

PIOFFET, MARIE-CHRISTINE. *Espaces lointains, espaces rêvés dans la fiction romanesque du Grand Siècle*. Collection Imago Mundi. Paris: PU Paris-Sorbonne, 2007. ISBN 978-2-84050-494-8. Pp. 285. 32 €.

Author and editor of several invaluable works on seventeenth-century travel literature, Marie-Christine Pioffet has now produced a rich, well-documented consideration of the representation of faraway spaces in the period's prose fiction. She demonstrates how Baroque writers reinvented the topos of the voyage, standard fare for narrative fiction since Antiquity, under the influence of the seventeenth century's love affair with travel relations, cosmographies, and other ostensibly nonfictional tales of distant places. By analyzing fictional depictions of foreign countries alongside their counterparts in documentary genres, Pioffet convincingly argues that novelists created hybrid landscapes which superimposed new geographical knowledge on outdated myths and tropes.

The book is organized in seven chapters, each focusing on fictional depictions of a particular space. Chapters 1 through 6 are concerned with the known world (the Americas, Africa, the Middle Eastern harem, Persia, China, and Scandinavia), while chapter 7 examines the quasi-utopian landscape of the "îles Fortunées." (chapter 4, on representations of Persia in novels by Madeleine de Scudéry, is based on a Master's thesis by Sara Cotelli, who is credited on the title page and in a footnote.) Reflecting Pioffet's extensive work on narratives about Nouvelle France, the chapter on the Americas is the longest, richest section of the book. The author notes that New World cosmographers and travelers, including André Thevet, López de Gómara, François de Belleforest, and René de Laudonnière, already blended empirical accounts of American topographies and civilizations with mythical elements such as Amazons, hermaphrodites, and giants. By comparison, fictional representations of the Americas appear remarkably restrained. The frozen Canadian desert of Du Périer's *Les Amours de Pistion et de Fortunie*, the rich and well-organized Incan cities of Gomberville's *Polexandre*, and the edenic Peru of Narségue's *Histoire de Cusiuhuarca* represent an "oscill[ation] entre la volonté de dépayser et le souci d'acclimater le lecteur" (55).

The book's subsequent chapters reach similar conclusions. Fictions by Gomberville, René du Chastelet des Boys, and Sébastien Brémond reflect French prejudices in their representations of an inhospitable Africa, but also indicate the diversity of the continent through toponymic and ethnographic details. China, on the other hand, appears as a vaguely exotic land peopled by chivalric heroes *à la française*. Following her detailed analyses of several dozen fictional works depicting the seven selected corners of the world, Pioffet justly concludes: "l'exotisme romanesque est bel et bien omniprésent" (225).

While Pioffet offers subtle readings of individual works in light of contemporary impressions about the spaces they represent, her analysis rarely considers the role of aesthetic constraints and conventions in shaping fictional depictions of foreign settings. One wonders, for example, how changing understandings of *vraisemblance* and standards of realism in the seventeenth century might have influenced the degree of geographical and ethnographic detail in individual fictions. Decreasing tolerance for narrative digression over the course of the century might also have affected representations of foreign places. Pioffet rightly notes, for instance, that Le Noble's *Ildegerte* offers minimal description of its Scandinavian landscape. While this is doubtless due in part, as she suggests, to seventeenth-century perceptions of this geography as a "vide," it is also important to note that late-century *nouvelles* such as this tended to be fast-paced, plot-centric, and generally hostile to description

of any kind. Such unexplored questions leave room for other scholars to develop this rich literary terrain.

Espaces lointains, espaces rêvés is a magisterial work that will interest scholars of seventeenth-century fiction, travel literature, and intellectual history. It will also pique readers' interest in the dozens of fascinating, understudied novels considered in its pages. Along with the twelve other volumes in the *Imago Mundi* series, Pioffet's book makes an important contribution to the study of early modern Europe's imaginings of the globe.

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GILBY, EMMA. *Sublime Worlds: Early Modern French Literature*. London: Legenda, 2006. ISBN 1-904350-65-8. Pp. 160. \$69.00.

From Jules Brody to Louis Marin, scholars seeking to revise the image of French Classicism as a cold, rationalistic formalism have turned their attentions to the sublime. Emma Gilby's new study of Corneille, Pascal, and Boileau belongs to this long and venerable tradition. Although Boileau did not publish his influential French translation of the pseudo-Longinus's *Treatise on the Sublime* until 1674, Gilby argues that the Greek author's ideas were in the air well before this date. By rereading canonical authors in the light of Longinus's treatise, she provides a fresh and compelling take on the period.

Gilby's topic, as her title suggests, is the way in which sublimity engages the "world." Eschewing the linguistic paradoxes of post-structuralism, she focuses on a constellation of loosely related "Longinian" concepts, including "encounter," "experience," and "contingency." These terms may come as a surprise to readers accustomed to thinking of the sublime in Ciceronian terms—as a lofty, heroic style. As Gilby astutely observes, however, this is clearly not what Longinus means. Her insight is that the Longinian sublime "is best defined as movement, and not merely a movement upwards [. . .] but also horizontally, toward others" (23). As such, it has ethical and epistemological implications that she sets out to explore.

After an introduction and a first chapter devoted to Longinus, Gilby devotes chapters 2–4 to Corneille's reworking of Aristotle, both in his theoretical writings and in the adaptation of the *Œdipe* myth in his *Cédipe*. Rather than staging a progression toward a climactic moment of cathartic revelation à la Sophocles, Corneille "splays out" the process of tragic recognition, making it dependent upon the complexities and contingencies of human encounter (48). This Longinian reading of Corneille leads Gilby to insightful remarks on the Cornelian hero and dramatic *vraisemblance*, two mainstays of the critical tradition.

Chapters 5–7 focus on Pascal, who is subjected to a similar Longinian rereading. Rejecting the premise that conversion "can be precipitated only through a denigration of 'raison' which, dictating human uncertainty, is presumed to open the reader up to the 'sentiment du cœur,'" Gilby stresses the importance of *expérience* (understood as both "experience" and "experiment") in Pascal (85). By engaging with the world, the reader sets aside her indifference and develops a kind of partial knowledge—an awareness of human limitations in a contingent world—that prepares her for the movements of God's grace. One of the implications of Gilby's reading is to revise the traditional account of Montaigne's influence upon Pascal by bringing the two writers much closer together.