

СТАТЬИ

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Power to the test of the passions: the ideal of absolute monarchy during the post French Wars of Religion (1610-1661)

Аннотация. Во Франции первой половины XVII в. (1610-1661 гг.) ненависть считалась главной причиной беспорядков, сотрясавших политическое тело во время Религиозных войн. Настоящая работа направлена на изучение рождения нового жанра: трактата о страстях, нацеленного на переосмысление королевской власти. Возникло рациональное понимание страстей, направленное на поиск политических средств для управления страстями в общественной сфере. С начала XVII в. рождаются настоящая политическая антропология и политическая наука. Появились новые концепции власти, в частности идея «разума, управляющего страстями», помогающего воздержаться от братоубийственных страстей в социальном теле. Восстановление сильной политической власти обосновывалось с помощью концепций «общественного договора», «божественного договора», узаконивающего абсолютную власть, «естественного закона», при этом конечной целью неизменно объявлялось «благо народа» и мирное общество. Монархическая власть стала мыслиться как рационально организованная система, которая способна умиротворять социальное тело. Стремление усмирить страсти как индивидуального, так и политического тела способствовало разработке и распространению богословско-политической мысли, благоприятной для укрепления абсолютной монархии. Абсолютная монархия мыслилась как умеренная монархия, которая разумом короля контролирует пагубные страсти.

Ключевые слова: абсолютная монархия, королевская власть, насилие, первая половина XVII в., политическая наука, политические трактаты, Религиозные войны во Франции, страсти

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Abstract. In the early seventeenth century France (1610-1661), hatred was held to be the primary cause of the disturbances that had shaken the political body during the French Wars of Religion. This paper seeks to study the birth of a new genre: the treatise on the passions rethinking the royal power. Rational understandings of the passions began to emerge, in order to find political means to control passions in the public sphere. From

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the beginning of the seventeenth century, a real political anthropology and a political science are born. New concepts of power appeared, particularly the ideas of a «reason ruling the passions» in order to refrain fratricidal passions in the social body. Many proposals have been thought to restore a strong political power: a «social contract», a «divine contract» legitimating an absolute power, a «natural law», but the final aim, every time, is the «welfare of the people» and a peaceful society. Monarchical power began to be thought as a rational organized system that brings the ability to pacify social body. The desire to pacify the passions of the individual body as well as those of the political body contributed to the elaboration and diffusion of theologico-political thought favorable to the strengthening of Absolute monarchy. An Absolute monarchy has been defined and thought as a moderate monarchy that controls evil passions due to the right Reason of the king.

Key words: an absolute monarchy, the early seventeenth century, the French Wars of Religion, passions, a political science, political treatises, the royal power, a violence

The consequences of the civil wars in the collective memory in the seventeenth century and the post-war context have not been highlighted by Historians, with only a few exceptions. Reinhart Koselleck has demonstrated the importance of the remember of the civil wars in the setting up of the « political structure of the absolutism¹. » Hélène Merlin was also interested in political and moral consequences of wars on collective memory². In last, Robert Descimon and José Ibañez underlined how the history of the League has been censured because of her role against the royal power during the wars of religion. However, the issue to know how reform the political power and leave civil wars has been the key questions at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

In the early seventeenth century France (1610-1661), hatred was held to be the primary cause of the disturbances that had shaken the body politic during the French Wars of Religion. Beyond political treatises on the passions, scientific treatises on physiognomy – that propose an unraveling of these passions, observable on the surface of the body – treatises on civility, mystical treatises and devout novels were all focused on the art of mastering human emotions, from the individual microcosm to the social and curial macrocosms. Perhaps no philosophical epoch has been more preoccupied with the workings of the passions than the early-modern period, and, given the resurgence of interest in the emotions in recent moral philosophy. This paper seeks to understand the enthusiasm aroused by the birth of a new genre: the treatise on the passions to rethink the royal power. The theories they elaborated offered an anthropological vision of the individual and an alternative vision of the relationship of royal power to its subjects. The reason of the king ought to impose itself on the passions of its subjects. In England, all of the English translations of treatises on the passions were undertaken during the English Civil Wars (1640-1660). Rational understandings of the passions began

¹ Koselleck R. *Le Règne de la critique*. Paris: Minuit, 1979.

² Merlin H. *Public et littérature en France au XVII^e siècle*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1994. P. 35-100.

to emerge, driven by a desire to domesticate the dire effects of this odious passion, in order to find political means to control passions in the public sphere.

The power began to be thought as a rational organized system that could bring a peaceful society. All fields of human activity were concerned by this translation of an anthropological and moral model of a reason governing hateful passions into the terms of political and religious thought. The desire to pacify the passions of the individual body as well as those of the body politic contributed to the elaboration and diffusion of theologico-political thought favorable to the strengthening of Absolute monarchy. An Absolute monarchy defined and thought as a moderate monarchy that controls evil passions due to the right Reason of the king.

The will to understand the origins of violence made the passions a privileged key for understanding the metamorphosis of political power in the seventeenth century.

This research takes as its starting point the traumatic context of the post French wars of religion and the fear regarding the return of wars. Hence, in a second time, the will to think otherwise the political power in order to put an end to the civil wars.

I. The political legacy of the wars of religion

1. Political treatises of passions

Immediately following the French Wars of Religion, the passions – hatred in particular – were identified as the source of the tragic disruption of the world, the cause of fratricidal conflicts and wars; thus, they became a privileged object of study in this context. The context shows that contemporaries were interested in the study of the passions and their impact on the individual body as well as on the body politic, as we shall see. Notably, the birth of a new literary genre in 1614, the treatise of the passions, sought to decipher, instrumentalise and control them³. The Bishop of Belley, Jean-Pierre Camus, published the first treatise on the passions in his *Diversitez* in 1614. The same year, the Jesuit François Loryot published his *Secrets moraux concernant les passions du cœur humain*⁴. Two years later, the magistrate Eustache du Refuge proposed an analysis of the passions in his *Traicté de la court*, written for an audience of courtiers.

In 1620, the Bishop of Marseille, Nicolas Coëffeteau, published a treatise of the passions which was translated into English in 1621 under the following title: *A Table of Humane Passions*⁵. Its great success explains that it went through 26 editions in France between 1620 and 1659. This political science of the passions constituted the focus of theorizing in the treatises on passions, increasingly voluminous, in the image of *Tableau des passions humaines*, dedicated to the king Louis XIII in 1620.

³ Rodier Y. La raison de l'odieux. Essai sur l'histoire d'une passion: la haine dans la France du premier XVIIe siècle (1610-1659). PhD under the Pr. Denis Crouzet's supervision. Université Paris IV, 2012.

⁴ Loryot F. Les Secretz moraux concernants les passions du cœur humain. Paris: Cottureau, 1614. BnF D-8597.

⁵ Coëffeteau N. Tableau des Passions humaines, de leurs causes et de leurs effets. Paris: S. Cramoisy, 1625. BnF R-31928.

In 1640, two treatises were published: that of the Jesuit Pierre Le Moyne entitled *Les Peintures morales* and that of the Oratorian Jean-François Senault entitled *De l'Usage des passions*. This last political work, republished fourteen times, was dedicated first to Richelieu then to Mazarin⁶. The author congratulated the cardinal-ministers, in the preface, for having contained civil hatreds and exercised their reason against the passions of the people. Then he went on to explain how governments should use the passions to domesticate them.

Finally, the treatise of Marin Cureau de la Chambre, councilor and ordinary doctor of the King, a man of influence at the Court who was close to Louis XIV⁷. This treatise was republished fourteen times and translated into English under the title *The Characters of the passions*. It is dedicated first to the cardinal Mazarin then to the king Louis XIV. Treatises on the passions highlighted the danger of the passions not controlled by reason.

2. The danger of violence of passions

All these authors experienced civil wars when they were young. Senault and Emeric Crucé were the members of the Catholic league's sons and they lived in exile. The Pierre Le Moyne's grandfather was killed during the war and his family fled violence of the civil war. They are straddling both centuries: the end of the XVIth century, that of religious wars and the beginning of the XVIIth century during which the royal power was seeking the peace. These "intermediate men," witnesses of the fratricidal wars provoked by the barrage of religious passions, sought their banishment by theorizing a political science and a new art of governing (*ars gubernandi*), based on rational domestication of the passions. Especially as two kings were murdered: Henry III in 1589 and Henry IV in 1610. It was necessary to strengthen the monarchy against popular passions. One of the causes identified by moralists to understand the origin of violence is the defamatory writings which contributed to constitute a powerful hateful emotional community against the royal power. Libels are considered by moralists, for instance, as a means of making hateful the other and as a tool of violence. The historian Luc Racaut perceives the corrosive content of the hatred on display in the libels of the wars of Religion⁸.

These treatises survey and show how passions were incorporated into political approaches in the course of the seventeenth century. They examine the place of the passions and its consequences in individual and social body. Moralists take an inventory of eleven human passions divided into two categories: *irascible* and *concupiscible*. This classification is that of the moral philosophy of Thomas Aquinas but the analysis of their corporal functioning is based on scientific and modern works of that time. Actually, all these authors stressed the curiously ambiguous character of the passions. On the one hand, they have a clear functionality, one consistent with their being part of our divinely bestowed nature: they conduce to our survival and basic

⁶ Senault J.-F. *De l'Usage des passions*. Paris: Vve J. Camusat, 1641, in-4°. BnF R-6176.

⁷ Cureau de la Chambre M. *Les Caractères des Passions. Où il est traité de la Nature & des effets de la Haine et de la douleur*. Amsterdam: A. Michel, 1640-1662. Vol. III-IV. BnF R-40251.

⁸ Racaut L. *Hatred in print: Catholic propaganda and Protestant Identity during the French Wars of Religion*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002.

comfort. But on the other hand, they are a sign of our fallen nature, “perturbations” (to use the Ciceronian term) which constantly threaten to disrupt the governance of reason and plunge us into folly and self-destruction. This observation explains why many moralists were interested in studying passions and in seeking a solution to contain dire effects of passions.

3. Fear regarding the return of the civil wars

The first point stressed by the moralists is the responsibility of uncontrolled passions in the phenomenon of violence, studied through the model of civil wars. All the treatises of the passions’ authors used a historical event or a myth to explain tragic impacts of the passions. In the Pierre Le Moyne’s treatise, he personifies hate in the guise of Hannibal regarded as the most bloody man of war at the time of the Punic wars. The horrific and very bloody description of Hannibal’s wars, in baroque style, is also illustrated by an engraving to make see the tragic consequences of Hate.



Image 1. «Representation de la Hayne» in: Le Moyne, Pierre. *Les Peintures morales ou les passions humaines*. 1640. Vol. I. P. 62. Graved by Grégoire Huret. BnF M-6274.

He appears victorious among corpses and buried villages⁹; in the background the bridge is made with corpses and a chapel is made from skulls¹⁰. He describes this «Theater of horror/ where Hate gave her arm to Rage»¹¹. He used also the biblical myth of fratricide with Esaü and Jacob to denounce civil wars. Senault

⁹ Le Moyne P. *Les triomphes de Louys le Juste en la reduction des Rochelois et des autres rebelles de son royaume dedies a sa Maiesté*. Reims: N. Constant, 1629. P. 62.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* P. 57.

¹¹ *Ibid.* P. 74.

used the Greek myth of Etéocle and Polynice: «it is a truth among Christians where there are brothers, whose hate is eternal, who keep their hate by losing their life and give it as an inheritance to their heirs»¹².

Traumatic memory about wars of religion is widely present in the Senault's work. The author of *The use of passions* (1640) is the Pierre Senault's son, one of the most influent members of the Catholic League. His father was famous for his intolerance¹³. Senault explains how war is an internal war which is bestowed in each human being because its passions rebel against reason. In his anthropological and moral treatise, he explains the changeover from an internal conflict inside the body to an external conflict on the social body by means of an outside and general civil war. He surveyed the origin of violence and wrote a myth to explain that phenomenon. Men used first the defensive war to protect themselves then having learned to kill animals, he killed men and became a parricide: «When he saw [rebellious man] the death of one man had attracted hatred of all those who belonged to him, he looked for followers and partners, and he entered all those who were its friends into his conflict»¹⁴. He criticizes the trend of historians to praise bloody conquests of princes. As theologian he expounds actually the metamorphosis of those criminal men, blinded by hate, who become murderers and fratricides: «Civil wars stifle natural feelings, those who fight in a same state have nothing of man but the face; they cease to know and to love each other as soon as they begin to take sides»¹⁵. Taking sides for someone has the consequence of dividing families and states. In his dedication, he stresses himself means of cure human passions by showing «how passions are raised them, how they rebel against reason, how they seduce the understanding and what sleights they use to enslave the will... When I have known the malady, teach me the remedy that I may cure it»¹⁶.

Most of these *intermediate men* were seeking to banish the return of the wars of religion by reforming individuals and society due to the domestication of the passions. Only a metamorphosis of the royal power allowed to keep away the dire effects of the passions, hence the justification of a strong political power.

II. The political reason of the king: absolutism of the passions

The methods that moralists proposed against passions in early seventeenth century France (1610-1659) centered on the inescapable issue of exiting the French Wars of Religion. They try to propose anthropological

¹² «Cette feinte des Poëtes est une vérité parmi les Chrestiens, où il se trouve des freres dont la hayne est immortelle qui conservent leur animosité en perdant la vie, qui la laissent en heritage à leurs successeurs».

¹³ Descimon R. et Ibanez J.J.R. Les Ligueurs de l'exil. Le refuge catholique français après 1594. Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2005. P. 272. Regarding the role of Pierre Senault in the government of Sixteen cf. Descimon R. Qui étaient les Seize? Mythes et réalités de la Ligue parisienne: 1585-1594. Paris: Klincksieck, 1983. P. 218-220.

¹⁴ Senault J.-F. L'Homme criminel, ou la Corruption de la nature par le péché, selon les sentimens de S. Augustin. Paris: Jean Camusat, 1644. 5^e traité. 4^e discours. P. 602: «Quand il vit [l'homme rebelle] que la mort d'un homme luy avait attiré la hayne de tous ceux qui luy appartenoient, il chercha des partisans & des complices, & il engagea dans sa querelle tous ceux qu'il avoit engagez dans son amitié».

¹⁵ Ibid. P. 605: «ils n'ont rien de l'homme que le visage, ils cessent de se connoistre et de s'aymer dès lors qu'ils commencent à prendre party».

¹⁶ Ibid. P. 3.

models of passions at the root of a grand ambition to reform the individual body as well as the social and political body. The emergence of a new political thought – or political science – of state finds its inspiration, in part, in this conception of a sovereign reason capable of governing hateful passions.

1. The metamorphoses of monarchy : the king of reason against the passions

Four years after the Saint-Bartholemew's Day Massacre, the philosopher and jurist Jean Bodin had already described in *Six books of the Commonwealth* (1576), the political principles necessary to bring peace against human passions which will be those of state in the classical age and absolute monarchy. God designed the world as a rational mechanics where the sun shines on an organised cosmos and where reason rules and contain the passions of body. In the same way, the king must provide law which will organise state in a rational way and will reflect divine harmony.



Image 2. Senault, Jean-François. *The use of passions*. Written in French by J.F. Senault. And put into English by Henry Earl of Monmouth. An. Dom. 1649. London: Humphrey Moseley, 1649, frontispiece.

The frontispiece extracted from the Senault's treatise illustrates the eleven passions in the chains held by the Reason. This reason is sitting on the throne and embodies that King of Reason who is controlling all passions. She holds a sceptre in one hand and a chained lion in the other hand, the symbol of sovereign powerful. The editorial history of these treatises, the enthusiasm they created, and the theories they elaborated offered an anthropological vision of the individual and an alternative vision of the relationship of royal power to its subjects. The reason of the king ought to impose itself on the passions of its subjects. However, all the moralists were influenced by the neostoic thought based on prudence, moderation and balance that ruler must observe to prevent the malfunction of social body. In each treatise on the passions, one chapter is devoted to the neostoic philosophy whose influence in the 17th century has been underlined by historians and philosophers like G. Osterreich and Jacqueline Lagrée¹⁷.

The receiving of this new conception of a king ruling the passions of its subjects can be found in propaganda which shows this royal power. With the resumption of wars of religion in 1621, Louis XIII is regarded as the only person who can use his righteous anger against Protestant rebels. When Catholics murdered many Protestants the same year in 1621 in the city of Tours, the king ordered the Catholic leaders of the revolt be hanged. He doesn't want popular passions born again in the whole kingdom. After the victorious siege of the first Protestant city, Saint-Jean-d'Angély, in rebellion against the power royal in 1621, many engravings represented this king mastering its passions by using his reason. One of them entitled, *La reduction de S^t Jean d'Angely*, depicts a king who is forgiving Soubise, the leader of the rebellion. In the below text, it is argued that his righteous angry was replaced by his clemency. Behind him, a prancing horse is held by a bridle, symbol of the domestication of the passions in iconography. On the right, a woman personifies Clemency recognisable by her lance, her thunderbolt not used, symbol of reasonable power, and a lion, symbol of Reason, who is looking at the king. It already used in the frontispiece of the Senault's treatise and in the political painting in general¹⁸. In his *Testament politique* Richelieu defined the role of the Ministry State as a ruler who is able to refrain its passions and use his reason: «Those who are vindictive and who follow their passions more than reason cannot rule a State»¹⁹. In this book, he summarizes his conception of political power based on the ability to rule by reason.

In his book published in 1661, *Le Monarque ou les devoirs du souverain*, Senault legitimates the practice of a strong power in which the king embodies the Reason in order to rule and contain the passions of its subjects. He invites the King himself, the year where he starts his personal reign after the Mazarin's death, to wage war on its passions. The only war important for a king, according to him, is the domestic war against oneself:

¹⁷ Lagrée J. *Le néostoïcisme*. Paris: Vrin, 2010.

¹⁸ Bar V. et Brême D. *Dictionnaire iconologique*. Les Allégories et les les symboles de Cesare Ripa et Jean Baudouin. Dijon: Faton, 1999. P. 231-232.

¹⁹ Richelieu A. J. du Plessis, duc de. *Testament politique* / éd. par F. Hildesheimer. Paris: Société de l'Histoire de France, 1995.

«Kings must rule their passions more than other men»²⁰. He introduces the king such as the one who rules passions of his body and social body. The Jesuit Le Moyne imitates Senault by editing a new political book in 1665, dedicated to the king Louis XIV, entitled *L'Art de régner*. This a political application of his treatise of the passions. He suggests the young king to exercise moderation in order «to earn the love of peoples». The king has to become a model of virtue for its subjects. We observe the same concern in England.

2. The influence of this political pattern outside France

In France, it was consecutive to the wars of Religion that marked the kingdom (1562-1598) and allowed men and women to seek the causes of the violence, imputed to the derangement of the passions. In England, all of the English translations of French treatises on the passions were undertaken during the English Civil Wars (1640-1660). The will to understand the origins of violence made the passions a privileged key for reading that was diffused throughout Europe. The Senault's treatise was translated in 1649, a decade after its first publication at the end of the first English Civil War (1649) under the following title: *The Use of Passions*. The fascination for this art of knowing human beings was also introduced or initiated in the English-speaking world by two ecclesiastics: a certain Catholic preacher, Thomas Wright (*Passions of the minde in generall*, 1601) and the bishop of Norfolk, Renolds Edward who wrote a *Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soul of Man* (1650), the latter of which was written during the English civil war and dedicated to Elisabeth of Bohemia. She was also a privileged interlocutor of Descartes who, through his correspondence, spoke to her about his similar preoccupations, from which his own treatise was born – translated into English under the title *The passions of the soule* (1650), one year after its first publication in French²¹.

In this context, the *Leviathan* was written in 1651 by Thomas Hobbes during the English civil war (1642-1651) and the Parisian revolt against the royal power, called in French the *Fronde*. Royalist, Hobbes had fled to Paris from 1640 in order to escape violence of English civil war but he knew trouble-makers of the Parisian revolt against the cardinal Mazarin from 1648. In Europe, the current context is that of the Thirty Years' war, one of the longest and most destructive conflicts. In 1629, Hobbes had already published a translation into English of *The History of the Peloponese* written by Thucydide. This a description of bloody wars that opposed Sparta to Athens in which he pays attention on the role of passions. It's why Hobbes begins his treatise of *Leviathan* on politics with an account of human nature and its passions²². This state of nature must be a war of all against all and give birth to civil wars. *Leviathan* argues for a social contract by an absolute sovereign. He is engraved in the frontispiece of his book: a giant crowned is seen clutching a sword and

²⁰ Senault J.-F. Le monarque ou les devoirs du souverain. Paris: P. Le Petit, 1661. I. IV. 2^e discours.

²¹ Descartes R. Le Traité des Passions. Paris: Henry le Gras, 1649.

²² Hobbes Th. Léviathan / éd. Gaskin. Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 1996.

a crosier, beneath a quote from the Book of Job: *There is no power on earth to be compared to him*, Job 41.24. The torso and arms are composed by hundreds persons and all are facing inwards.



Image 3. Thomas Hobbes. Léviathan. London: Andrew Crooke, 1651, frontispiece from Abraham Bosse

King is the only one who can prevent conflicts in a world divided by civil wars, international wars and religious wars. André Corvisier noted that there were only two years without wars in the whole 17th century in Europe.

Conclusion

Theories of passions stimulated and contributed to a significant debate regarding the political power. From the beginning of the seventeenth century, a real political anthropology and a political science are born. New concepts of power appeared after the French wars of religion, particularly the ideas of a «reason ruling the passions» in order to refrain fratricidal passions in the social body. It is why many proposals have been thought to restore a strong political power: a «social contract» with Grotius and Hobbes, a «divine contract» with Senault and Cardin Le Bret legitimating an absolute power; a «natural law» with Pierre Le Moyne but the final aim, every time, is the «welfare of the people» and a peaceful society. Monarchical power began to be thought as a rational organized system that brings the ability to pacify social body. It's a kind of neostoic monarchy based on prudence and moderation to avoid the rebellion of subjects and put an end to violence. The term of absolutism to qualify monarchy must be attenuated because, for the contemporaries, it would be a power based on passions and not on the reason. This is only an absolutism of the passions to control them. The observation of a violence produced by a lack of controlling evil passions explains the necessity to justify a strong power, an absolute monarchy ruled by a king of reason. But the justification for a strong power, not really an absolutism, was based on the use of a rational and sovereign reason against the disordered passions of subjects.

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