

engagement with the *Essais*, starting with “Sur des vers de Virgile?” Ton Harmsen and Alicia Montoya, for their part, examine less known and discussed Dutch readers of Montaigne: Jan de Brune the Younger, who creatively imitated Montaigne’s colloquial style in his *Whetsone of the Minds*, and Maria Heyns, who deployed a double strategy of literary *appreciation* and *appropriation* in her translation of Montaigne. Next, Pieter van Veen’s illustrations to the *Essais* are addressed from an art-historical point of view by Elmer Kolfin and Marringje Rikken, and from a contextualist one by Warren Boutcher. Taking as his subject “a copy of the 1602 Paris edition of Montaigne’s *Essais* owned by a Dutch lawyer and painter Pieter van Veen,” Boutcher “approach[es] this object not as a work by Montaigne that reached a Dutch context, but as a work by Van Veen that originated in a Dutch context” (263).

The last two contributions contextualize the *Essais* further by considering their editorial history. Kees Meerhoff and Paul J. Smith trace the history and explore the implications of the recent rediscovery (in the University of Leiden library) of Montaigne’s lost letter to Mlle Le Paulmier (1588), a letter which had played an important role in shaping the image of Montaigne in later eighteenth-century editions of the *Essais*. Finally, Philippe Desan takes us through the complex editorial reality of seventeenth-century Holland, examining the reasons why French and Genevan publishers used Dutch addresses for their pirated editions. As a whole the volume makes a significant contribution to the Dutch reception of Montaigne’s *Essais*. And while the editors do not proclaim to have been exhaustive in their study (it is “only a beginning” [5], they assert), they do succeed in offering readers numerous lines for future inquiries.

Emma Gilby. *Sublime Worlds: Early Modern French Literature*. Oxford: Legenda, 2006. 170 pp. £45; \$69.00. Review by DAVID SEDLEY, HAVERFORD COLLEGE.

In her book Emma Gilby formulates a theory of the sublime and applies it to a series of key authors and texts of French classicism. The result is a solid contribution to the study of early modern sublimity and a useful rethinking of several episodes in the literary history of seventeenth-century France.

In her introduction Gilby announces the central elements of her approach. She construes sublimity as a movement that instigates encounters between human beings and that blurs the difference between such categories as force and weakness, great and small, extraordinary and ordinary. She argues that this notion of sublimity “troubles” the texts of Corneille, Pascal, and Boileau, whether or not they explicitly invoke the treatise of Longinus, *Peri Hypsous*, whose fortune scholars such as Jules Brody and Marc Fumaroli have traced. (As she explains her interest in both direct and indirect influence, Gilby cites Terence Cave’s method in *Seuils de la modernité* as a model). By reading these texts through a revised Longinian lens, one may correct the tendencies of some critics to focus exclusively on the “grandeur” of sublimity, and of others to impose modern perspectives on its early modern fortune. Gilby also proposes to mitigate the dominance of Cartesian selfhood in critical conceptions of classicism.

The subsequent chapters execute this plan straightforwardly. Chapter one establishes the conception of sublimity that Gilby wants to deploy. On the one hand she contends that sublimity happens, according to Longinus, when one is moved into the position of a subject other than one’s own. She finds support for this idea in Longinus’ remark that in the sublime moment it is “as if we had ourselves produced the very thing we had heard” (25). On the other hand, in order to sustain her interpretation, she rejects the Deconstructionist understanding of the moment as a super-cognitive event. That is, she insists that the projection of the self into encounters with other selves occurs through—rather than beyond—the human, cognitive efforts to make sense of the world. In Gilby’s view, therefore, sublime ecstasy (as opposed to Plato’s *furor poeticus*) pushes its subjects not so much toward the absolute, simple, and divine as toward the contingent, complex, and human.

Chapters two, three, and four concern Corneille. Beginning with Corneille’s theory of tragedy as expressed in *Trois discours sur le poème dramatique*, Gilby notes that the kind of tragedy deemed sublime by Corneille is precisely the dramatic formula that Aristotle rejects as untragic in the *Poetics*: a situation where the hero is about to act, knows full well what he is doing, and then does not act after all. Rather than concentrating emotional impact in a single moment of recognition, Corneille favors a scheme that spreads passion throughout the plot. According to Gilby, this diffusion leaves cognition unravished and intact. The lack of a sudden, overwhelming passage from ignorance to

knowledge deflects sublimity from no-holds-barred grandeur and attaches it instead to the limitations that arise due to one's encounters with others in the world. The fact that recognition is an ongoing process for Corneille means that Cornelian sublimity involves a "curtailment" or "purchase" that such encounters have regarding what is possible for human beings to accomplish (42). Gilby then shows how Corneille practices this theory in *Edipe* by rewriting *Oedipus Rex* in such a way that "a single extreme ignorance is shattered into multiple unknown quantities provided by multiple intersecting relationships" (47). Gilby substantiates her reading of *Edipe* with seventeenth-century reactions to the play (primarily those of Sévigné and Saint-Evremond), which emphasize human encounter and communication rather than the superhuman grandeur that has preoccupied twentieth-century critics (such as Paul Bénichou, Fumaroli, and Sophie Hache). She thus offers a caveat to their accounts.

In chapters five, six, and seven the focus turns to Pascal. Here Gilby explains that Deconstructive critics have taken the Jansenist sense of an incommensurability between human and divine discourses as a manifestation of the limits and instability of human discourse. Against these critics, Gilby holds that Pascal is indeed interested in human knowledge, that he in fact does believe in the accessibility of divine truth to human beings, and that he tries to make such truth available in his texts by investing them with the experience of human relations. Gilby explores how this is so by examining Pascal's opposition of "experience" to "indifference," which he associates with Descartes. According to Pascal, Descartes reduces the world to a "machine" in such a way as to preclude the dynamic life of experience. Pascal inserts such experience—which is also a series of "experiences" in the sense of "experiments"—into his discourse by insisting on the extent to which the human condition is fraught with movement and peril. Gilby completes her analysis of Pascal by arguing that he reads Augustine and Montaigne against the grain of orthodox Jansenist interpretations in order to promote "the fact of human encounters, and the need for them" as a precondition to the reception of divine grace (112).

The eighth and ninth chapters present the articulation of sublimity by Boileau and another, anonymous translator of *Peri Hypsion* along the lines of human communication established from the start of Gilby's study. Here she uses her version of the Longinian perspective to review Boileau's dispute with

Perrault, and thus a major issue of the *Querelle des anciens et des modernes*. Whereas critics such as Joan DeJean have seen Boileau as pitted against an independence of mind supported by Perrault, Gilby shows that, to Boileau and other ancients, such independence looks like a narcissistic satisfaction with the contents of the modern mind and a narrow resistance to the alterity offered by sublime experience.

This last point typifies a strength of Gilby's book. It makes a significant contribution to the ongoing and collective project launched by Brody and Fumaroli of filling in the early modern history of sublimity in France. And in the process of doing so, her book casts some features of the landscape of seventeenth-century French literature in a different and interesting light. Some readers will disagree with the definition of sublimity, which Gilby formulates and applies. She sometimes seems over-committed to wresting the sublime from its senses of ecstasy, grandeur, divinity, and so on that critics have not entirely imposed on Longinus. I for one would find her reading of Pascal more convincing if it took into account his concepts (e.g., "disproportion" and "divertissement") that seem to indicate an absolute distance between human and divine, which would preclude their communication, via sublimity or otherwise. Perhaps a finer explanation of what such communication actually consists of and what enables it would clarify the relation between Gilby's account of the sublime and the ones she criticizes. But she is in any case right that "sublime," long before Burke and Kant got their hands on it, is not just another way of saying "superhuman."

Gilby argues efficiently, which on the whole I consider a virtue. At times, however, she presents her evidence without enough analysis to make it speak to her point. As a result it is not always clear what the "communication" that she says sublimity enables actually entails. And Gilby relegates her intriguing suggestions about the yield of her argument for the history of the self to footnotes. Elevating them would have added to the book's interest for early modern scholars. But as it stands, it gives substantial food for thought to those seeking to teach and write about the sublime in the literature of early modern France.