England and the Netherlands, everywhere accompanying the creation of art academies and the discussion of the role of the artist and the definition of fine art. Translated by Dryden, read by Pope and Benjamin West, Dufresnoy was “a household name” among the elite in England. In England the first effective challenge to Dufresnoy’s theorizing took place in the essays of the English artist Sir Joshua Reynolds. The chapter extends its remarks into the nineteenth century with a discussion of Turner’s use of Dufresnoy and color theory.

Christopher Allen’s lengthy Commentary forms the major part of this book. He divides the poem into sections, which are then discussed within a wide range of aesthetic writings from Classical, Renaissance and contemporary discussions of art. The poem’s difficulties and vocabulary are illuminated usefully as the reader is informed not only of aesthetic theory, such as that of Alberti, but of actual practice by various painters. Each section is therefore discussed within several layers of context: these will be of major help as scholars come to study further Dufresnoy and work toward developing new interpretations of De arte graphica.

The six Appendices provide documents that are fundamental for the appreciation of the importance and meaning of De arte graphica. One has at hand documents demonstrating the poem’s reception and biographical documents important for understanding the poem’s origins. Of especial value are remarks by Dufresnoy himself, in French, some of which have only been recently discovered. Two French translations of the De arte graphica are also included, one published here for the first time and completely unknown until discovered by the authors in 1997.

Overall, we have a work remarkable for its careful erudition and usefulness. The writing of the three editors of this text remains clear and eminently readable throughout. The result is a thorough introduction to a poem and its essential connections to the development of European painting, and a demonstration of the importance of the neo-Latin poetic tradition.

Six of the eight chapters comprising this book have been published earlier, between 1989 and 2003. The present volume is thus the result of a long-term project gradually brought to fruition. Framed by an opening and afterword, and accompanied by an abbreviated chronology, a select bibliography, an index of names, and several useful pages concerning editions and previous studies of the *Pensées* and *Provinciales*, all six chapters have been revised and one considerably enlarged according to Natoli. Modestly presented as “readings and reflections” (ix), these essays have been produced for general readers and specialists alike. They are enjoyable to read, as well as thought-provoking.

Natoli informs the reader that his introduction and conclusion constitute a “Pascal-centered reflection on the philosophy of religion” (xii). Pascal’s existential portrayal of the human condition has maintained into our own time its original force and incisiveness. In the *Apology of the Christian religion* that Pascal never finished, this portrait aimed to bring the reader to self-understanding by furnishing glimpses into the true nature of a hidden God. Hence Pascal’s fundamental focus on “the question of who God is” (8). Following Laurent Thirouin, Natoli views the famous wager for the existence of God as a prologue to Pascal’s injunction that the unbeliever seek the nature of the Christian God. This Christian God, moreover, has a specific nature: He is the “Hidden God” of Augustine, whose thought permeated the views and writings of so many in the early modern period in France. The bulk of Natoli’s introduction thus delivers a succinct, precise, and lucid account of the tenets of Augustine’s theology which will imbue both the *Pensées* and the *Provinciales*.

Part Two of Natoli’s study consists of three chapters devoted to the *Provinciales*. Both the historical context and the content of Pascal’s great polemic are magisterially explored. The reader of these letters, according to Natoli, undergoes a process of seduction which is not altogether free of bias, despite claims to the contrary. Pascal’s sometimes-unfair attack on the Jesuits’ morality is fueled by his conviction that their wicked and scandalous logic must be rebutted by an equally scandalous disclosure of their laxism and accommodation to worldly corruption. Following a remarkably even-handed treatment of Pascal’s refusal to accept innovation in religious practice—a refusal matched by the Jesuits’ movement away from the morality preached by the Fathers of the Church—Natoli points out the drawbacks of Pascal’s
strategy. By seeking to predicate Christian conviction and practice on Augustine’s writings, Pascal overlooks Augustine’s assertion that the Church trumps his own authority. By condemning the Jansenist view of faith, “the Church effectively condemned the teaching of Saint Augustine as well” (63).

Turning to the *Pensées* in the three pithy chapters of Part III, Natoli addresses three familiar, yet pivotal questions: the role of rhetoric, the concept of justice, and the dialectic of speech and silence in Pascal’s thought. Natoli convincingly argues in his fifth essay that “reason is a power that persuades, and that persuasive power is proof” (70). Proof, therefore, is not demonstration, since it can forego reason and spring instead from custom, habit, and the testimony of the heart. Included in this discussion are a luminous contrast drawn between Pascal and Descartes, a diagram and analysis of proofs drawn from within and without according to Pascal’s notion of argument, and a discussion of the problem of induction. In chapter six, divine justice is presented as an inscrutable but fundamental aspect of Pascal’s Hidden God. Identified with God’s very will, His justice is basic to Pascal’s apologetics and the paradoxical presentation of mankind’s fallen nature in the *Pensées*. Christianity is thus shrouded in mysteries which it alone, presumably, can account for. Finally, in his seventh essay, Natoli takes up the topic of the “*Pensées*’ speaking silences” (109). Chief among these is the mystical experience of the *nuit de feu* commemorated in the celebrated and talismanic *Mémorial*. Following a close textual analysis, Natoli concludes that this relic arguably reveals Pascal’s conviction that human speech cannot convey the ineffable nature of the Hidden God. The ultimate paradox of the *Pensées*, as Sarah Meltzer has also noted (her work, curiously, is not mentioned by Natoli), is that the unspeakable lies at the very heart of Pascal’s projected *Apologie pour la religion chrétienne*.

Natoli’s conclusion draws together in eloquent fashion the various strands of his previous readings of Pascal. He insists once more on the enigmatic nature of divine justice *vis-à-vis* the real presence of evil in the sub-lunar world. He invokes the Pascalian command to love God rather than to seek to know Him, and to seek the light of God’s truth, according to Jesus’s statement that those who search for that truth have already found it.

This is a well-crafted, erudite, and engaging study which eschews jargon without turning aside from the hard questions posed to the modern reader by Pascal’s best-known texts. Natoli underscores both the age-old sway of
Pascal’s thought and those anachronistic elements which make it seem so alien today. His work should find a broad audience among students of philosophy, the history of religion, theology, and French letters and culture.


This is a high-quality facsimile republication of the first edition of this work (published in Paris by Klincksieck in 1996) in the smaller format *Titre courant* series. A re-edition would not necessarily merit a review, but given Forestier’s meteoric ascension to a position of uncontested dominance in the French academic study of seventeenth-century French theatre, it is important that this title both remain in print (now that Klincksieck is out of business) and be appreciated as the start of a lively new current in the history of dramatic literature. Since first writing this *Essai*, Forestier has gone on to edit the new Pléiade edition of Racine’s dramatic works, to write an overview of seventeenth-century dramatic theory (*Passions tragiques et règles classiques*, 2003) and a huge biography of Racine (*Jean Racine*, 2006). He is now directing the new Pléiade edition of Molière’s works, and thus decisively influencing, for a whole generation, the study of the three major dramatists of seventeenth-century France. Moreover, the significance of the *Essai de génétique théâtrale* is different today from what it was a decade ago, even though not a word has changed. We can now see in it something that became abundantly clear only in the Pléiade Racine. Forestier challenges one of the most entrenched principles of literary history, the privilege generally given to the last edition published during the author’s lifetime and, even beyond that, the acceptance of traditions of reading which transform our views of an author by selecting certain works for the canon and by rejecting others into obscurity. By preferring instead the first edition of Racine’s plays, Forestier’s Pléiade edition directs attention back to the historic moment of initial publication with a view to restoring a vision of what the work was at the moment it first appeared and, in many cases, created literary and cultural turmoil.