

# **L'Oeil du Maitre**

**1778**

**Mss.354.B45**

American Philosophical Society

2002

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository</b>	American Philosophical Society
<b>Creator</b>	Berny, Pierre Jean Paul,1722-1779.
<b>Title</b>	L'Oeil du Maitre
<b>Date</b>	1778
<b>Call number</b>	Mss.354.B45
<b>Extent</b>	1.0 Volume(s) 75 p.
<b>Location</b>	LH-MV-E-15
<b>Language</b>	French
<b>Container</b>	1
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>Born in Chartres, France, on August 9, 1722, the chevalier de Berny studied law before entering the military. During the Seven Years War he served in the Low Countries and Germany, retiring to Strasbourg after fifteen campaigns and a number of wounds with the Bavarian Order of St. Michel. He claimed familiarity with a number of European princes and ministers and the protection of the Comte de Vergennes. Berny is known as well as the master of a writing academy in Brussels and as a draftsman. He died on January 22, 1779.</p> <p>Professing admiration for Franklin's support for the arts and sciences, and ever interested in ingratiating himself to the celebrated and powerful, the chevalier de Berny dedicated his "L'Oeil du Maître, ou essai sur le ministère," to Franklin in February 1778. In this essay on governance and the qualifications, activities, virtues, and vices of ministers to the king, Berny excuses himself, a draftsman, for commenting upon the affairs of</p>

state by insisting that the thoughts in his essay arose from long personal experience: "le fruit de la fréquentation de nombre de Cours où j'ai résidé depuis la paix dernière." Franklin appears never to have acknowledged its receipt.

**Preferred Citation**

Cite as: Pierre Jean Paul Berny, L'Oeil du Maitre, American Philosophical Society.

## **Background note**

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Born in Chartres, France, on August 9, 1722, the chevalier de Berny studied law before entering the military. During the Seven Years War he served in the Low Countries and Germany, retiring to Strasbourg after fifteen campaigns and a number of wounds with the Bavarian Order of St. Michel. He claimed familiarity with a number of European princes and ministers and the protection of the Comte de Vergennes. Berny is known as well as the master of a writing academy in Brussels and as a draftsman. He died on January 22, 1779.

## Scope & content

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Professing admiration for Franklin's support for the arts and sciences, and ever interested in ingratiating himself to the celebrated and powerful, the chevalier de Berny dedicated his "L'Oeil du Maître" to Franklin in February 1778. In this essay on governance and the qualifications, activities, virtues, and vices of ministers to the king, Berny excuses himself, a draftsman, for commenting upon the affairs of state by insisting that the thoughts in his essay arose from long personal experience: "le fruit de la fréquentation de nombre de Cours où j'ai résidé depuis la paix dernière." Franklin appears never to have acknowledged its receipt.

The flavor of "L'Oeil du Maître" is summarized in Berny's concluding remarks, in which he advocates the value to the state of 1) carefully circumscribing the power of those whose interests might conflict with the interests of the state, 2) changing ministers only when necessary, 3) traveling to gain familiarity with other courts, 4) involving the king personally in leading his military, and 4) guarding the king against vices to ensure that he does not leave leadership of his military to those with contrary interests.

The essay is written entirely in French and appears not to have been published.

## Administrative Information

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### Publication Information

American Philosophical Society 2002

## Provenance

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### Acquisition Information

Formerly owned by Benjamin Franklin.

### Processing Information

Recatalogued by rsc, 2002.

## Related Materials

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### Related Material

The letter that accompanied the manuscript when it was sent to Franklin in February 1778 is located in the Franklin Papers (B F85) 41:88. For letters concerning this item, see Hays calendar listings of letters from Berny to Franklin. Film 54-67 Frame 1.

## Indexing Terms

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### Genre(s)

- Foreign Language
- Manuscript Essays

### Personal Name(s)

- Franklin, Benjamin, 1706-1790

- Louis XVI, King of France, 1754-1793

## Subject(s)

- American Revolution
- Kings and rulers--Duties
- Political science--Early works to 1800

## Other Descriptive Information

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“L’Oeil du Maitre” is a treatise on governance written by Pierre Berny, a well-known Frenchman in the eighteenth century. During the Seven Years’ War, he served in Germany. After retiring in 1757, he established a school in Brussels and gained a reputation as a master draftsman. Berny sent this manuscript to Benjamin Franklin in February 1778, when Franklin was in France as the American envoy. This bound volume, although handwritten, is formatted in such a way as to give this essay the appearance of a pamphlet.

The essay, written in French, was mailed to Franklin and is a discourse on Berny’s view of good governance. In the essay, Berny appears to be a monarchist who advocates a greater direct role of the king in affairs of state.

There is no record of Franklin acknowledging receipt of the volume in his correspondence, but the volume came to the APS via Franklin’s papers. Franklin received numerous other letters from Berny, but there is again no record of Franklin writing to Berny himself.