



## In the Sun King's Cosmos

Comets and the Cultural Imagination of  
Seventeenth-Century France

Claire Goldstein

Offering a new history of a formative cultural and political era through the  
cosmic phenomena that captured the public's imagination

In the winters of 1664–65 and 1680–81, the French public was galvanized by two bright comets whose elliptical orbits could not be mapped with contemporary geometry and that thus seemed to appear in random and unpredictable locations. Bookending the period during which Louis XIV's sun king mythology was created, these comets defied the heliocentric order to which French politics and culture aspired. As Claire Goldstein demonstrates, literary texts, cultural institutions, and architecture inspired by comets offer a different perspective on the relationship between sensory experience, ideology, and artistic form.

*In the Sun King's Cosmos: Comets and the Cultural Imagination of Seventeenth-Century France* presents an alternative view of a formative era in cultural and political history, when distinctly modern forms of power and control were established through a regime of the spectacular. Goldstein shows how comets allow us to see the seventeenth century in ways that complicate the narrative of a race toward rationalization, classicism, and modernity, indexing instead a messy period in which the spectacular was sometimes also inscrutable.

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**Claire Goldstein** is a professor of French at the University of California, Davis. She is the author of *Vaux and Versailles: The Appropriations, Erasures, and Accidents That Made Modern France*.

*"This is a book everyone will have to know and cite and, more importantly, that everyone will want to devour and discuss."*

—Faith E. Beasley, Dartmouth College