

graduate students found the book quite helpful, although they were startled to find that the Christ-like Mustapha was really a portrait of an Ottoman Muslim. Muslims hold Christ in very high esteem, but it is quite a stretch to view the son of Suleyman the Magnificent as Christ-like.

April G. Shelford. *Transforming the Republic of Letters: Pierre-Daniel Huet and European Intellectual Life, 1650-1720*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2007. xii + 264 pp. + 7 illus. \$75.00 Review by G. MATTHEW ADKINS, QUEENSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK.

At a meeting of the Académie Française in 1687, Charles Perrault read his poem “Le siècle de Louis le Grand,” in which he insisted upon the superiority of modern culture and learning over that of classical civilization. Irritated by Perrault’s assertions, the poet and satirist Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux rose to object to the reading, but the érudit Pierre-Daniel Huet interrupted Boileau’s protest, stating flatly, “Monsieur Despréaux, it seems to me this concerns us more than you” (161-162).

The reading of Perrault’s poem, including Boileau’s interrupted protest and Huet’s retort, touched off, at least in the French Academy, the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns, a culture war that had been brewing for years and that would continue with skirmishes long after the main battles were over. Since scholars generally recognize Boileau as the leader of the “Ancients” in the quarrel, Huet’s rejoinder to him is puzzling. Devoted to ancient literature and a master of Latin, Huet was deeply critical of the decadence, as he saw it, of contemporary learning and had every reason to agree with Boileau. In the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns, Huet chose to side with the Ancients. Why, then, would he silence Boileau’s criticism of Perrault and even imply that Boileau was not one of “us?” April Shelford’s book, *Transforming the Republic of Letters* is ultimately an explanation of Huet’s hitherto poorly understood comment to Boileau. Shelford reveals that the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns went deeper than a debate over the relative merits of classical and contemporary learning, that the Quarrel represented a fundamental transformation of elite French intellectual culture. Boileau may have extolled the ancients, but to Huet he represented everything about contemporary intellec-

tual culture that Huet detested: cleverness without erudition, imitation without discernment, and egoism without humility. To Huet, Boileau was a *poseur* like so many others who had invaded the Republic of Letters, transforming it from a elite, erudite, Latin-writing correspondence network with “roots in Renaissance humanism” into a public, witty, vernacular social club whose members cultivated a contrived intellectual *négligence*—a *sprezzatura*—and brazenly demeaned the *érudits* as ridiculous pedants with bad hygiene (3).

Although about the life of Huet, *Transforming the Republic of Letters* is a cultural history disguised as intellectual biography. In fact, as biography the book is unsatisfying: the reader ends up with what feels like an incomplete understanding of Huet’s life—we do not even get a picture of the man although portraits are extant (and I for one would have preferred pictures of the interesting personages who populate the book to the boring illustrations graphing social networks). Huet serves rather as a lens through which to see the Republic of Letters transforming from one thing into another. Importantly, Shelford gives us a lens who was ultimately an opponent of the transformation, although not always a convinced enemy—which makes me think that Shelford mis-titled her book. *Transforming* connotes an active involvement that Huet rejected; he sought to prevent the *transformation*. Nevertheless, Shelford’s subtle and sympathetic study of Huet explodes the Moderns’ caricature of the Ancients as reactionary conservatives. Like Darrin McMahon in *Enemies of the Enlightenment* (2002), Shelford argues that those who opposed the more radical elements of the Enlightenment had a serious and viable intellectual and moral alternative that was not merely reactionary. Sometimes they were even right. Shelford also goes beyond caricature to demonstrate that there really was no Enlightenment/Counter-Enlightenment, or Ancient/Modern polarity—that, in fact, the battle lines were morally, intellectually, and socially porous. The Enlightenment was not merely the radical Enlightenment of Voltaire.

Cultural biographical studies such as this one are becoming more common it seems. Two recent ones that come to mind are Alyssa Sepinwall’s *The Abbé Grégoire and the French Revolution* (2005) and Judith Zinsser’s *La Dame d’Esprit* (2006). It may be that the renewed focus on the individual in history, even on elite men such as Grégoire and Huet, is part of the general reaction to the perceived excesses of the “linguistic turn” that seemed to demote living, breathing people to mere effects of discourse. The inability of discourse

analysis to account for human agency or to recount the human drama of history may explain the return to detailed studies of individuals and the changes they wrought in their lifetimes. Several recent works, including Jay Smith's *Nobility Reimagined* (2005) and William Sewell Jr.'s *Logics of History* (2005) even provide useful theoretical constructs for dealing with individual ideas and human agency. The case studies appearing now, therefore, approach biography with an eye to using the individual to illuminate cultural change, generally refusing to indulge the traditional hagiographic pieties of the genre—or, if they do then expressing discomfort with them. Sometimes, one must admit, this discomfort is due to intellectual snobbery: the public likes biographies, but scholars like to see themselves as above such vulgar concerns. At least Shelford does not belabor the issue as some scholars have and gets on with her story. And it is a good story. In five concise yet remarkably erudite chapters, Shelford unveils the intellectual world into which young Huet entered as a precocious student at the Jesuit collège of Caen, then details the slow transformation of intellectual fashion and style that eventually embittered the older Huet and which explains his obscurity today.

In the first chapter, Shelford builds upon L.W. B. Brockliss's *French Higher Education in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (1987) to demonstrate the successes of Jesuit pedagogy in producing “morally upright gentilhommes” with an excellent grasp of classical languages, history, philosophy, and the natural sciences—the study of which, as Brockliss claims, may have undermined the Jesuits’ confessional ends (18). Promising graduates of Jesuit education, such as Huet, entered into an elite intellectual world devoted to Latinity, bound together by the rules of friendship, transparency, and candid but courteous exchange—the opposite of the hierarchical and highly competitive society at large. Yet this Latin *Respublica litteraria* was already under siege when Huet came of age in the 1650s. As we find in Chapter Two, neo-Latin composition and poetry still retained its prestige by mid-century, even earning masters of it royal subventions for work that served the royal propaganda machine. But a growing reading public (Huet would not have considered them truly educated) could not understand Latin well and demanded the vernacular. The king’s advisors began to support the use of French for civic expressions. It did not matter that Huet and his friends judged vernacular literature and poetry inferior because of its “willful rejection . . . of the best models (the Ancients)” (71). By the 1670s, Colbert backed the advocates of French and in

1685 Louis XIV replaced the Latin inscriptions in the gallery at Versailles with French.

Why the abandonment of Latin? There were many reasons, of course, but Shelford examines a major reason in Chapter Three, arguing what may be hard news to feminist scholarship that has tended to highlight the positive contributions of women to the cultural achievements of the period. For it was clearly the feminization of the learned world that contributed to the downfall of Latin and to the transformation of the Republic of Letters into something perhaps more open, but also intellectually shallower, less scholarly and, despite the claims of some historians, less egalitarian. The rise of salon culture dominated by socially elite women gave rise to a parallel Republic of Letters: the Empire of Women. Focused on style over content, the Empire of Women *was* the Republic of Letters but operating according to a female mode of sociability. Although the reasons need further study, it is undeniable that by the late seventeenth-century, salons were becoming the “arbiters of language, taste, and literature” (91). Salon culture, ruled by influential *salonnières*, edged out the older, homosocial Republic of Letters, never entirely eliminating it, but reducing it to an object of ridicule. Because women did not receive the same education as men and were not educated for the same reasons, the *salonnières* were often antipathetic to erudition. Without rejecting traditional notions of gender difference, “salon ideology . . . transformed into strengths characteristics traditionally considered weaknesses” and vice-versa (92). Learning should not be work, but pleasure; appearance mattered more than reality; social exchange was not a dispute to uncover truth, but a form of play. Men had to be gallant, not serious; women must appear natural, effortlessly genial. In short, the entrance of women into the Republic of Letters brought about a sexual tension that made the older sociability impossible. As Huet wrote, “Men wanted to please women, so they echoed women’s condemnation of ‘pedantry’” (112). Even though Huet cavorted for a while in the courts of the Empire of Women, enjoying his female relationships, he never took women seriously as intellectual companions and eventually felt compelled to resist the threat the Empire represented.

Huet’s particular target was Cartesianism, which in the new Republic of Letters became a fad, a “cultural event” with a tenuous connection to the philosophy of Descartes—which Huet also rejected after an initial flirtation, but which he at least was willing to engage seriously. As Shelford demon-

strates in Chapter Four, Huet in fact was hardly uncritical of the Ancients or a slavish devotee to an outmoded Aristotelianism. Intensely interested in the natural sciences, Huet studied optics and anatomy, “was probably a Copernican,” and even argued in favor of Gassendist-Epicureanism and skepticism (121). He also established strong friendships with savants such as Christiaan Huygens and participated in the scientific academy of Caen. Not at all conservative, Huet’s problem with the Cartesianism of the salons was his problem with the decadence, in his view, of learning and literature in general: it was intellectually lazy. Learning required hard work, training, and good judgment; but idle people scorned erudition as pedantry or affected a “false erudition” (177, Huet’s phrase). Cartesiansism provided license to reject the Ancients without bothering to understand them. Shelford’s final chapter details Huet’s last, failed defense of his version of the Republic of Letters as he criticized every bogeyman of his learned world: Jansenists for failing to understand the historical contexts of theological debates; Spinoza for his lack of exegetical expertise; and Descartes for his arrogant dismissal of the Ancients even while he plagiarized their ideas. Arguing for a version of learning that was expansive rather than incisive, Huet—almost incredibly—seemed to believe that a display of superior erudition would convince his opponents that he was right. He was, of course, wrong. The intellectual world of the eighteenth century, as Shelford notes, did not succumb to decadence and triviality, as Huet believed—it thrived. But to Huet, the true Republic of Letters was dead.

In all, Shelford’s book is a well-researched, thoughtful, and critical study of Huet and the transformation of the older Republic of Letters into the more widely studied one of the eighteenth century. She demolishes the mantras of modernity that have burdened scholarship of the period and provides us with a more subtle understanding of the cultural changes in the period that does not read contemporary ideals backward, proleptically, into the past. For all her focus on the place of the individual in cultural historical change, however, Shelford is not able to account well for human agency. Agency appears rarely in her book, in fact. Huet, we are told, cannot change the culture in which he finds himself—“Huet and his female friends could not escape, much less change their social world,” Shelford writes—and yet that culture is changing around him (101). Nowhere are there agents of change, unless perhaps in the person of Descartes—but he is only a specter haunting the book. Culture is nothing but the aggregate practices of its participants, but

the culture of the Republic of Letters transforms due to contingencies seemingly beyond the control of its citizens. Even the *salonniers* cannot help but be what they are. Change simply is. That may be true, though I do not believe it. Perhaps the lure of biography, both for scholars and everyone else, is that the messy details of “life” are easier to recount than the complicated processes of human agency that we barely comprehend.

Alastair Hamilton, Maurits H. van den Boogert, and Bart Westerweel, eds. *The Republic of Letters and the Levant*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005, x + 302 pp. + 11 illus. \$129.00. Review by JONATHAN BURTON, WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY.

The eleven essays comprising *The Republic of Letters and the Levant* seek to “document some of the various links between the visible area of the Levant and the invisible Republic of Letters in Europe” (4). The Republic of Letters, of course, existed nowhere beyond the intellectual and epistolary relationships of a group of like-minded early modern scholars. Nevertheless, it has conventionally been seen as a small and exclusively European community sharing an erudite neo-Latin culture and ushering in the Age of Enlightenment with their free-thinking and secularism. The volume under review sets about expanding the narrow geographic spaces associated with this non-geographic republic, and thus acknowledging the place of the East in the formation of Enlightenment thinking. Yet while we learn of Dutch, English, French and Florentine figures who pursued eastern knowledges through their correspondence, travel, and manuscript collecting, this volume has virtually nothing to say about the participation of Levantine scholars in a broader Republic of Letters. Instead, one contributor goes so far as to argue that no “reciprocal current” of interest existed, an argument belied by the work of both historians and literary scholars including Jack Goody, Jerry Brotton, and Maria Rosa Menocal. Thus, where Goody makes a case for the eastern lineages of allegedly European cultural formations such as democracy and capitalism, the essays here generally go no further than demonstrating an interest among European intellectuals in eastern scientific and religious, and geographic writings. The single exception is Maurits H. van den Boogert’s essay on Ibrahim Müteferrika, a Hungarian convert to Islam who operated the first printing