

Michel Antoine — *Louis XV*. Paris: Fayard, 1989. Pp. 1049.

Louis XV occupied an unenviable position in the chronology of French history. He exists as the predecessor to the deluge — the swing figure between the splendors of Louis XIV's successful if brutal absolutism and the eruption of the Revolution. The timing of Louis XV's reign leads historians to speculate whether, by acknowledging the claims of the battling *Parlements*, he could have created a monarchy with a different structure or whether, by utilizing a strong absolutist method, he could have modernized French administration and law and joined other enlightened despots in Europe. We still want to know what kept Louis from becoming a successful monarch.

For Michel Antoine, in his extraordinary biography of this king, the answer begins with his conviction of the centrality of monarchy: "The temperament of France was monarchic" (173). The author captures and indeed distills the essence of majesty for his readers. He blends the personal, the religious and the public components of majesty and reconstructs the necessity of the combination of majesty and monarchy for a successful reign. He equally projects Louis XV's particular personality onto the institution of French monarchy. This book, then, is a biography of an individual and an examination of monarchy. It traces both Louis' personal evolution and the changing parameters of monarchy in the eighteenth century.

Antoine skillfully maintains this balance between complex government and complex individual throughout the book. In the early chapters, he depicts Louis XV's childhood in all its loneliness. He places the origins of this king's furtiveness and secretiveness in his painful youth. The orphan king emerges a handsome youth with the bearing of the Bourbons at his coronation. Despite his intelligence and intellectual curiosity, however, he was plagued by a timidity that hampered his ability to become a flexible monarch. This shyness and, according to the author, deep-seated self-doubt, masked his accomplishments. He places much of the burden for Louis' reluctant performance as a monarch on these attributes. Indeed, he frequently contrasts the king's personal solitude with the bustle of the court and the intimacy of mistresses. The inability to talk easily to strangers is a shattering burden to those in politics. If Louis had been able to achieve an easy manner, his reign might well have been less divisive and loyalty to the king easier to achieve.

In fact, Louis' reign witnessed an explosion of opposition by the *Parlements* of France. Long held in tight check by Louis XIV, they welcomed the regent Philippe d'Orléans' invitation in 1715 to participate in government affairs. Orléans, described by Antoine as capable and self-assured, could not have realized the repercussion of his act on the shy young monarch. The author says: "As he [Orléans] was himself quite capable of talking and acting as master, he was not conscious of compromising the exercise of monarchic power for the whole century" (37).

Louis, after his majority, hesitated to re-established strong monarchical control of the *Parlements* and the conflict between them lasted for decades. This opposition, galvanized initially by the crisis over the Bull Unigenitus, would in time incorporate not only court nobles, but also provincial parliamentarians far distant from Versailles and Paris. Antoine's careful examination of the nature and structure of the institutions of government and the role of the embattled absolute monarch clarifies the complexities of the conflict. The pomp and circumstances of public court life are more familiar to many than the daily rituals of councils and ministerial briefings. The author succeeds, however, in delineating the method by which monarchical government

actually functioned. This is an extraordinary accomplishment and an important addition to the writing of institutional history.

Antoine, however, does not sympathize with the disorder provoked by the *Parlements* and their opposition. He clearly argues for the need to preserve a strong monarchy and sees the opposition as threatening the actual stability of the State. As he asserts, "The superior seemed...to disown [their role as pillars of the monarchy] and to give themselves no other vocation than to destabilize the State, to seize the scepter while confining the prince to a role of supernumerary, inert and mute" (610). He welcomes the end of the conflict and convincingly presents the king's new grasp on monarchical authority. With the Jesuits banished and the Dauphin dead, Louis finally gathers new strength to dominate the *Parlements*. The author considers this action, this *coup de majesté*, to be the king's political testament for his grandson — a declaration of Bourbon strength and solidarity.

Antoine's interest in the monarchy leaves him less time for a discussion of the impact of the Enlightenment on the opposition. He acknowledges Montesquieu's writings as part of the parliamentary platform, and examines the role of the *avocat* Le Paige as popularizer of the ideas of Boulainvilliers and Montesquieu and as the creator of the "mythic past" (574) of the *Parlement*. He does delineate the formation of public opinion among the "robins" and sees the increasing espousal of this opinion by court nobility to be very menacing to the king's authority. In keeping with the demands of royal biography, Antoine does not see the emergence of opposition as a positive development in the eighteenth century.

The rhythm of the rituals of kingship is very clearly defined in Antoine's book and one cannot help but appreciate the complexity and the richness of monarchy after reading this lucid and evocative work. One of the most striking images is the author's description of Louis' return to Versailles in 1722. After chasing around the gardens with his court behind him, the twelve-year-old king throws himself on the floor of the hall of mirrors in order to look at LeBrun's paintings of Louis XIV on the ceiling. The image of an orphan king, alone, regarding the achievements of his predecessor conveys both the loneliness of Louis XV and the burden of inheritance. Antoine has rescued Louis from the philandering king who profited from the grain scarcity and has presented us with a troubled intelligent man who, after all, displayed the strength to preserve the absolute monarchy for his grandson Louis XVI.

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Katherine Arnup, Andrée Lévesque and Ruth Roach Pierson, with the assistance of Margaret Brennan — *Delivering Motherhood: Maternal Ideologies and Practices in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990. Pp. xxv, 322.

In 1976, Adrienne Rich published *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. *Delivering Motherhood*, the first comprehensive survey about motherhood in Canada, is part of her legacy. Sixteen scholars contribute fourteen chapters dealing with the medicalization of childbirth, hospitalization and midwifery, birth control, abortion, and reproductive technology. They also discuss the role of the