Introduction

Speaking several years ago of Nathan Edelman, Jules Brody remarked that some writers are superior to their books, and others inferior, while a few—by some miracle of inner harmony—are equal. To the third category belongs Hugh M. Davidson, whose qualities as a colleague, teacher, and friend as well as a scholar and critic have inspired this garland of essays, presented to him with affection and esteem on his seventy-second birthday.

THE MAN

BY MARY B. MCKINLEY

A skillful balance of the art of listening and the art of questioning contributes to Hugh Davidson's esteemed success as a teacher and colleague. During his years at Chicago, Dartmouth, Ohio State, Yale, and, since 1973, Virginia he has developed an educational philosophy as distinctive as his signature. In the classroom he helps his students to discover knowledge by an ongoing process of dialogue, a process constantly nourished by the unfailing respect that characterizes his attitude toward them. Whether in his French composition classes, in his advanced undergraduate literature courses or in his doctoral seminars, Hugh tries to discern the individual strengths of each person in the group and encourages them to value and to question their ideas while learning to articulate them. His course on the moralists has become a cherished tradition among French majors. Students who approached the reading of Descartes, La Bruyère, La Rochefoucauld, and Pascal with trepidation find that those writers offer fascinating perspectives on the human mind and soul. They seem to engage each other in dialogue under Hugh's direction and gradually to entice the students into their discussions. A recurring topic in those colloquia is the continuity prevailing behind the appearances of change, a concern that reappears regularly in Hugh's teaching and scholarly writing. In 1975 he gave a post-doctoral seminar sponsored by the National
Endowment for the Humanities on "Underlying Constants in the Changing Methods of Literary Study." The title, like the attitude toward criticism that it implies, characterizes his approach to literature in his graduate courses. Unfazed by the latest critical fad but willing to consider its possible merits, he likewise eschews imposing rigid methodologies on his students while welcoming their cogent proposals for any critical approach. That open attitude represents an enduring conviction about critical discourse. In an article published in the Bucknell Review in 1965, "Yet Another View of French Classicism," Hugh argued that the survival of humanistic studies today depends upon the willing acceptance of a variety of critical approaches to literature. He emphasizes the need for continuing dialectical confrontation between various methods and schools if criticism is to thrive as a vital tool of scholarship. The perfect setting for such dialogue is Hugh's doctoral seminar on Pascal, a true locus amoenus for graduate students at Virginia. Discussions generated in it continue outside the seminar itself and flow naturally into courses on other writers and other centuries. It has helped to convert many students to the seventeenth century and has planted the seeds for several excellent dissertations. Hugh's calm, quietly expressed confidence in his doctoral candidates acts as a catalyst, urging them to pursue intellectual challenges because that is their common endeavor. As one such student put it: "Monsieur Davidson voit dans chaque étudiant un potentiel intellectuel à développer, et il s'occupe à le développer étape par étape jusqu'à ce que l'étudiant puisse voler de ses propres ailes." Recognition of Hugh's teaching has taken him far beyond the university community of Charlottesville. In 1980 and 1989 the Folger Institute invited him to give postdoctoral seminars on Pascal at the Folger Library in Washington, and in 1984 he was invited to give a course on "Les Anciens dans la littérature du XVIIe siècle" at the Sorbonne.

The arts of listening and questioning are not left behind when Hugh Davidson leaves the classroom. An artist attempting his caricature would do well to portray a man at lunch intently sketching with pen on paper napkin while an interested student or colleague looks on. Those familiar diagrams speak of his talent for gently taking another's awkward disorder of expression and deftly recasting it into an eloquent statement of compelling intellectual clarity—while giving the other full credit for both the idea and its eloquence. That generosity is particularly appreciated by junior colleagues, whose books and articles owe much to those lunches.
In departmental and university affairs Hugh draws upon his characteristic equilibrium and clear thinking to suggest innovative programs, to argue for the highest intellectual standards and to recall the voice of reason whenever necessary. As graduate student advisor from 1977 to 1985 he led the graduate program through a crucial period in its growth, chairing the committee that revised and restructured the M.A. and Ph.D. programs in 1985. As a highly respected consultant to deans and other administrators, he frequently serves in roles that have a significant impact on the future direction of the university. His birthday provides a welcome opportunity for his students and colleagues to celebrate his career. Modestly and unobtrusively Hugh Davidson has come to embody the highest ideals of intellectual inquiry and its promulgation.

His Work
by David Lee Rubin

_Tel arbre, tel fruit:_ if Hugh Davidson himself is a model of magnanimity, lucidity, and elegance, his contributions to the study of seventeenth-century French literature possess corresponding qualities: broad learning and instinctive pluralism; incisiveness and rigor of thought; as well as a style whose polish is matched only by its naturalness. Ideally, of course, these remarks would do justice to his entire achievement. Space limitations, however, preclude such exhaustiveness, and, as a result, we shall confine ourselves to an overview of the work that has exercised the widest and deepest influence.

_Audience, Words, Art_ (1965)

The six exquisitely written essays that compose this volume recount, step by step, the official French effort to reinstate the discipline of rhetoric. After tracing rhetoric's Latin origins and its naturalization by Vaugelas and Rapin, Hugh discusses four other facets of the problem: cartesianism and its impact (especially on Port Royal, whose _Logique_ sought to redefine rhetoric in terms of logic); Pascal's shift from polemic to apology; and finally, the absorption of rhetorical theory into the widely diverging critical and programmatic statements of Corneille, Racine, and Molière.
Methodologically, *Audience, Words, Art* achieves for its subject what Bernard Weinberg’s history did for Italian Renaissance criticism: it clarifies the subtly shifting assumptions and the diverse modes of argument marshaled in a debate which compels our attention not only for its own sake and as a chapter in the history of ideas, but above all for its impact on the creative enterprise itself.

One of the particular strengths of *Audience, Words, Art* is Hugh’s treatment of the *Provinciales* and the *Pensees*. His analysis of these works in the light of the fragments, *De l’esprit de géométrie* and *L’art de persuader*, still stands, by common consent, as the best we possess. It is fitting, then, that from the general question of rhetoric, Hugh passed, in his next four books, to the work of Blaise Pascal.

\textit{Two Concordances}

Hugh recognized early that the daunting vastness and complexity of Pascal’s work had tempted more than one critic to launch incandescent, if tenuous theories. From the experience of writing *Audience, Words, Art*—in which he applied and extended the semantics of thought modes proposed by Richard McKeon and Ronald Crane—Hugh also understood why such purely intuitive flights so frequently fall short: the author’s key terms, in all their resonance and polyvalence, are imperfectly known. To preserve intuition, yet impose needed controls, in both his own work and that of his fellow *pascalisants*, Hugh concluded that a concordance would be necessary—an instrument that would exhaustively, precisely, and accurately identify the verbal building blocks of Pascal’s system as they appear in (and are modified by) their immediate contexts. A manually produced reference, however, was immediately ruled out: to achieve the desired degree of adequacy, its compilation would have left neither time nor energy for the more important work that the concordance was to support. Computerization and the assistance of programmer Pierre Budé overcame these obstacles, with spectacular results, in *A Concordance to Pascal’s Pensées* (1975) and *A Concordance to Pascal’s Provinciales* (1980). With these tools, the analysis of Pascal’s most important texts could, and did, proceed with greater confidence.
If proof were needed of the uses to which a sound concordance might be put, this bold yet graceful volume would more than suffice. As Charles G. S. Williams wrote, “Davidson approaches and promotes the intelligibility [of the Pensées] by the study of complexes of words, terms, and designations surrounding them, which establish, as they interact and converge in the text . . . a matrix that will . . . fix any important [element] in Pascal’s thought and . . . [reveal] some of its overarching principles, including the relationship of faith to scientific certainty.” What results is a diagrammatic treatment of the moyens de croire (reason, custom, and inspiration), by which Hugh transcends ancient and inconclusive debates concerning the completeness of sequential order of the Pensées to discover something far more essential: what Robert J. Nelson has called their “intra-relatedness” or “symbiotic” connection. Through his reconstructive readings, Hugh created a new, richly promising critical framework—indeed a new hermeneutic genre—for exploration and elaboration by future students of the Pensées, to say nothing of other works which have come down to us in fragmentary form.

Creation of new genres goes hand in hand with a revitalizing of the old. Thus in this volume—a contribution to the Twayne World Authors’ Series—Hugh works within the limits of the “l’homme et l’oeuvre” format, but infuses it with extraordinary coherence, vigor, and depth. Conceding the doubleness of Pascal’s formative experiences and the intensity of his commitment to scientific inquiry as well as religious faith and reflection, Hugh nevertheless insists on the unity of the author’s spirit and method. This he then traces through a series of condensed, crystalline analyses of the major works and résumés of the opuscules. Particularly stimulating is a supplementary account of Pascal’s changing image and presence in literature and scholarship not only during his own century but those to follow.

That, at this writing, Hugh is in the midst of other book-length projects on Pascal and nonrhetorical aspects of seventeenth-century French es-
theotics makes this introduction incomplete in more senses than the one already mentioned: the authors and the editors honor Hugh Davidson not at the conclusion of a long and distinguished career, but at the very height of his powers and productivity. To paraphrase Mallarmé, "nous les voulons perpétuer."