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RESEARCH ARTICLE

La Boétie Absolutist? An episode in the history of political thought

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First published in 1652–1654 and then in a new edition in 1666, the *Discours politiques* of the *académicien* Daniel de Priézac (1590–1662) have been characterized as a statement of Aristotelian politics in the service of absolutism. The aspect of interest in this article is Priézac's hitherto unnoticed practice of quoting from La Boétie's *La Servitude volontaire*. It may seem strange that a treatise so often associated with anti-tyrannical literature should be used in a work of political thought defending the monarchy and the state. Priézac's attempt to exploit it takes place against the background of the Fronde. Priézac was also a protégé of Séguier, to whom the *Discours* were dedicated; and Séguier owned an (extant) manuscript of La Boétie's treatise. Through a combination of close reading and historical contextualization, this article will elucidate this absolutist turn in the reception of La Boétie.

KEYWORDS La Boétie, Priézac, absolutism, political thought, Fronde, Séguier

The *Discours politiques* of Daniel de Priézac (1590–1662) first appeared in 1652–1654, with a second edition in 1661 and a revised posthumous edition in 1666.¹ Rising rapidly from his post as *intendant* of Guyenne owing to the favour of Pierre Séguier, Priézac moved to Paris where he frequented the chancellor's intellectual

¹ On Priézac and his *Discours politiques*, see René Kerviler, *Le Chancelier Pierre Séguier second protecteur de l'Académie Française*, 2nd edition (Paris: Didier, 1875), chapter 8, 'Deux avocats à l'Académie et chez le Chancelier. I: Daniel de Priézac (1590–1662)', pp. 581–602; Étienne Thuau, 'Les *Discours politiques* de Daniel de Priézac: un manifeste absolutiste à la fin de la Fronde', unpublished *thèse complémentaire*, University of Paris-Sorbonne, 1966.

circles before being elected to the Académie Française in 1639. It comes as no surprise that he repaid his debt to Séguier by dedicating his *Discours politiques* to him.²

Described in the *privilege* as *Discours sur la Politique d'Aristote*, Priézac's work has been characterized as nothing less than 'une application de la politique d'Aristote aux gouvernements des États modernes, qui doit, suivant lui [Priézac], assurer à jamais la félicité publique'.³ Étienne Thuau nuances this claim. For him, Priézac bases his theory of political science on three principles: the order of the universe as the work of God, the 'cité' as an object of knowledge, and the spirit of Aristotelian rationalism.⁴ Each chapter deals with an aspect of such a commonwealth – society, family, slavery, royalty, religion and so forth – and the overall purpose of the work is a defence of 'les institutions françaises contre toutes les attaques dirigées par les ennemis de Richelieu et de Mazarin'.⁵ As a statement about absolutist rule and particularly the institutions which support it, the *Discours politiques* make a specific contribution to the theory of government under the Bourbon monarchy.⁶ Priézac is an 'étatiste qui tournait la pensée d'Aristote à la justification du seul régime qu'il jugeait possible en France'.⁷

The hitherto unstudied aspect which is the focus of attention in this article is Priézac's debt to La Boétie's *La Servitude volontaire*.⁸ Among the countless acknowledged and unacknowledged references to Classical and sometimes contemporary writings which throng Priézac's work, we can identify five adaptations of and three allusions to the sixteenth-century treatise. Interestingly, none occurs in the discourse specifically entitled 'De la tyrannie',⁹ but as elements related to tyranny in topics such as slavery, royalty and majesty. None of these borrowings is avowed. As often in the early modern period, La Boétie remains under the veil of anonymity.¹⁰

Priézac uses the full range of imitative devices, from reference to imitation. In 'De la majesté', for example, he picks up La Boétie's examples of the Kings of Egypt and Assyria in order to illustrate tyrannical practices of mystification designed to inspire wonder and fear in their subjects (*DP*, p. 149).¹¹ The clear allusions apart, the

² For references to Séguier in the body of the *Discours*, see Thuau, 'Les *Discours politiques*', pp. 69–70.

³ Kerviler, *Le Chancelier Pierre Séguier*, p. 592. Thuau, 'Les *Discours politiques*', p. 65, points out that Kerviler's analysis of the structure of the chapters is inaccurate.

⁴ Thuau, 'Les *Discours politiques*', pp. 66–7; cf. p. 68 on Aristotle 'la gloire du Lycée, et de toutes les hautes sciences'.

⁵ Kerviler, *Le Chancelier Pierre Séguier*, p. 592.

⁶ See Cecilia Carnino, *Économie politique et science du gouvernement au XVII^e siècle. L'exemple du 'Conseiller d'État'* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2022), pp. 200–4; and for an overview of absolutism, Fanny Cosandey and Robert Descimon, *L'Absolutisme en France. Histoire et historiographie* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2002).

⁷ Thuau, 'Les *Discours politiques*', p. 132.

⁸ Nothing about La Boétie is to be found in Thuau's *thèse* and his subsequent *Raison d'état et pensée politique à l'époque de Richelieu* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1966; reprint Albin Michel, 2000).

⁹ Thuau, 'Les *Discours politiques*', pp. 98–102, shows how Priézac distinguishes the traditional image of the tyrant from the picture of his absolute ruler.

¹⁰ See *La Première Circulation de la 'Servitude volontaire' en France et au-delà*, ed. by John O'Brien and Marc Schachter (Geneva: Droz, 2019), especially pp. 289–90. For clandestinity in mid-seventeenth-century literature, see Giuliano Ferretti, 'Autour de la bibliothèque du Roi: la littérature clandestine d'opposition sous la régence d'Anne d'Autriche', *Revue de la Saintonge et de l'Aunis*, 26 (2000), 45–52.

¹¹ Daniel de Priézac, *Discours politiques* (Paris: Pierre Rocolet, 1652[–1654]), abbreviated *DP* and incorporated in the text with a page number. BL, Harley MS 4436 contains early manuscript versions of some of these discourses. The La Boétie material is less pronounced there than in the print edition.

verbal reminiscences 'flammes' and 'admiration' and the reference to invisibility also point to the subtext in question (SV, pp. 60–1).¹² Related to this device, but at the next stage of refinement up, are 'punctual' borrowings in which an identifiable quotation appears but its implications are not further developed in the passage. Thus the lines from the chapter 'Du naturel des peuples' where the people are compared paranomastically to a poplar tree (*peuplier*) in a rather clumsily handled allegory: 'De la sujettion la plus basse, il monte à la plus superbe domination, & souvent *tombe en un si profond oubly de soy-mesme, qu'à le voir si librement servir, on diroit qu'il n'a pas perdu sa liberté, mais sa servitude*' (DP, p. 340).¹³ The passage abridges and, towards the end, partly re-arranges La Boétie's original (SV, p. 46).¹⁴ It is inserted here simply as part of a small cluster of images designed to illustrate the fickle nature of the populace subject to shifting passions. Likewise, La Boétie's image of the colossus is deployed to describe the perilous position of a ruler brought to power by popular favour: '*comme un grand Colosse auquel on dérobe la base, fond à bas par son propre poids, & couvre de ses ruines les appuis mesmes qui le soustenoient*' (DP, p. 133). As with the previous instance, direct quotation here is combined with minor verbal variation or changes to word order. In both cases, the point remains highly localized.

A related form of localization is to be found in 'Des secrets de la domination ou de la raison d'estat'.¹⁵ The section in question is a sustained reflection on the Imperial Roman use of bread and circuses as a means of pacifying and controlling the populace. It bears the strong imprint of Tacitus, also La Boétie's source here, while introducing at one particular point a re-worked quotation from *La Servitude volontaire*:

tous ces voluptueux spectacles [...] estoient en effet autant d'attraits & d'allechemens, ou pour mieux dire, n'estoient que le prix de sa servitude, & les instrumens de la Tyrannie. (DP, p. 281)

The sixteenth-century version runs as follows:

c'estoient aus peuples anciens les apasts de la servitude, le pris de leur liberté, les outils de la tyrannie; [...] ces allechemens avoient les anciens tyrans pour endormir leurs sujets sous le joug. (SV, p. 58)

La Boétie's point merges with Tacitus's on the question of the secrets of domination, and it is Tacitus who is the more important figure, with La Boétie playing a supporting role.

Other passages, however, are more expansive in their use of *La Servitude volontaire*. One concerns a fundamental of early modern political thought, the question

¹² Estienne de La Boétie, *De la servitude volontaire ou Contr'Un*, éd. Malcolm Smith with additional notes by Michel Magnien (Geneva: Droz, 2001), abbreviated SV and incorporated in the text with a page number.

¹³ Thuau, 'Les *Discours politiques*', pp. 186–7, quotes this passage of La Boétie without identifying it. Here and in what follows, the actual wording of *La Servitude volontaire* is italicized.

¹⁴ The original reads at the close: 'gagné sa servitude'. The reading here, 'mais sa servitude', makes less sense, but is nonetheless the variant of the Goulart tradition of the text – see later.

¹⁵ On this chapter, see Thuau, 'Les *Discours politiques*', pp. 103–15.

of ‘amitié’ conceived of as the social bond which holds the fabric of society together. Priézac is discussing the impossibility of ‘amitié’ in tyrannical societies:

l’Amitié qui est une chose sacrée & une Vertu tout ensemble, n’entre point dans le commerce de ceux qui font regner le vice, & si les Tyrans s’associent avec les ministres de leurs passions, c’est un complot & non pas une compagnie; ils sont complices & non pas amis, & il en est comme des Brigands entre lesquels il y a bien un partage de despoüilles, mais sans aucune communication de legitimes affections. Ce sont des societez de larcins & de crimes que l’Amitié ne peut souffrir [...]. (DP, p. 43)

The comparatively small amount of direct quotation conceals techniques of integration spread over the whole passage. The order of the original is re-organized – ‘un nom sacré [...] une chose sainte’ (SV, p. 73) – or reversed (La Boétie: ‘ils ne sont pas amis mais ils sont complices’, SV, p. 73).¹⁶ Above all, the whole passage provides a series of glosses on its source: ‘brigands’ and ‘larcins’ qualify ‘complices’, just as ‘despoüilles’ and ‘crimes’ explain the results of their ‘commerce’, in contradistinction to ‘Amitié’ which is a ‘compagnie’ and a ‘communication de legitimes affections’. Social bonds are thus given a precise codification; they cannot legitimately be predicated of tyrannical society. On this particular occasion, Priézac is reaffirming and strengthening La Boétie’s point.

The example at the start of ‘De la royauté’ takes this technique in a different direction. It has a recognizable opening:

Certes, l’esprit humain ne sçauroit comprendre que tant de Villes fortifiées, tant de Provinces armées, & tant de millions d’hommes [...] s’assujettissent à un homme & souvent à un enfant, pour le salut duquel tous les perils leur sont précieux, & la vie moins chère que l’honneur qu’ils trouvent en leur sujétion. (DP, p. 121)

This beginning mirrors La Boétie’s own exordium: ‘je ne voudrois sinon entendre comm’il se peut faire que tant d’hommes, tant de bourgs, tant de villes, tant de nations endurent quelque fois un tyran seul [...] il s’en faut de tant plus doulouir et moins s’esbahir, voir un million d’hommes servir miserablement’ (SV, p. 34). Priézac retains the techniques of *anaphora* and *gradatio*, while, as usual, re-arranging and telescoping the original. This example might seem ‘punctual’, were it not for what follows – a set of reflections, initiated by this sentence. While not directly and identifiably indebted to La Boétie, they are strongly reminiscent of his thought: human beings prefer freedom to slavery; by nature, they cannot voluntarily submit to the control of another. As with the passage in ‘Des secrets de la domination’, there is a concomitant Classical text, in this case Quintilian, yet here it does not leave La Boétie in a subordinate position. On the contrary: the sixteenth-century writer’s themes pave the way for a larger argument Priézac is mounting, the critical importance of royalty as a political organizational principle.

Our final example, drawn from the chapter ‘De la servitude’, offers the most expansive occurrence of Priézac’s techniques of assimilation with their combination of quotations, allusions and free imitation. It is taken from one of the famous sections in *La Servitude volontaire*, which Priézac phrases as follows: ‘elle [la Nature] a

¹⁶ Harley MS 4436, fol. 232^v, maintains La Boétie’s word order here.

donné à tous une mesme voix, & qu[']elle les a jettez en mesme moule [...] afin qu'ils se reconnussent pour freres' (*DP*, p. 56). The strong verbal echoes anchor his words firmly into La Boétie's fervent declaration (*SV*, p. 41). Yet the next sentence goes on to read: 'Que si de tout temps il luy a pleu de se monstrier plus liberale envers les uns, soit pour les ornemens de l'esprit, soit pour les biens du corps; ce n'est pas pourtant qu'elle ait voulu pousser les autres comme dans un camp clos, pour y estre exposez à tous les outrages de la violence, ou de la servitude' (*DP*, p. 57). This is a free re-writing of its equivalent in *La Servitude*, while incorporating a direct quotation ('dans un camp clos', *SV*, p. 41). And this proves to be the pattern for this whole imitative sequence: re-writing, clarification and expansion (or the opposite, abridgement) stand alongside allusions, adaptations and quotations as Priézac reshapes *La Servitude volontaire* for his own purposes.

What is the source of these borrowings? Although their rearrangement makes it difficult to be categorical, at least two of the readings in the passages used by Priézac point to the *Memoires de l'estat de France sous Charles IX*.¹⁷ Put together by the Swiss pastor Simon Goulart, this three-volume compilation of tracts, discourses, dialogues, narratives, harangues, remonstrances and letters was first published in 1576–1577, with a second edition in 1578–1579. The first appearance of *La Servitude volontaire* in print was in the third volume of this collection in 1577. In the seventeenth century, the *Memoires* are sometimes referred to by French writers and had clearly become an historical source as well as a collector's item.¹⁸ Yet there is far more to Priézac's choice than the archaeologist's tool or the bibliophile's delight.

As Étienne Thuau underlines, the context of Priézac's *Discours* is the Fronde of 1648–1653, 'le dernier effort de l'opinion "libérale" pour maintenir la forme modérée de la monarchie'.¹⁹ It was during this period that some of the most notable or indeed notorious polemical tracts of the sixteenth-century Wars of Religion were reprinted or recirculated as an implicit critique of the French authorities, notably the Queen Mother and Mazarin. While Nicole Cazauran has briefly studied one particular instance of this activity, Hubert Carrier has provided a useful overview of the topic as it relates to Mazarinades.²⁰ 'Ce qui resort principalement du

¹⁷ One reading is 'mais leur servitude' (p. 340), which only occurs in the Goulart tradition. The other is 'allemens' (p. 281) which Goulart shares with some, but not all, of the extant manuscripts.

¹⁸ Some examples: *Le Mercure François*, vol. 17 (Paris: Estienne Richer, 1633), p. 320; Gabriel Naudé, *Considerations politiques sur les coups d'estat* (Rome: n.pub., 1639), p. 116; Gabriel Naudé, *Bibliographie politique* (Paris: Guillaume Pelé, 1642), p. 156, sig. Oiii^r; Mathieu de Morgues, *Diverses Pieces pour la defense de la Royne Mere [...]* (n.p., n.pub., no date [1643]), p. 45; Charles Sorel, *La Bibliothèque françoise* (Paris: La Compagnie des Libraires du Palais, 1664), p. 305; Adrien Baillet, *Des enfans devenus célèbres par leurs études ou leurs écrits* (Paris: Antoine Dezallier, 1688), p. 135. BnF MS 17298, Séguier's copy of *La Servitude volontaire*, carries a handwritten note on fol. 99^r stating that the discourse was published in the third volume of the *Memoires*.

¹⁹ Thuau, 'Les *Discours politiques*', p. 88. Cf. pp. 153–64 for a comparison of the *Discours politiques* with Claude Joly's *Recueil de maximes véritables* of 1652.

²⁰ [Henri Estienne,] *Discours merveilleux de la vie, actions et departments de Catherine de Medicis, Roynne mere*, ed. by Nicole Cazauran (Geneva, Droz, 1995), especially pp. 18, 57–8; Hubert Carrier, 'Des guerres de religion à la Fronde: l'héritage des monarchomaques dans les Mazarinades', in *Devis d'amitié. Mélanges en l'honneur de Nicole Cazauran*, ed. by Jean Lecointe, Catherine Magnien, Isabelle Pantin and Marie-Claire Thomine (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2002), pp. 901–18.

gigantesque dévouement collectif que furent les Mazarinades,’ Carrier writes, ‘c’est [...] la lassitude d’un peuple qui s’interroge sur la légitimité des mesures dont l’acablent, sous le nom d’un roi enfant, une régente espagnole et un ministre disciple de Machiavel’.²¹ The re-publication of this earlier material, or its presence as a source of inspiration in writings during the time of the Fronde, fed into this discontent.

One such re-publication was the major treatise *Le Politique du temps traitant de la puissance, autorité & du devoir des Princes*, reprinted in 1648–1650 after its initial publication in Goulart’s *Memoires de l’estat de France*.²² In Goulart, this large-scale tract immediately precedes *La Servitude volontaire*, with which it shares a number of themes and ideas about tyranny, slavery, freedom and the right to resistance. There is even one printed *manchette* in *Le Politique* which may allude to a version of La Boétie’s work printed under a different title.²³ Also part of Goulart’s *Memoires*, the influential treatises *Vindiciae contra tyrannos*, possibly by Hubert Languet, and the *Francogallia* by François Hotman were likewise re-issued during the Fronde.²⁴ Indeed, *La Servitude volontaire* was sometimes quoted along with them. In *Mascurat*, for instance, Naudé mentions it as ‘ingenieux ou solide’ along with the *Francogallia*, *Vindiciae* and other works, while Mézeray’s *Histoire de France*, dedicated to Séguier, links it with the *Francogallia* and indeed *Le Politique*, carefully underscoring, however, that *La Servitude volontaire* had been written in a very different political era.²⁵

The circumstantial as well as textual evidence suggests, then, that Priézac was referring to a copy of Goulart’s *recueil*. The significance of this point will emerge as we turn to the manuscript witnesses. For Séguier, the dedicatee of the *Discours politiques*, owned a still extant manuscript copy of *La Servitude volontaire*,²⁶ but as that manuscript belongs to a different branch of the textual tradition, it does not appear that Priézac consulted it. The chancellor, a loyal servant of the Crown, may have collected it as an example of historical *parlementaire* resistance or as an instance of contentious discourses circulating in Paris.²⁷ At the same time, another seventeenth-century manuscript of La Boétie’s treatise attests, by

²¹ Carrier, ‘Des guerres de religion à la Fronde’, p. 902.

²² Carrier, ‘Des guerres de religion à la Fronde’, p. 902–3. It was reprinted as a Mazarinade: see Célestin Moreau, *Bibliographie des Mazarinades*, 3 vol (Paris: Jules Renouard, 1850–1851), vol. 2 (1850), no. 2813, pp. 361–2.

²³ [Anon.], *Le Politique du temps*, n.p., Jouxte la coppie imprimée à Paris, 1650, p. 69, ‘Vive description des tirans & de leur naturel’, which reproduces the same *manchette* from Goulart. In 1577, La Boétie’s treatise was published separately under the title *Vive Description de la tyrannie, & des Tyrans*: see Jean Balsamo, ‘La Servitude volontaire à l’usage des “Malcontents”: La Vive Description de la tyrannie, & des Tyrans (Reims, 1577)’, in O’Brien and Schachter, *La Première Circulation*, pp. 231–52.

²⁴ Carrier, ‘Des guerres de religion à la Fronde’, pp. 903–4.

²⁵ [Gabriel Naudé,] *Jugement de tout ce qui a esté imprimé contre le cardinal Mazarin, Depuis le sixième Januier, iusques à la Declaration du premier Auril mil six cens quarante-neuf*, n.p., n.d. [Paris: Sébastien Cramoisy, 1650], p. 647; François de Mézeray, *Histoire de France*, 3 vols (Paris: Mathieu et Pierre Guillemot, 1643–1651), II: 1646, p. 1151.

²⁶ See O’Brien and Schachter, *Première Circulation*, pp. 37–8 and Marc Schachter, ‘Presentation of a newly discovered Manuscript of La Boétie’s *Discours de la servitude volontaire* and Hypotheses on the Datation of the BnF Manuscripts’, *Montaigne Studies*, 20 (2008), 185–206 (pp. 196–7).

²⁷ See John O’Brien, ‘Un manuscrit inconnu de *La Servitude volontaire*’, *BHR*, 83/2 (2021), 303–21 (p. 316).

contrast, to its association with the Fronde through the issue of revenue and especially taxation, a source of *parlementaire* discontent and opposition to the royal will during the Fronde.²⁸

As a well-known anti-tyrannical treatise, *La Servitude volontaire* clearly merited Priézac's attention, inasmuch as it could be taken to undermine monarchical authority and excite unrest. Since he does not make use of this treatise in any of his other works, his deployment of it in his *Discours politiques* suggests he was reacting to one prominent instance of the material used in the historical context around 1650. The Fronde would be a prime reason for that.

Another reason could be La Boétie's role in 'libertine' literature.²⁹ La Mothe Le Vayer, an *académicien* like Priézac, had published his *De la liberté et de la servitude* in 1643. Its debt to *La Servitude volontaire* is indubitable and has very recently been the subject of close critical investigation which argues that the treatise fed into a double, contradictory trend in La Mothe, a scepticism towards forms of political authority and yet the valorization of natural law and potentially of a political regime capable of respecting it.³⁰ Such double-edged readings of La Mothe and the *libertins* have become the norm since the ground-breaking studies of Jean-Pierre Cavaillé and Sophie Gouverneur questioned the old assumption, notably embodied in the work of René Pintard, that *libertinage* was a conservative movement supporting absolutism.³¹ Gouverneur argues, for example, that *libertinage* is 'un art d'écrire permettant la diffusion secrète de thèses politiques subversives'³² under the guise of dissimulation. It is not difficult see the value of La Boétie in that universe.

In the *Discours* themselves, Priézac condemns the horrors of civil war.³³ We also know from other contemporary sources that he disapproved strongly of the Fronde.³⁴ At the same time, he works in a different mode from *libertin* dissimulation or deliberate ambivalence, although he incidentally shares with *libertinage* the technique of 'détournement' of the 'signification première' of his borrowings.³⁵ Thus more than one quotation from *La Servitude volontaire* (pp. 149, 281, 340) involves a denigration of the common people and its ability to fall into slavery under the spell of tyranny, as much as an attack on the mechanics of domination.³⁶

²⁸ O'Brien, 'Un manuscrit inconnu', pp. 318–19.

²⁹ Thuau's briefly mentions Naudé and Cyrano de Bergerac in 'Les *Discours politiques*', p. 173.

³⁰ See Ambre Perez-Parfait, 'L'Héritage de La Boétie dans les textes libertins du XVII^e siècle', in *Libertinage et philosophie à l'époque classique (XVI^e-XVIII^e siècles)*, thematic number, *Les Libertins néerlandais*, 19 (2022), 321–48.

³¹ Jean-Pierre Cavaillé, *Dis/simulation. Jules César Vanini, François La Mothe Le Vayer, Gabriel Naudé, Louis Machon et Torquato Acetto. Religion, morale et politique au XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Champion, 2002); Sophie Gouverneur, *Prudence et subversion libertines. La critique de la raison d'État chez François de La Mothe Le Vayer, Gabriel Naudé et Samuel Sorbière* (Paris: Champion, 2005); René Pintard, *Le Libertinage érudit dans la première moitié du XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Boivin, 1943). See also the contributions to 'Libertinage et politique au temps de la monarchie absolue', special number of *Littératures classiques*, 55 (2004/3).

³² Gouverneur, *Prudence et subversion*, pp. 27–8.

³³ Thuau, 'Les *Discours politiques*', pp. 76–8.

³⁴ Kerviler, *Le Chancelier Pierre Séguier*, p. 597.

³⁵ Gouverneur, *Prudence et subversion*, p. 29.

³⁶ On Priézac's negative view of the common people, see Thuau, 'Les *Discours politiques*', pp. 186–92.

Or again, La Boétie's words can be used as a foil for the vindication of regal majesty and dignity (p. 56) or for the defence of royalty (p. 121) and the political and social *amitié* it establishes (p. 43). In each case, it is less the actual adaptation of the Sarladais's phraseology which is critical as the techniques Priézac employs to counter, downplay or re-direct its point. While implicitly acknowledging the nature of some of La Boétie's arguments, he harnesses their force for other purposes.

In the 1640s and 1650s, *La Servitude volontaire* could be used to support manifoldly divergent perspectives on monarchical authority – *frondeur*, *libertin*, absolutist; opposition, subversion, endorsement. While such conflicting usages had already existed in the sixteenth century to some degree,³⁷ the intellectual as well as political ferment of the Fronde supplied especially fruitful instances of the tangled nexus of uses and meanings La Boétie's treatise could produce.

Biographical note

John O'Brien is Emeritus Professor of French at the University of Durham and currently finishing a book entitled 'Du manuscrit au texte. Études sur La Boétie et sur "La Servitude volontaire"', to be published in 2024 by Classiques Garnier.

³⁷ The use of La Boétie's work among Protestants in the 1570s is well-known and understood. But for its use among rival Catholic factions in the following decade, see John O'Brien, 'Mais de quel roi parlez-vous, et de quel prince? Sovereign Power, Freedom and La Boétie's *La Servitude volontaire* in the 1580s', *MLR*, 116/2 (2021), 245–63.