

A Survey of
French Literature

VOLUME II
THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY



Third Edition

MORRIS BISHOP
KENNETH T. RIVERS

A SURVEY OF

French Literature

VOLUME TWO:
THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

MORRIS BISHOP

NEW REVISED THIRD EDITION

KENNETH T. RIVERS

focus Publishing
R. Pullins Co.

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For Dianna Lipp Rivers

with added appreciation to
Beatrice Rivers and Alison Jolly

A Survey of French Literature

Volume 1: The Middle Ages and The Sixteenth Century

Volume 2: The Seventeenth Century

Volume 3: The Eighteenth Century

Volume 4: The Nineteenth Century

Volume 5: The Twentieth Century

NOTE ABOUT ILLUSTRATIONS

One of the most easily noticed differences between this edition and its predecessors is the addition of extensive visual material. Many of the new illustrations included have come from the Bibliothèque nationale de France (the French National Library), which was of considerable help to the editor. The remaining illustrations are, except for the few noted otherwise, in the public domain and derived primarily from rare books in private collections. The line drawings illustrating each century are by Alison Mason Kingsbury; they constitute the only pictures carried over from the previous editions.

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ISBN 1-58510-107-9

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Printed in the United States of America

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Preface

The editors of this compilation have been guided by certain principles: to introduce the student to the greatest masters of French literature; to make a Survey of Literature rather than a course in literary history; to choose famous examples rather than obscure ones; to choose examples more for their merit, interest, and present vitality than for their “significance” or importance for other than literary reasons; to present one long selection in preference to a collection of tiny *morceaux*; and to make the entire text as user-friendly as possible for instructor and student alike.

Each of the five volumes represents a complete era or century. This division is designed to give the instructor maximum latitude in course utilization of the texts. Whether instruction is intended for a course spanning a year, a semester, a trimester or a quarter, the instructor can plan a syllabus using the number of volumes appropriate to the time allotted.

The editors have leaned toward inclusion rather than exclusion in deciding which literary texts to present. Even so, in the choice of selections, the editors have been compelled to make certain compromises, recognizing the impossibility of including everyone’s favorites. And not every work that we admire has all the desirable qualities appropriate for an anthology, such as being famous, interesting, self-contained, and of convenient length. The editors will embark on no long defense of their own judgment, which others have every right to dispute. We have preferred Boileau to Malherbe, and La Bruyère to Saint-Simon, for reasons which seemed to us good. With so many great writers demanding to be heard, we have inevitably excluded some of considerable merit. But over the course of our five volumes we have more than enough authors’ works for anyone’s needs.

Literary periods, usually centuries or half-centuries, and all the major individual authors have introductory material included. Biographical information about the writers has been presented in a concise, informative and hopefully entertaining fashion designed to help make the authors come alive for the reader. In addition to the essentials about these lives, we have also focused on how certain biographical facts may be relevant to the specific texts. The introductions provide such facts and generalizations as a student will need for reference, in view of examinations as well as overall comprehension. It is evident that today’s student is often in need of background information about the historical, artistic, social, and geographical context of the literature. This we have tried to provide. For example, our presentation of French classical literature begins with a clear eleven-point summary of what literary Classicism was. The generalizations that we present are not meant to be taken by the student as absolute truth, but rather are intended to give the student a compact body of common knowledge and prevalent opinion; the student will then have something solid to agree or disagree with upon encountering the literature. And our contribution is designed to leave plenty of scope for the instructor’s own commentary.

Introductions and footnotes are in English. Whereas classroom discussion is best held in French, a textbook all in French would not necessarily be ideal. It is necessary to consider the serious time restraints that life today has imposed on most students. When doing their reading, they desire to get through the introductory material as quickly as possible without the intrusion of language difficulties. They need not labor with an editor’s French; they might better get on as fast as possible to the memorable words of the great authors. And all the texts of the authors are presented with modernized spelling and punctuation, except

where poetic concerns dictate otherwise.

In the footnotes, words and phrases which would not be in the vocabulary of a typical student are translated, and other aids to fluent reading and ready comprehension are given. Since footnotes should aid and not distract, the editors have struggled against the temptation to give superfluous information.

In the preparation of this Third Edition, the advice of many instructors and scholars has been heeded. By popular demand, there is now greater representation of women authors; for example, the first volume sees the addition of Christine de Pisan and Louise Labé. We have found it possible also to add another requested author, such as Charles Perrault in this volume. (Later volumes add to their tables of contents several notable writers previously absent, such as Choderlos de Laclos, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Lesage, Vauvenargues, Sade, de Maistre, Chénier, Bonaparte, Sand, Maeterlinck, and a variety of modern French and Francophone luminaries.) The selections from a few authors throughout the edition have been further abridged to make them more manageable for class assignments, and a handful of authors whose reputations have fallen have been excised. Footnotes have been amplified throughout, in order to assist students who may not have the strongest of vocabularies or much knowledge of French culture. The Time Lines have been augmented with additional information. The introductions have been expanded, updated, and reorganized. Bibliographical information is now included at the end of the volume. And numerous visual materials have been added, including, where possible, portraits of authors and pictures of their homes or home-town areas in order to give a sense of social context and make their work seem all the more real to the reader. Moreover, both the organization and appearance of our text have been modernized to enhance clarity and ease of use.

The kindness of French publishers who have permitted the use of copyrighted translations into modern French is acknowledged in footnotes at the beginning of each such selection.

[In the remainder of this part of the discourse, which we unfortunately must forgo, Descartes takes up the objection that we can imagine things that are by no means true, as in dreaming, and in a fifth and sixth part he passes from the statement of these essential laws to a demonstration that the laws of the universe can be explained. He then defends the usefulness of the publication of his ideas, so that science may progress in the knowledge of reality.]

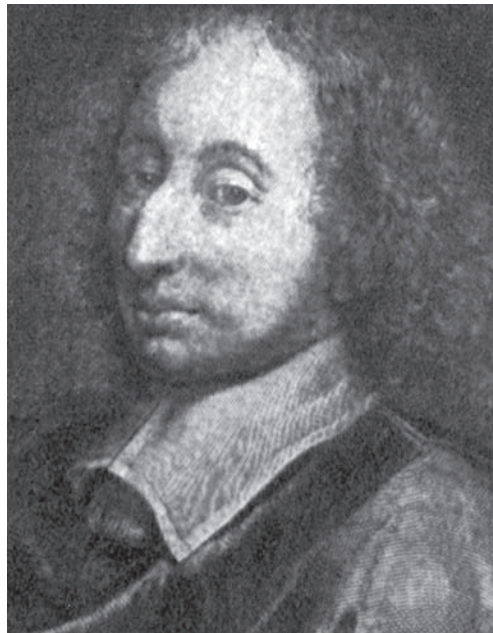


2. Blaise Pascal

[1623-1662]

Science and Spirit

Passion, courage, intellect, creativity, faith, and a vast sense of wonder do not often come together in one individual. But such a man was Blaise Pascal. A lightning-rod for religious controversy, a civic planner who created the first true public transportation system in Paris, an astounding mathematician who founded the modern science known as probability studies, Pascal in a brief time seems to have led several lives instead of one. And in each of these he left writings which still have either great practical application in our lives or the power to move us in a lyrical or spiritual fashion.



Blaise Pascal. Reproduction from Blaise Pascal: Thoughts, 1910

A Calculating Mind

No one can dispute that Blaise Pascal was an authentic genius, one of the greatest minds in humanity's records. Although he hated the ego, proclaiming that "le moi est haïssable," Pascal had much that he could have boasted about, had he wished. A true math prodigy, the young Blaise, born in Clermont-Ferrand but raised in Paris following the death of his mother, quickly made strides seemingly impossible for someone his age. Having entered the world of mathematics at the age of twelve, when he induced the rules of Euclidean geometry on his own, he wrote at sixteen a treatise on conic sections which is the herald of modern projective geometry. At nineteen he invented, constructed, and offered for sale the first calculating machine, called the "Pascalienne." His experiments upon the Puy du Dôme volcano gave physics Pascal's Law for the communication of pressure through liquids. Pascal proved the existence of the vacuum (despite death threats from the Vatican, which insisted that God is everywhere and that a vacuum therefore cannot exist). He helped to establish the science of hydrodynamics. He created an independent mathematical theory of probability out of a discussion of the division of gamblers' stakes. His speculations were important in the early development of the infinitesimal calculus. He

formulated the principles of the inductive method in scientific research. After a night of religious revelation, when he was but thirty-one, he abandoned science, though he returned to mathematics as a diversion from a toothache, to solve the problems of the cycloid.

Espousing the theological principles of the Jansenists, he wrote in their defense the *Lettres provinciales*, a controversial weapon which has not yet lost its edge. His prose style, novel in its rhythms based on current speech, determined the shape and character of modern French prose. Indeed, he created the modern literary language; he invented that art, made of clarity, harmony, and measure, which has been the model for most French prose writers since his day. He devised a new method of teaching reading. He organized the first omnibus line and wore what was probably the first wrist watch. In the lucid moments of a cruel illness he wrote his *Pensées*, thoughts which have affected the mental cast of three centuries; thoughts which still stir and work and grow in men's minds. He died at the age of thirty-nine. His brief, agonized life may serve as a case history for the study of genius at work.

Jansenism

Pascal's adoption of Jansenism was perhaps the single most defining aspect of his life. The Jansenists were a sect within the Catholic Church, holding a rigorous fundamentalist theology that took everything in the Bible literally. Basing their thought on the writings of the Bishop of Ypres, Jansénius, the Jansenists disputed the prevailing Catholic belief that God's "Efficacious Grace" could be earned by good works. Although they were *not* Protestants, the Jansenists shared with them a belief in Predestination, Calvin's idea that God's grace and salvation were preordained. Jansenists considered themselves to be good Catholics, but Jansenism was seen as a heresy by the Catholic hierarchy. The Jansenist sect's headquarters was at the convent of Port-Royal, near Paris. Its faith and its pretensions aroused much hostility; the Jesuits (the most learned of Catholic orders) led the attack upon it. Pascal presented the Jansenist case to the general public. With admirable wit and lucidity he made difficult things seem easy. But he did not win his case; Jansenism continued to be condemned as a menace to Church and State. Eventually, Louis XIV had a wrecking crew demolish Port-Royal. Nevertheless, Jansenist thought was not killed off; it persisted, a pretext for theological revolt and political dissension for a hundred years. There are even a few vestigial Jansenists left today.

The Human Predicament

Pascal struggled throughout his life to reconcile religion and science. Shaken by the discoveries about the universe that resulted from new inventions such as the telescope and the microscope, he pondered the nature of infinity. Pascal wrestled with the troubling realization that humanity, ignorant and troubled, no longer the center of the universe, had to find its proper place somewhere between the infinitely large and the infinitely small, two extremes that it had scarcely known existed.

The *Pensées* are a collection of Pascal's notes, jotted down in preparation for an *Apologie de la religion chrétienne*, a defense of Christian truth which was never completed. His scheme is briefly this. He addresses a worldly *honnête homme*, fixes him with his glittering eye. He says that man must recognize his *misère*, his insignificance, weakness, vanity, folly, evil. But this appalling creature *thinks*. Visibly he is made to think; that is his dignity and merit. He has his share of *grandeur* as well as *misère*. This opposition can be resolved only by God's revelation: man was once perfect and has become corrupt through sin. This demonstration troubles Pascal's charge; he sets out in search of truth. He does not find it in philosophy or in science. He does not find it in the religions of the world. The Bible alone gives him

a reasonable explanation of man's duality. The consecrated destiny of the Jewish people, the inspired wisdom of the sacred book, the fulfillment of its prophecies make irrefutable proofs of Christian truth. But divine proofs can be completely apprehended only by the divine method: "you must open your spirit to them, confirm yourself in them by custom, offer yourself by humiliation to inspiration." Accepting such a method, Pascal decides that Christ is the answer to all questions. And in this journey toward religious truth, he rises above reason, for in the end, contends Pascal, it is the heart that feels God, not reason.

For those not convinced by this argument, he also offered, in another context, what has come to be known as Pascal's Wager. It states that if you do not particularly believe in God, you should do so anyway, because you have nothing to lose. To most observers, that sounds like shameless hypocrisy. However, it should be remembered that Pascal was an expert on probability, and he was speaking quite literally. If there is no other solution for death, then even a hypocritical confession of faith that has perhaps a one in a billion chance of being successful with God is literally a better bet than no confession of faith at all, which offers a zero chance of success.

Pascal's *Apologie* has not apparently converted many unbelievers, but the *Pensées* have been the spiritual companion of numberless men and women. The reasons may be reduced to two: *insight* and *art*. Pascal's understanding of the human spirit reveals us to ourselves. And in his art he conveys the sense of infinity and its wonder in words that vibrate with suppressed emotion. This is true poetry.

The *Pensées* should be read slowly and attentively. Pause after each *pensée*, reflect on it, judge it. "L'homme n'est qu'un roseau, le plus faible de la nature; mais c'est un roseau pensant," says Pascal in his most famous pronouncement (*Pensée* no. 391); so take his advice and think about what he is saying.

The ordering of the *Pensées* and the text follow the edition of Louis Lafuma.¹ This is now generally accepted as the nearest approximation to Pascal's own plan and phrasing.



LES PENSÉES

SECTION I

INTRODUCTIONS

[3] Quand on voit le style naturel, on est tout étonné et ravi, car on s'attendait de voir un auteur, et on trouve un homme. Au lieu que ceux qui ont le goût bon, et qui en voyant un livre croient trouver un homme, sont tout surpris de trouver un auteur: *Plus poetice quam humane locutus es.*² Ceux-là honorent bien la nature, qui lui apprennent qu'elle peut parler de tout, et même de théologie.

[4] Qu'on ne dise pas que je n'ai rien

dit de nouveau: la disposition des matières est nouvelle: quand on joue à la paume,³ c'est une même balle dont joue l'un et l'autre, mais l'un la place mieux.

J'aimerais autant qu'on me dît que je me suis servi des mots anciens. Et comme si les mêmes pensées ne formaient pas un autre corps de discours, par une disposition différente, aussi bien que les mêmes mots forment d'autres pensées par leur différente disposition!

1. *Pensées sur la religion*, ed. by L. Lafuma. Paris, Delmas, 1960.
2. *Plus...es*: You have spoken as a poet rather than

as a man.

3. *paume*: racquets, tennis.

[9] M. de Roannez⁴ disait: « Les raisons me viennent après, mais d'abord la chose m'agrée⁵ ou me choque sans en savoir la raison, et cependant cela me choque par cette raison que je ne découvre qu'ensuite. » Mais je crois, non pas que cela choquait par ces raisons qu'on trouvait après, mais qu'on ne trouve ces raisons que parce que cela choque.⁶

I. ORDRE

[39] Je blâme également, et ceux qui prennent parti de louer l'homme, et ceux qui le prennent de le blâmer, et ceux qui le prennent de se divertir; et je ne puis approuver que ceux qui cherchent en gémissant.

II. VANITÉ

[50] Deux visages semblables, dont aucun ne fait rire en particulier, font rire ensemble par leur ressemblance.

[72] *Talon de soulier*.⁷ « Oh! que cela est bien tourné! que voilà un habile ouvrier! que ce soldat est hardi! » Voilà la source de nos inclinations, et du choix des conditions.⁸ « Que celui-là boit bien! que celui-ci boit peu! » Voilà ce qui fait les gens sobres et ivrognes, soldats, poltrons, etc.

[80] Peu de chose nous console parce que peu de chose nous afflige.

[84] Nous ne nous tenons jamais au temps présent. Nous anticipons l'avenir comme trop lent à venir, comme pour hâter son cours; ou nous rappelons le passé pour l'arrêter comme trop prompt: si imprudents, que nous errons dans les temps qui ne sont point nôtres, et ne pensons point au seul qui nous appartient; et si vains, que nous songeons à ceux qui ne sont rien, et échappons sans réflexion le seul qui subsiste. C'est que le présent, d'ordinaire, nous blesse. Nous le cachons

à notre vue, parce qu'il nous afflige; et, s'il nous est agréable, nous regrettons de le voir échapper. Nous tâchons de le soutenir par l'avenir, et pensons à disposer les choses qui ne sont pas en notre puissance pour un temps où nous n'avons aucune assurance d'arriver.

Que chacun examine ses pensées, il les trouvera toutes occupées au passé et à l'avenir. Nous ne pensons presque point au présent; et, si nous y pensons, ce n'est que pour en prendre la lumière pour disposer de l'avenir. Le présent n'est jamais notre fin: le passé et le présent sont nos moyens; le seul avenir est notre fin. Ainsi nous ne vivons jamais, mais nous espérons de vivre; et, nous disposant toujours à être heureux, il est inévitable que nous ne le soyons jamais.

[85] L'esprit de ce souverain juge du monde n'est pas si indépendant qu'il ne soit sujet à être troublé par le premier tintamarre⁹ qui se fait autour de lui. Il ne faut pas le bruit du canon pour empêcher ses pensées; il ne faut que le bruit d'une girouette¹⁰ ou d'une poulie.¹¹

Ne vous étonnez pas s'il ne raisonne pas bien à présent; une mouche bourdonne¹² à ses oreilles; c'en est assez pour le rendre incapable de bon conseil. Si vous voulez qu'il puisse trouver la vérité, chassez cet animal qui tient sa raison en échec et trouble cette puissante intelligence qui gouverne les villes et les royaumes. Le plaisant dieu que voilà! *O ridicolosissime heroe!*¹³

[88] « Pourquoi me tuez-vous? A votre avantage.¹⁴ Je n'ai pas d'armes.—Eh quoi! ne demeurez-vous pas de l'autre côté de l'eau? Mon ami, si vous demeuriez de ce côté, je serais un assassin et cela serait injuste de vous tuer de la sorte; mais puisque vous demeurez de l'autre côté, je suis un brave, et cela est juste. »

4. *M. de Roannez*: Pascal's best friend.

5. *m'agrée*: pleases me.

6. This is essentially the Zen concept that quality is spontaneously perceived by human consciousness and then reason joins in afterwards to validate the judgment. Perhaps it is also a forecast of William James' peripheric theory of emotion, modern behaviorism; "We are happy because we laugh."

7. *Talon de soulier*: Boot heel.

8. *conditions*: occupations

9. *tintamarre*: hubbub.

10. *girouette*: weather vane.

11. *poulie*: pulley.

12. *bourdonne*: buzzes.

13. *O ridicolosissime heroe!* What a very ridiculous hero!

14. *A votre avantage*: You have the advantage over me.

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