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Abstract

The main aim of this thesis is to examine the vision of history which is presented in the *Mémoires* of the due de Saint-Simon/ a work which describes life at the French court during the last years of the reign of Louis XIV and during the period of the Regency which followed the death of the Sun King (1691-1723). The thesis is a study based on a close reading of the text itself using two methods to shed light on the different aspects of the subject. It begins with an investigation of the theme of paternity or fatherhood/ and the way in which this theme relates to the question of royal power/ focusing on the figure of the king himself as he appears in his various father roles : father of both a legitimate and an illegitimate line of children/ and father of his kingdom. The strongly religious and moralistic overtones of Saint-Simon's political and social convictions lead the memorialist to condemn what he sees as the chaos and social disorder resulting from the king's "confusion" of these differing paternal identities. The second half of the thesis is largely a stylistic analysis of two passages taken from the body of the *Mémoires*. For by examining the style of this work (at both a lexical and a syntactical level)/ one may begin to develop an insight into the way in which Saint-Simon interprets the events of his day in order to fit them into his larger vision of the history of the world. Certain stylistic traits in the text suggest a movement from the mere presentation and explanation of events to an interpretation of their deeper meaning. As well/ frequent references in the *Mémoires* to both Genesis and Revelations/ taken in conjunction with Saint-Simon's theologo-political view of society/ seem to indicate that the memorialist regards the reign of Louis XIV as being a playing-out/ in miniature/ of the history of the world/ from the Fall to a final confrontation between good and evil. Thus/ in the end/ Saint-Simon's constant need to interpret events leads him away from the simple explanation of causes/ towards the elaboration of a prophetic vision (or "apocalypse") : a dire warning issued to the monarchy and to the people of France as to the fate which may yet befall them, if the process of corruption begun by the Sun King himself is not somehow reversed.

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