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*Le Discours de vérité dans les mémoires du duc de
Saint-Simon* by Marc Hersant (review)

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(Review)

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frequent compromises, negotiations, and transgressions. Chapter four centers on Louis XIII's royal declaration of 1641, one of Richelieu's last juridical acts on behalf of the theater. This document attempted to absolve actors of the ignominy and excommunication to which canonical law automatically subjected them. In a departure from existing scholarship, Blocker sees the edict not as a direct affront to the church: "Richelieu et son entourage auraient tenté, dans le texte produit, de contourner le problème du droit canonique plutôt que de l'affronter" (316). The goal was to legitimate the kind of theatrical practice Richelieu aimed to promote in the service of the crown by making actors subject, not to ecclesiastical authorities, but to the civil codes of a newly disciplined theater.

The effects of Richelieu's politics on actors, on the church, and on playwrights remained limited. Pierre Corneille, the focus of the fifth and final chapter, represents the most significant response to Richelieu's project. Blocker gives a new reading of Corneille's "Discours" and "Examens" as politically charged actions by which Corneille both highlights and downplays erudition while also emphasizing the importance of experience (and popular success) in theatrical production. Through a reading of *L'Illusion comique*, Blocker extends this analysis to show how, like the magician Alcandre, Corneille hides some of the secrets of his art while also indicating that the practice of theater is a crucial "savoir-faire" that holds the potential for social utility while evading the grasp of authorities. This valuable study will allow specialists in early modern literary history to see both Corneille's and Richelieu's politics in a new light.

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HERSANT, MARC. *Le Discours de vérité dans les mémoires du duc de Saint-Simon*. Paris: Champion, 2009. ISBN 978-2-7453-1784-1. Pp. 938. 145 €.

If you have ever read Saint-Simon's *Mémoires* to appreciate their "literary" quality, and you haven't read the text in its more than 8,000 pages entirety, then you've committed two grave errors, claims Marc Hersant. Saint-Simon's work is history—only history—and its annexation by literary scholars is nothing short of "impérialisme" (87) based on ignorance of the author's work. So argues Hersant, as if defending a neglected orthodoxy against heretics.

Beneath the polemical tone is an interesting thesis. According to Hersant, Saint-Simon's notion of truth has been misunderstood, leading readers to classify the *Mémoires* as something other than history. For Saint-Simon, truth derives from a traditional social order, dictated by God and maintained by aristocratic honor. To pervert this order is to destroy the truth, hence those who undermine social hierarchy through their own personal ambition are *de facto* sources of error. Historical objectivity is less a product of erudition than of one's social rank. Thus Saint-Simon's strong passions, including his caustic portraits of political enemies, prove his dedication to historical truth rather than his powerful imagination, as it might erroneously appear to modern readers. Since court life under Louis XIV and the subsequent Regent is the antithesis of Saint-Simon's principles, truthful discourse can only emerge as an occasional, spectacular eruption against institutional resistance. Hersant has some engaging pages on how Saint-Simon represents the *mot d'esprit* and courtiers' involuntary slips of the tongue as a kind of collective unconscious that Louis XIV wishes to repress. As for Saint-Simon's

own narrative voice, it often speaks with besieged frenzy in recognition that the truth is losing ground to falsity, embodied by the king's illegitimate children. Hersant shows the tension between Saint-Simon's appeal to his reader and his melancholic sense of solitude.

All of this is interesting, but Hersant wishes to make a more dramatic, if somewhat simplistic, point: since Saint-Simon writes history and disdains literature, his text should not be evaluated for its literary merit. Hersant adapts Käte Hamburger's distinction between fiction and nonfiction to argue that Saint-Simon's most "literary" passages are still grounded in historical reality. Based on this fact, and on the many monotonous passages in the *Mémoires* that literary critics overlook, Hersant condemns virtually every scholar (including Leo Spitzer, Jules Brody, and Yves Coirault) who has praised Saint-Simon's "artistry" or done a rhetorical analysis of some section of the work. Here the argument becomes quite shrill and self-aggrandizing, as if Hersant were rescuing Saint-Simon from the hands of predators. Hersant's repeated warning that the *Mémoires* are not a novel hardly seems provocative, nor does it prove that people interested in novels shouldn't *also* be interested in Saint-Simon.

Indeed, the larger question of how history and fiction relate to each other during the late-seventeenth to mid-eighteenth centuries is largely unexplored by Hersant. Instead of analyzing the vogue of pseudo-memoirs and the *nouvelle historique*, which might shed light on why both Saint-Simon and novelists like Villedieu use the term "histoire particulière" to describe their work, Hersant anachronistically blames postmodernism for the blurring of genres. The volume is strictly for specialists, though even they may grow weary of Hersant's uncordial tone and his overuse of the first-person pronoun. In arguing that Saint-Simon must be read *in extenso*, Hersant has written a book that can only be read in *morceaux choisis*.

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PÉROUSE, MARIE. *L'Invention des Pensées de Pascal: les Editions de Port-Royal (1670–1678)*. Paris: Champion, 2009. ISBN 978-2-7453-1912-8. Pp. 606. 85 €.

Le livre de Marie Pérouse entreprend de relire les éditions des *Pensées* de Port-Royal en dépassant les préjugés dont elles ont souffert, et ce, depuis la lecture manichéenne de Victor Cousin qui écrivait: "Il n'y avait pas ici de censure jésuitique à craindre, il n'y a pas eu d'autre censure que celle de la médiocrité sur le génie" (*Des Pensées de Pascal*). Pour mener à bien son projet, Pérouse a reposé la question de la fidélité des éditeurs de Port-Royal, dans le contexte non pas de la fidélité littérale mais de la fidélité intellectuelle, montrant qu'à de rares exceptions près, le comité souhaitait simplement rendre plus accessible la pensée de Pascal obscurcie par l'inachèvement.

Dans sa première partie, Pérouse s'attarde sur la genèse du livre. Elle y étudie avec précision le rôle joué par les différents membres du comité éditorial, explorant leurs attentes qu'elle met en parallèle avec le "degré de vénération" (21) entretenu envers Pascal. Au nombre des figures-phares, elle cite le Duc de Roannez, puis Etienne Périer, Arnauld et Nicole. Quant à Gilberte Périer, elle lui attribue une place unique, Gilberte qui tout au long du processus avait redouté les changements apportés au texte de son frère. Malgré des divergences, le comité