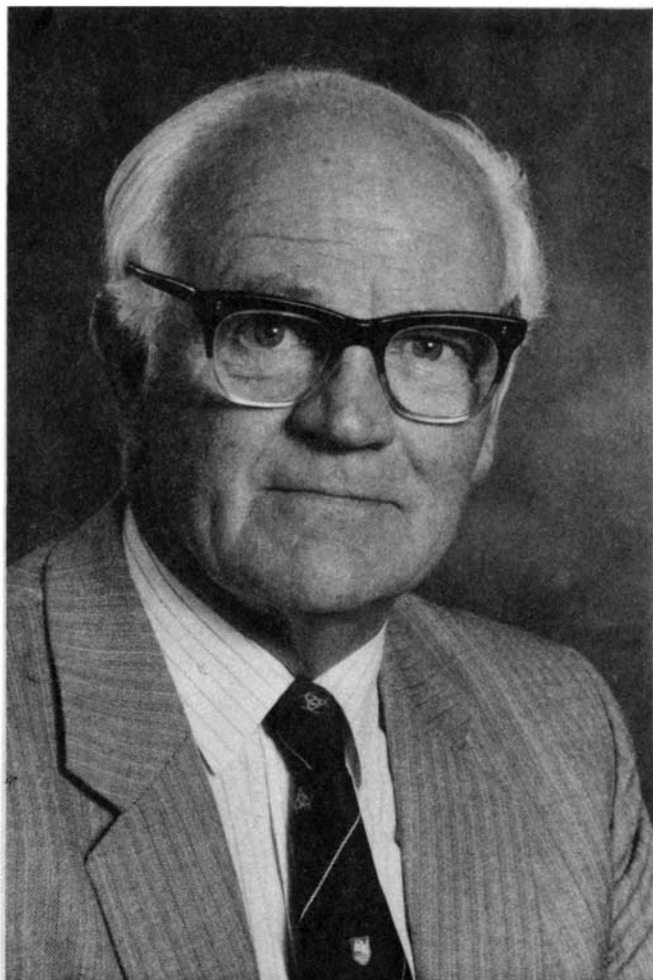
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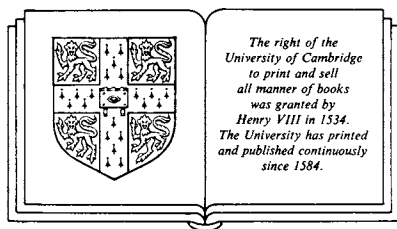
# MYTH AND ITS MAKING IN THE FRENCH THEATRE

Studies presented to W. D. Howarth

Edited by

E. FREEMAN, H. MASON

M. O'REGAN, S. W. TAYLOR



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## W. D. Howarth: an appreciation

William Driver Howarth is of south Yorkshire stock, born in 1922 and educated at Silcoates School. In 1941 he went up to Queen's College, Oxford, to read French and Latin; but, in the manner of the time, after one session his undergraduate studies were cut short by war service. In his case, this meant Bomber Command of the Royal Air Force, in which he saw active service as a navigator in the European theatre. He took up his interrupted studies in 1945, graduating in 1947 and being awarded the college's Laming Travelling Fellowship. This enabled him to spend the 1947–8 session in Paris, where, as well as researching into the eighteenth-century novel, he continued his strenuous activities on the rugby field, playing for the local SNCF team and thereby becoming one of the few future professors of French to achieve the status of honorary *cheminot*. His cricketing prowess had to await his return to England to find continued outlet for its practice.

In 1948 he was elected Fellow and Tutor of Jesus College, Oxford, and there began the career of the probing and enthusiastic teaching of all aspects of modern French language and literature; this was to win him the gratitude and respect – as well as the friendship – of students over the next four decades. Meantime he devoted himself to research in an equally wholehearted manner, turning his attention now principally to the seventeenth century and also the French theatre over the whole of the modern period. His unremitting activity in the research field is clearly documented in the bibliography that Robin Slaughter, with characteristic care, has compiled for this volume. In addition to his publications, there has been a string of higher degrees supervised by him, whose recipients all testify to the thoroughgoing attention he devoted to their work. He also found time to act as general editor, over a period of many years, of Oxford University Press's Clarendon French Series.

In 1966, on William Stewart's retirement, Bill Howarth moved to Bristol where he was appointed Professor of Classical French Literature. He lost no time in fitting into the very different environ-



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S. W. TAYLOR

ment, and it was immediately evident that Bristol French Département's tradition of friendliness and hospitality was in no danger of going into decline. It was unfortunate that this move coincided with the onset of widespread student unrest, but within a year of his arrival in Bristol he was in the thick of the action, having accepted the chairmanship of the Union Management Committee just in time to be faced with a student occupation of Senate House. The fact that the university recovered from this painful experience fairly quickly and with a minimum of bitterness was due to the sense and cool judgement of a handful of people, and among them Bill played a decisive role, becoming Chairman of the newly created Joint Committee of Council, Senate and the Union – one of a number of reforming initiatives in which he was active. His departmental commitment remained unflagging, and on Ronald Grimsley's retirement in 1981 he became Head of the Department of French.

His willingness to take on a range of administrative tasks that most people would find daunting is almost legendary – perhaps in the present context it might even be considered to have a mythic quality. To rehearse the list of his committees strikes awe into the heart of an ordinary mortal: 1969, Publications Committee (under his chairmanship, 1973–81, the University Printing Unit was set up and the first works published under its imprint); 1970, Library Committee; 1975, Member of Council; 1976, Member of Finance Committee; 1978, Dean of the Faculty of Arts; 1983, Pro-Vice-Chancellor. That is a selection only. What has to be stressed is that – as all his departmental colleagues will testify – none of all this was allowed to affect either his research or his teaching: he was often forced to rearrange teaching commitments but he never abandoned them or sought to lighten his load.

His commitment to the development of his subject in its wider context within the university was illustrated when, in the mid-seventies he played an important role in establishing the School of Modern Languages inside the Faculty of Arts; what had before been a disparate set of autonomous departments and semi-autonomous sub-departments achieved a kind of federal union status that has worked to the benefit of all. It was appropriate that he should have been chosen to be its first Chairman. It was also thanks to him that the Subsidiary Subject 'European Literature in Translation' was set up: only his energy and friendly contacts could have made liaison with so many different departments possible,

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### W. D. Howarth

and he continued to organize the course until he became Dean. Similarly, but in a wider field, he was moving spirit and founding father of the Society for Seventeenth-Century French Studies, a notably successful development of the last decade; he served as its Chairman from 1981 to 1984.

Department, university, scholarship: enough to fill a life, one might suppose, but there is more. Where most people regard their civic duties as fulfilled when they record their vote, Bill Howarth insists on playing an active part in politics, having even stood for election as Liberal councillor (seldom can a family have prayed so fervently for the defeat of a loved one's ambitions). Shortly after coming to Bristol he was co-opted on to the Committee of the Bristol-Bordeaux Association – the first and one of the most active of Anglo-French town-twinings, largely the brainchild of his predecessor as Head of the French Department, William Stewart; since 1976 he has been its Chairman, performing the duties with the enthusiasm and attention to detail that mark all he does, and presiding over its fortieth anniversary celebrations in 1987. Nor is his interest in the theatre just academic: since 1981 he has been Chairman of Bristol Opera Company, whose status is amateur but whose standards are professional; and in February 1987 he even emerged from an extended Thespian hibernation to play the part of Brid'oison in Beaumarchais's *Mariage de Figaro*.

Then there is the domestic man. There may be a score of student essays to be marked by Monday morning; the diary be full of meetings; a seminar or two to prepare; the proofs of an article to be read, and two or three dilatory contributors to the next volume to be chivvied. No matter, the cupboard in the spare bedroom will be completed by Sunday night, or the cottage in Wales reroofed. There are four children, and their families, dispersed over a fluctuating number of countries, to be kept in touch with. Barbara's life is no less animated than Bill's, yet not only does she unreservedly support him in his multifarious activities but they both give most generously of their time and concern to a wide circle of friends, among whom all the members, past and present, of the Bristol French Department are happy to be numbered.

S. W. T.

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In addition, Professor Howarth has contributed some 150 reviews to various scholarly journals from 1953 onwards.

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## Preface

'Le théâtre sera mythique ou il ne sera pas'

Antonin Artaud

'Tous les mythes sont vrais'

Pierre Albouy

The authors of the fifteen essays that make up this volume were invited to interpret 'Myth and its Making' in the widest possible sense. They were encouraged to re-examine not only the time-honoured ancient themes that have been exploited in the French theatre from the Renaissance to the twentieth century, but other literary, historical or legendary subjects that have undergone a similar process of mythic enhancement and stylization. Thus they have explored the ways in which existing literary myths – those of Thebes, Troy and the erotic universe of Don Juan – renewed themselves, as well as the processes involved in creating new myths for the age in which we live. No culture has proved more richly innovative in its mythopoeia than the French from the time of the Revolution onwards. Indeed, in 1969 Pierre Albouy went so far (and further than the present editors would want to go) as to limit his *Mythes et mythologies dans la littérature française* more or less exclusively to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

However fruitful Albouy's study may be, we have not wished to restrict our contributors to a historical time-limit; rather, we have sought to transcend the great divide 1789–1815. Thus while some of the questions raised in the essays are specific to an age, many too touch on aesthetic or strategic dilemmas encountered by Racine and Montherlant, Voltaire and Sartre. How can myth serve as camouflage, a political expedient to ensure performance in a hostile climate? Do supernatural endings pose insuperable problems for a dramatist in a rationalistic age – that of *Iphigénie* for Racine in the seventeenth century, of *Don Juan* for Montherlant in the twentieth? What is the function of the various types of irony, parody and seemingly anti-mythic deflation in Musset, Giraudoux, Anouilh, and, once again, Montherlant? Cannot *place* – Rome in

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## E. FREEMAN

the sixteenth century, Troy in the imagination of Andromaque, sundry *grottes* and *palais* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – attain a mythic status as significant as that of character? And is not the theatre itself, in its evolution from Aristotle to Artaud, as well as in its self-conscious, neo-baroque exploitation by Anouilh, the mythic place *par excellence*? What are the rhetorical devices and structures most suited to endowing a controversial political leader (who would have had the added disadvantage in the eyes of spectators of the 1840s of being small, ugly and black) with mythic grandeur? Toussaint Louverture's historical death was 'undramatic': how could it be replaced by a more heroic final curtain? Must myth in fact be grandiose? Is it not a delusion to look to myth for the meaning of life rather than for meanings? Is it not the case – as we see, appropriately, in the last essay in the volume – that myth can be everywhere in our daily life, polyvalent and all-pervasive?

These then are some of the subjects discussed in this collective examination of 'Myth and its Making in the French Theatre'. The questions raised are many, as are the types of play and mythic theme under scrutiny. It is by encouraging such an approach that the editors have sought to pay tribute to the eclectic critical taste, and unfailing personal curiosity and energy of the man who has been to so many a stimulating colleague and friend.

E. Freeman