

## Book Reviews

Louis Marin. *Portrait of the King*. Martha M. Houle, translator. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988). xvii + 288 pp.

Students and scholars of seventeenth century literature and history will rejoice to see Louis Marin's *Le Portrait du roi* now appearing in English and available in both cloth and paperback. First published in 1981, this epochal work remains Marin's most fundamental and theoretical examination of the Sun King's world and its influence on the arts. "A patient reading of Marin's work ... yields the conclusion that in the arts of representation are found the real origins and organs of social control" (vi). The overwhelming presence of Louis XIV, fragmented throughout the state, demonstrates the ostensible relationship between arts and politics, the "incessant crisscrossing" of aesthetics and kingship (xvi). The author elicits the triadic symbolic identity of state, truth, and God by revealing similar strategies deployed in works such as Pellisson's historical project, La Fontaine's "The Fox and the Crow", and other works by Racine, Pascal, Le Brun, and Félibien. Marin asserts that symmetry represents sovereignty and absolute power is derived from self-inverting symmetry.

Taking on a daunting task, Martha Houle, Associate Professor of French at the College of William and Mary, had achieved an excellent translation of Marin's difficult text. The English version reads accurately and smoothly, avoiding ambiguities and confusion that could occur. For example, some difficulties with subordinate clauses have been remedied by the use of the first person, formerly not present in Marin's original. If the translation of certain words at times seems not to be sufficient, she has added the original French text in brackets. Thanks to her attentive reading of *Le Portrait du roi*, she has succeeded in obtaining a lucid and elegant translation that remains faithful to the original text.

The physical appearance of the text maintains a professional quality of binding and printing. Its internal structure reduplicates the French version by retaining the same charts and the same division of chapters and sub-chapters. Four additions appear in the English version: the forward, the appendix, the index, and the editorial notes. Written by Tom Conley, chair of the department of French and Italian and Professor of French at the University of Minnesota, the forward does not present the usual outline of Marin's life and works, but instead gives excellent pointers to Marin's goals and an illuminating analysis of his objectives. Conley's succinct forward, helpful for the scholar unacquainted with Marin's critical theory, underlines the importance of this work in the history of media. The appendix, which contains a translation of *Donkey Skin: A tale*, and the index are both helpful and convenient aids. Martha Houle's well-documented notes are supplemented by additional information and complete bibliographical references to guide the reader; whereas for those of Marin, one must constantly refer to the bibliography. Unfortunately however, the numerical references for Houle's footnotes don't always correlate to the French edition due to the fact that the notes of the English version consist both of Marin's notes and the translator's.

In conclusion, Martha Houle's translation of *Le Portrait de roi* is a welcome for all English-speaking seventeenth-century scholars. This important work which unites the history of objectivity with that of political practice ought to be available to a larger population. Reasonably priced, it is now accessible to all those interested.

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