

Eloge: Fernand Hallyn (1945-2009)

On 11 July 2009 Fernand Hallyn passed away after a five-year long fight against cancer. With his death we lost a unique intellectual mentor and personal friend. As far as Hallyn's intellectual stature and debt goes, however, we appear to have lost two persons instead of one. In his work he mixed literary theory and history of literature, on the one hand, and history of science and intellectual thought, on the other, in innovative and unsurpassed ways.

Born in Bruges (Belgium) shortly after World War II, on 20 September 1945, Hallyn studied Romance philology in the 1960s at the *Rijksuniversiteit Gent* as the State University in the city of Ghent was then called (now Ghent University). After obtaining his *licenciaat* degree in 1967 Hallyn chose for a career as a teacher of French at the *Rijknormaalschool* in Kortrijk. This career was short, but the love of teaching and his belief in the importance of teaching stayed with him for the rest of life. His later investments in the development of a university curriculum for the education of teachers of French as well as his conviction that the history of science had an important role to play in the teaching of the sciences testify to this love.

In 1970 Hallyn returned to Ghent University. In 1974 he was awarded a doctoral degree for his dissertation on metaphor in French Baroque poetry under the supervision of Roger Dragonetti, who in those very same years was appointed as Professor of Romance Langue and Literature of the Middle Ages at the University of Geneva. The author of *Dante pèlerin de la Sainte Face* and *Un fantôme dans le kiosque* on Mallarmé was a permanent inspiration to him. In Hallyn's recent publications on dissimulation in literature and on the 'silvae' he still quoted Dragonetti's book on forgeries in the novel of the Middle Ages and his article on Quintilian. Hallyn's dissertation, *Formes métaphoriques dans la poésie lyrique de l'âge baroque en France*, was published in 1975 with Droz in Geneva. Ghent University had the good fortune of seeing Hallyn converted to a faculty position, and finally to a full professorship in 1987. During all those years he taught courses on the history of French Literature at Ghent University, and from 1976, also at the *Universitaire Instelling Antwerpen* (now University of Antwerp).

Meanwhile, he published widely on the topic of his dissertation, French literature and the metaphor in particular. He cast his net ever wider including literary theory (*Paradigmes dans les études littéraires*, Ghent, 1979), trying to get rid of what he called impressionistic and freewheeling literary critique, but also focusing on art history (with a paper on Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* which derived from his life-long interest in anamorphoses and *mise on abyme* in 1980) and on the history of science with a first publication on Kepler's *Somnium* in the *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, one of the many leading journals to which editorial boards he would be elected in later years, also in 1980. A number of these articles were collected in *Le sens des formes* (Geneva, Droz, 1994). All the while, his original interests in the study of French literature stayed with him until the end of his life. His article on the prologue of Gargantua, on the irony in *Le Songe* of Du Bellay, on the anthropomorphic landscape painted by Arcimboldo or the metaphor of the 'Book of Nature' in the work of Nicholas of Cusa are eloquent examples of Hallyn's method. By connecting his expertise on literary history to the newest discoveries in linguistics, psychoanalysis and philosophy, Hallyn tried to renew the interpretation of canonical texts and artworks. During the last months of his life he worked on a paper on Arcimboldo for a conference to be held in Paris, during a prestigious exhibition, and on a book on the use and meaning of metaphors, especially the

‘pillars of Hercules’, in which he wanted to discuss the analyses of Hans Blumenberg, so formative of his own work.

Hallyn developed his paper on Kepler’s *Somnium* into the final chapter of *La structure poétique du monde* (Paris, Seuil, 1987). This is perhaps Hallyn’s most important work, and arguably, his most influential, especially in the Anglophone world. As Hallyn’s only work, originally written in French, that was translated in English (*The Poetic Structure of the World*, New York, Zone Books, 1990) it was widely read and primarily shaped the reception of Hallyn’s work in the United States. Shortly thereafter, in 1992 Hallyn was invited to come to Princeton University as the Whitney J. Oates Fellow of the Humanities. Going beyond the history of ideas (which he identified with the work of Alexandre Koyré) and Michel Foucault’s archeology of knowledge, in this book, Hallyn wished to develop a ‘poetics’ of science applied to the cases of two giants of the Scientific Revolution, Copernicus and Kepler. With this ‘poetics’ he hoped to grasp the evasive process by which hypotheses in science are established, and to this end, he concentrated on the study of the use of metaphor and analogy, but also of other tropes which could not be subsumed within the category of metaphors. In *The Poetic Structure of the World* he described ‘mathematical aspects of the Copernican proposition in terms of *metaphor*, its optical implications in terms of *metonymy*, and its physical innovations in terms of *synecdoche*.’ (p. 29). Since both Copernicus and Kepler considered the world the work of a divine poet, Hallyn reached back through the poetics of Copernicus and Kepler to the ‘poetic structure of the world’. He did not conceive of the relation between literature and science as one between external and internal, or one of cause and effect. Hallyn’s point of departure in the history of science was its discursive dimension, the texts, and he was interested in intertextuality, that is, in the discovery of the ‘intertextual presuppositions’ which, for example, Renaissance art and Copernican astronomy shared. His ultimate aim (here and elsewhere) was to show that science belonged to the Renaissance.

It is essential to stress that Hallyn never neglected the study of the original texts. He was not fascinated by literary theory and philosophy for the only purpose of producing some pages on literary theory. Hallyn’s writings consist mostly of interpretative commentaries on the works of major thinkers of past ages. He considered the study of the early modern texts for the meanings they acquired in the period of their production crucial to understand our own era. Therefore, he favoured the close reading of early modern texts. He edited and translated Galileo’s *Sidereus Nuncius*, published in 1610 (*Galilée: Le messager des étoiles*, Paris, Seuil, 1992) and he organised a conference on Descartes’ lost manuscript *Olympica* (of which the proceedings were published as *Les Olympiques de Descartes*, Geneva, Droz, 1995). Hallyn’s introduction to his translation of *Sidereus Nuncius* was complimentary to his earlier studies of Copernicus and Kepler. He closely studied Galileo’s use of metaphors in the text of *Sidereus Nuncius*, and he developed the more general thesis that the analogy was ‘le complément conceptuel de la lunette’ (p. 96). Hallyn continued to return to the central texts of Galileo, Kepler and Descartes. A number of his papers, including his study of Kepler, ‘La troisième loi de Kepler et la psychologie de la découverte’ published in this journal in 1993, were brought together in *Les structures rhétoriques de la science* (Paris, Seuil, 2004). Hallyn’s aims were not limited to the study of the rhetoric of science in the sense of an analysis of ways of persuasion in scientific communication, but he envisaged the study of science in its making or the formation of representations, that is a ‘poetics’ of science, which in this book he also called ‘une rhétorique profonde’. From his poetical study of Kepler to his rhetorical analysis of Sadi Carnot he emphasized that he aimed at the understanding of how scientists arrived at the formulation of problems, a highly important aspect of scientific creativity which escaped even the most recent approaches in logic and psychology. In his recent work Hallyn applied

his methods and insights, which he had successfully elaborated for texts of the early modern period, to the thermodynamics of James Clerk Maxwell and others in the nineteenth century.

From the mid-1990s Hallyn became increasingly concerned with the establishment of a stronger institutional basis for the history of science at the local, national and international levels. Besides his service, in his role as Professor of French Literature, as Chair of the Department of French at Ghent University, and member and president of the Commission for Languages and Literature of the Flemish Fund for Scientific Research (FWO), he found time to serve the history of science profession in Belgium as member and president of the National Committee for Logic, Philosophy and History of Science and to serve on the first advisory board of the Dutch (and later Belgian-Dutch) journal for history of science *Gewina* (now *Studium*). He enthusiastically supported the establishment of the European Society for History of Science and served on its first scientific board from 2003. In 2005 he also was elected to corresponding membership of the International Academy of History of Science.

In those same years Hallyn, generous with his time and his ideas, also supervised numerous doctoral dissertations on topics in early modern history of science and beyond - on Buffon and on Gemma Frisius' annotations to Copernicus' *De Revolutionibus*; on Galileo, Montaigne, Calvin and Racine – reflecting the remarkably wide scope of his interests and expertise. In 2003, together with the university historian Hilde De Ridder-Symoens and his students he also established a Centre for History of Science at Ghent University providing the history of science with the institutional basis, which it never had in the birth town of George Sarton.

While we were packing to leave together to the International Summer School on the 'Impact of the Humanities on European Science', organized by William Shea at the *Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti* in June 2004, the shocking news came that Fernand was diagnosed with cancer. He did not make it to Venice that year, but fortunately his illness was not the end of his intellectual life. In the following years he heroically fought against cancer. Although he was obliged to spend increasingly more time at the hospital for therapy, admirably, he found the intellectual energy not only to deliver papers at conferences (when he was permitted to travel) and to publish numerous articles, but also to publish no fewer than two books. In 2006 *Descartes: dissimulation et ironie* (Geneva, Droz) appeared, in which he connected the prudent writings of Balthasar Gracian to the hermeneutics of Cartesian philosophy, distinguishing two types of irony: a figure that not only allowed to express dangerous heterodoxies or compromising thoughts, but also provided the text with a sense the author ignored. In 2008 his well-received intellectual biography of the mathematician Gemma Frisius, professor at Leuven University, was published, with the title *Gemma Frisius, arpenteur de la terre et du ciel* (Paris, Honoré Champion). Hallyn succeeded in finding coherence in Gemma Frisius's work by portraying him as a cosmographer, connecting his interests in geography with those in Copernican astronomy. The papers elsewhere in this volume, delivered at a conference at Ghent University and the University of Leuven which Hallyn initiated and inspired, document his interest in the history of cosmography in the final years of his life. We dedicate the volume to his memory.

In spite of his illness Hallyn was relentless in his efforts to entrust his ideas to paper and to publish his books on Descartes and Gemma Frisius. At the age of 63, with still two years to go to his retirement, he expressed as his only desire that he would still be able to teach for two years – testimony to the importance he attributed to teaching. Alas, it was differently decided.

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