

BOOK REVIEWS

Beasley, Faith E. *Versailles Meets the Taj Mahal: François Bernier, Marguerite de La Sablière, and Enlightening Conversations in Seventeenth-Century France*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018. ISBN 978-1-4875-0284-3. Pp. 349. \$85

Faith Beasley's *Versailles Meets the Taj Mahal* is a wonderful addition to the burgeoning field of interdisciplinary approaches to the seventeenth century. Much of the history recounted centers around the salon of Marguerite de La Sablière and those who frequented it; especially the traveler François Bernier, writers including La Fayette, Sévigné, and La Fontaine, and other figures of the literary, diplomatic, religious, and social worlds. The book adds needed new perspectives on female-dominated salons. Its focus on the ways in which "India was invading the mental space" of writers (7) opens areas of literary and cultural history that have not been developed before, offering a rich array of sources from literature, travel memoirs, correspondence, art, the decorative arts, and fashion.

The book opens with a painting of Madame de Sévigné arriving at Lorient in Brittany, stepping onto a dock strewn with exotic merchandise including fabric, porcelain, pineapples, and birds: an Ancien Régime encounter with foreign products. In the first two chapters, "Worldly Encounters" and "Salons, Seraglios and Social Networking," Beasley uses François Bernier's travels to India, novels, letters, and memoirs to help her imaginatively reconstruct possible salon conversations. She takes readers to one of the most famous scenes in Lafayette's *Princesse de Clèves*, where the princess ties ribbons on a "canne des Indes." Thanks to Beasley, scholars now know what a "canne des Indes" was, can see one in a carving from India, and learn some of the ways in which knowledge of India was making its way to France. The chapter follows references to the vogue for Indian fabric in Sévigné's letters and looks at real Mughal women described by Bernier and fictional Mughal characters in Dryden's drama *Aureng-Zebe*. Chapter 3 discusses the emergence of "cultural relativism" (217) and support for intellectual and religious diversity in Bernier, La Fontaine, and Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* and *Discours sur les oracles*.

Chapter 4, "Indian Taste: A Taste for India," takes the reader into the fascinating worlds of fashion, material culture, and international trade. Lafayette declares in a letter that she and her circle love anything from India, including envelope paper. We follow Sévigné writing to her

daughter of recycling the fashionable and expensive Indian fabrics called *indiennes*, turning a dressing gown into a screen. We learn of the arrest warrant for a woman accused of illegally wearing and selling Indian textiles, and about some of the ways sellers and buyers attempted to evade the King's ban on fabrics from India. Diamonds, bottles, paper, mercantile networks, fashion staged by Molière, and real fashion in and outside the home form a fascinating and timely picture. Recent exhibitions in 2017 and 2018—including *Islamic Art and Florence* in Italy, and *Visitors to Versailles* in Versailles and New York—have also brought together works of art, books, gazettes, gifts, the decorative arts, and fashion to give new focus to international connections and exchanges. Beasley's well-illustrated discussion of some of the complexities involved in images, ideas, and products from India is often set in a binary opposition to a more monolithic image of Louis XIV, depicted as seeking to maintain "absolutist power over thought" (211) and using edicts to attempt to "erase India from the material culture of seventeenth-century France" (248). Historians of early-modern consumerism are still unraveling the networks of economic, political, and social concerns, the roles of manufacturing advances, transportation, and pirating, and the international movement of artisans that brought commerce, consumers, and rulers into complex and shifting relationships. Whether Louis was erasing India from material culture or using it in different ways—buying diamonds but trying, unsuccessfully, to force the French to buy copies of *indiennes* made in France—will likely be part of continuing historical discussion of international commerce and reproductions.

The book reads well, with quotations in French along with English translations and references to historical and theoretical studies. Beasley joins others today in proposing that an over-reliance on Edward Said's approach to exoticism has "perhaps obscured our understanding of other modes of interactions between the West and East at different periods in history" (25-26). The figures and sixteen color plates—paintings, miniatures showing Mughal rulers, fabric, a sultan's tent, and the author's own photographs of Indian monuments and decorative items—are a valuable feature. Given the number and the depth of the connections that Beasley has assembled from sources both in France and India, it seems stunning that the influence of India on seventeenth-century French conversation, literature, and consumption has never before received the kind of rich and fascinating study that Beasley demonstrates the topic merits. *Versailles Meets the Taj Mahal* will

surely, and fittingly, inspire new conversations on salons and on the relationships between France and India.

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Bilis, Hélène. *Passing Judgment: The Politics and Poetics of Sovereignty in French Tragedy from Hardy to Racine*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016. ISBN 978-1-4875-0026-9. Pp. 258. \$65

From the opening sentence of Hélène Bilis’s book, *Passing Judgment: The Politics and Poetics of Sovereignty in French Tragedy from Hardy to Racine*, her purpose is clear and gripping. Bilis’s study considers the evolving role of the onstage sovereign as judge and monarch in the context of the “conflicting aesthetic and political imperatives” (xi) of the seventeenth century. From the royal verdicts and punishments of the “Tragedy of the Scaffolds” in the early part of the seventeenth century, to the more dignified representations of onstage monarchs thought increasingly to represent the actual French king later in the century, Bilis examines the dramatic and historical motivations underlying the shifts in representation of the sovereign figure in canonical and non-canonical works from Hardy to Racine. One of Bilis’ greatest strengths in *Passing Judgment* is her engaging plot summary. Even a reader unfamiliar with the plots of the playwrights she includes will be drawn into their political and amorous conflicts through her careful prose. Extensively researched and annotated, *Passing Judgment* subtly enters into dialogue with many of the most prominent critics of the Early Modern period, offering enough nuanced, contextual reading of their key arguments to permit even those new to this scholarship to appreciate its central tenets, and Bilis’s contributions thereto.

While centering her argument around the evolving politics of seventeenth-century France and their theatrical portrayal, Bilis resists a chronological approach to the study of the royal character on stage. Acknowledging the canonical role of *Le Cid* and the polemical quarrel the play engendered, Bilis begins her book with a close examination of Scudéry’s and Chapelain’s interventions in the debate. Instead of rehashing the much-discussed “suitability” of Chimène’s response to the King’s proclamation, Bilis focuses her analysis on the role of the royal judge, King Fernand, in allowing Chimène’s impossible situation to

occur. After assuring her justice, the king in fact leaves the execution of that justice to chance by pitting Chimène's two suitors against one another in a duel. Bilis's sympathetic reading of Corneille's monarchs encourages readers to view *Le Cid* as an early attempt to reconcile the competing demands made of the onstage monarch.

Bilis's second chapter takes a chronological detour to consider the shaping of the onstage king as judge. Bilis summarizes the baroque aesthetic of onstage violence that was meant to demonstrate the king's supreme power to decide guilt and deliver punishment, which stands in stark contrast to the sanitized, offstage punishments of the neoclassical era. Revealing the "gulf" between baroque and neoclassical theater, Hardy's *Scédase ou l'hospitalité violée* demonstrates the failure of royal judgment to "bring about a cathartic reaffirmation of the dominant social order" (51) as the *dénouement* violates the laws the king himself has established. *Scédase's* "realistic" depiction of the "biased judicial-political dynamics" (57) of the period, alongside *Le Cid's* "implausible" outcome will define, Bilis argues, the notion of *vraisemblable* and the "[restoration of] order via a decisive judgment" (59) that will dominate the tragic poetics of the neoclassical period.

According to Bilis, the transition to a more "polish[ed] royal image" (73) that arose from Richelieu's increasing attention to the theater was neither abrupt, nor seamless, and the Hardy model of imperfect judgment was more persistent than is often acknowledged in critical scholarship of the period. She highlights the playwrights' own awareness of the genre's potential for flawed royal portraits. Clearly defining her position relative to the scholarship that has come before her, Bilis emphasizes the dangers inherent "when the ceremony comes apart and persuasion collapses into farce" (75). Corneille and his contemporaries became keenly aware of the need to avoid too much emphasis on the literal body of the king. Similarly, vulgar objects, such as torture devices, were banished from the stage as, Bilis argues, punishment was meant to be dispensed by the royal judge and divinely inspired (86) and *coups de théâtre* replaced the objects and mechanisms at the heart of onstage punishment. Bilis demonstrates how Racine's comedy *Les Plaideurs* and his tragedy *Britannicus* poke fun at hasty judgments and class differences as they depict a main character who diverges so significantly from "a contemporary monarchical ideal of justice" that the performance of justice "becomes a caricature of itself" (98).

Bilis returns to Don Fernand and *Le Cid* to reframe it within its historical context, to emphasize its structural similarities to *Clitandre* and Corneille's earlier comedies, and to highlight the king's almost comical lines throughout the judgment scenes. She argues against the traditional notion of a "pre-/post-*Le Cid* Corneille," positing instead that Corneille was responding to the changing dramatic and political demands of his time. For example, Bilis sees Médée as a model for Corneille's future sovereigns, and her infanticide as "a violent response accomplished in the name of an ideal" (106). Reading *Le Cid* in this light, Bilis convincingly demonstrates Corneille's failure to recognize the new imperative for a moral lesson in tragedy as he attempted to create a "less polemical" (112) king in Don Fernand. Bilis highlights how the titular hero's guilt in *Horace* allows the focus of the entire fifth act to shift to the role of the king in judging him and dispensing justice. Bilis reads this convincingly as Corneille's attempt to respond, albeit imperfectly, to the earlier criticisms of *Le Cid*.

Through an insightful historical analysis Bilis demonstrates that clemency in Corneille's *Cinna* "tread[s] a fine line between virtue and abuse" (138-39) and allows Corneille to step away from the constraints of time and procedure. Auguste's clemency confirms the sovereign's position of power over his newly pardoned subjects. Bilis argues that, despite the critical reluctance to view Rotrou in the same political light as Corneille and Racine, his plays demonstrate similar "changes linked to Richelieu's efforts to redefine theatre" (153). In her analysis of *Crisante*, Bilis reads the queen's refusal to accept the Roman lieutenant's advances during the king's absence, and her subsequent pursuit of justice after being raped, not as an affirmation of "female authority," but rather as a reflection of the increasing importance of the king's "indissoluble union with the state, or the 'République'" (161). Bilis argues that Corneille and Rotrou's royal judgments "end the system that was in place at the start of the play...[emphasizing] the power of royal judgment to transform government and the person representing the state" (167-68).

Bilis's final chapter examines Racine's entrance into the "ongoing conversation" between Corneille, Rotrou, and Aristotle. She diverges from previous biographical and psychoanalytical analyses of Racine's corpus to argue that Racine focuses on the son's decision to follow or violate his father's will. In *Mithridate* and *Phèdre*, however, Racine takes this dynamic one step further by portraying the mid-play return of

the father and his immediate distrust of his ruling son. Upon the king's return, "[his] judgement becomes the central problem of the play, not its resolution" (185) because the father and son cannot both occupy the same space as sole royal sovereign. Bilis highlights Racine's repositioning of royal judgment to emphasize the importance, not of the royal decision itself, but of its aftermath. Despite their different outcomes, in both *Phèdre* and *Mithridate*, "the tragedy's spotlight moves away from the pronouncement of a misguided royal verdict and turns instead to the post-judgment world of the kingdom... the accent is placed on forgetting and looking ahead" (196). This turn away from the Cornelian model of the king as acting solely in the best interest of the state, Bilis argues, paves the way for the 18th century's *drame bourgeois* and *comédies larmoyantes*.

Bilis's focus on the role of the king in seventeenth-century theater calls into question not only the notion of a perfect formula for the onstage sovereign, but also the entire concept that fiction can be thought to adequately or intentionally support or detract from contemporary social powers. Bilis's book highlights the dangers inherent in performing sovereignty, and the playwrights' attempts to respond to ever-changing critiques in order to find the elusive, perfect onstage monarch. Yet, as she concludes, their attempts to perfect this portrayal of the sovereign may very well have led to their enduring artistic success. To read Bilis's book is to revisit many of our own preconceived notions about some of the most canonical plays of the Early Modern period and to reconsider them alongside lesser-known plays, allowing us to reflect on the critical framework surrounding neoclassical theater as a whole and thus reevaluate the centrality of the sovereign judge.

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Bolduc, Benoît. *La Fête imprimée : Spectacles et Cérémonies politiques*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2016. ISBN 978-2-406005679-9. Pp. 391. \$53

Dans cet ouvrage, Benoît Bolduc entreprend de comprendre les tenants et les aboutissants du livre commémorant une fête ou une entrée royale, des derniers feux de la Renaissance à l'absolutisme triomphant, rappelant « les empreintes qui facilitent la relation (au sens étymologique de rapport, de relais) de la fête au livre et du livre à la fête, mettant le

lecteur en présence d'un objet à deux dimensions appartenant à la fois à l'espace de la fête et à l'espace du livre » (35). Autour de cette relation intime, complexe, et parfois antithétique qui se tisse entre les deux s'opèrent des liens qui vont de l'immédiateté de l'évènement à la composition restructurée, réordonnée à l'intérieur des pages et des gravures. S'opère alors une équivalence singulière entre le plaisir premier, physique et intellectuel, et la fonction profonde du témoignage à postériori. Ainsi se définit un genre nouveau, « une fête de papier » (38) dont on peut chercher aussi les sources dans un autre genre qui apparaît en même temps, l'emblématique. La pluralité des genres et des voix trouve une unité dans une vision unificatrice autour de la personne royale, dans les gestes rituels et les quatre cérémonies essentielles d'un règne : le Sacre, le Lit de Justice, les Funérailles, et l'Entrée royale. Le geste rituel de la fête—celle des accords inscrits dans la diversité de la danse, du spectacle, de la poésie, de l'architecture, de l'épigraphe, de la théâtralité et des sciences de l'énonciation, des ordres de la société—ordonné dans l'espace et dans un livre, prend fonction de témoignage à valeur universelle et s'arrête dans le temps.

L'étude est organisée de façon claire et précise autour des thèmes essentiels qui définissent le genre : l'ordre du livre de fête, sa substance, les voix implicites, l'espace, la postérité. Ces différents chapitres se structurent autour d'exemples spécifiques, de lectures exemplaires qui permettent une analyse concrète et précise. On suivra donc les analyses des thèmes dans *Le Balet Comique de la Royne* (1582), le carrousel de 1612, le carrousel des Chevaliers de la Gloire, le gala d'ouverture de la grande salle de spectacle du Palais Cardinal, l'entrée triomphante de Louis XIV et de sa jeune épouse à Paris en 1662. Le livre de Bolduc rappelle avec finesse que le rapport écrit d'une fête royale est bien plus que le compte-rendu d'une cérémonie rare, au luxe inouï, un rapport sur le goût et la puissance du monarque ; il sert avant tout à « fixer dans la mémoire du lecteur la substance magnifique du spectacle bien plus que son apparence » (115). La fête et son récit sont alors les traits d'union nécessaires entre théologie, littérature, théories de la représentation, et définition du pouvoir. On ne s'étonnera donc pas de voir se côtoyer Ronsard et Alciato, Raymond Sebond, Desmarets, le père Ménestrier, Stefano Della Bella, Jacques Callot, le père Cossart, ou Félibien. Tous apportent leur voix à la création d'un genre et d'une représentation à la fois symbolique et physique du pouvoir et d'une politique. On suit ici l'évolution du livre de fête, de la période des guerres de religion à la gloire de Louis XIV, dans une pensée critique qui expose avec élégance,

précision, et pertinence le développement d'une conception du souverain et de l'Etat. « La fête imprimée convie donc également son lecteur à une forme de promenade autour de l'évènement commémoré, à des détours qui l'entraîne hors du cadre spécifique de la fête et lui permettent de poser un regard critique sur l'idéologie qu'elle véhicule » (280).

L'ouvrage est donc fait pour le plus grand plaisir du lecteur. Il apporte un regard nouveau sur la question de la fête et de sa diffusion, voire son décryptage sous forme de relation écrite. La bibliographie, l'appareil critique en général, inscrivent le travail de l'auteur dans un cadre de pensée vaste, rigoureux, et clair. Elle s'avère aussi être extrêmement utile dans la mesure où elle explore les différentes analyses autour du thème, de celles de Françoise Bardon à celles d'André Chastel, d'Anne-Elisabeth Spica ou d'Amy Wygant pour n'en citer que quelques-unes. L'ouvrage est illustré, ce qui permet une compréhension plus complète des textes étudiés.

Si l'auteur s'inquiétait du défi pour le chercheur de « ne pas succomber aux *effets de sources* [...] à la beauté de l'objet, la finesse de gravures, la chaleur de la poésie, l'élégance de la relation » (283), il a su parfaitement le relever en proposant une lecture critique, renouvelée, et érudite; au-delà même d'un *effet de lecture* (283), il propose une théorie de lecture d'un genre complexe et multiforme.

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Grélé, Denis. *Le Bonheur et la morale. Essai sur le développement de la pensée utopique de Lesage*. New Orleans: Presses Universitaires du Nouveau Monde, 2018. ISBN: 978-1-9370-3090-2. Pp. 156.

The patronymic wisdom of Alain-René Lesage seems to originate in the fine art of straddling: straddling the centuries, with a literary production that begins on the cusp of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; straddling the genres, with a body of work almost equally divided between Molièresque comedies such as *Turcaret* and picaresque novels such as *Gil Blas*; and straddling the social divide between the waning power of a cash-strapped aristocracy and the rising influence of a wheeling and dealing bourgeoisie. For Denis Grélé, however, the wisdom of straddling is clearly overrated.

Lesage's Crispin (chapter 1) and Frontin (chapter 2) may well follow in the footsteps of Molière's Scapin, as the wisecracking, street-savvy manservants of infuriatingly harebrained aristocrats, but they are also, first and foremost, the embodiment of a moral code as well as of a spirit of entrepreneurship (31 and 41). Likewise, Gil Blas (chapter 3) is no mere picaro in the pre-bildungsroman tradition of *siglo de oro* novels; he is a success story (75) whose social climbing does not emanate from the amoral behavior of the Spanish street urchin, but from the empirical application of Lockean economic principles: "une mise en action des préceptes de John Locke justifiant la propriété et l'autonomie de l'individu" (81).

Thus, the resourceful go-getters of Lesage's plays and novels provide far more than a trompe l'oeil illustration of the shifting societal values of an Ancien Régime sitting on the edge of revolutionary change. Despite their illusory ties to classical culture, these new entrepreneurs aspire neither to the pandering mediocrity of the aristocracy nor to the grotesque power mongering of the bourgeoisie. Instead, they become the embodiment of a hard-working, self-reliant underclass whose Schumpeterian "creative destruction" (45) reaches far beyond even the more promising aspects of European Enlightenment.

Skeptical though he may sound about Lesage's ability to comfortably straddle the centuries, their literary traditions and their social order, Grélé does, however, produce his most original work when he himself straddles the ambivalences of one of Lesage's lesser-known works: *Les Aventures de Robert Chevalier* (chapters 4 and 5). By reprising his earlier research interests in utopian literature (*Les Condamnés du bonheur*, 2009), Grélé indeed explains first how the eponymous hero finds nobility, if not of heritage (84), at least of purpose (86), in joining a community of privateers who educate him in no less than the fundamentals of private enterprise (89-92). He then demonstrates how Mademoiselle Duclos's American colony relies just as much upon her ability to separate herself from the autocratic practices of her class (111) as upon her inability to sever her ties with the French homeland (130-131).

In showcasing these "disorganized utopias" (117), Grélé markedly differentiates his analyses from those of the other two main Lesage scholars, Christelle Bahier-Porte and Francis Assaf, for whom the Duclos colony, in particular, should be read more as a dystopia (118 and

129). More importantly, he also takes a stand against theorists, such as Zygmunt Bauman, who have continued to define early modern utopias as proto-socialist models of communitarianism (115). As a result, his conclusions appear mercifully less liberal than *libérales*.

For this particular reader, the main enigma posed by Grélé's Lockean thesis remains hidden in a fragment that mysteriously glosses over the unsettling similarity between biblical morality of retaliation and capitalist ethics of competition ("la loi du Talion, ou de la concurrence," 28). If, as Grélé seems to believe, Lesage's answer to the woes of insider trading ("capitalisme de copinage," 141) should be found in the benefits of laissez-faire ("bienfaits du libéralisme," 11 and 14), then what should one make of the implied "copinage" between the free market and organized religion? Clearly the freedom of faith advocated in Mademoiselle Duclos's utopia is a fallacy, since none of the community members may practice atheism (113), and since the colony implicitly seems 'Locked' into a form of protestantism. Could the economic conspiracy between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy simply have been replaced by a duplicity of ethics between Huguenots and capitalists? Although never mentioned explicitly, Max Weber and his Protestant ethics of capitalism remain lurking in the margins of Grélé's conclusions, a troubling yet at least somewhat more reassuring image of modernity than that of a zombie aristocracy feeding off the trickle-down scraps of a gangrened bourgeoisie.

In short, for those of us who view happiness less as the result of providential felicity than of socio-economic calculations (14), and for whom morality resonates more as a Weberian ethic of responsibility than of moral conviction, Denis Grélé's limpidly written and cogently argued *Le Bonheur et la morale* is a definite must-read, even for a non-specialist of Alain-René Lesage.

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Wellington, Robert. *Antiquarianism and the Visual Histories of Louis XIV: Artifacts for a Future Past*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2015. ISBN: 978-1-4724-6033-2. Pp. xx + 258. \$125; paperback ISBN: 9781138295582 (2017), \$49.95

The importance of this book can best be grasped by unpacking what is by far the shortest—and least laudatory—of its three blurbs, namely the one written by Peter Burke: “Placing medals, antiquaries and posterity at the centre of his story, Robert Wellington approaches the public image of Louis XIV from a new angle.” The angle is indeed new. By reorienting our approach to the production of the image of Louis XIV, the book brings into sharp focus the methodological shortcoming of what is still today the major contribution in the field more than 25 years after its publication: Burke’s own *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (Yale UP, 1992). For if Robert Wellington is right in his emphasis on posterity—or rather: right about the extent to which posterity was on the mind of Louis XIV’s image-makers, right in positing, as the subtitle of the book has it, that these are “artifacts for a future past”—then basic assumptions about the instrumental role of the arts in the period need to be rethought. It is not that the production of the king’s image was not part of a tightly supervised plan or strategy, coordinated by Colbert and the Petite Académie; it was, but in a very different way from what can be adequately analyzed within a framework that considers these artifacts as mere propaganda (which seems to be the regular reflex of modern scholars) or in a more subtle yet equally insufficient communication model (which is the case for Burke, as spelled out at the end of the introduction of that book: “the attempt to discover who was saying what about Louis to whom, through what channels and codes, in what settings, with what intentions, and with what effects” (13)).

The dual emphasis on antiquarianism and posterity may surprise at first, but Wellington makes a compelling case that the two are intimately linked through the production of medals. Invented in Italy during the Renaissance, “the medal was the consummate antiquarian object, made in imitation of the ancient coins used to study the past” (15). It is a deep engagement with a remote past that spurs the reorientation toward the future: a realization that the way they themselves considered ancient Greek and Roman coins as direct, unmediated sources in the reconstruction of ancient history was indicative of how future historians would approach the history of their age. Importantly, not only does the production of medals itself hold a more central place in the absolutist enterprise than it is normally granted in the historiography, but an “antiquarian mode of inquiry” (2), indeed a “numismatic sensibility” (15), infused the whole intellectual culture of the time. Hence the central claim: “This study seeks to reposition them [medals] at the center of a

broad artistic program for documenting the history of Louis XIV by demonstrating their influence across media” (15).

The book makes its case in seven carefully crafted, tightly argued, and beautifully illustrated chapters. The argument moves from a consideration of the cultural setting and institutional networks, inside which the antiquarian fascination with coins and medals was so pervasive (not only as an elitist phenomenon in erudite salons and in the Petite Académie, but also in much wider circles at court, starting with the king himself), to an exploration of the process through which this fascination with the artifacts of the past gave birth to the production of “artifacts for a future past.” As the last chapters of the book demonstrate, this was true not only in the actual project of a *histoire métallique* of the reign of Louis XIV, but through the propagation of the underlying numismatic logic across media, in tapestry, portraiture, and all the way to Charles Le Brun’s paintings in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles. An example of the unexpected ways in which the numismatic sensibility had a bearing on artistic choices is in the inclusion of non-idealizing “grotesque” elements in royal portraits, as in the famous Rigaud painting from 1701, where, in opposition to the king’s elegant body, “his face wears the burden of 63 years of life” (176). The naturalistic accuracy is here closely linked to these artifacts’ position as primary documents for future historians: they “make a claim to the truth that relies on a slippage between pictorial and historical accuracy, where naturalism in portraiture becomes a persuasive tool” (177).

The central part of the book maps the surprising development through which the main interest of this antiquarian enterprise grew from the original study of medals and coins from the past, via the making of modern medals to the antiquarian documentation of these: the writing of contemporary history by way of medals, as an aid to future historians in their task beyond the existence of the mere artifacts. This is the case first with Claude-François Ménéstrier’s *Histoire du roy Louis le Grand par les médailles...* (1689), which includes emblems, devices, inscriptions, and other public monuments in the corpus of contemporary artifacts. Then in the monumental project of the Petite Académie leading to *Médailles sur les principaux événements du règne de Louis le Grand* (1702), which sets out to provide the definitive reading of the medals written at the time of their creation. According to Wellington, this development is far from accidental. “It is *the* principal claim of my study that such a text [as Ménéstrier’s] was *inevitable*, given that antiquarian

methodology, and especially the study of ancient coins, inspired the king's image-makers to produce new objects and images as visual histories of Louis XIV for the benefit of posterity" (2, my emphasis). In the work toward the 1702 volume of the *Petite Académie*, the numismatic care going into the project was in fact such that the whole generative process was at times reversed: instead of only documenting existing medals, more than a hundred new medals were made to assure the continuity of events covered by the antiquarian text serving to describe them.

From a twenty-first-century perspective, there is obviously something paradoxical if not troubling about this development, as Wellington is the first to point out in his introduction. Already at the outset, it may be a challenge for us to understand how the antiquarian scholars could consider the visual materials from antiquity as authentic and unmediated historical sources. However, as Wellington stresses, he has "uncovered much evidence to support the claim that this was a belief held to be true by many savants of the *grand siècle*" (11). But if this were indeed the case, would not then their own effort at shaping the reception of the artifacts they produced for "a future past" have made this position more complicated to embrace? Indeed, did they not themselves "compromis[e] the integrity of these artifacts as a trustworthy form of evidence by exposing their partisan origins" (10)? And should not their own manipulation of the future interpretation have made them suspect a similar manipulation in the materials coming down to them from the past?

Wellington touches on these questions in his introduction, and makes an intriguing gesture toward the place of the phenomenon he is studying within the wider intellectual culture at the time: "The pull towards and push away from the authority of the classical world was a defining feature of the *ancien régime*, famously expressed in the 'quarrel of the ancients and the moderns,' where scholars publicly debated whether classical culture was superior to their own" (12). The introduction also gestures toward the "epistemological continuity between the classical past, the present, and the future" that undergirds the antiquarian enterprise (11), and surmises that the explanatory treatises of the *Petite Académie* expose "an anxiety of erudition that might be seen to undermine the authority of the objects that they refer to" (12). However, these reflections remain exterior to the main inquiry of the book. In fact, the *Querelle* is never thematized again, although it is obvious that the

book, at the very least, provides fresh ground for reconsidering the position and argument of the side of the ancients. It would, for example, have been very interesting to see the author situate his inquiry in relation to the transformative intervention by Larry Norman in *The Shock of the Ancients* (2011), but this title is surprisingly not in the bibliography. Furthermore, this reader missed a more systematic reflection on the surprising political function of antiquarianism in general and the numismatic sensibility in particular in the construction of the exemplarity of Louis XIV. Such a reflection is latent everywhere, starting with—but not at all limited to—subsections with titles such as “Louis XIV as a ‘great man’ of history” (12-14) and “Historical agency” (52-55), but never properly pursued.

It may be wrong, however, to formulate these observations as a criticism. The interest of the author is quite simply elsewhere: “This study looks beyond a self-evident political reading of the iconography of Louis XIV to discover an artistic process deeply entrenched in a sophisticated intellectual and connoisseurial culture” (4). While some readers may resist the claim about the self-evidence of the political reading, this is clearly a very different project, itself antiquarian, according to the definition the author himself provides of the term: “the antiquarian studies the past in detail via the evidence presented by primary artifacts, without attempting to produce a broad synthetic study of period or culture” (4). As such it is an important achievement and a valuable source for future studies of the *Grand siècle* in its relationship to the past and construction of its future.

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