

social historians of religion including Alec Ryrie, Ann Hughes, and Joel Halcomb, make relatively little impact in Hutton's book. There are, of course, limitations on available evidence, but only fleetingly do we see Cromwell attending sermons or prayer meetings (154, 296), or having a frosty encounter with Richard Baxter (269–70). Without this context it is harder to grasp the fervent personal loyalty—and equally intense feelings of betrayal—that Cromwell could inspire; the shared experience that bound him together with fellow believers, that made him capable of sending a “hit squad” into the Cambridge colleges, and of cutting off the king's head. In this sense I missed here some of the most deeply engaging facets of Hutton's rich, varied, and sometimes strange career: the bold juxtaposing of social history with high politics in his study of *The Restoration* (Oxford, 1985); the ethnography of parish community life in *The Rise and Fall of Merry England* (Oxford, 1994); or even the still more recent histories of witches, druids, and shamans. Not that there is much in the way of church ales or paganism in Cromwell's life, but there is more that a scholar like Hutton might interestingly tell us about the values and practices through which Cromwell and his allies sought to supplant such things.

Hall Bjørnstad. *The Dream of Absolutism: Louis XIV and the Logic of Modernity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021. xii + 230 pp. + 21 illus. \$30.00 (paper). Review By IVY DYCKMAN, INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR.

If we as citizens of our planet are paying even minimal attention to the barrage of daily news throughout the ether, we know that democracies around the globe are facing existential crises. Whatever the principles espoused by autocratic leaders and governments, all of them adhere to a similar political playbook. Historically, we also know that repressive phenomena disappear and reappear in analogous forms fairly predictably. In this monograph, the author Hall Bjørnstad considers one of the world's most recognized authoritarian sovereigns. Louis XIV, whose epithets “Louis le Grand” and “le Roi Soleil” reflected both the image he had of himself and the one propagated inside and outside the confines of his realm, is deemed by many to represent

the absolute monarch par excellence. Rather than focusing on Louis XIV per se, Bjørnstad examines instead the dream or manifestation of absolutism that the king, together with his “image-makers, the court, if not the whole nation, dreamt together collectively and that perhaps remains latent in the collective political imaginary today” (xi). Throughout his study, then, Bjørnstad seems to encourage his readers to peer into the past in order to awaken them to the surge of dreams of absolutism occurring right now.

In between the lengthy introduction and the pithy conclusion, Bjørnstad sandwiches three chapters that support the argumentation of his book. He explores the expression of monarchal absolutism through cultural artifacts as opposed to the more concrete economic, political, and social avenues. He insists that what he proposes is not regime propaganda even if it may be interpreted as such. He explores the notion of the dream of absolutism through textual and visual examples. Chapters 1 and 3 rely on lesser-known writings from the period in question. Chapter 2 takes readers to the Hall of Mirrors in the splendid royal Palace of Versailles. While the chapters appear chronologically in the text, the order of discussion here will be slightly modified.

The title “Mirrors of Absolutism” aptly describes the contents of Chapter 2. The visual element of Bjørnstad’s analysis not only makes for a fitting introduction to his work but also generates a most convincing, clear-cut, and illustrative discussion of the dream of absolutism, which functions concurrently as a reflection of modernity. Beautiful color plates of Charles Le Brun’s decorative artwork facilitate the author’s vivid observations. In this section, Bjørnstad details the history of the Hall of Mirrors (in French “La Grande Galerie” or the more recent “La Galerie des Glaces”); the iconography; the technological innovations, placement, and symbolism of the mirrors; and the impressions of Louis XIV as well as those of visitors over the decades. Whether experiencing the Hall of Mirrors in person or virtually, one is bedazzled by the esthetics and majesty of the space. Perhaps the most fascinating, impactful passage of this chapter is the author’s in-depth examination of Le Brun’s mythological concept of the inception of Louis’s personal rule in 1661. The strategically placed painting, *Le Roi gouverne par lui-même*, 1661, appears on the ceiling of the vault of

the Hall of Mirrors. Within this depiction of the defining moment in the long reign of the Sun King, another image within the larger one reveals the sovereign's soul, which remains shrouded in the portrayal of the event itself. Upon close observation, the viewer may detect a reflection of the royal face in the shield of the allegorical figure of the Roman goddess Minerva. Here, the artist deviates from the king's public stoic persona. As First Painter to the King, Le Brun exposed an emotion-filled face heretofore closeted from view. A familiar anecdote recounted by Le Brun's hagiographic biographer Claude Nivelon attests to Louis's interiority. Upon first viewing Le Brun's *La Résolution prise de faire la guerre aux Hollandais*, 1671, the king remarked to the artist from his position on the floor well below the high ceiling, "M. Le Brun, vous m'avez fait voir des choses que j'ai ressenties." The painter was not only honored by Louis's unanticipated emotional reaction but also by the royal touch on his arm.

Bjørnstad's additional support of his argument relies on three lesser-known writings of the period in question. He devotes the first chapter to Louis XIV's *Mémoires*, whose content and grammar he analyses. This sort of how-to manual was devised for the purpose of transmitting to his successor the Dauphin royal advice and real-life examples thereby assuring the continuation of absolute rule à la Louis. The project began in 1661, which was simultaneously the year of the Dauphin's birth and the beginning of Louis XIV's personal reign. The irony of this book is twofold. By all accounts, Louis neither wrote the *Mémoires* himself nor did his eldest son ever see the work. Tragically for the king, the Dauphin's unexpected demise prevented him from ensuring the everlasting replication of his father's dream of absolutism. The king's desire for a *mise-en-abîme* type of governance was foiled. He failed to control "the future beyond his own reign" (42).

Bjørnstad offers two final texts to complete his probe into tangible evidence of Louis XIV's vision of absolutism. He classifies both as "Absolutist Absurdities," the title he fittingly conceived for Chapter 3, and selects as examples over-the-top writings associated with recognized literary genres, the parallel and the fairy tale. In fact, each comes across as a subtly irreverent, farcical image of the king, his rule, and his dream. Notwithstanding the inflated panegyric, these oblique portrayals of authority seem to emerge as subjects grow weary and

more critical of authoritarian patterns and behaviors. The first text, published in 1685, concerns Claude-Charles Guyonnet de Vertron's *Parallèle de Louis le Grand avec les princes qui ont été surnommés grands*. The author, who identifies himself on the title page as a historiographer of the king, talks about great sovereigns of the past, Louis being the greatest. He is so great, in fact, that it would be inconceivable to imagine a future king as superior as he. Vertron underscores Louis's greatness as existing only in the present. He stops short of acknowledging the predetermined role of his royal successor as outlined in the *Mémoires*. The fairy tale example that follows is decidedly more engaging simply due to the fantastical, cleverly subversive nature of the genre. After delving into the complexities and analysis of Jean de Préchac's tale, "Sans Parangon," first published in 1698, the reader may better understand why Bjørnstad chose it to conclude his book, since it acts as a summation of his previous discussions and serves as a vehicle for conveying reality through the intervention of the supernatural. Even as he celebrates the glory of his Louis-inspired fictional king, Préchac challenges the sovereignty of the fairies. The king is able to achieve greatness without their magic. There is no happy ending in this fairy tale, only a contest to continue waging war against them. In this instance, fairies, not human beings, are the casualties in the king's dream of absolutism. Louis's glory surpasses even the supernatural.

Boris Donn , *Moli re*. Paris: Les  ditions du Cerf 2022. 184 pp.  15.00. Review by DENIS D. GR L , THE UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS.

Another book on Moli re? Don't we know by now everything that needs to be known about Jean Baptiste Poquelin? But do we know Moli re the man? This is the question that Boris Donn  attempts to answer in this short book in the collection *Qui es-tu?* In order to do so, Donn  applies the traditional chronological framework to structure the life of Moli re around the three phases of his life: the first part (entitled "L' cole des hommes") retraces his youth with the experience of the Illustre th  tre and his long journey throughout France; the second part ("Le Comique honn te homme") looks at his march to glory when he comes back to Paris and becomes the author of