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Abstract

Biography, a difficult and ambiguous genre, the most popular in all of literature, has played such an important role in the meaning of the individual self in western civilization. Its history has also followed the main crises of history, challenging its relationship to narration and fiction. It has been criticized many times, even if history seems incapable of dealing without it. Perhaps biography is even more difficult to handle and justify when the man whose life you are trying to puzzle out is a well-known and emblematic politician, as is the case of Armand Jean du Plessis, best known as Cardinal de Richelieu (1585-1642). First Minister of King Louis XIII for 20 years, from 1624 to his death in 1642, he (willingly or not) carried out, promoted and witnessed some of the most significant political and social changes in French and European history. Richelieu has been so often portrayed, criticized and glorified over the centuries that his personality, and even the very reasons for his actions, sometimes seem to us to be covered with a thick coat of finish, like an old painting to be restored. How did Richelieu construct his own image: as a public man, an authoritarian Minister and a Cardinal, occupying the summit of the pyramid of wealth and patronage, an inveterate art collector, but also a Christ-like suffering servant of the king? I attempt to show how he wove together different social, political and personal qualities, in a way that enabled him to stay in his position, and also to legitimize his actions in an epoch of major changes.

Keywords

Armand Jean du Plessis cardinal duc de Richelieu, biography, historical methodology, seventeenth-century France, political action.

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Introduction

Armand Jean du Plessis, best known as cardinal duc de Richelieu, is one of the most well-known men of state in French history. First Minister of King Louis XIII from 1624 to his death in 1642, he – willingly or not – carried out, promoted and witnessed some of the most significant political and social changes of his times. Richelieu has so often been portrayed, criticized and glorified over the centuries that the very reason for his actions often seems to us to be covered with a thick coat of finish, like an old painting in need of restoration. How can we approach the great man in a time when there are no longer any great men?

1. How do we give a narrative to Richelieu?

Biography and narrative of the self are a pervasive, increasingly subtle and bold tendency in fiction or art, and impose themselves on all forms of narrative. Whatever one thinks about biography, it seems that history cannot do without it. It is not only a matter of its commercial success, but also because of the renewal, or rather of the integration of the field in history since the 1980s.

If the story of lives is an old tradition in western culture¹, the meaning and the place it was granted have changed much over time. When Plutarch wrote *Parallel Lives*, a work that was the prototype of how to chronicle biographical trajectories in the West until the eighteenth century, his scope was less to talk about a specific person than to show how the individual achieves a perfect ideal essence². In questioning the possibility of expressing the reality of the self, the Enlightenment introduced a change of perspective. But in the nineteenth century, the positivist biography became the repository of the glorification of the public man. After the Second World War, which marked the end of authority for great men, historians, discouraged by a field mostly conservative and commemorative by tradition, often deserted biography. This was particularly the case in continental Europe, where biography was denounced by a historiography mostly preoccupied by large structures³. However, at the same time the biographical landscape began to enlarge and become more diverse, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world. Through memoirs, stories of ordinary people, the story of life opened itself to women, minorities, victims or anti-heroes. With these changes in perspective, as well as the influence of anthropology, the uses of biography expanded in the 1980s, from prosopography to micro-history, through the lives of unknown people or the reconsideration of famous men of state from the viewpoint of mythology, among others⁴. This was also the time, with the increasing importance of memory and patrimony in the public sphere, that the historian as a storyteller returned. Some of the characters recovered by historians in this period have without doubt inspired several generations to read and to study history⁵.

Today, biography must strike a balance between two opposite poles. At one end of the

¹ On the specificities of occidental biography and its place in social sciences and especially ethnology, see Jean Jamin and Marcello Massenzio, “Jeu et enjeu ethnographiques de la biographie”, *L’Homme*, 195-196, 2010, p. 7-20.

² Plutarch, *Lives*, Nabu Press, 2008. On the history of biography and its importance in Western civilization, see J. C. Davis, “Introducción”, in J. Colin Davis, Isabel Burdiel (eds.), *El otro, el mismo. Biografía y autobiografía en Europa (siglos XVII-XX)*, Valencia, PUV, 2005. Giovanni Levi, “Les usages de la biographie”, *Annales ESC*, nov-déc. 1989, p. 1325-36.

³ The problem was more the refusal of what Jacques le Goff called a “superficial and factual short view”, to which he opposed “a history of politics, that would be a history of power under all its features, which all are not political”. See Jacques Le Goff (éd.), *La nouvelle histoire*, préface à la nouvelle édition, Paris, Complexe, 2006, p. 17.

⁴ For example, Alain Corbin, *The Life of an Unknown*, Columbia UP, 2001; Lucy Riall, *Garibaldi: Invention of a hero*, Yale, Yale UP, 2008. See Jos de Mul, “Das Schauspiel des Lebens. Wilhelm Dilthey and historical biography”, *Revue internationale de philosophie*, 4, 2003, p. 407-424. Hayden White, *The Fiction of Narrative: Essays on History, Literature, and Theory, 1957-2007*. Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.

⁵ We can quote especially Carlo Ginzburg’ Menocchio (*Il formaggio e i vermi*, Roma, 1976; Natalie Zimon Davis’s Martin Guerre (*Le retour de Martin Guerre*, Paris, 1982); John Kershaw’s Hitler (*The ‘Hitler Myth’. Image and Reality in the Third Reich*, Oxford, 1987); or Georges Duby’s Guillaume le Maréchal (*Guillaume le Maréchal ou Le meilleur chevalier du monde*, Paris, 1984).

spectrum, the exhaustive positivist one, more or less declaring that the aim of the genre is to provide an illustration of historical structures. Here, we find the fantasy that a life can be a mirror of the world; therefore that it is possible to understand everything through the life of a single person. This idea reflects, as Jean-Claude Passeron emphasizes, the practice of fiction, where it is the detail that reveals the plot and makes it relevant. At the other end of the spectrum, there is a more literary trend, which emphasizes the formation of the self and seeks to grasp the profound and unique meaning of the personality⁶.

Another convention of the biography is that under the guise of a person is a true self, to be discovered by the biographer. However, the "biographical illusion", taken from the cutting title of one of Pierre Bourdieu's well-known articles⁷, in which the sociologist condemned any biography as artificial, individualistic and manipulative, is less about perceiving life as a linear path, or the problem of what is true or false, and more the question of the relationship between biography and narrative, between life as it tells itself, life which is experienced as a story (perhaps without necessarily being deceived by what it relates), and the writing of this life, the way it can be recalled.

Biography has now been rehabilitated by storytelling. We rediscover identity as "representational momentum", which means that identity is no more considered rigid or totalitarian, but as fluctuating⁸. While everyone seems compelled to peel his own "onion skin"⁹, to expose hidden defects or misfortunes, art and the novel make the most of what appears to be the last *terra incognita*, the man without God, investigating thoroughly the relationships and grievances of body and soul. This trend invades everything, including the historical dimension, whether through memoirs or through attempts to unveil the last secret recesses of the secret. Despite its narrative eccentricity, Jonathan Littell's *The Kindly Ones*, which tells the world of an SS officer as a horrific autobiography, pushed historians to take a position in interviews and articles. This shows in a paradigmatic way to what point history is still uncomfortable with regard to fiction. And yet, who is really fooled by this fictional autobiography?¹⁰

In this oceanic wave of biography, the historian probably no longer has the authoritative voice he once had. Indeed, as pointed out by Colin Davis, even though it may seem paradoxical, it is not clear if readers of historical biographies are interested in history as such¹¹. Curiosity about the search for individual identity seems to have overwhelmed the desire to understand social structures.

Against these "threats", historical biography barricades itself into guarantees of professionalism and scholarship. Biography is a risky genre, obsessed by the dangers of determinism, of fiction¹² or of over-valuation of the "great man". And yet, biography has the advantage of being able to question historians on its limits and to compel the historian to tackle complex issues. The issue

⁶ Anna Caballé, "Biografía y punto de vista: Perspectivas actuales de la escritura biográfica" in *II Reunión de la Red Europea sobre Teoría y Práctica de la Biografía: "Le singulier et le collectif à l'épreuve de la biographie"*, Paris, 8-9 de enero 2011, <http://www.uv.es/retpb/docs/Texto%20Caballe.pdf>.

⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, "L'illusion biographique", *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, Vol. 62-63, June 1986, p. 69-72. See the excellent contextualization of the sociologist's motivations by Nathalie Heinich, "Pour en finir avec « l'illusion biographique »", *L'Homme*, 2010, p. 421-430.

⁸ Daniel Madelénat "Moi, biographe : m'as-tu vu ?", *Revue de littérature comparée* 1/2008, n° 325, p. 95-108.

⁹ In his autobiography entitled *Peeling the Onion* (Harvill Secker, 2007), the famous German novelist Günter Grass revealed his membership of the Hitlerjugend.

¹⁰ The book was qualified by Jorge Semprun as the "event of the century". Jonathan Littell, *The Kindly Ones*, (*Les Bienveillantes*, Paris, Gallimard, 2006). See Florent Brayart, "Littell, pas si "bienveillant"", *Libération*, November 1, 2006. And Jean Solchany, "Les Bienveillantes ou l'histoire à l'épreuve de la fiction", *RHMC*, 54-3, 2007, p. 159-178.

¹¹ J. Colin Davis, "Decadencia final de necesidad cultural: la biografía y su credibilidad intelectual", in *El otro, el mismo*, *Op. cit.*, p. 31-47.

¹² Isn't the biographer capable of reconstructing a human life, of making an individual be born and die, of making him act, love or suffer? This power however as its limits: "As the little god he is, the biographer knows only that he has to resign himself to cease the essence of a life only consequently, as a necrology lets say, and not a priori, as a programme" Jean-Claude Passeron, "Biographies, flux, trajectories", *Enquête*, *Biographie et cycle de vie*, 1989, <http://enquete.revues.org/document77.html>.

of documentation comes first (since in biography it is impossible to vary the angle of the subject). Second, biography questions the limitations and the unresolved issues of historiography. In fact, biography is a good way of testing the findings of small cases on a larger scale. Finally, biography raises the question of how to feel and share the meaning and the spirit of an era. This is a pedagogical, but also a literary problem. Because it is the characters that give life to the scene and it is the reader who makes the characters exist.

Unlike fiction, which questions the *lacunae* in the documentation, historical biography refers to the signs left by the character in the world¹³. The fact that the genre is naturally reductionist is an interesting feature, since it allows the narrator to capture the moment of choice, to analyse the conditions of the course of action taken, which are not visible through a study of the context alone. Finally, to undertake a biography can help us to break the usual temporalities of the past, or to question the reality of the person in former times¹⁴.

In a time in which everyone is potentially a hero, recounting the life of a great statesman is likely to require a preliminary justification that conjures the old positivist tendency of history "from above"¹⁵. It is true that Richelieu was one of those "great men" who traditionally fascinated people with a political soul, or an illustrious imagination. This kind of identification flourished above all under the Third Republic, when the great Minister seemed to represent the resolution of conflicts between State and Church and embodied the triumphant colonizer. Richelieu has been reported as a statesman with an insatiable appetite for action; an image that appears not only through the mass of surviving letters and documents, but also through his own works which explain his actions: the *Testament Politique* (the bible of a statesman, according to Sainte-Beuve) and the *Mémoires*¹⁶. The unknown elements of action and of the private man are often explained in psychological terms, particularly regarding the relationship of Richelieu with the Queen Mother Marie de Medici, or with Louis XIII.

Today, however, as a sign of the times, it is more Richelieu the churchman and patron of the arts who appeals to historians. In fact, the "great men" still fascinate, but probably less for their activities in war or in government and more for the uniqueness of their "course of life" and the relationship that can be made between a patrimony and an individual, enabling us to animate the cultural inheritance¹⁷.

Yet, writes Christian Jouhaud, "If we really want to talk about the power of men of power, perhaps it is about power we really need to talk about, and from there that we must really start."¹⁸ From this point of view, in fact, a figure like Richelieu's remains problematic, for several reasons. First, because the legend surrounding his character continues to overshadow his actions. We keep bumping into shelves of biographies, memoirs and distortions, anecdotes repeatedly invalidated and summarized. Even the anecdotal names given to the events of the time, such as "The Day of Dupes", or the "Drôlerie des Ponts de Cé", are already interpretations. We even come across the deletion, the accidental or deliberate cancellation of marks, which prevent us from seizing something other than criticism or praise, or what the character wanted to leave to posterity. In this context, to try to capture the "real me" of Richelieu seems illusory, even dangerous. Must we try to understand Richelieu

¹³ Edward Acton, "La biografía y el estudio de la identidad", in *El otro y el mismo*, op. cit., p. 177-198.

¹⁴ Michel de Certeau or Daniel Vidal's studies on the writings of seventeenth-century mystics show us how they questioned the problem of meaning, of temporalities, of secular responsibility and challenged the received ideas of their time. See Pascale Gruson, "Actualité du XVIIe siècle", in *Le sujet absolu. Une confrontation de notre présent aux débats du XVIIe siècle français*, Grenoble, Jérôme Million, 2007, p. 9-22.

¹⁵ See Isabel Burdiel's argument in the foreword of her *Isabel II. Una biografía (1830-1904)*, Madrid, Taurus, 2010.

¹⁶ These texts are compilations made by Richelieu's publicists. On the controversy, see Christian Jouhaud, *La main de Richelieu ou le pouvoir cardinal*, Paris, Gallimard, 1991. For the *Testament Politique*, see Françoise Hildesheimer, « Préface », in (éd.), *Testament politique de Richelieu*, Paris, Société de l'histoire de France, 1995.

¹⁷ See the topic of the 2010 French "Journées du Patrimoine", which were dedicated to "illustrious men (and women)". The idea was, as the press kit tells us, to "illustrate the places through the life of great figures, famous people but also ordinary heroes", who have left "marks in the national memory".

¹⁸ Christian Jouhaud, *La main de Richelieu*, Op. cit., p. 105.

without himself? Should we try to narrate his life without taking into account what he wanted us to see of it?

Moreover, the fact that Richelieu monopolized and restricted the historical description of his times, subsumes the history of France to the history of the reign of Louis XIII and then finally to himself. Yet the biographies of Richelieu have often tended to do the same. This observation led Joseph Bergin to limit his account of Richelieu to more specific aspects. Concentrating on Richelieu's childhood, or on the importance of his assets for his career, made it possible to find essential sources and to focus the research on issues that had not yet been tackled by those who sought, instead, to update large movements of history.

Finally, the figure of Richelieu is still far from being politically correct. It is difficult to find the man pleasant, despite the efforts of the latest biographers, who minimize the famous rapacity of the man and his authoritarian attitude in favour of his religious qualities¹⁹. A great prelate, duke and peer who accumulated titles and responsibilities, and invoked at the same time a reason for every action, who advocated political misogyny, a very sick man, sometimes tearful, a graphomaniac of boring speeches, he seemed almost to have exaggerated an indefensible role. So who was Richelieu in reality? How can we go beyond the cold and frightening icon he was good enough to reveal?

It is hard to grasp his character, hidden under so many masks that it appears to be full of contradictions, contradictions that are traditionally accounted for by means of lies and manipulation. The destiny of the man appears linear, starting from his childhood. It looks as though it took shape through strictly individual capabilities and events, apparently unrelated to the social or political context, which led to a success considered extraordinary, if not unmatched.

To break with this hagiographical pattern, which can be criticized from within only by a reversal of perspective, leading to a dark and evil image of the character, we have to find different forms of registration of his identity over time²⁰. In other words, the scope is to consider the person, not as an individual who would set up himself in a linear fashion according to his own logic, nor as the mere plaything of external circumstances. In this sense, the renewal of political biographies offers an exciting prospect for the historian. The idea is to question the discrepancies between the individual and the role attributed to him, the social arrangements he inherited and his need to constantly adapt himself to the exigencies of politics. The character produces himself reflected in the eyes of others. For if we simply seek for the "real" behind the public persona, we necessarily lose the meaning of the social and political might and what was actually the strength of the authority that he achieved. This approach has the advantage of understanding privacy as a component of public life. This approach also permits us to insert into the biography the character's legend as well as its impact and its role for the community who made it up. "In a way, the politician is an author in search of character", writes Dominique Damamme, "he uses typifications, such as activist, parliamentarian, or even statesman, that help him to make his actions logical and chronologically coherent, to himself as for others."²¹ This is why the analysis of context is crucial to the understanding of a man who made the world his field of action.

To analyze the individual as an actor that builds and transforms himself does not necessarily mean being relativist, nor does it mean strictly following the hagiographic or demonic trail of the character, designed as a social type. The idea instead is to take his itinerary as that of a man of his time, programmed in a certain way to be what he is, and at the same time that of an individual who lives in a shifting environment and who necessarily changes with it.

This approach seems to provide a certain advantage as regards the study of a man of the seventeenth century. Indeed, Richelieu lived in a time when the clothes made the man in the most literal sense: the function made the personality, merged with it²², and the image that was represented

¹⁹ Françoise Hildesheimer, *Richelieu*, Paris, Flammarion, 2004.

²⁰ Paul Ricoeur, "Sixième étude. Le soi et l'identité narrative", in *Soi-même comme un autre*, Paris, Seuil, 1990. See François Dosse, *Michel de Certeau, le marcheur blessé*, Paris, 2002; and *Le pari biographique. Écrire une vie*, Paris, La Découverte, 2005.

²¹ Dominique Damamme, "Grandes illusions et récits de vie", *Politix*, 27, 1994, p. 186.

²² This is why – as in fairy tales – the clothes contained the power of metamorphosis, and concentrated in literature a broad reflexion on illusion, identity, and dignity.

had to resemble the model. Men had to achieve the perfect match between a social role – imposed on them at an early stage in life – and a specifically developed kind of personality, which was to follow an archetype. Richelieu's problem was that he had to invent, to develop and to adapt his image to his role and function in a turbulent and insecure environment, moving his pawns by intuition and chance shots.

What concerns us is to understand who Richelieu was, how he became what he was (not without much effort), how he created a political brand, that is to say the expression of a number of symbolic values, and how he imposed a certain image of the state. The importance of the contradictions in his character, and their persistence over the centuries, is proof of how successful was the manufacture of Richelieu as a man in a new public role, a role that was meant to meet a new situation, how it developed gradually, and was so well played and integrated by Richelieu himself that one can qualify it as one of his major achievements²³.

2. How to construct and breathe existence into the character Richelieu



Philippe de Champaigne, *Triple portrait of Richelieu*, 1640, London, National Gallery.

Richelieu succeeded in establishing extensive control over the country: it was under his government that the marginalization of alternative options to royal absolutism was achieved and that the monarchy came to monopolize the majority of client relationships and proto-institutional mechanisms. To achieve this Richelieu, as a nobleman, asserted his authority, his love of reason, his contempt for what he called "feminine passions", and at the same time always showed himself dependent upon the King, fragile (as he wrote in a letter to Louis XIII on 16 June 1635, shortly after the beginning of the war against Spain) as "an Alençon diamond, which (strictly speaking) is no stronger than glass."²⁴ He used this dangerous contradiction many times, and it enabled him to survive, to be envied and loved, to surprise, to intimidate and to terrify.

The portraits, palaces and propaganda works, ultimately the posthumous biographical making of the action, are seen as a coherent and progressive masterpiece. This finally established the classical and consistent image (in the Christian sense) of the Cardinal as the sum and the indissoluble meeting of three elements that at the same time divide and are indivisible. This civil trinity is composed of the Cardinal (clergyman and man of faith), of the great aristocrat (proud of his rank, heir to his "house") and finally of the Minister (servant of the state and of the King). These *a priori* irreconcilable elements

²³ See, on the character Jacques Chirac, Annie Collovald, "Identité(s) stratégique(s)", *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, n°73, June 1988, p. Peter Burke, *The fabrication of Louis XIV*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1992.

²⁴ Georges d'Avenel, *Lettres*, T. VI, p. 55. The diamond of Alençon, brown smoked quartz very popular in the seventeenth century, used to be sharpened in the same way as a diamond.

find their unity in the King's service. The action also consists of three parts, according to a Cartesian conception which embodies perfection in itself: lower the pride of the great nobles, make the Protestants submit, raise the reputation of the King²⁵.

However, the perfect embodiment of a role requires preparation. The role is also shaped by circumstances and evolves constantly with its interpreter. Finally, to be perfect the role must be integrated; the individual must believe and live his role. These are therefore stages of development of the political role and circumstances which are favourable to its execution.

Armand Jean du Plessis was born in 1585 into an old aristocratic family of Poitou, already in the service of the crown. The death of his father in 1590 left the family facing major financial problems and his sons needing to regain lost positions and heritage. Armand Jean's elder brother, Henri, devoted all his energies to this task until he died in 1619. Armand Jean, first intended to be a soldier, was afterwards trained to inherit the family bishopric, Luçon. In order to keep this resource in the family, Armand had to speed up his studies, and he became a bishop at the age of 21. This was a period when the country had just come out of the religious wars and peace was restored, suggesting that anything was possible. The two brothers fought to regain the lost dignity of the family.

Richelieu rapidly lost interest in the material conditions of his mission as a bishop. Fascinated by the great prelates of the time, the Cardinal du Perron, or the bishop of Poitiers La Roche-posay, he immersed himself in his studies aiming to equal their rhetorical skills in the controversy against the Protestants. He dreamed not of being a theologian, but a great orator, in the future of being a great prelate with a voice that had the ear of the court, speaking clearly, giving a long-term opinion on things. Both Richelieu brothers found themselves involved in the service of the state in the 1610s, in the circles of the queen mother, Marie de' Medici.

On the death of his brother Henri in 1619 Armand Jean became the head of the family, responsible for its destiny. After years of secondary positions in the government, he finally became a Cardinal in 1622 (at the age of 37) and this opened the door to greater responsibilities. But initially he had to overcome the reluctance of the King, wary of this being who was a creature of the queen mother, playing a double game in the complex civil wars of the time. The King finally allowed him to enter the royal council of ministers in 1624 intending thus to contain his mother's ambitions. All this made Richelieu prudent²⁶, a man who built his role in relation to the character of the King but also by systematically reinforcing his own power.

The Minister had to struggle to establish his position. His governmental function aside, his relationship with Louis XIII was all the more risky, because it did not depend on institutional status, nor on emotional or personal ties (unlike the King's favourites or his mistresses), but on a moral pact with the King and on his ability to remain indispensable to him. Richelieu therefore sought to guard against setbacks and this is why, in a short time, the Cardinal accumulated ecclesiastical benefices, titles, functions, honours and properties. In consolidating his position in power by guarding against the possibility of others replacing him, controlling the networks of the kingdom, monopolizing public speech, in becoming the conductor of cultural life, Richelieu gradually became the head of the corporate social pyramid of the kingdom²⁷. Because this structure finally dislocated traditional society and imposed itself without regard to opposition, this feudal organization, existing in parallel to the King's, was violently criticized.

Richelieu was a clergyman, which was apparently a handicap for a man of power. First, he was unable to marry – and therefore to have children – and this naturally reduced his ability to expand his networks. Second, the ecclesiastical state seemed to be a limitation to the optimal conditions for the exercise of power, in the management of the war as well as court life. Richelieu yet managed to

²⁵ Roland Mousnier distinguishes the Christian, the nobleman and the servant of state: "Introduction", in *L'homme rouge ou la vie du cardinal de Richelieu*, Paris, Laffont, 1992.

²⁶ Following the neo-stoic precepts popularized by Justus Lipsius and Machiavelli, prudence, the virtue which gives the meaning of moral autonomy of man, is the most frequently quoted virtue in Richelieu's Political Testament.

²⁷ Orest Ranum, *Richelieu and the councillors of Louis XIII. A study of the secretaries of State and superintendents of finance in the ministry of Richelieu (1635-1642)*, Oxford, Clarendon press, 1963. Joseph Bergin, *Cardinal Richelieu: Power and the pursuit of Wealth*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1985.

turn this weakness into a strong point. His ecclesiastical position gave him a natural authority, and the fatherly and impartial figure of the prelate allowed him to justify his total commitment to the state. Because he did not have any direct family relationship, Richelieu was naturally less suspected of using power to his own advantage. Function became the condition of disinterested advice, gradually even of a sacred duty, devoted to the Catholic cause and fighting for the common good. Donning the red hat helped him to differentiate himself from the secretaries (originally clerics), from the ministers among the secular nobility (especially Sully, Henry IV's minister²⁸), but most of all from Louis XIII's former favourites, Concini and the duke of Luynes. Richelieu took the great Roman cardinals as his model; he copied their artistic tastes and diplomatic modes of communication which cultivated secrecy. Finally, in the context of the conflict between essence and quality that affected at the time a nobility in search of identity, the ecclesiastical function allowed Richelieu to reconcile the usually irreconcilable aristocratic status with the office (the King's service), that is, to invent a third way.

On the 10th and 11th November 1630, Richelieu was confirmed in command, while the queen mother Marie de' Médicis, who had patronised Richelieu in the circles of power since 1616, was exiled²⁹. This event stabilized Richelieu's power, made public his position as a "creature of the King" and the only man to lead the government. This crucial moment of rupture with his earlier bonds allowed Richelieu to complete the forging of the brand of a minister who followed a policy of supremacy of royal power, which involved the preparation for the French intervention in the Thirty Years War and open conflict against Spain (which was declared in May 1635). Richelieu sought to justify for the rest of his life this apparent (to all) reversal of a servant's client loyalty and evidence of his duplicity.

Richelieu's character cannot be understood without that of Louis XIII, with whom he made up a powerful couple³⁰. Indeed, each had to struggle to build their characters, in a novel situation which took nothing for granted. It is in relation to the King that Richelieu adapts his own role.

Richelieu, the "chief minister" made himself indispensable to Louis XIII. He said the Mass and preached to the King, representing for him the persistence of religious unity. This relieved a melancholic King, who profoundly feared hell, of the weight of the violence of the state, which was now legitimized by its religious intention.

Although he always positioned himself behind Louis XIII, Richelieu was also a kind father, a *Tutores regni*, senior to the King, according to examples from the past³¹. He maintained control over the King, over his actions as well as his scruples. And he reinforced the image that the King was forging of himself, and this was ultimately the best protection of the King's power. Indeed, he sustained the idea of the King's lack of responsibility, allowing him not to play a direct part in the most unpopular decisions.

Richelieu was a sick man. Severe headaches, insomnia, extreme nervousness and sometimes what appears to have been excessive sensitivity (tears, irritability), seem to have played an important part in his life from early adulthood. These afflictions, gradually complicated by recurrent haemorrhoids, and painful urinary retention, associated with the malnutrition common at the time, literally tortured him several days a month. Yet, less the expression of the fragility of man, claimed in the *Testament Politique*, it seems to me that it is important to realize that this frightening and striking suffering played an important part in his life, expressed themselves in a visible way, that is, they were a central element of his political persona. Indeed, these diseases were not regarded by contemporaries as a sign of weakness. Critics mocked his bluntly disgusting and grotesque body, they asserted it was a sign of the Cardinal's future torments in hell. But these criticisms themselves show the successful expression of the aggression expressed by this body. In fact, the Minister punished his enemies

²⁸ Laurent Avezou, *Sully à travers l'histoire. Les avatars d'un mythe politique*, Paris, École des Chartes, 2001.

²⁹ Pierre Chevallier, "La véritable journée des Dupes (11 novembre 1630). Étude critique des journées des 10 et 11 novembre 1630 d'après les dépêches diplomatiques", *Mémoires de la Société académique de l'Aube*, t.CVIII, 1974-1977.

³⁰ On Louis XIII, see Jean-Christian Petitfils, *Louis XIII*, Paris, Perrin, 2008. Joël Cornette, *Le roi de guerre: essai sur la souveraineté dans la France du Grand Siècle*, Paris, Laffont, 1993.

³¹ For a comparative study of the relations between the Minister and his King, see John H. Elliott, *Richelieu and Olivares*, Paris, PUF, 1991.

quickly and without hesitation, and let's not forget he was also a minister of war.

Like his bad reputation (which he perhaps pretended to counter), Richelieu may have used his terrible illnesses to create a space between action and an almost aesthetic pain. The sufferings of the Cardinal, who dragged his sick body on his constant travels on the battlefield, refer to ritualized suffering, to the endurance of saints, a manifestation of heroism, all conditions to become an intermediary with the sacred³². In this sense, suffering is the sign of the intimate participation of the Minister in the secrets of power and can include government participation in the sufferings of the people he leads³³. In other words, suffering is the counterweight and the justification of his political power, in the same way that material wealth makes up for his job and his subordinate place in relation to its noble identity.

His weak body made Richelieu acceptable to Louis XIII, who was also a very sick man³⁴. The pair often wrote to each other about their illnesses, wishing each other well, and swearing that it was only the presence of the one that could cure the other. Indeed, the sick Minister reflected the sick King, who had a recurrent fear of death. By publicly showing physical weakness, while acting fearlessly against opponents and leading the country to war, Richelieu screened off the risk of the King's death, and at the same time involved him in the royal dimension of Christ-like sovereignty³⁵.

As we can see, the character of Richelieu was built in a constant dialogue between the King and his Minister, a dialogue in which the character of Louis XIII was also built. It is the visible viceroyalty of Richelieu that engendered Louis's real kingship³⁶.

Did Richelieu seek to apply "reason of state" or did he follow a catholic politic? Such a question presupposes that his ministry (and Richelieu's entire life) followed a clear path; this corresponds to a mythologized vision that cannot explain all the facets or processes of the action.

Richelieu would have pursued power by ambition, he would have identified his own interest with that of the state, he would have first sought to elevate the King above the noble factions, before subjugating the Protestant faction and fighting against the Habsburgs who encircled France. The success of these three goals, considered logical and conditional one upon the other, would in itself demonstrate that Richelieu had planned them in advance. Above all, this version takes as a teleological assumption that these achievements, because they succeeded, necessarily corresponded to the interests of the state³⁷.

Richelieu was a man of action, he defined himself as such and valued this incarnation in his portraits, expressing it in texts through a dynamic vocabulary of consummation. This embodiment was also intended to represent a break with the past and to justify his power, power founded on his spectacular success. In Richelieu, the ecclesiastical condition, associated with virginity, probably has a direct link not only with the bellicosity expressed mostly under the form of a crusade, but also with aristocratic voluntarism and the struggle against opponents³⁸. And here again, we should link the

³² On the meaning of sacred suffering in the Renaissance, see especially Jacques Dalarun, *Claire de Rimini. Entre sainteté et hérésie*, Paris, Payot, 1999.

³³ C. Aguilar Adán, "Métaphores du corps politique malade au tour des années 1620", in Augustin Redondo (pres.): *Le Corps comme métaphore dans l'Espagne des XVIe et XVIIe siècles*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 1993, p. 61-71. Ramalhosa Guerreiro, Luis Manuel: "La maladie du prince", in *La Représentation du pouvoir royal à l'âge baroque portugais (1687-1753)*. PhD thesis, Paris, EHESS, 1995.

³⁴ Louis XIII suffered from gout, violent headaches and what he called « bouffements de ventre », stomach diseases as humiliating and not less significant from a political point of view as Richelieu's. Also, his melancholy made him the archetypal king without distraction (roi sans divertissement).

³⁵ On this topic, see Jean-Marie Apostolidès, *Le prince sacrifié. Théâtre et politique au temps de Louis XIV*, Paris, Minuit, 1985.

³⁶ Michel Tyvaert, "L'image du roi : légitimité et moralité royales dans les Histoires de France au XVIIe siècle", *RHMC*, t. XXI, oct-déc. 1974, p. 521-547.

³⁷ On these questions, see the methodological statement by Robert Descimon and Fanny Cosandey, *L'absolutisme en France : histoire et historiographie*, Paris, Seuil, 2002. Nicholas Henshall, *The myth of absolutism: change and continuity in Early-modern monarchy*, London / New York, Longman, 1992.

³⁸ Giovanni Ricci, *Ossessione turca. In una retrovia Cristiana dell'Europa moderna*, Bologne, Il Mulino, 2002, p. 75.

attitude and the way the character evolved with the man he served. For Louis XIII, the political and family frustrations, the long period in which the lack of an heir seemed to reflect a kind of incompleteness of power until the providential birth of the future Louis XIV in 1638, was overturned into the expression of the warrior aspect of the man. The little unconscious bravery and the real military talent of Louis XIII reflect his constant efforts to match his role of King as he imagined it to be, that is, as a King on horseback.

Richelieu's political thinking had no theoretical or abstract view. It was action oriented and first linked to the justification of action. He did not develop a theory before acting, and in fact this attitude is described as "pedantic" in the *Testament Politique*. He developed a state of affairs, from which he derived several choices of action which he submitted to the King. There was therefore no thought for the long term concerning problems or important issues. In any case, the Minister did not have the time for it and there was nobody in the state dedicated to what we today call strategic analysis. We must therefore not think Richelieu would have understood the challenges and opportunities over the long term.

Similarly, Richelieu was not a mystic, because he did not have time to stop and try to unravel the true secrets of the soul, the only place where an explanation of the contingencies of a world of illusions could be found³⁹. As Robert Descimon recalls it, mystical language was also probably not for the majority in Counter-Reformation France⁴⁰. People wanted a practical, positive faith, that would support what they did. Cardinal at the same time as Minister, Richelieu had to embody a Catholic politics, supporting the Catholic reconquest inside the country, and religious conquest missions abroad, for which his ally, Father Joseph⁴¹, was certainly the best representative and the most important tool.

The basic arguments that justify Richelieu's action are the King's interest, necessity and reason⁴². If the debate of the time opposed reason of state (Machiavellian) to pious political thinking, Richelieu (no more indeed than Olivares on the side of Spain), did not follow one or the other line. His choice was a compromise, which explains the constant mobilization of the means of justification. In this context, the "reason" quoted by Richelieu was not a Cartesian one (even if Descartes built on this common concept to craft his inescapable system, since this is also a solid base from which to find a logical reason in apparently incoherent contingencies). This reason, equivalent to what is often called the principle of "natural light", is a reason for action, which opposes the passions. The reason is that higher value that justifies the action, but is also an instrument of justification, that forces obedience.

His relationship to reason followed a binary logic: what is reasonable is good and what is not relevant to reason (mental abstraction, body language or "passions") is pernicious. Indeed, Richelieu channelled his own contradictions in the service of political action, which is inseparable from writing. We could say that his literary and more broadly interpretative game resembles the pedagogical technique the Jesuits tended to master in the same period and used in teaching or in festive events: the idea that it costs less to impose or to make facts, to make the signs or the words disappear, than to control that they are correctly interpreted by the audience. Thus, the "reasonableness" of Richelieu connects to the "correct reading" of the Jesuits. It is the powerful, neutral, traditional and leading authority, accepted as a source of truth, which offers the guarantee of a fair reading.

³⁹ Michel de Certeau, "Politique et mystique. René d'Argenson (1596-1651)", in *Le lieu de l'autre*, Paris, Gallimard, 2005.

⁴⁰ Robert Descimon, "Comment critiquer la raison mystique ? Dévotion et finance au XVIIe siècle", in Pierre-Antoine Fabre, Pascale Gruson, Michèle Leclerc-Olive (éds.), *Le sujet absolu, Une confrontation de notre présent aux débats du XVIIe siècle français*, Grenoble, Jérôme Million, 2007, p. 59-69.

⁴¹ Benoist Pierre, *Le père Joseph. L'éminence grise de Richelieu*, Paris, Perrin, 2007.

⁴² The bibliography on the reason of state, political ideas, absolutism and its limitations is huge. I mention only Etienne Thuau, *Raison d'État et pensée politique à l'époque de Richelieu*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2000 (1966); Michel Sennellart, *Machiavélisme et raison d'Etat*, Paris, PUF, 1989; Maurizio Viroli, *From Politics to reason of state : the acquisition and transformation of the language of politics*, Cambridge, UP, 1992 ; Laurie Cateeuw, *Réalisme et mythologie de la raison d'État. 1. Une question de mémoire historique*, direction du numéro spécial de la *Revue de synthèse* (n° 2, 2009), Paris, Springer, 2009.



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Richelieu man of action and of justification: *Le Cardinal de Richelieu, a shovel in one hand and a pair of pliers in the other, removes a caterpillar placed on a fleur-de-lys.* [engraving] Jean Ganière, 1637, BNF.

Against the uncertainties of lobbies fluctuating around moral, political patronage and various states, Richelieu imposed the domination of the reign of reason, the King's reason. In this process, he transformed his love for the art of public speaking into that of writing and into the attempt to monopolize opinion. Because it is of course those who write history who are right⁴³. Meanwhile, the moral superiority of the authoritarian state was reinforced by the publication of political texts that clarified and disseminated the doctrine of absolutism. By publicizing Jean Bodin's ideas on royal sovereignty, Cardin Lebret's *De la souveraineté du roi*, published in 1632, gave a theoretical foundation to the policy of levelling of hierarchies in favour of the King, advocated by Richelieu.

Pursuing a policy initiated by Henri IV, the Minister intended to control information, through strong censorship and the monopolization of most of the existing means, but also by establishing new literary formulas in favour of his glory. He formed a group of paid secretaries and writers, charged to develop, under his direction, letters, plays and pamphlets, to feed the Cardinal's archives with copies of documents⁴⁴. From the 1630s, control was strengthened to a remarkable level⁴⁵. Nevertheless, critics could not be fully contained. And with the financial requirements of the war, Richelieu's lack of popularity kept growing. The Cardinal was far from a charismatic leader. His power manifested the sacredness that came from elsewhere, he built his authority painfully and slowly through strategies and complex developments in sophisticated propaganda. Nothing was ever achieved, it was always necessary to start over again.

There are over a hundred works attributed to Richelieu, and yet almost none of them are in his hand. We do not even have a copy of the actual spelling, nor even an autograph of Richelieu himself. His two main works, the *Testament Politique* and the *Mémoires*, pose special problems in terms of

⁴³ Yves-Marie Bercé, "Richelieu: la maîtrise de l'histoire et le conformisme historique", in Myriam Yardéni (dir.), *Idéologie et propagande en France*, Paris, Picard, 1987, p. 99-106. Marc Fumaroli, *L'Age de l'éloquence. Rhétorique et «res literaria» de la Renaissance au seuil de l'époque classique*, Paris, Droz, 2002 (1980).

⁴⁴ Charles Aubéry, *L'Histoire du cardinal-duc de Richelieu...*, Paris, 1660, p. 609-611. See Christian Jouhaud, « Les Mémoires de Richelieu. Une logique manufacturière », *Mots*, 32, 1992, p. 81-93.

⁴⁵ Jean-Pierre Vittu, "Instruments of Political Information in France", in Brendan Dooly & Sabrina Baron, *The Politics of Information in Europe*, Londres, Routledge, 2001. Hélène Duccini, *Faire voir, faire croire. L'opinion publique sous Louis XIII*, Paris, Champ Vallon, 2003.

authorship, since they contain and concentrate the essential motivations of the Cardinal, who appears in the third or first person in texts for which we do not have the original manuscripts.

Yet the man was a graphomaniac. An insomniac, he wrote at night when he couldn't sleep, he kept a record of the notes of his spies who reported to him what was said about him. He was pictured with a pen in hand, but his writing itself remains in the shadows, leaving only the sound of the power of the state, become impersonal. This writing is often heavy, full of striking phrases reused from occasion to occasion. Words are tools in the service of a task to be undertaken, or a means for reflection to solve looming problems. Writing is also a way to make things happen, for it makes the assertion of certainty.

Above all, Richelieu's most original side is probably his desire to take control of history⁴⁶. Ultimately, it is as the King's historian that Richelieu staked a claim on posterity. In the *Histoire de Louis le Juste* (1635)⁴⁷, Simon Dupleix, guided by Richelieu, shows that the Cardinal's entire policy followed that of Henri IV. This exceptional man was guided by a providential vision, reinforced over time by military success. It is also for this reason that the battles had a central presence in the decoration of Richelieu's palaces. Associated with major conflicts of the past, the battles testified to the registration of the successes of the reign in a timeless gesture, which should lead to the establishment of peace.

Associated with the King and second only to him, Richelieu was also a kind of half-king. He played on this ambiguity in the registers of representation and justification of action, yet he always made sure not to exceed the limit. This is also why we never find in him any real enjoyment in his glory or in the assets he accumulated. It also explains the constant projection of his character into the future, a projection which was more a pragmatic propaganda of immediate effect than a theological perception of life.

Yet Richelieu never ceased to be concerned with the image of his actions and of himself. This concern even appears to have become a growing obsession. Obsessive anxiety to please the King, the practice of self-censorship, so as not to assimilate himself directly to the royal power (in his will, Richelieu gives all credit for success to the King, whose "excellence" had helped offset the lack of resources available to implement a policy presented as a coherent whole), were accompanied by a furious justification of his glorious person. Alone in his unique function, constantly dealing with problems of war and continual rebellions over nearly ten years of his life, he persisted until the end in defending himself from the accusation that he had abandoned the queen. The actions show the need to persuade others so as to reassure himself, that is, the perception of persuasion as self-persuasion.

The manufacture of a "brand"⁴⁸, that is, a set of images, patterns, colours, behaviours and practices experienced, etc., allowed the public man to develop a role in interaction with the environment and circumstances, but also in such a way that imperceptibly combined the private and the public spheres. This set of markers of the personality, stylised and completed through pamphlets, commentaries and finally painting and its assemblage in a decorative and programmed collection, allowed Richelieu, who became the man of portraiture, to practice a certain type of identity gap that protected him and presented another deceptive screen in front of power itself.

Two years after acquiring his family's lands, in 1624 Richelieu began major works and a systematic purchase of the surrounding land. The same year, he began to build the Palais Cardinal, opposite the Louvre (when this became the property of the King in 1642, the palace became the Palais Royal). In 1631, Richelieu became a duke and a peer of France, the highest degree of nobility after that of the prince. A palace, a park and a new city, capital of the duchy, were built, and connected by a network of canals. As the castle of which it was the annex, the city was expressed through logic and

⁴⁶ On this question, see in particular Christian Jouhaud, *Pouvoirs de la littérature*, Paris, 2000, Orest Ranum, *Artisans of Glory. Writers and historical thought in seventeenth-century France*, Chapel Hill, 1979.

⁴⁷ See Mathieu Lemoine, "Dupleix, Aristarque et Philotime: une polémique à trois voix ou comment le maréchal de Bassompierre conçoit le métier d'historien", *XVIIe siècle*, 2-2008, p. 195-221.

⁴⁸ François Sawicki, "Laurent Fabius : Du "Giscard de gauche" au "socialiste moderne" ", *Op. cit.*

symmetry, the double image of power, that is, the very position of Richelieu in the state⁴⁹.

In order to furnish and decorate his houses and gardens⁵⁰, Richelieu became a rival of the major European courts on the market for antiques and paintings, and he sought to attract the greatest artists⁵¹. For him, the taste for accumulating and collecting fitted into the strategy of appearing as a great prelate and a great lord. But these activities that mobilized his energies even in his busiest moments, also corresponded to the complementary role he held beside the King. For Richelieu failed to make of Louis XIII a courtly King, who used the court as a place for discipline and social control. It was therefore the Palais Cardinal that had this function. The works had mostly, but not exclusively, a decorative role. They were arranged in the gallery of the Palais Cardinal, as a metaphor of the historical method⁵². In this vision Richelieu built for posterity, he was set almost as the equal of the King, who faced him in a full-length portrait, at the other end of the great gallery. He was praised as a statesman in the gallery of illustrious men in the Cardinal's Parisian palace, which represented 25 full-length portraits of great men of the administration and the army, among which were Suger, the Cardinal d'Amboise and the Cardinal of Lorraine, to whom Richelieu appeared both as successor and as the latest and most accomplished⁵³.

The famous portraits painted by Philippe de Champaigne in the late 1630s allowed Richelieu to develop fully the unity of his character. In these paintings, Richelieu appears most often standing, moving, coated in a scarlet robe with a wide pleat, with a gentle and reflective look, following the usual manner of portraits in the Flemish style. The portraits were popularized through engraved copies of Champaigne's paintings, or stylized images that showed general attributes with a clear propagandist aim. These portraits, like those of the kings, follow the course of time, from the first prints of the 1620s to the final portrait by Champaigne, a model for a bust commissioned of Bernini in Rome in 1640⁵⁴. But by the end, the features, attributes, attitudes and looks were always the same and in a paradoxical way, this repetition offers a feeling of variation that makes the character at the same time ubiquitous and elusive⁵⁵.

In the tomb placed in the middle of the chapel of the Sorbonne, the ancient university Richelieu had rebuilt and revived, the mask is deeply internalized: Richelieu dying in between mourning figures plays his role to perfection, he believes in it. The suffering is real. And there is no reason to think he is lying about his relationship to the King, or that he is not really pained to tears by the verbal abuse of his opponents. He also prepared everything for his posthumous life, to pursue a linear construction of his public action.

3. *The posthumous man (1642 to 2011)*

Putting the spotlight on the posthumous life of great characters can help us to follow the paths of ideological construction. This construction cannot be separated from the character's life in itself, because we cannot grasp today who Richelieu was without questioning the perpetuation and transformation of a memory which has become a legend, an ideological tool and a national signifier.

⁴⁹ Hanno-Walter Kruft, "Abbild in Staatsraison: Richelieu", in *Städte in Utopia. Die Idealstadt vom 15. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert zwischen Staatsutopie und Wirklichkeit*, München, Beck, 1989, p. 82-98.

⁵⁰ Kenneth Woodbridge, "The picturesque image of Richelieu's gardens at Rueil", *Garden History*, 9, 1981, p. 1-22.

⁵¹ Antoine Schnapper, *Curieux du grand siècle. Collections et collectionneurs dans la France du XVIIe siècle*, Paris, Flammarion, 1994. J. Brown, *Kings and connoisseurs: collecting art in 17th century Europe*, New Haven, 1995. P. Cabanne, *Les grands collectionneurs, T. 1: Du Moyen Age à la Révolution*, Paris, 2003. *Richelieu, l'art et le pouvoir*, catalogue d'exposition, Montréal/Cologne, 2002. Jean-Claude Boyer, Bénédicte Gady, Barbara Gaehtgens (eds.), *Richelieu patron des arts*, Paris, Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 2009.

⁵² Yann Potin, "Collections et trésors. Représentations sociales et politiques de l'accumulation", *Hypothèses*, 2003/1 p. 13-22.

⁵³ Thomas Kirchner, "Richelieu et son usage programmatique de l'art", in *Richelieu patron des arts*, *Op. cit.*, p. 251-272.

⁵⁴ "La fonction politique du portrait", in *Richelieu, l'art et le pouvoir*, *op. cit.*, p. 261-266. Louis Marin, *Le portrait du roi*, Paris, Minuit, 1981.

⁵⁵ Malcolm Baker, "Pope, the portrait bust and patterns of repetition", in Lorna Clymer (dir.), *Ritual, routine and regime*, UCLA, Toronto Press, 2006, p. 224-245.

The legend is actually a part and parcel of the historicity of the character⁵⁶.

While the material remains of Richelieu's property gradually disappeared, to the point that almost nothing is left today of his castles, of his vast collections or even of his library, the legend continues to support the character for which he himself provided most of the major threads. The legend of Richelieu is one of those myths that has built the main strands of national identity and that, despite corrections, remains a common thread, constantly recalled. It is so first of all because the historiographical reconstruction undertaken by Richelieu deleted a number of sources that could have give us different versions⁵⁷. Second, because we are still perhaps at the beginning of a complex reconstruction of the "Grand Siècle" as a complex, baroque period, which cannot be separated from earlier or later times. Finally, it is perhaps also because, despite several attempts at cross-temporal studies⁵⁸, the historical vision of the seventeenth century remains largely focused on national dimensions.

If the legend was already being built during Richelieu's lifetime, with his enormous work of justification and propaganda on the one hand and his fiercest opponent's pamphlets on the other, criticism and praise literally exploded after his death⁵⁹. Richelieu was attacked for his tax policy and his cynicism and the way he took control of power. After the first moment of surprise, there was a cathartic release of talk, particularly noticeable at the time of the Fronde, when criticism that had been directed at Richelieu was republished and directed at his successor Mazarin⁶⁰. Critics converged in denouncing Richelieu as the originator of wars he had initiated for his own sake, and the cause of their devastating consequences. In this way, Richelieu's political power was largely discredited and soon the image of an altruistic servant of power was eclipsed. Richelieu was accused of having created a vacuum around the King, of being the cause of his break with his mother and brother, and even of having tried to get rid of the King's heirs. But at the same time, a literature of exaltation appeared, which owed very much to the work of Richelieu's niece, the Duchesse d'Aguillon, who published his posthumous writings and reprinted those already published, and demonstrated to what extent the projects undertaken by the Cardinal had prepared for the accomplishments of the glorious reign of Louis XIV. After 1661, the controversial figure of Richelieu faded, while a historical figure of inhuman stature asserted itself. In 1688, the publication of the *Testament Politique*, initiated the controversy surrounding the authenticity of the book.

It was also about the authenticity of Richelieu's work that Voltaire first unleashed his criticism of 1737. The philosopher – who ruined in a humorous tone the idea of "greatness" in the *Philosophical Dictionary*⁶¹ – while he admired in Richelieu the Minister and the patron of arts and letters, refused to

⁵⁶ On the concept of "regimes of historicity", See Reinhard Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*. Cambridge, Mass, MIT University Press, 1985 (1979). François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicités, présentisme et expérience du temps*, Paris, Seuil, 2003. Christian Delacroix, François Dosse, Patrick Garcia, *Historicités*, Paris, La Découverte, 2009. Antoine Fabre, Pascale Gruson, Michèle Leclerc-Olive (éds.), *Le sujet absolu. Op. cit. Rodríguez de la Flor, Barroco. Representación e ideología en el mundo hispánico (1580-1680)*, Madrid, Cátedra, 2002. For a history of posthumous legends and their role in national consciousness, see for instance Michel Winock, "Jeanne d'Arc", in Pierre Nora (dir.), *Les lieux de mémoire*, T. 3, 1983.

⁵⁷ This is the case of the papers of the duc de Luynes, Richelieu's predecessor. See Sharon Kettering, *Power and Reputation at the Court of Louis XIII: The Career of Charles d'Albert, duc de Luynes (1578-1621)*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2008.

⁵⁸ John H. Elliott and L.W.B. Brockliss (eds.), *The World of the Favorite*, Yale, Yale UP, 1999, Jean-Frédéric Schaub, *La France espagnole. Les racines hispaniques de l'absolutisme français*, Paris, Seuil, 2003.

⁵⁹ Cit. Ferretti, Giulio Ferretti, "Élites et peuples à Paris, 1642-1650. La naissance de l'historiographie sur Richelieu", *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*, 1, 1997, p. 114. *Thrésor des épitaphes pour et contre le cardinal duc de Richelieu* Anvers, 1642.

⁶⁰ Christian Jouhaud, *Mazarinades, la Fronde des mots*, Paris, Aubier, 1985. Laurent Avezou, "La légende de Richelieu. Richelieu et la postérité", in *Richelieu patron des arts*, *Op. cit.*, p. 521-543. "Le tombeau littéraire de Richelieu. Genèse d'une héroïsation", *Hypothèses*, 2001-1, p. 181-190.

⁶¹ The term "large" (*gros*) is sometimes used with respect to subjects of the latter description, that is, material ones, as equivalent to great, but never with respect to moral subjects. We say large property for great wealth, but not a large captain for a great captain, or a large minister for a great minister. Great financier means a man eminently skilful in

admit that an ecclesiastical figure could be a politician, and destroyed Richelieu's public stature with a regular attack. Indeed, while the challenges of the seventeenth century passed away, there was a distancing that allowed for the exploitation of character in the light of more contemporary issues. Montesquieu saw in Richelieu "one of the meanest people that France ever had" and even denounced his lack of taste. In this period, there was also a new development in the form of pseudo-memoirs of the time of Richelieu, including those of d'Artagnan by Gatien de Sandras Courtilz, which fed the criticism and demystification of the royal power.

The Revolution claimed retribution of the past monarchy. In December 1793, the tomb of Richelieu at the Sorbonne was ritually profaned: the body was exhumed in a perfect condition, according to the topos of the exhumation of saints⁶². The exhumation recalls the takeover of power, but also the ritual looting that was an ancient part of interregnum, in which the group appropriated the sanctity of the King. In the end, the crowd cut off the Cardinal's head, killing the tyrant following the revolutionary rite. Richelieu was afterwards attacked by the heirs both of the revolution and the counter revolution; he was considered a demiurge and a precursor to the abolition of privileges, of the general levelling of society before the state. Compared with Bonaparte and the Marquis of Pombal, Richelieu became the epitome of the pragmatic politician.

At the same time, the last material elements of Richelieu's achievements eventually disappeared. Richelieu's castle went to a speculator who sold its stones. The art collections were scattered, some of the most important works, such as the great antique sculpture, went to the new museum of the Louvre. The castle and the extraordinary gardens of Rueil, near Paris, were also broken up. Only the city of Richelieu has remained intact until now, almost in the same state as when it was built.

The proliferation of works on the Old Regime under the July Monarchy, as well as the late publication of texts from the period, revived anti-aristocratic memory at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Gédéon Tallemant des Reaux's *Historiettes* allowed the Romantic generation to satisfy its growing curiosity for the private life in biography⁶³. Alfred de Vigny's *Cinq Mars*, the first French historical novel, published in 1827, was also a thesis novel⁶⁴. Through the story of the execution of Cinq Mars (the favourite of Louis XIII who plotted against Richelieu and was executed in 1638) portrayed in the guise of the perfect romantic hero, Vigny sought to depict the feeling of loss of identity among the contemporary nobility. Through a modern aesthetic, the novel described the transformation at the time of death into an ideal piety, while Richelieu appeared as an executioner of low extraction.

The Romantic period saw a proliferation of intrigue and works of art which attempted to combine the reconstruction of intimate bourgeois life and reason of state. Richelieu appears as a mitred demon in Victor Hugo's *Marion Delorme*, the supposed love story of the Minister with a courtesan. This image of bad faith also reflected a new curiosity in the secrets of the alcove, hidden beneath the official morality of history.

In the 1830s, however, Richelieu was gradually rehabilitated into patriotic memory which introduced the great men of the nation. The transition can be seen in Alexandre Dumas's *The Three Musketeers* (1844), where Richelieu appears in the role of the wicked man, but also as a figure able to recognize the value of men, and then, in *Twenty Years After* (1845), he appears as a man of dignified

(Contd.)

matters of national finance; but *gros financier* expresses merely a man who has become wealthy in the department of finance." Voltaire, *The Philosophical Dictionary, Great/Greatness*. On Voltaire's doubts about the attribution of the *Testament Politique*, see *Mélanges*, IV.

⁶² The body had indeed been embalmed in 1642. Another profanation, although this time more facetious, of the Sorbonne memorial of the Cardinal took place on the occasion of the riots of May 1968.

⁶³ Among other things, Gédéon Tallemant des Réaux (1619-1692), mocks the choleric and jealous temperament of the Cardinal, his avariciousness and his lack of taste. *Historiettes*, 2t., Paris, La Pléiade, 1960. In the same period was published Henri-Auguste de Loménie de Brienne's *Mémoires contenant les événements les plus remarquables du règne de Louis XIII et de celui de Louis XIV jusqu'à la mort du cardinal Mazarin, composés pour l'instruction de ses enfants*, pub. par Michaud et Poujoulat, 3e série, tome 3, 1838.

⁶⁴ Jean-Christophe Abramovici, "« On a sans doute reconnu Cinq Mars » : Vigny, le corps et l'histoire", *Romantisme*, 1993, 81, p. 21-26.

stature opposing the pettiness of a curled and perfumed Mazarin.

A new understanding of the Old Regime appeared after the publication of Tocqueville and Ranke's works around the middle of the nineteenth century⁶⁵, which opened the doors to a multiplication of historical works and biographies, and widened understanding of a period poorly known until then. Nevertheless, the great historian Michelet developed the image of Richelieu as a bad-tempered hypocrite and a man full of contradictions: "Sphinx in a red dress", "silly intriguing", and always under suspicion of not really having served France, but his own ambition and perhaps even worse." Richelieu was pro-Spanish for forty years, and then anti-Spanish. Should we believe that in the first period, he stubbornly lied? Or that having been sincere until then, he suddenly changed so late and became French?"⁶⁶

After 1871, when the Third Republic mobilized itself to forge a strong French identity ready to take its revenge against Prussia, historians and politicians rediscovered Richelieu, who became the precursor of the idea of the so-called "natural frontiers" and of the glory of colonial France. Richelieu, Cardinal and chief Minister who had been allied with the German Protestants, a duke but also "teacher of the French nation", became the symbol of the contradictions finally overwhelmed by the Third Republic. In a final perspective, the *Grand Siècle* was naturally considered an essential step in the myth of nation building. This model reached its apogee in the period preceding the First World War, particularly in the discourse of teaching manuals, which prepared students for the conflict.

Therefore, Richelieu continued to fascinate and disturb, despite his status as a cleric or perhaps because of it, he brings together various trends in French society. After the exhaustive debates of scholars in the interwar period, a more objective view emerged, but Richelieu was still employed to interpret the totalitarianism of the time⁶⁷. During the Second World War, the Vichy regime briefly rediscovered the Cardinal, to make him a domestic enemy, guilty of dreams of grandeur, or, although with little consistency, the precursor of a Europe united under the aegis of a victorious Germany.

After 1945, in France as elsewhere, history had much less of a tendency to summon the "great men", who had been toppled from their pedestals with the failure of the charismatic dictators. While academic research focused on economic and social structures, while Pierre Goubert reduced the role of the Sun King, associated with the immensity of "twenty million Frenchmen"⁶⁸, cinema, which became a leading provider of biographical narratives, followed with the success of the *Three Musketeers*. The successive versions of the story allowed Richelieu to enter the collective memory of the baby boomers, alongside the stories of Indians, at the same level of the dream of the exotic and the certainty of right. Richelieu became a secondary character, typical of an old regime often considered as a curious, wiggled and cruel period, as it appears for example in the pink-dressed Richelieu summoned to court in Monty Python's *Flying Circus*.

While French historians tended to set Richelieu aside, in the 1960s Anglo-Saxon historians started to focus with a renewed interest on the history of the first half of the seventeenth century and on Richelieu's character.⁶⁹ A new look at the sources, at the angle of analysis of the Minister, at the study of political motivation and the practice of government, or of the networks and the material sources of the Cardinal's power, meant that their work qualified the image of Richelieu in France where, partly because of the lack of critical biography, hagiography often dominated the historical scene.

If the history of early-modern France interests the Anglo-Saxons, it is especially because of the political differences experimented upon by the two countries, precisely in this period of the

⁶⁵ Alexis de Tocqueville, *La démocratie en Amérique* (1840 et 1845). *L'Ancien régime et la révolution* (1856). Leopold von Ranke, *Histoire de France principalement pendant le XVIIe et le XVIIIe siècle*, 3 t., Paris, 1854-1856.

⁶⁶ "Richelieu est espagnol jusqu'à quarante ans et, depuis, anti-espagnol. Faut-il croire que, dans la première période, il ait obstinément menti ? Ou bien qu'ayant été sincère il changea tout à coup si tard et devint Français ?" Jules Michelet, *Henri IV et Richelieu*, Helibron classics, 2006 (1861).

⁶⁷ Auguste Bailly, *Richelieu*, 1934. Jean Giraudoux, *Pleins pouvoirs*, 1939.

⁶⁸ Pierre Goubert, *Louis XIV et vingt millions de Français*, Paris, 1966.

⁶⁹ I quote Joseph Bergin, Orest Ranum, William Church, John H. Elliott or Robert Knecht.

first half of the seventeenth century. While France attempted royal absolutism, that doubled its territorial expansion on the continent, England, turning in the direction of the Atlantic, gradually established a government of balance between the king and parliament, which advocated both the old feudal ties and an element of political modernization. Anglo-Saxon historians also questioned the strangeness of a country that came out of the wars of religion with an authoritarian solution and apparent compromise, unlike the English solution. After World War Two, while Europe experimented for the first time with a communitarian structure, it reconfigured itself yet again, in a complex dialectic between Atlantic and continental options; Anglo-Saxon questionings of Richelieu's ideological motivations linked with those touching upon the reasons for the existence of a deep ideological duality in France and for its displayed independence vis-à-vis the two blocs engaged in the cold war.

German research into Richelieu is different. The concern of German historians was in particular the role of the Minister in the reconfiguration of Europe through the participation of France in the Thirty Years War and the settlement of the peace treaties of Westphalia in 1648. The Richelieu of the historian and Swiss diplomat Carl J. Burckhardt (published in work between 1935 and 1967), is a disinterested and visionary negotiator, like Burckhardt himself who negotiated with the Nazis on behalf of the League of Nations and the International Commission of the Red Cross. This rehabilitation of Richelieu as a great minister who had a long-term vision of European peace, as well as the new reflections of historians since the 1960s on the scope and the interpretation of the peace of 1648, led in Germany to discussion of the role of the balance of power in Europe, of the origin of the confrontation between the Empire and France in the Old Regime, as well as the role of the great man and authoritarianism throughout the period⁷⁰.

The name of Richelieu remained a safe bet in twentieth-century France. A familiar image on the 500 franc banknote, the glorious image of the battleship *Richelieu* (built in 1935), the name still evokes today the great institutions of power and, more broadly, finance, culture or state in their supreme solemnity. Today Richelieu is discussed more around cultural issues, long neglected, than around issues of power. A sign of the times, Richelieu is more admired today as a collector and patron of the arts than as a statesman! In the press kit of the spring 2011 exhibition in the town of Richelieu⁷¹, he appears as "one of the greatest collectors of his time", without any reference being made to his political function. In today's France, Richelieu, historical and consensual, is something of an icon associated with the cold and impassive state⁷².

Today, what connects research on Richelieu in a context of profound renewal of the practice of biography, is the fundamental question of the reason for the action and the scope of his authoritarian and voluntarist policy, in which scholars understand his influence on the European scene. The time of Louis XIII, long considered austere and linear, leading to an absolutism already theorized even before being practised, is now being rediscovered as an exuberant time, colourful and full of doubts, which allows us to link our own uncertainties to those of the beginning of the seventeenth century.

Conclusion

The life of Richelieu shows us accurately how he progressively built a strong and at the same time very complex way of demonstrating and being himself that allowed him to exist as a man of power. These baroque features built a role he patiently developed in the light of circumstances, and a role that he lived as himself and propagated through a significant and magnificent propaganda. In 1642, when Jean Armand died, the legend was already ready to carry on the lasting memory of the Cardinal. This apologetic side was challenged by numerous opponents. His actions and bizarre status as clergyman at

⁷⁰ See especially Klaus Malettke, Heinz Duchhardt, Rainer Babel. See also Jörg Wollenberg, « Richelieu et le système européen de sécurité collective », *Dix-septième siècle*, 2001/1, p. 99-112.

⁷¹ *Richelieu à Richelieu*, 11 mars-12 juin 2011, Musées des Beaux Arts de Tours et d'Orléans / Musée municipal de Richelieu. Catalogue : *Richelieu à Richelieu. Architecture et décors d'un château disparu*, Silvana Editoriale, 2011.

⁷² Ariel Colomonos, "La froideur du regard impassible des Etats", *Communications*, 75, 2004, p. 75-90.

the top of a strong government, have built a contradictory image of the man. Positive and negative opinions have constructed a terrifying and marvellous image of the man, an image which has been adapted for different purposes over time.

If Richelieu's time is obviously fascinating, it is because it seems to illustrate in its contradictions and its theoretical uncertainties, the key moment of a historical transition, the moment in which things seem to find a solution. And maybe this period questions especially our own epoch, because we also experiment today in a period of transition, and the questions and contradictions of the seventeenth century point to or overlap with our own. In addition, turning again to the story of an iconic character raises questions about the historian's methods, the state of the available sources and historiographical trends. Richelieu is also exciting because in him are concentrated a number of historiographical issues that are rarely considered face on in current historiography, especially the questions of absolutism, of reason in the mirror of the state, or of the formation of modern Europe. Finally, in this character lies an opportunity to revisit the history of the posthumous hero, that is to say, the way he has continued to shape history and how our present deals with great men of the past as a testimony of our own vision of history, the state and its future in Europe.

