SELF-PROMOTING STRATEGIES OF AN AUTHOR THROUGH THE USE OF PARATEXT: THE CASE OF THE LYON BASED DOCTOR, LAZARE MEYSSONNIER (1611-1673)

Abstract: My M1 History dissertation is dedicated to the life of doctor Lazare Meyssonnier (1611-1673) and to the various self-promoting strategies displayed throughout the paratext of his printed writings in the XVII e century Lyon. The study of the doctor’s writings took place in three fields: history of books and medical history. The development of the analysis is based on a corpus of thirty-five digitalized books available online. More precisely, it revolves around the paratext of these sources, that is: the introductions, the dedication pages, the table of contents, the notes to the readers and other textual elements surrounding the text to present it to the reader.

Lazare Meyssonnier was a very prolific author. I listed a total of a hundred entries where the name Lazare Meyssonnier was seen on the front page. For the most part, those are printed books and a great number of those are reissues and reprints of his work. The originality of this corpus was made up of accessible sources thirty-five, specifically digitalized copies of the printed work of Lazare Meyssonnier. In order to narrow it down, I focused only on the paratext of those books. This consisted of all the text surrounding the main body of the text, that carries it and that presents it to the reader. I have organized the outline of my dissertation around two parts, the first one being a biography of the doctor (in chronological order) and the second one is focused on the strategies used by Lazare Meyssonnier in his writings to put himself forward. The guideline between those two parts is the importance of the context in the choice expressed by the writings of the doctor.

The development of the two main parts of the outline is made easier thanks to the correspondence of another doctor: Guy Patin. In those letters, only one that remains is addressed directly to Lazare Meyssonnier. However, through the discussion of G. Patin with others doctors (mainly, Charles Spon and André Falconcet, both located in Lyon) Lazare Meyssonnier is mentioned an astonishing number of fifty-five times. Most of those mentions are very critical of the actions of Lazare Meyssonnier and help contextualize and have a better understanding of the doctor. Another primary source of information relies on the will of Lazare Meyssonnier, both the first will and its updated versions have been transcribed by Anne Béroujon.

From his birth in 1611 to his death in 1673, he gradually rose in the professional world of medicine. He received a doctorate from the University of Montpellier in 1632; became member to the college of doctors of Lyon in 1638 and was received ordinary physician of the king in 1642. He converted to Catholicism in 1644. Joined the Lyon Faith Propagation Company from its creation in 1659. He then, obtained an appointment from the king that same year; became doctor of HRH Anne Louise d’Orléans in the same decade. Finally, he became a canon in 1671 and a priest in 1672.

Such a progression was supported and favored by the various strategies of Lazare Meyssonnier. He first drew from his rich and powerful clientele potential protectors including the families of Puy du Fou and Diziaux. He startled these relations through letters to the Richelieu family, he was rewarded by obtaining a patent of ordinary physican from the king in 1642; at only 31 years old. He also dedicated some of his writings to the de Villeroy a powerful family based in Lyon. Despite that, he was treated with a certain care by the two families, the de Villeroy family in particular never granted him a position of responsibility within the company of the propagation of the faith (the Family created). Camille de Nelly and Guy Patin de Villeroy even went as far as refusing him entry to the Cordeliers seminary.

Which, testifies to the limits of clientelism relations of the doctor. He then had to start a lawsuit and thanks to the intervention of the pax pax he won his case; thus, testifying to both the effectiveness and the failures of this dedication strategy.

Within his writings, he established his professional identity as a doctor by inserting references to his previous books inside a newly printed one, establishing himself as an important figure of the medical world. He also used advertising promotion of a work to be published within a work that is printed in hopes of achieving commercial success. He was very aware of the evolutions in the establishing readership public of his century thus following the general tendencies of the printed production in Lyon in the 17th century, going towards a reduction of the formats and a massive use of French. He addressed his works to the widest possible audience to support his personal prestige. Finally, always with a view to securing prestige and recognition for his professional practice, he associated his name with reissues of works by authors who mostly originated from the 16th century, which he summarized, recomposed, and increased from his own productions.

This master’s dissertation conclusion underlines the originality of that doctor and the size of his ego. This allows to take a peek inside the medical world of the 17th, a world that is not impervious to the balance of power within the rest of society. Even if the findings of that research are important, some limitations have appeared during the realization of my study, mainly, that I did not find any point of comparison between his use of paratext and the one of other doctors.

As for new research perspectives, thanks to the broad range of topics discussed within the work of the doctor, some new studies could easily be started. I would say that studying his relations with the republic of letters or an analysis of the topics of his writings compared to the evolutions in the field of the history of knowledge would be very rewarding.

Keywords: Doctor Self-promotion Elevation Strategies Clientelism Patronage Lyon Book history

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Discussion

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