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## Review of Margaret McGowan, *The Vision of Rome in Late Renaissance France*.

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**Margaret McGowan, *The Vision of Rome in Late Renaissance France*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000. 461 pp. 101 black and white illustrations. 12 colored plates. ISBN 0300085354.**

**Reviewed by Eric MacPhail , Indiana University**

Margaret McGowan's new book documents the transfer of ideas and images of Rome to France and the decisive impact which these visions had on French art and literature in the latter half of the sixteenth century. The first part of the work surveys the erudite and popular sources of the vision of Rome, while the second part analyzes the artistic response evoked by these sources. Throughout, more than a hundred illustrations embellish this patiently compiled and meticulously researched history of French Renaissance emulation of ancient Rome.

The initial chapters on travel accounts and guide books reveal the complexity of a vision founded as much on memory and imagination as on objective experience. The traveler's vision of Rome was overlaid, if not overwhelmed, by literary reminiscences so that the city acquired an "extraordinary density of presence" (24) which challenged the creative impulses of poets and architects. Erudite and princely collectors eagerly appropriated the antiquities recorded by travelers, especially coins and medals, which proved instrumental in circulating images of Rome in France. Four individuals stand out in McGowan's account for their role in conditioning French attitudes to Rome. The architectural writings of Sebastiano Serlio contributed to the adoption of the classical esthetic in France and to the development of a technical vocabulary for describing and judging architectural forms. He also helped to design the loggia of the Château de Fontainebleau, which was a locus for French emulation of Rome. Gabriel Symeoni was an Italian who settled in Lyon in mid-century where he published a series of antiquarian works that helped to import the imperial theme from Rome to France. Blaise de Vigenère wrote translations and commentaries on Caesar and Livy in which he tried to reconstruct ancient Rome from its literary and artistic remains. Unlike so many of his compatriots, Vigenère had a scrupulous and reliable vision of Rome: "he really saw what was there and recorded it as faithfully as he could" (120). Finally, Justus Lipsius contributed to the cult of Rome in France through his editions of Seneca and Tacitus, in which he stressed the relevance of Roman history to contemporary Europe. Lipsius also corresponded with a wide network of French scholars, which increased the impact of his work in France.

While the first part of *The Vision of Rome* records the transmission of ideas, images, and art objects through an approach relying to some extent on anecdote and enumeration, the second part offers the sort of in-depth analysis and criticism that satisfy the expectations of scholarly readers. This second, more substantial section begins with a meditation on the evocative power of ruins both in European Renaissance tradition in general and in sixteenth-century France in particular. Through text, illustrations, and notes, McGowan demonstrates with enviable thoroughness to what extent the landscape with ruins became a ubiquitous feature of the visual arts in Renaissance France. One artist who was particularly obsessed with Rome was Antoine Caron, whose works, especially the painting now exhibited in the Louvre with the title of *les Massacres sous le triumvirat*, present not only a "double vision" (156) of Rome superimposed on France but also a sinister vision of Roman civil war revived in France. Caron exemplifies the Renaissance fascination with its dual inheritance of classicism and cruelty. The chapter on ruins

concludes with a lengthy discussion of the imaginative reconstruction of Rome through conjecture and extrapolation. In France this process yielded such monuments as the Château de Meudon whose superb grotto, inspired by Hadrian's Villa, embodied, in the view of Ronsard and other contemporaries, a new French esthetic of artifice combined with nature. In this way, French Renaissance artists sought not only to revive and surpass antiquity but also to vie with Italian intermediaries such as the Villa d'Este at Tivoli, which furnished a model for many French country estates.

The next chapter, devoted to Du Bellay and Montaigne, represents the most sustained effort of literary criticism in the work. In 1553, in the midst of a brief and brilliant career, Joachim Du Bellay accompanied his cousin the Cardinal Jean Du Bellay to Rome, where he composed four collections of poems which were published in France in 1558: *les Antiquitez de Rome plus un Songe*, *les Regrets*, *les Divers jeux rustiques*, and the *Poemata*, which are a collection of Latin elegies, epigrams, epitaphs, and love poems. McGowan first rehearses the critical debate over the *Antiquitez* and then proposes to discern, in the *Poemata* and elsewhere, signs of a new poetic enterprise, which we might call an architectural poetics. This enterprise, whose novelty is dubious, receives its finest expression in a pair of sonnets addressed to the architect Pierre Lescot (*Regrets* 157 and 158 miscited as 149 and 150) where Du Bellay appropriates the architectural impulse to refashion the remains of the past. After a pointless detour through the philological conjectures of Joseph Justus Scaliger, we return to the *Antiquitez* and to their fundamental ambivalence toward Rome. As always, the test case of any critical response to the *Antiquitez* is the final, most elusive sonnet, where the poet asks his verses if they hope to achieve immortality when more solid monuments have vanished into oblivion. In her reading, McGowan de-emphasizes the pathos and sense of loss to which Thomas Greene and other critics are sensitive, in order to emphasize the idealism of Du Bellay's poetry and his commitment to the restoration of Rome. The section on Du Bellay concludes with an informative survey of Du Bellay's heritage, covering a number of minor poets from the reigns of Charles IX and Henri III including a new discovery, Adrian de Gadon, whose *Sonnets faits à Rome* were published in Paris in 1573 and apparently haven't been read since.

From Du Bellay, we move to Michel de Montaigne, the author of a travel journal as well as three books of essays. In reading the *Journal de voyage*, McGowan is acutely sensitive to Montaigne's archaeological response to Rome, his recognition of the many layers reposing beneath the surface and of the passage of time inscribed in those layers. This sense of stratification naturally suggests an analogy between Rome and the *Essais*, whose different layers accreted over a long course of time. McGowan rightly stresses Montaigne's ambivalence to Roman ruins, his "double projection" (230) of greatness and ruin, whereby she means to qualify Greene's judgement in *The Light in Troy* that Montaigne dismisses the ruins as a tomb. Unfortunately, there is a seriously garbled quotation from the *Journal* on page 229 that will need to be corrected in subsequent printings. McGowan's reading of the *Essais* focuses on their fragmentary composition and disjointed style, which emulate the author's thought process and constitute the most authentic image of the self. These pages on the *Essais* (pages 234 to 246) are without question the best part of the book, the most analytical and perceptive, and the least schematic. In effect, through his fragmentary style of composition, Montaigne is able to capture something of the evocative power of ruins, soliciting from his own readers the same effort of conjecture that Roman ruins inspired in Renaissance artists.

The next chapter describes what McGowan calls the reverse appropriation of Rome among French poets who portrayed France as the heir to Roman ruin rather than Roman glory. This tendency prevailed during the Wars of Religion (1562 to 1598) when many French authors deplored the reenactment of Roman civil war in France. In these pages we find a sensitive survey of the twenty-four sonnets on Rome composed by Jacques Grévin, an unduly neglected successor to the Pléiade. The final chapter considers two figures which epitomized ancient Rome in the imagination of Renaissance France: Julius Caesar and the triumphal arch. Here we learn how French kings throughout the century appropriated Caesar's image for their own royal propaganda, and how they took inspiration from ancient triumphs for the royal entries which they staged in an attempt to revive classical pageantry and prestige. This is an area in which McGowan possesses special expertise, having published a facsimile edition of the text of Henri II's entry into Rouen in 1550.

After this eighth and final chapter, a brief coda or epilogue extends the topic into the seventeenth century. Taking the career of Jean-Louis Guez de Balzac as example, and borrowing liberally from the scholarship of Jean Jehasse, McGowan demonstrates how the idea of Rome was subsumed by French classicism while Paris eventually supplanted Rome as the locus of cultural prestige. This makes a convincing ending to an impressive survey of the role of vision and memory in the retrieval of the past.