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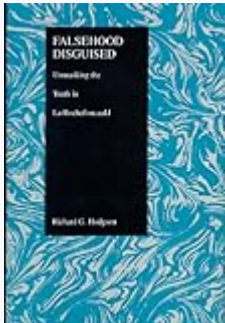
Features June 1996

La Rochefoucauld: maximum maximist

by Joseph Epstein

On Falsehood Disguised: Unmasking the Truth in La Rochefoucauld by Richard G. Hodgson

BOOKS IN THIS ARTICLE



Richard G. Hodgson

Falsehood Disguised: Unmasking the Truth in LA Rochefoucauld (Purdue Studies in Romance Literatures)

Purdue Univ Pr, 176 pages, \$41.95

François vi, Duc de La Rochefoucauld (1613–80) did not invent the form known as the maxim, but instead, fairly early in its history, merely perfected it. Defying any notion of progress in the arts, nobody has come along in more than three centuries who has done it better; he remains unsurpassed. “We all have strength enough to endure the misfortunes of others,” he wrote, and later, not gilding but crushing the lily, he added: “We are easily consoled for the misfortunes of our friends, if they afford us an opportunity of displaying our affection.” He also wrote that “hypocrisy is the homage that vice pays to virtue” and that “however much good we hear of ourselves, we never learn anything new.” Bull’s-eyes, all of them, but then La Rochefoucauld hits the target more than any other writer of maxims in the history of the form, making him, beyond all...

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Joseph Epstein is the author of *Gossip: The Untrivial Pursuit* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt).

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