

Ellen McClure. *Sunspots and the Sun King: Sovereignty and Mediation in Seventeenth-Century France*.

Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2006. x + 316 pp. index. bibl. \$45. ISBN: 0-252-03056-7.

Ellen McClure's study exhibits exhaustive erudition and keen perspicacity in analyzing the theories of sovereignty and divine right in the sphere of Louis XIV's role as both an embodiment of God as well as an independent and self-possessed ruler. Moreover, her examination of the Sun King's role as ruler by divine right extends to the complex world of the king's diplomats and ambassadors as mediators of the crown who transmitted and represented his power and authority. Finally, the author displays most remarkable gifts of vision and comprehension of the seventeenth century in her last chapter, concerning the complexities of mediation in the creation of plays and the role of theater in the French monarchy.

Beginning with major political and intellectual events that defined the seventeenth century, such as the assassination of Henri IV, Galileo's discovery of sunspots, and Descartes's critical rationalism, which charted a new course of self-discovery, McClure describes the reaction of the French monarchy to these rather

disconcerting developments. Faced with the assertion of rational discoveries that liberated the mind from a God-dominated and geocentric system, Louis XIV reacted strongly to this changing world by creating a sense of tradition, stability, and certainty of rule. At once, he cast himself as both a divine ruler and possessor of God's presence as well as a completely independent master of his world. These seemingly contradictory ideas that defined his monarchy are reconciled in the idea of the king as mediator between divine and human worlds. In the first chapter of this work, "What is a King?," McClure examines key theorists such as the jurist Cardin LeBret, the oratorian Jean-Francois Senault, and the Jesuit leader Pierre LeMoyné. She skillfully analyzes the ideas and nuances of "these early architects of divine right theories that elevated the sovereign while avoiding the perils of tyranny" (9). Their works form an understanding for the king's *Memoires*, which he and contributing authors composed as an instruction for the dauphin. This royal treatise provides the subject of the following chapter of McClure's book.

Louis's *Memoires* are given full exposure here and provide a dynamic model of royal power. Unlike James I, who described himself "as the privileged yet ultimately passive vehicle through which God's will expressed itself, Louis XIV occupied the more Bodinian position of asserting his similarity with God. Godlike, rather than godly, the French monarch embodied the singularity, will and creative power of the Supreme Being much more than the humility of Christ or of a passive believer" (77). Therein lies the key difference which separates the rule by divine right of Louis XIV from that of James I. Louis's God establishes a fountainhead of stability and laws from which the king taps as an active and masterful director. Thus, God is defined as a passive judge in this world, with Louis in the driver's seat.

Even more complex is the translation of the king's potency into diplomatic action. This Gordian knot and subsequent queries form the basis for chapters 3 and 4. McClure covers the myriad interpretations of diplomatic roles by such authors as Alberico Gentili, Abraham de Wicquefort, Juan Antonio de Vera Zúñiga y Figueroa, and François de Callières. From there the author relates how diplomats representing the Sun King operated with the tacit enforcement of the dictum that Louis, as "the King is [always] the sun, the ministers [only] the planets" (165). Since the roles they played often obliterated their own personalities while making them vessels or messengers of the king's will, diplomats were not unlike actors in a play. Here the author provides a clear path for the final chapter of her book, dealing with the cultural sphere of French theater and the relations between monarchy, playwright, and actors.

This connection of sovereign power with theater marks the most original and insightful part of McClure's book. Of special interest are her keen analyses of both Jean Racine's *Andromache* and Pierre Corneille's *Surena* as examples of mediation concerning power, politics, and human relations.

The conclusion is not only a concise summary of the five main chapters, but also an anticipation of how the status of king, diplomat, and actor would evolve in the coming eighteenth century. In addition, a very helpful index and footnotes

which clarify fine points while displaying more knowledge on details, make this book a valuable contribution for those interested in political philosophy, sources of power, and the connection to cultural expressions in theater. How few truly interdisciplinary works we have, such as this one, that help bridge political and cultural parallels in history; how many more we need that bear the exceptional standard of Ellen McClure's *Sunspots and the Sun King*.

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