

H-France Review Vol. 10 (November 2010), No. 179

Response to William Chester Jordan review of Daisy Delogu, *Theorizing the Ideal Sovereign: The Rise of the French Vernacular Royal Biography*. Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2008. viii + 300 pp. Notes, bibliography and indices. \$72.00 U.S. ISBN 978-0-80209807-8.

I would like to thank Professor Jordan for his thoughtful remarks on my book, *Theorizing the Ideal Sovereign: The Rise of the French Vernacular Royal Biography* (Toronto, 2008), and to express my gratitude to H-France editor Michael Wolfe for affording me the opportunity to extend this conversation about my work. I will begin by stating what my aims were in undertaking my study of kingship and vernacular royal biography, and then will address two important questions raised by Professor Jordan in his review.

Medieval kingship is a subject that has long interested scholars, but the texts that I examined had not, for the most part, been included in considerations of this topic, whether because they were dismissed as panegyric, deemed to have only limited relevance to the subject of kingship, or thought to be unrelated to contemporary political concerns. In my book I look at the ways in which royal vernacular biographies from the later French Middle Ages both reflected and shaped transformations in late medieval political and philosophical thought. By engaging in close readings of five such biographies – Jean de Joinville's *Vie de saint Louis*, the anonymous *Chanson de Hugues Capet*, Guillaume de Machaut's *Prise d'Alexandre*, the *Vie du Prince Noir* by the Herald Chandos, and Christine de Pizan's *Livre des faits et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V* – I show how kings' lives could advance precise political aims, as illustrated by the *Chanson's* articulation of the principles of Salic Law, and also how they could promote new values, such as prudence, as part of a kingly ideal. These works demonstrate how theories of kingship evolved during a dynamic period marked by the 'rediscovery' of Aristotle, the rise of the vernacular as a language of ethics and philosophy, and the crisis of legitimacy provoked by the Hundred Years' War.

With respect to the textual objects of my study, Professor Jordan concedes that vernacular kings' lives are a "category" but, he asks, are they a genre? If so, what are the conventions that govern this form? Such a question is not easily answered since, as the work of Thomas Heffernan, Sarah Kay, Gabrielle Spiegel, and others has amply demonstrated, medieval genres are fluid, unstable, inscribed in on-going processes of creation and modification. Moreover, although the emergence and subsequent transformation of vernacular royal biography is an important topic, my primary purpose in this book was to examine kings' lives as a practice, to see how these texts work and what they accomplish. As Hans-Robert Jauss pointed out in "Littérature médiévale et théorie des genres," every medieval literary work belongs to a genre inasmuch as it "suppose l'horizon d'une attente" on the part of its public.<sup>1</sup> This formulation accords each work a certain autonomy, and highlights the variable and dynamic nature of medieval texts, whose meanings are generated through the interaction of text and publics. The authors of the works in my study demonstrate an awareness of their antecedents. They situate their texts with respect to recognizable models, predominantly saints' lives, chronicles, and *miroirs du prince*, and yet the combination of qualities that they borrow from each, as well as the diverse perspectives and aims the authors bring to their literary endeavors, results in a work that is unique. In my book I approached these works through the focused lens of literary analysis, which enabled me to illuminate the ways in which each text was able to construct, reinterpret, and promulgate a distinctive vision of medieval

kingship, in the process contributing to the production and transformation of political ideology, authority, and theory.

Regarding the works in my study, Professor Jordan expresses doubt concerning their capacity to theorize because they do not embed their claims about kingship “in philosophically or theologically sophisticated analyses of the nature of power and rule.” I believe it is important to embrace a conception of theorizing that takes into account sources that do not necessarily make abstract or universalizing claims about a given topic. The works that I examine demonstrate the how the particular can accompany and even precede the universal in the emergence of what we could call a theory of kingship, and my study of these texts provides insight into the processes by which medieval theories of kingship were modified and transformed as a result, precisely, of the pressure exerted by the particular and the local. Moreover, the theorizing that occurs in these works is not staged for a passive reader, but is made possible for an active one by the variety of exempla presented. As John Dagenais and Mary Carruthers have shown in their work on medieval reading practices, reading supposes a process first of discernment and evaluation, and second an incorporation into the self of the lessons derived from one’s reading, which results in a transformation of the reader’s conduct.<sup>2</sup> The many kings whose qualities and choices are depicted in the works that I study provide a gallery of kingly models – both positive and negative, sometimes ambiguous – that the engaged or ethical reader is invited to compare, reflect upon, and emulate as appropriate. These works are open-ended, not conclusive, providing a point of departure for reflections on and conversations about kingship. This is, in part, what I hope to have achieved in my own work: to have made an important set of texts more widely-known and accessible, to have reintroduced them into scholarly conversations in which they have a significant role to play, and to have set that conversation into motion with my own critical interventions and interpretations.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Poétique* 1 (1970): 79-101, at 82.

<sup>2</sup> See Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory. A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990 (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. 2008) and John Dagenais, *The Ethics of Reading in Manuscript Culture. Glossing the Libro de buen amor*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

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