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## **Constructing the Sublime: The Discourse on Architecture and Louis XIV's Sublimity in Seventeenth-Century Paris**

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## The sublime as a critical notion: reflections on architecture, rhetoric and the king's virtue (1670-1687)

The case of the *Tapisseries du Roy* demonstrated that even though ideas such as the ineffable and superhuman might seem as powerful rhetorical instruments at first, they are ultimately unstable, and virtually unrepresentable and uncontrollable. Trying to instrumentalise a quality that was deemed elevated beyond all human control, meant trying to wield something that cannot be grasped. And Félibien's attempt to dismiss the less powerful means of language in this venture, ultimately confronted him with the problem that he still depended on it.

This mysterious and unquantifiable character of sublimity became a topic of studies and regular debates during this period. The domain of poetic and artistic creation has always been subjected to the reflections of the world of criticism; and indeed, opposite the claim of royal sublimity in French poetry and the visual arts, such as the example of the *Tapisseries du Roy*, we are able to find a community of philosophers and theoreticians that reflected on these ideas. From 1667 onwards, during the same period in which Félibien worked on the *Tapisseries du Roy*, a literary circle called the Académie Lamoignon was formed, at the home of Premier Président Guillaume de Lamoignon. Its members, which included Rapin and later Boileau, as well as other notable figures such as Paul Pellisson (1624-1693), Fleury, Claude-François Ménestrier (1631-1705) and Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627-1704), each read papers on Ancient, religious and early modern literature during the Académie's regular Monday meetings. Among its recurring topics was the sublime, which, as Elfreida T. Dubois writes, "was discussed as a category of rhetoric" but was "gradually set apart as an independent aesthetic emotion and expression."<sup>1</sup> During the 1670s and onwards, a growing critical discourse on the nature of sublimity developed, which was characterised in particular by a necessity to create of a French critical concept – one which would be able to incorporate ideas that "neighbouring concepts" such as *le merveilleux*, *le je ne sais quoi* and *la magnificence* already shared. Boileau's French edition of Longinus' *Peri hypsous* (1674) would succeed in this endeavour, by using the noun *le sublime* to translate

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1 Elfreida Teresa Dubois, "Some definitions of the sublime in seventeenth-century French literature," in Essays presented to C.M. Girdlestone, ed. Elfreida Teresa Dubois (Newcastle upon Tyne: University of Durham, 1960), 77. Quoted from Cronk, *The Classical Sublime*, 124.

the Longinian *hypsos*, and employing *le merveilleux* as its synonym. As a result of its success, a number of French texts were published in the 1680s that employed the sublime in theoretical reflections on Louis XIV and the representation of his transcendence. Nevertheless, being able to reflect better on the sublime did not at all solve the issue of instrumentalising it politically.

After Boileau's publication, the critical concept of the sublime became used as a means to *reflect back* on the interrelationship between architecture, literature and the royal virtue in seventeenth-century France. From 1670 onwards, and in the context of several debates, the notion of *le sublime* became increasingly used to address the strengths and weaknesses in this interrelationship. What needs to be understood here, however, is that all of these texts actually underscored Félibien's claim of Louis XIV's own sublimity, instead of attacking it or breaking it down. The weaknesses that were discussed only concerned the pitfalls in evoking the monarch's sublimity, and not the sublimity itself. This begs the question if, and to what extent these reflections collectively participated in the same claim. A part of the answer lies in the shared aims of several quarrels – the members of which, despite belonging to opposing camps, all shared the same thought: the joint power of language and architecture in evoking royal sublimity.

The first quarrel that will be discussed in this chapter is Élisabeth Sophie-Chéron's (1648-1711) criticism of Molière's (1622-1673) laudatory poem *La Gloire du Val-de-Grâce* (1669) (fig. 31). In her poetic response, the notion of the sublime is used to reflect on the failure and dangers of rhetoric of both Mignard's fresco and Molière's laudatory poem. Secondly, this chapter will inquire into another major debate of the 1670s: the *Querelle des Inscriptions*. Although this quarrel focused on the question whether the inscriptions on Parisian public monuments should be in Latin or French, the debate quickly transcended the limits of literary rhetoric alone. The French camp relied on the argument that the sublimity of the monarch mirrors the united grandeur of French architecture, language, and national virtue. This argument would return in the work of Bouhours, who nevertheless emphasised the dangers of hyperbole and exaggeration that could potentially harm this sublime unity.

#### EARLY CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON ARCHITECTURE AND RHETORIC: CHÉRON ON MIGNARD AND MOLIÈRE

In the second of his *Satires*, Boileau addressed the difference between accomplished and failed poetry. Here, he praises Molière by characterising the poet (and himself) as frustrated geniuses, in the face of a pack of foolish and enslaved "rimeurs" ("rhymesters") such as Georges de Scudéry.<sup>2</sup> Although these "rhyme-

2 See his "Satire II", in Boileau, *Œuvres Diverses*, 14.

sters” lack the sacred gifts of taste and inspiration, they are still able to find a large audience of other fools. But poets such as Molière, the satirist suggests, produce works that are truly great, even though they break the rules. In contrast to the lofty aims Scudéry expressed in the preface to his epic *Alaric* (1654) – to push the genre of the epic poem towards the most elevated style of “le sublime,” instead of sinking towards those of “le mediocre; & le bas”<sup>3</sup> – Boileau emphasised the poor and rushed nature of Scudéry’s rhyme, and stated that both the poet and his public seemed to be totally oblivious of these shortcomings. Why, Boileau lamented, can such a fool be so admired and astonished by himself and by others, while those blessed with a truly sublime mind, such as Molière, never seem to be able to arrive at their desired degree of perfection.<sup>4</sup>

There were, however, others that found the same problems that Boileau had with the work of Scudéry in the work of Molière himself. Whereas Boileau saw in Molière’s oeuvre a union of rhyme and reason, the painter and poet Élisabeth Sophie-Chéron saw the complete opposite. Although she recognised the beauty of his rhymes, it was the contrast with its subject matter that troubled her. In order to understand her criticism, which is related to the grandeur of Louis XIV, let us first turn to the object of her response.

#### — MOLIÈRE’S LA GLOIRE AND CHÉRON’S RESPONSE

In 1669, Molière published his poem *La Gloire du Val-de-Grâce*, a text consisting of 366 verses that was written as a eulogy glorifying the interior of the dome of the Church of Val-de-Grâce, painted by Pierre Mignard in 1663 (fig. 14). Molière’s work is in fact a response to Charles Perrault’s impassioned 1668 poem *La Peinture. Poème*, a laudatory text celebrating the work of Charles Le Brun. Molière had several reasons to attack both Perrault and Le Brun, and to defend Mignard. The close friendship between Mignard and Molière may have been one of the most important.<sup>5</sup> The year 1663 saw the first confrontation between Mignard and Le Brun, when the first refused Le Brun’s proposal to become a member of the Académie Royale, explaining that he and his friend and colleague, Charles Alphonse Du Fresnoy (1611-1668), were far too occu-

3 Cronk, *The Classical Sublime*, 86.

4 Boileau, “Satire II,” 14: “Un sot en écrivant fait tout avec Plaisir:/ Il n’a point en ses vers l’embarras de choisir:/ Et, toujours amoureux de ce qu’il vient d’écrire,/ Ravi d’étonnement, en soi-même il s’admire./ Mais un esprit sublime, en vain veut s’élever/ A ce degré parfait qu’il tâche de trouver.”

5 In her book *Molière. A Theatrical Life*, Virginia Scott argues that Perrault had “forced Mignard, against his will and on pain of exile, into the newly founded Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture to take orders from Le Brun.” See Virginia Scott, *Molière. A Theatrical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 206-07.

pied with the decoration of the dome at Val-de-Grâce.<sup>6</sup> Molière's poem reads not only as a defence of Mignard's work, but also as a theory of painting. In particular, *La Gloire* responds to and adopts parts of the poem *De arte graphica*, written by Du Fresnoy himself and published in 1668. This didactic poem in Latin presented to the reader the principles of painting, and was translated into French by the art critic Roger de Piles (1635-1709) in the same year.<sup>7</sup>

A lengthy critical response to Molière's poem was written by Élisabeth Sophie-Chéron, a female painter who was admitted to the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, under the sponsorship of Charles Le Brun. This response enabled her to claim a place in the camp of Le Brun, Colbert, and Perrault, opposing Molière, Mignard, as well as the figures of Du Fresnoy and De Piles.<sup>8</sup> Her poem, bearing the title *La Coupe du Val-de-Grâce*, remained a manuscript of which we do not know the precise date.<sup>9</sup> A heavily edited version was published in a *recueil* entitled *Anonimiana ou Mélanges de Poésies*, and only in 1700.<sup>10</sup> Jean-Marc Poiron argues that Chéron's *La Coupe* must have been written much earlier, even before Molière's death in 1673. He uses the argument that the poem directly challenges Molière and "le prend à partie au présent."<sup>11</sup> Also, he continues, the poem does not refer to the *Querelle sur le Coloris* that started in 1671 (with Louis-Gabriel Blanchard (1630-1704), and later Champaigne, Le Brun and De Piles). Thus, one would date the poem between 1669 and/or 1670. If Poiron's hypothesis is true, this would imply that the debate between Chéron and Molière, and in particular their discussion on the role of the sublime in the visual arts, would predate Boileau's 1674 translation of Longinus and the subsequent popularization of the sublime in the field of aesthetics.

One should not forget that the ultimate subject of Mignard's fresco, and of Molière's poem as well, is the person of Louis XIV himself. While the Holy Trinity, saints and angels are present in the scene of heavenly glory, they are present for the sake of the queen's *vœu*, which is depicted near the dome's edge (fig. 15). Molière also clearly underscores the important role of Anne's wish in the

6 Jean-Marc Poiron, "Elizabeth-Sophie Chéron et La Coupe du Val-de-Grâce," in René Démoris, ed., *Hommage à Elisabeth Sophie Chéron. Texte & Peinture à l'Âge Classique* (Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1992), 19.

7 For Du Fresnoy's original text, see Charles-Alphonse Du Fresnoy, *De Arte Graphica* (Paris, 1668), ed. and trans. Christopher Allen, Yasmin Haskell, and Frances Muecke (Geneva: Droz, 2005). The poem departs from Horace's parallel between painting and poetry (*ut pictura poesis*). See also Jacqueline Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color. Rhetoric and Painting in the French Classical Age*, trans. Emily McVarish (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 147.

8 Christopher Allen, "Charles-Alphonse Dufresnoy, Painter and Poet," in Du Fresnoy, *De Arte Graphica*, 21.

9 Élisabeth-Sophie Chéron, *La Coupe du Val de Grace, Réponse au poème de Molière*, ed. P.L. Jacob (Paris: Librairie des Bibliophiles, 1880). In my discussion of the poem, I will refer to and quote from this edition.

10 See Élisabeth-Sophie Chéron, "Reponse à la gloire du Val de Grace. De M. de Moliere," in *Anonimiana ou mélanges de poesies, d'éloquence, et d'erudition*, unknown editor (Paris: Nicolas Pepie, 1700), 241-81.

11 Poiron, "Elizabeth-Sophie Chéron," 10.

building's *gloire*, to which he refers in the second strophe of his poem.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the glory in Molière's poem is the glory of Louis XIV's birth, and any faults in its representation would harm the communication of its grandeur towards the spectator below. In this respect, Chéron's critical message strikes two birds with one stone; the core of her poem is her belief that Mignard's fresco completely ruined a divine subject with crude and mundane imagery, which, she explains, also rendered Molière's laudatory poem on his fresco as a piece of pure flattery. In other words, for Chéron, the subject of the fresco is sublime, but both its execution and its poetic counterpart are the exact opposite. As a result, she considered this sense of sublimity gravely assaulted and inverted. Both painter and poet are guilty of obstructing a union of style and subject matter – and the fact that the context is both royal and religious only worsened their crime.

Chéron's text is constructed as a true *prosopopeia*; it is Mignard's painted dome itself that speaks and responds to a group of men visiting the church and quarrelling about the glory of the painting itself. Here, Chéron seems to employ Molière's idea of a talking dome; in his poem, Molière already writes that the dome itself "lectures" on topics such as arrangement, rules of proportion, colour and the portrayal of emotional states.<sup>13</sup> Molière further anthropomorphised the dome when he described it as a beautiful stranger who strikes the eyes of the beholder ("Et la belle inconnuë a frapé tous les yeux").<sup>14</sup> However, at the very beginning of Chéron's poem, the dome turns itself to Molière, the ever-praising *sçavant*, and opens a direct attack toward the poet and his poem. It is only as a result of Molière's lies and flattery, Chéron implies, that the painting seems so very elevated in his poem:

Pourquoi faut-il, pour mon malheur, [...]
   
Que tu m'esleves dans la nûe
   
Pour me rendre aux yeux trop connüe?
   
Veux-tu passer pour un menteur,
   
Toy qu'on ne crut jamais flatteur?<sup>15</sup>

The dome continues its attack on Molière's verses. Here, Chéron reveals the central, underlying issue of Molière's verses, and by extension of Mignard's fresco:

12 Molière, *La Gloire du Val-de-Grâce* (Paris: Pierre Le Petit, 1669), 6: "Fais briller à jamais, dans ta noble richesse,/ La splendeur du saint vœu d'une grande Princesse;/ Et porte un témoignage à la posterité/ De sa magnificence, & de sa pieté."

13 Michael Call, "The Poet's Vision and the Painting's Speech: Molière and Perrault on the Sister Arts," *Cahiers* 17 13, no. 1 (2010): 135. Call refers to: "Il [FK: le dôme] nous enseigne," "Il nous dit," or "il nous dicte."

14 Molière, *La Gloire*, 21.

15 Chéron, *La Coupe*, 10: "Why do you (to my misfortune)/[...] Have to elevate me towards the clouds/To make me too well-known?/ Do you want to pass for a liar,/ You, who has never been considered a flatterer?"

154 instead of elevating its subject, the poet's lofty rhetoric may have actually ruined it even more:

Cache donc à tout l'univers  
Ces grands et magnifiques vers,  
Car leur éloquence divine  
Seroit cause de ma ruine.<sup>16</sup>

Opening the attack, Chéron's description of Molière's text as an example of divine eloquence seems an act of ironic mockery. She appears to address the paradoxical issue of the *Verbum Dei*, which featured, for example, in Jesuit rhetorical theory: is it possible to pour the Holy Truth in the mould of human speech? Jean-Yves Boriaud writes on this matter that "the Word of God does not manifest itself immediately," and therefore the paradox resides in the question whether a Christian orator can be a mediator acting as "an adapter of a spiritual philosophy whose mysteries go beyond the profane," beyond the worldly.<sup>17</sup> In her poem, Chéron points at the same paradox, and includes the visual arts in the rhetorical discussion on the distinction between the divine and the earthly.<sup>18</sup> This shift between these two realms is key to Chéron's counter attack, in which the question of the position of Molière's and Mignard's rhetoric between these two worlds is at issue.

— CHÉRON ON "SUBLIME" VERSUS "BAS," OR HOW TO RUIN  
DIVINE RHETORIC

In seventeenth-century France, the prevalent view on religious painting of the period was to a great extent influenced by the Council of Trent. "Limits were imposed on the artist in the invention of his own details," Henry Phillips writes

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- 16 Ibid., 10: "So hide to the entire Universe/ Your grand and magnificent Verses./ Because their divine eloquence/ Would cause my own ruin."
- 17 Jean-Yves Boriaud, "L' «Orator Christianus». D'après les traités de rhétorique jésuites de la 1re moitié du XVIIe siècle," *Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé* 2 (1998), 162.
- 18 Using the notion of "éloquence divine," she evokes the "triple éloquence," the three registers of the Catholic voice – éloquence divine, héroïque and humaine – as introduced by Nicolas Caussin in his 1618 *Electorum symbolorum et parabolarum historicarum Syntagma*. Caussin attributed divine eloquence, which is inspired and sublime, to saints and prophets such as Moses and Paul; heroic eloquence, which is based on human methods, belongs to the Church Fathers, such as Basil or John Chrysostom; and finally the purely human eloquence, though strong and wise, is that of Demosthenes and Cicero. On Nicolas Caussin, symbolics and sacred eloquence, see Florence Vuilleumier, *La Raison des figures symboliques à la Renaissance et à l'âge classique: Etudes sur les fondements philosophiques théologiques et rhétoriques de l'image*, vol. 2 (Geneva: Droz, 2000), 173. See also Marc Fumaroli, *L'Âge de l'éloquence: Rhétorique et "res literaria" de la Renaissance au seuil de l'époque classique* (Geneva: Droz, 2002), 208.



in his *Church and Culture in Seventeenth-Century France*, “certainly as far as the central episode was concerned, and his painting had to reflect exactly the text of the Scripture.”<sup>19</sup> Being loyal to the Bible and to historical facts was deemed important, as well as avoiding profane elements. However, no consensus existed on these matters. Some, like Champaigne, who also produced paintings for the Val-de-Grâce complex, respected these ruling “injunctions” but others, such as Simon Vouet (1590-1649), did not.<sup>20</sup> Chéron seems to agree with Molière on these prevailing norms on religious painting, but, interestingly, uses the same arguments as Molière, not to glorify but rather to criticise Mignard and the poet himself. Whereas Molière writes that Mignard’s fresco teaches us about the right *vraisemblance* and *ordonnance*, Chéron disagrees and enumerates all the crimes Mignard has committed in this respect. Responding to Molière’s verses on human proportions (“Où la teste n’est point de la jambe, ou du bras”), Chéron writes, from the dome’s viewpoint, that Mignard has dishonoured all of his subjects by breaking the bones of his painted virgins, but without a sword or cutlass.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, through the mouth of one of her characters, Chéron reminds the reader what a painter must do when treating a glorious, elevated subject – a message this character expressed even more firmly in an earlier version of these verses (“N’y doit rien mettre qui n’exprime/ Le grand, le divin, le sublime.”):

Et la raison ne permet pas  
D’y rien faire entrer qui soit bas.  
Tout doit, aux cieux, estre celeste;  
Il n’y faut rien qui soit terrestre.<sup>22</sup>

In order to be able to convey this argument even more clearly and powerfully, Chéron also attempts to dismantle any claim of the fresco’s sublime effect on the part of the beholder. To do this, she first constructs a sublime response that she can attack: one of her characters, the so-called “deffenseur” (“defender”), is in

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19 Henry Phillips, *Church and Culture in Seventeenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 50.

20 *Ibid.*, 50.

21 Chéron, *La Coupe*, 12: “Celuy qui m’a voulu parer/ N’a fait que me deshonnorer./ Il a fait souffrir le martire/ A mainte Vierge: il les déchire./ Il leur casse jambes et bras,/ Sans espée et sans coutelas.” Further on in the poem, she writes a similar statement on Mignard’s rendering of the figures: “Que c’est une haute imprudence/ De donner des expressions./ Ou plustost des contorsions./ Des actions si messeantes/ Aux ames qui sont jouïssantes.” See *ibid.*, 28. For Molière’s verse 122, see Molière, *La Gloire*, 12.

22 Chéron, *La Coupe*, 29. “And reason does not allow him/ To add anything that is low,/ In the heavens, everything should be heavenly;/ And nothing should be earthly.” Longinus similarly writes that “the thought of the genuine orator must be neither small nor ignoble.” See Longinus, *On the Sublime*, 9, 184-85. The verses Chéron rejected in her manuscript (“[A painter] Must not paint anything that does not express/ The grand, the divine, the sublime.”) are collected in the “Variantes du manuscrit autographe.” See Chéron, *La Coupe*, 49. These two lines were nevertheless added to the published version of the poem in 1700.

complete awe of Mignard's work. He states he is ravished ("me ravit"), praises the "sublime spirit" of the saints ("ce grand saint Hierosme" and "son grand et sublime esprit"), and exclaims that the fresco paradoxically strikes the ears with the eyes ("Frappe l'oreille avec les yeux").<sup>23</sup> Then, suddenly, a more critical character of the *troupe de gens* takes the floor and begins his scornful tirade, stating that there is no grandeur or magnificence at all, and that nothing amazes the eye.<sup>24</sup> One example the character mentions is the figure of Saint Jerome, who is shown reacting to the sound of the trumpet of the Last Judgment. Chéron states that he is supposed to be ravished and elevated by the sight and sound of Christ approaching. Instead, he is represented as a worried and distressed figure, shown in a state of pure terror the painter, and "the painter is to blame" ("L'extase ou le ravissement/ Qui remplit les saints d'allegresse/ Se change en luy comme en detresse").<sup>25</sup> Chéron also recognizes the same low and earthly emotions, contrary to the sublime state in which they ought to appear, in Mignard's figure of Saint Catherine (fig. 32):

Venons à Sainte Catherine,  
De qui l'éloquence divine  
Convertit les plus grands docteurs, [...]  
Elle exprime une passion  
Contraire à l'adoration,  
Et l'on connoist dans son visage  
Le ressentiment d'un outrage;<sup>26</sup>

What is clear from the immediate context of the neighbouring lines, is that Chéron accuses Mignard of copying his Saint Jerome from a painting by Tintoretto of the same saint, and his Saint Catherine from the *Death of Dido* by Guido Reni (1575-1642).<sup>27</sup> Here, Chéron particularly stresses the importance of expression, seemingly referring to the recent and influential *Conférences* on the expression of the passions (1668) held by her protector Le Brun. More importantly, the aspect Chéron disapproves of the most is Mignard's disregard to

23 Ibid., 24-25.

24 Ibid., 26: "Je vous dirai donc, sans destours,/ Que je ne voy point d'ordonnance,/ De grandeur, de magnificence,/ Rien d'esclattant, rien de pompeux,/ N'y rien qui surprenne les yeux,/ Dans cette si fameuse Coupe."

25 Ibid., 31: "Saint Jerome is more frightened/ Than a group struck by thunder,/ His action is that of worry/ As if he saw the trumpet/ That will herald the Judgment./ The ecstasy or ravishment/ That fills the Saints with delight/ Changes in him into distress."

26 Ibid., 33: "Let us turn to Saint Catherine,/ Whose divine eloquence/ Converts the greatest of Doctors/[...] She expresses a passion/ Contrary to that of adoration,/ And we recognise in her face/ The resentment of contempt."

27 Ibid., 31-32: "Tintoret l'a fait, sans écrire,/ Dans l'endroit d'où Mignard le tire" and "C'est la Didon près du trepas,/ Cette belle Didon du Guide."

the suitability and the true, heartfelt passions of the saint's figure, rather than the painter's plagiarism.<sup>28</sup> According to the ideas of René Descartes (1596-1650), Marin Cureau de la Chambre (1594-1669) and Le Brun, the face was seen as a faithful index of the inner passions.<sup>29</sup> Hence, an inadequate rendering of the facial expression could inhibit the transfer of overwhelming emotion towards the viewer.

Near the end of her poem, Chéron returns to the intentions behind Molière's laudatory poem. After having asserted the issues of Mignard's visual rhetoric – as a result of his failure of communicating a divine rhetoric – the sublime verses of Molière appear as hollow phrases: “Si la Coupe est une merveille,/ Ce n'est que dedans ces beaux vers” (“If the Dome is a marvel,/ It would only be in his beautiful verses”).<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the angry dome states, ignoring Molière's poem would be the most appropriate laudation of the fresco itself:

Voilà, docte et rare Moliere,  
L'estat fascheux où je me voy.  
Malgré ce que tu dis de moy,  
Malgré ces éloges sublimes,  
Malgré tes magnifiques rimes,  
Chacun de moy s'entretiendra.  
Tant que l'ouvrage durera,  
Qui n'en dira mot fera grace  
A la Coupe du Val de Grace.<sup>31</sup>

Chéron's critical poem constitutes one of the first large attempts to discuss the failures of the interrelationship between art and poetry during the seventeenth century. Of course, her opinions should be understood within the broader context of the rivalry between Le Brun and Mignard, and particularly her interests as an aspiring young painter. Nevertheless, her poem is a strong manifesto of the pitfalls of visual and literary rhetoric; it enumerates all of the ingredients that impede the elevation of ideas, namely that of hyperbole, exaggeration (*enflure*), and the poverty of thought. In the same period, around 1670, a much larger intellectual debate on the relation between visual and literary rhetoric (and its potential and

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28 Jennifer Montagu, *The Expression of the Passions: The Origin and Influence of Charles Le Brun's Conférence Sur L'expression Générale Et Particulière* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 61-62 and 202, note 42.

29 Joseph Rykwert, *The Dancing Column: On Order in Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999), 41.

30 Chéron, *La Coupe*, 38.

31 *Ibid.*, 43: “This is, wise and unique Molière,/ The enraged state in which I find myself./ Despite what you say about me,/ Despite this sublime praise,/ Despite your magnificent rhyme,/ Every piece of me will speak/ As long as the work will last,/ Only those will not talk about me, would spare [FK: or “would give grace to”]/ The Dome of the Val-de-Grâce.”

158 hazards) began to develop – a debate in which the role of the sublime assumed ever greater proportions.

THE TRIUMPHAL ARCH INSCRIPTION:  
IN SEARCH OF A LANGUAGE TO EVOKE SUBLIME ROYAL VIRTUE

Through Boileau's adaptation of Longinus' *Peri hypsous*, and his added "Préface" in particular, Longinian ideas reached a great number of scholars. During and after the second half of the 1670s, some of these authors began to employ these ideas to serve their respective arguments. Although Boileau's edition ensured that the difference between the elevated style and the elevating effect of rhetoric became very clear, this did not mean that the Longinian sublime could not be moulded and shaped in order to arrive at new conceptions of sublimity, such as Rapin's treatise on sublime morality. In their new treatises on rhetoric and virtue, these writers continued to discuss the same problem that was central to Chéron's text: the dangerous gap between an elevated aim and a failed execution, between means and end, be it in inscriptions or descriptions. Moreover, in these treatises, the transcendence of Louis XIV would remain the elevated aim in question. In their discussions, these texts recognised an essential and mutually reinforcing relationship between the elevated virtue of the French monarch (and his people), on the one hand, and the powerful capacities of language, on the other. In view of a project for a triumphal arch in honour of Louis XIV, an intellectual quarrel on the most appropriate language for its inscriptions was the next step. On the one hand, these various theoretic works discussed the relative merit of both ancient and contemporary rhetoric, which led them to reflect on several modern texts that have already been discussed in this thesis. On the other hand, these works looked forward to the future of French language and its capacities, particularly in relation to the challenge of Louis XIV's correct representation.

As we have seen earlier, Colbert's idea to enrich the Louvre's east façade with Latin inscriptions generated much interest among French writers, who submitted an incredible amount of proposals. But with the production of these inscriptions also came a number of theoretical reflections that discussed the issues associated with Colbert's decision. One of the earliest examples is a small text written by Michel de Marolles, which he added to his *Histoire auguste des six auteurs anciens* from 1667.<sup>32</sup> Its title, "Discours pour servir d'éloge à la Langue Française, au sujet de quelques Inscriptions," already makes it quite clear what the problem is that the author wants to address. He starts his argument by stating

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32 Bernard Magné, *Crise de la littérature française sous Louis XIV: humanisme et nationalisme*, vol. 1 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1976), 405.

that he has no doubt that many contemporaries are convinced that Latin is more magnificent and advantageous for inscriptions on palaces or other public buildings than the French language. However, he immediately adds that perhaps not the entire world shares this opinion. Rhetoric, he argues, belongs to all idioms and all ages, and the French language, with the beauty of its words and the order of its composition, is so pure and agreeable, that it is not at all inferior to Latin.<sup>33</sup> This notion of purity, joined with that of clarity (“claret”) and brevity (“concision” or “brièveté”) are central to his belief that the French language, compared to Latin, is able to include as many ideas in just as few words.<sup>34</sup> To substantiate this idea, he has composed a total of twenty-six inscriptions for the Louvre:

J’ay fait en deux vers les Inscriptions qui se verront en suite, au sujet des Bastimens du Louvre, pour montrer contre l’opinion de beaucoup de gens que nostre Langue, aussi bien que la Latine, est capable de comprendre beaucoup de sens en peu de paroles: Et je ne voy pas qu’il y en ait davantage dans ce Distique Latin quelque beau qu’il soit, de l’un des meilleurs Poètes de nostre temps en cette langue là, quand il escrit avec son élégance accoustumée, pour une pareille inscription des bastimens du Louvre.<sup>35</sup>

With these distiches, which reflect on the grandeur of the building and its royal inhabitant, he responds to an earlier Latin proposal for the Louvre, which he attributes to Charles du Perrier, a poet from Aix-en-Provence: “Attonitis inhians oculis, quam suspicis hospes,/ Magna quidem, domino non tamen æqua domus” (“Stranger, agape and with eyes aghast you stare at this large mansion; yet, it is not equal to its Lord”).<sup>36</sup> More powerfully than Vertron’s proposal for the Louvre, the inscription aims to confront and convince the Louvre’s beholder with his or her open-mouthed and awestruck admiration. Marolles, however, was not totally convinced. He explains that Perrier had derived his words from Virgil’s seventh book of the *Aeneid* (“attonitis inhians animis ut regius ostro/ velet honos levis umeros” or “agape with wonder at how the glory of royal purple drapes her

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33 Michel de Marolles, “Discours pour servir d’éloge à la Langue François, au sujet de quelques Inscriptions,” in *L’Histoire auguste des six auteurs anciens, Spartien, Capitolin, Lampride, Gallican, Pollion et Vopiscus* (Paris: Jean Couterot, 1667), 24.

34 *Ibid.*, 27.

35 *Ibid.*, 31: “In two verses, I wrote the Inscriptions that will follow, about the Buildings of the Louvre, in order to demonstrate, contrary to the opinion of many people, that our own language, as well as Latin, is able to contain a lot of meaning in a few words. And I do not think that this Latin distich written by one of the best Poets of our time should contain more, beautiful as it may be, when he writes with his customary elegance a similar inscription for the buildings of the Louvre.”

36 I adapted this English translation from Andrew Amos, *Martial and the moderns* (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell and co., 1858), 255. He writes: “Stranger to Paris! you gape and stare at this large mansion; yet, it is not equal to its Lord.”

160 smooth shoulders”), but by replacing the word *animis* (minds) by *oculis* (eyes), Perrier seemed to express the same thing twice.<sup>37</sup> “And when considering more closely the meaning and composition of these words,” Marolles continues, “they express in a way the figure of a grimacing man, who is contemplating something very attentively.”<sup>38</sup> He explains that this idea reminds him particularly of “those fanciful people who live beyond the mountains, who walk down the street with glasses on their noses, and consider with a sense of ridiculous astonishment everything that presents itself before their eyes.”<sup>39</sup> Marolles uses the example to stress that instead of the use of such figurative speech, which “does not always evoke in us a beautiful image,” the French language is capable of “elegantly representing our thoughts in discourse according to the order in which they form themselves in the mind.”<sup>40</sup>

The twenty-six French inscriptions on the Louvre that supplement his own argument are accompanied by valuable “Remarques sur les Inscriptions,” footnotes in which Marolles explains the ideas and composition of each of his distiches.<sup>41</sup> The inscriptions have all the ingredients of the aim of a dual sublimity that would be expressed in the *Tapisseries du Roy* three years later, by which I mean the elevation of rhetoric and of people (the transcendent nature of the represented subject, which, through the means of art and literature, aims to evoke in the beholder an overwhelming effect). Firstly, the fourth distich (“Admires-tu si fort cette haute structure?/ L’Art, comme toy, l’admire avec la Nature”) expresses the manner in which the building talks to the beholder, as if through a guardian angel (“que l’Ange tutelaire du grand Palais, parle aux Citoyens & aux Estrangers qui le contemplant”). The building’s heavenly and epic character amazes (“étonne”) and dazzles (“éblouit”) the beholder (“V. Pour quel sujet fit-on ce Dôme nonpareil?/ C’est l’auguste portail du Palais du Soleil”). Secondly, this effect evokes in the spectator an idea of the limitless grandeur of the king (“XI. Si la grandeur du Louvre étonne l’Etranger,/ La grandeur de mon Roy le fera bien songer”). Instead of Perrier’s wide-eyed and open-mouthed beholder (“l’espece d’étonnement ridicule”), Marolles returns to the idea of “l’esprit,” since the physical grandeur of the Louvre elicits the *moral grandeur* of Louis XIV in the mind of the beholder (“Il passe de la consideration d’une

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37 Marolles, “Discours,” 33. For Virgil’s original and translation, see Virgil, *Aeneid*: Books 7-12, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1918), 7.814-815, 58-59, <https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.virgil-aeneid.1916>.

38 Marolles, “Discours,” 33.

39 *Ibid.*, 33-34: “J’avouë qu’elles me remettent en l’imagination ces gens fantasques de delà les Monts, qui vont par les Ruës avec des lunettes sur le nez, considerant avec une espece d’étonnement ridicule, chaque chose qui se presente devant eux.”

40 *Ibid.*, 34: “Nous nous pouvons donc bien passer de ces sortes de paroles figurées, qui ne font pas toujours chez nous une fort belle Image: & nous avons cela de bon dans le bel usage de nostre François, de représenter élegamment nostre pensée dans le discours, selon l’ordre qu’elle forme en l’esprit; ce qui n’est pas ordinaire dans le Latin.”

grandeur Physique a une grandeur Morale”). Here, Marolles’ text already hints at the union of physical and moral grandeur, a union which merges building and inhabitant, which would be discussed more extensively by René Rapin.

Marolles’ approach, however, does betray the very same weaknesses and pitfalls that would underlie the *Tapisseries du Roy* a few years later. Like Vertron and Félibien, his texts ultimately try to enforce the experience of the sublime on the part of the reader-spectator. The inscriptions already spell out the overwhelming effect that the recipient is supposed to feel, while hopelessly trying to evoke it. His distiches, in other words, are more descriptive than evocative. In fact, while Marolles implies that the French language has enabled him to “elegantly represent” his own thoughts in his own distiches, his rhetorical style, however, betrays that he wants to represent and control the thoughts of the spectator as well. His approach thus disrupts the “order in which thoughts form themselves in the mind,” since his distiches try to take over this creative process.

— THE EARLY QUERELLE DES INSCRIPTIONS ON LOUIS XIV

Marolles’ argument forms the beginning of a longer polemic on the superiority of Latin or French inscriptions on public buildings; the *Querelle des Inscriptions* – a quarrel in which Boileau’s Longinian sublime repeatedly returns as a critical instrument. Shortly after Marolles’ “Discours,” a broader quarrel in the form of a controversy on the superiority of either Latin or French as the language for public inscriptions on monuments began to arise, which seems to have been instigated by Louis Le Laboureur (1615-1679). The latter addressed to the *académicien* Henri Louis Habert de Montmor (1600-1679) a dissertation on the advantages of the French language compared to Latin, which, in turn, provoked two letters in Latin written by René-François de Sluse (1622-1685) and addressed to Samuel Sorbière.<sup>42</sup> Le Laboureur, then, replied and collected the texts in a new work called *Avantages de la langue françoise sur la langue latine*, published in Paris in 1669. Soon, the discussion that these texts had started truly gained momentum on the occasion of the erection of a triumphal arch dedicated to Louis XIV, near the Porte Saint-Antoine in Paris (fig. 33). The first stone had been laid in August 1670 and inscriptions were needed, but the choice for the most appropriate language was not yet made. Since the decision lay with the team of Colbert, the quarrel revolved around the Petite académie, and by extension

41 For the twenty-six distiches, see *ibid.*, 35-38. And for his “Remarques sur les Inscriptions,” see *ibid.*, 40-42.

42 Ferdinand Brunot, *Histoire de la langue française, des origines à 1900. Le français en France et hors de France au XVIIe siècle*, vol. 5 (Paris: A. Colin, 1917), 10.

the Académie française. Charles Perrault, for instance, would receive letters from both Ancients and Moderns who tried to persuade him to follow their respective advice, and several members of the *Académie* pronounced their arguments during the academy's meetings.

After the publication of Jean Desmarets' *La Comparaison de la langue et de la poésie française avec la grecque et la latine* in 1670, one of the earliest, albeit weak, arguments, it would take a few years before the quarrel evolved into a more serious polemic. The year 1676, in particular, would be a key year in the debate, since it saw three important contributions: a speech in Latin by the Jesuit Jean Lucas from the *Collège de Clermont*, a response by the *académicien* Paul Tallemant le Jeune (1642-1712), and the publication of a speech by fellow *académicien* François Charpentier. The oration by Lucas, which was published as *De monumentis publicis latine inscribendis oratio* the following year, attempts to summarise and refute the most prominent arguments of his opponents and thus provides a clear insight into the quarrel's most important themes. Crucial in his speech is the universality and eternity Lucas attributes to Latin, which therefore constitutes the most appropriate language to guarantee the equally universal and eternal fame of Louis XIV.<sup>43</sup> As Tim Denecker has argued, Lucas' argument is based on properties that fit into a conception of language as a platonic system. Its properties (perfection, stability, perpetuity and universality) would ensure that the inscribed text – provided that the marble will not perish – will be understandable for everyone and for all time. And since Louis XIV's device is a radiant sun, a preference for a language "as timeless and universal as sunlight" would be most fitting.<sup>44</sup> In his speech, Lucas' four properties also served as counter arguments refuting the claims that the French language would be immediately intelligible, as opposed to the understanding of Latin which several of Lucas' opponents limited to a small elite.<sup>45</sup> The rather "patriotic" argument of the dishonour of preferring Latin to one's mother tongue, which was dismissed by Lucas as a populist idea, played a rather large part in the French or Modern camp.<sup>46</sup> Whereas Charpentier argued that the beauty and nobility of the French language is the result of a noble minded nation ("le peuple dont la langue est la plus parfaite est celui dont l'esprit est le plus éclairé et le plus noble"), his colleague Desmarets agreed, but opted for a different phrasing: "la nation française étant [...] noble, prompte [...], aussi sa langue, suivant le génie de la nation, est [...] pure, noble, et magnifique."<sup>47</sup>

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43 I am much indebted to the annotated edition of Lucas' speech in Tim Denecker, "Joannes Lucas SJ, De Monumentis Publicis Latine Inscribendis Oratio (Paris, 1677): Introduction, Analysis of Assumptions About Language, and Annotated Edition," *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 62 (2013): 527-28.

44 *Ibid.*, 531-32.

45 *Ibid.*, 529.

46 *Ibid.*, 529.

47 Magné, *Crise de la littérature*, 1:428-29.



A month later, on 23 December 1676, Tallemant presented similar arguments in his reaction to Lucas' oration in a speech to the *Académie*, which was published as a "Discours ... pour servir de reponse à celui du R.P. Lucas Jesuite, qui souûtenoit que les Monumens publics doivent avoir des Inscriptions Latines." The French language, he argued, has the same beauty and grace as Latin, but is also characterised by a *je ne sais quoi* that cannot be explained.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, Tallemant puts forward the same "patriotic" argument of the link between the beauty of a language and that of its nation. Although Tallemant is far more concerned about the choice of language in books about the king, instead of short inscriptions,<sup>49</sup> the sheer idea of Latin texts on public monuments angered him. Why, he argues, would you hide the message of a public inscription from the French public itself, from a French soldier on the street who needs to be able to read in his own language the glorious deeds of his king? It is, he states, the same language that helped the king to win his military campaigns:

Peut-on être assez aveugle, pour ne pas voir que le dessein de faire connoître ses glorieux travaux à une poignée d'Etrangers qui les sçauront d'ailleurs, les cache en même temps à un nombre infini de personnes, & sur tout à ses Sujets? Pourquoi ôter au Peuple la douceur de lire tous les jours ce qu'on fait pour son bien, & pour son avantage? [...] Servons nous, MESSIEURS, pour raconter tant de merveilles, de la même Langue, dont ce fameux Heros s'est servy pour gagner des batailles, & pour prononcer des oracles, & laissons aux Traducteurs, qui ne nous manqueront pas, le soin d'expliquer nos écrits à toutes les Nations. Je ne veux point icy insulter à ceux qui écrivent en Latin, ny leur reprocher que se servant d'une langue qu'ils ne peuvent sçavoir assez

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48 Paul Tallemant le Jeune, "Discours ... pour servir de reponse à celui du R.P. Lucas Jesuite, qui souûtenoit que les Monumens publics doivent avoir des Inscriptions Latines," in *Recueil des harangues prononcées par Messieurs de l'Académie françoise* (Paris: Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1698), 301: "Je voy dans nôtre siecle toutes les mêmes circonstances qui ont accompagné ces siecles les plus fameux [...]. [C]'est chez nous que se trouvent les Architectes, les Sculpteurs, les Peintres, les Musiciens; mais pour dire encore plus, nous avons des Tacites, des Demosthenes, des Euripides, & des Terences. [...] Quand je les compare aux anciens, je leur trouve les mêmes graces & les mêmes beautez qui leur ont fait meriter de venir jusqu'à nous; quand j'en veux juger par le bon sens naturel, j'y voy tout conforme à la nature & à la raison, j'y trouve cette politesse & ce je ne sçay quoy qui plaît tant, & qu'on ne peut exprimer; quand j'y cherche la noblesse, & la douceur du langage, j'y trouve des expressions magnifiques & éloquentes." My emphasis.

49 *Ibid.*, 303-04: "[I] nous reste une plus forte raison à examiner, qui est l'interêt de la gloire du Prince que nous servons; on dit que ses grandes actions & ses vertus innombrables doivent être connuës par toute la terre, & que le Latin y est plus propre comme étant plus universellement entendu des Etrangers. [...] Si l'interêt de la gloire de ce Monarque invincible demande du Latin, il est à croire que c'est principalement dans les ouvrages qui sont entre les mains de tout le monde, & qui se transportent chez toutes les Nations, & non pas dans l'Inscription d'un Arc de Triomphe, qui étant de marbre, & de pierre, ne va qu'en estampe chez les Etrangers, & plutôt pour leur faire connoître la magnificence, & la beauté d'un pareil Monument, que pour leur faire lire une Inscription tres-simple."

pour la bien parler, leurs écrits sont dépouillés de cette grace naturelle qui fait la principale beauté d'un Ouvrage.<sup>50</sup>

The final remark in this quote is a cleverly covered point of criticism, since Talle-mant subtly evokes the idea that Latin is not at all a living and spoken language. This argument was shared by many of his fellow companions.

Another member of the “French camp,” Desmarests, went even further in his attack on the competence of the Ancients. A few years in the *Querelle des Incriptions*, Desmarests published his *La défense du poëme héroïque* (1674), in which he includes a paragraph “Remarques sur la traduction du Traité de Longin.” Desmarests saw the opportunity to continue his attack on the Ancients as defenders of Latin and Greek, by focusing on the flaws in Boileau’s edition. Through a fictional dialogue between Doranthe and Philène, Desmarests responds to Boileau’s attack on his work in his *Art Poétique*, by arguing that Boileau does not understand Greek, nor Longinus, and that he translates ancient poetry into poor verses. According to Desmarests, Boileau replaced and added words and meanings of his own in his translations of Homer from Longinus.<sup>51</sup> Desmarests closes his “Remarques” with a particularly peculiar one, when he writes that Boileau’s presentation of his *Traité du sublime* to Louis XIV is an act of poor judgment, given the anti-monarchical message of Longinus’ final chapter. In this closing text, Longinus sees the loss of sublimity of mind as a cause of cultural decadence, and asks the question why there is a lack of great minds capable of elevating themselves towards the sublime.<sup>52</sup> The reason, Boileau-Longinus states, is the absence of a popular government and its associated state of freedom, which would nourish and form great geniuses.<sup>53</sup> And here, Desmarests actually considers Boileau to a large extent complicit in the message expressed in Longinus’ final chapter on the constraining

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50 Ibid., 305: “Could we be so blind that we do not see that by communicating his glorious deeds to a handful of foreigners (that will know them from elsewhere) we hide these deeds at the same time from an infinite number of people, and his own subjects in particular? Why deprive the People of the tenderness of being able to read every day what is done for their well-being, and to their advantage? [...] To tell so many wonders, Messieurs, let us use the same Language that this famed Hero has used to win battles, and to pronounce oracles. And let us leave it to the Translators, who will not fail us, to explain our writings to all nations. I do not want to insult those who write in Latin, nor blame them that by using a language they cannot grasp enough to be able to speak it well, their writings are stripped of this natural grace that forms the main beauty of a work.”

51 Jean Desmarests de Saint-Sorlin, *La défense du poëme héroïque* (Paris: Jacques Le Gras, 1674), 120–21. Desmarests writes, for instance: “Pourquoy mettre dans ses vers, du haut d’une tour, puis que cela n’est pas dans son texte Grec, & qu’il y a seulement, assis sur un lieu élevé regardant vers la mer [...] Que de choses qui ne sont point dans le texte Grec, par incapacité de serrer le sens,” and on the following page: “On peut aider au vers pas quelque mot adjouté, mais on ne doit pas y joindre des sens qui ne sont pas dans le texte. Car ne le faisant pas, on ne pouvant pas le faire, on se fait voir Escolier, & bien bas, en mesme temps que l’on veut se faire le Maistre, & bien haut, par un traité du sublime.”

52 Ibid., 125.

53 Ibid., 125: “[C]’est le gouvernement populaire, qui nourrit & forme les grands genies; & qu’il n’y a rien qui élève davantage l’ame des grands hommes, que la liberté.”

effect of the monarchy.<sup>54</sup> In a concluding response to both Boileau and Longinus, Desmarests puts forward the monarchy as the true source of the sublime, since only the grandeur of the virtues and deeds of a great king truly elevate us (“Et il n’y a rien qui élève tant au sublime, que les fréquentes actions Heroïques d’un grand Roy, & que ses vertus, qui sont bien plus grandes que ne furent jamais celles des Areopagites, ny celles des Ephores.”).<sup>55</sup> Here, we approach the ideas put forward by Félibien in his *Tapisseries du Roy* that same year, who described Louis XIV himself as a source of the sublime, and therefore reflects on the need for a new means that would be able to evoke it.

In retrospect, we are able to detect two key aspects in Desmarests’ argument that would remain fundamental to the Modern relationship to the notion of *le sublime* during the course of the following decades. Firstly, he points at the inability of Ancients to fully comprehend, translate and speak classical languages. As a result of Boileau’s lack of knowledge of the Greek language, of French poetic translation, and of his sense of judgment, Desmarests implicitly suggests that his *Traité du sublime* is ironically detrimental to the sublimity of language and of people (Louis XIV in particular). And secondly, instead of dismissing *le sublime* and its obvious associations with classical literature and irrational ecstasy entirely, the choice of Desmarests (as well as other representatives of the French camp) to appropriate and adapt Boileau’s notion to be able approach the elevated virtues and deeds Louis XIV’s needs to be emphasised more than has yet been done.<sup>56</sup>

— THE HEIGHT OF THE QUERELLE DES INSCRIPTIONS:  
CHARPENTIER AND LOUIS XIV’S ELEVATED SPIRIT

Perhaps the most surprising use of the Longinian sublime in this context can be found in the work of François Charpentier, another defender of the French language who published two of the most important texts in the *Querelle des Inscriptions*: his *Deffense de la langue françoise pour l’inscription de l’arc de triomphe dédié au Roy* from 1676, and *De l’excellence de la langue françoise* from 1683. His *Deffense* builds on the oration he delivered before the *Académie* in December 1675. Although Charpentier, as one of the first four members of the *Petite académie*,

54 Ibid., 126-27. By “cét homme” Desmarests seems to mean the “Traducteur”: “Où est le jugement de cet homme, de rapporter la cause de la decadence des esprits à l’Etat Monarchique, & la cause de l’élévation des esprits à la liberté, à l’Etat Populaire, & aux prix que les Republicques proposoient; puis que vivant sous un bon & sage Roy [...]. Et il faut luy demander si la consideration du Roy luy a osté l’ardeur de s’élever au dessus de tous les Poëtes.” He continues: “Il se seroit bien passé de rapporter à la Monarchie les causes de la decadence des esprits, & des foiblesses du sien; & d’esperer son élévation par cette seule traduction du traité du sublime.”

55 Ibid., 126.

56 In this sense, Desmarests’ *Défense* should be placed in the same development to which belongs another Modern creation: the *Tapisseries du Roy* from 1670.

had much influence on the creation of public inscriptions, he had tough competition. One of his opponents in the debate, Amable de Bourzeis (1606-1672), also belonged to the same small, illustrious group of four. Moreover, Bourzeis was supported by Jean-Baptiste Santeul (1630-1697), a most ardent advocate of the use of Latin as a living language, who had also been responsible for many inscriptions that adorned public monuments and fountains in Paris. In order to be most persuasive and to invigorate his defence as much as possible, Charpentier moves the central arguments of the French camp to the first lines of his “Epistre au Roy,” which is also the first part of his book. “The cause that I defend,” he writes, “is that of your Majesty, since it is that of the whole of France. There is such a close relationship between the spirit of a people and its language, that it should not be treated with disregard.”<sup>57</sup> Charpentier continues by explaining that words are the images of one’s thoughts, so if there is any deformity or confusion in these images, then the same imperfections can be found in the thoughts that produce them. “In the same way one can judge the beauty or ugliness of a person by his portrait,” he argues, “one can also judge the grandeur or pettiness of the genius of a nation by its language.”<sup>58</sup> He continues:

Et de vray, y a-t’il autre chose qui fasse la beauté des Langues, que le bel Esprit de ceux qui s’en servent? Si l’Usage ou le Hazard les introduit, c’est la delicatesse du Goust qui les purifie; c’est la fertilité de l’Imagination qui les rend abondantes; *c’est la noblesse des Sentimens qui leur donne de la Force & de la Sublimité.* Tellement qu’on ne sçauroit dire qu’une Langue est foible & grossiere, sans donner à penser quelque chose de desavantageux du Peuple qui la parle. Il en est de mesme, si on la compare avec une autre; Celle où il paroistra plus de Majesté & plus d’Elegance, est *celle dont le Peuple a plus d’elevation dans l’Ame* & plus de politesse dans les Mœurs.<sup>59</sup>

57 François Charpentier, *Deffense de la langue françoise pour l’inscription de l’arc de triomphe dédié au Roy* (Paris: Claude Barbin, [1676] 1683), iii-iv: “La Cause que je deffens, est celle de Vostre Majesté, puisque c’est celle de toute la France. Il y a une relation si estroite entre l’Esprit d’un Peuple & sa Langue, qu’elle ne peut estre méprisable, que ce ne soit un sujet de blasme pour luy.”

58 *Ibid.*, iv: “Nos Paroles sont les Images de nos Pensées; S’il y a de la diffôrmité ou de la confusion dans ces Images, il faut que ces mesmes imperfections se rencontrent dans la Pensée qui les produit; Et comme on peut juger de la beauté ou de la laideur d’une personne par son Portrait, de mesme on peut juger de la grandeur ou de la petitesse du Genie d’une Nation par sa Langue.”

59 *Ibid.*, p. iv. My emphasis: “And, indeed, would there be anything else that makes up the beauty of Languages than the bel Esprit of those who use them. If it is this Use or Chance that introduces them, it is the delicacy of Taste [FK: du Goût] that purifies them; it is the fertility of Imagination that enriches them; it is the nobility of Feeling that gives them Strength and Sublimity. So much so that one cannot state that a language is weak and crude without giving any thought to the inferiority of the People who speak it. The same applies when we compare it with another; one that holds more Majesty and more Elegance has Speakers whose souls are more elevated and whose Morals are more civil.”

In other words, when one's sentiments and thoughts are governed by a *bel esprit* (nourished by a delicate *goust* and a certain *noblesse*), they are able to attain a level of power and sublimity. Chapelain's argument is very similar to the argument Bouhours put forth in his *Entretiens d'Ariste et d'Eugène* from 1671, in which he explained that a "bel esprit" is one of several qualities one must possess in order to be able to produce the ineffable ("le je ne sçay quoy") in great works.<sup>60</sup> And in addition to Bouhours' thoughts, Charpentier here anticipates Rapin's moral understanding of the sublime. Both authors adapted the Boileau-Longinian sublime of discourse to a virtuous quality, arguing that elevated minds bring forth a sublimity that is mirrored in the actions and language of the people.<sup>61</sup> And from the beginning of his first "discours," Charpentier is very clear about the question which language this would be: a choice for the French language would mirror the king's glory, serve the public interest, and testify to a powerful authority and love for French traditions ("Il importe à la gloire du Roy, & à celle de toute la Nation, que ce fameux Monument soit tout François"). And since the king, Charpentier argues, did not approve of the destruction of those buildings of the Louvre that were constructed by his forefathers, he would also never "dishonour a language that had been cultivated with such care by all of the Kings, [his] predecessors."<sup>62</sup>

Moreover, a large majority of Charpentier's argument responds and calls into question De Bourzeis' claims concerning Latin, such as those of its universality and its origins. One of Charpentier's most intriguing counter-arguments focuses on the sublimity of works from antiquity written in *other* languages than Greek or Latin, such as in Hebrew. The example he uses to support this attribution of "eslevation de pensées" is the famous passage on the divine creation of light from the book of Genesis (Genesis 1:3), which Charpentier quotes from Longinus:

[L]es grandes qualitez de ce fameux Historien & Legislatteur, n'ont pas esté inconnuës aux Payens, comme il paroist par le Sophiste Longin, qui l'appelle *un Homme extraordinaire*, & qui louë si hautement cette expression sublime tirée

60 See Bouhours' "Entretien IV" on "Le Bel Esprit" in Bouhours, *Les Entretiens*, 190-236, and see Delehanty, *Literary Knowing*, 56.

61 This is a point Nicholas Cronk also emphasises, although he does argue that Charpentier's might have adapted the sublime because he "either misunderstood, or actively disagreed with, the particular interpretation of Longinus enshrined in Boileau's translation, for the proposition that sublimity is simply the reflection of elevated feeling would make of the sublime a moral concept, an approach which in no way accords with Boileau's emphasis on the sublime as a characteristic of literary discourse." I would nuance this view, for Charpentier does not only consider noble sentiment but also an elevated soul as a source of the sublime. This thought resembles the words used by Boileau to describe Longinus himself: "[H]is sentiments have that ineffable quality that marks not only a sublime mind [or spirit]: but a soul far elevated above the common" ("[S]es sentimens ont je ne sçai quoi qui marque non seulement un esprit sublime: mais une ame fort eslevée au dessus du commun"). See Cronk, *The Classical Sublime*, 123. And for Boileau's remark in his "Préface", see Boileau, "Traité du sublime," vii.

62 Charpentier, *Deffense*, v-vi.

du premier chapitre de la Genese, ou pour marquer la celerité, avec laquelle toutes choses furent créées par la puissance Divine, il se sert d'une façon de parler si serrée, qu'elle semble imiter cette promptitude mesme. *Dieu dit que la Lumiere soit faite, & la Lumiere fut faite.* Tout cela justifie donc, qu'il y a eu de l'Eloquence, & de la Beauté d'esprit, ailleurs qu'à Athenes & à Rome. Et si cela a esté ainsi dans les siècles passez, pourquoy cela ne seroit-il pas de mesme aujourd'huy?<sup>63</sup>

Although Longinus originally quoted Moses in Greek in his *Peri hypsous*, Charpentier consciously ignores this detail for the sake of his argument, implicitly referring to the powerful brevity and promptitude of the original words in Hebrew. Moreover, he does not provide the biblical passage in Hebrew, but in a French translation. Charpentier thus bypasses the Greek language while still emphasising the fact that a Greek sophist acknowledged the expression of sublimity through languages other than his own, which is precisely Charpentier's point. Another crucial aspect is that the French sentence he provides differs from Boileau's translation of Longinus, which reads "Dieu dit: Que la lumiere se fasse, & la lumiere se fit."<sup>64</sup> Whether or not Charpentier has used or read Boileau's edition – and it seems very likely that he did – his specific wording might be another manner of avoiding the Greek text that underlies Boileau's translation.

In addition to establishing and placing the perfect conditions for sublime literature – and most importantly inscriptions on buildings – in contemporary France, Charpentier finishes his argument by extending his debate to the creation of buildings themselves. The words that Augustus had once uttered when describing Rome, for example, could apply today to the architecture of Louis XIV ("he found Rome a city of brick and left it a city of marble").<sup>65</sup> Shifting the attention away from the unfinished building of the Louvre to the palace of Versailles, Charpentier (as Félibien did before him) employs the epic poetic image

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63 Ibid., 280-81: "[T]he great qualities of this famed Historian and Legislator were not unknown to the Pagans, as we see in the example of the Sophist Longinus, who described him as an extraordinary man and who praised very highly this sublime expression drawn from the first chapter of Genesis. In order to evoke the promptitude with which all things were created by Divine power, he used a manner of speaking so limited, that it seems to imitate this very promptitude: 'Dieu dit que la Lumière soit faite, & la Lumiere fut faite.' All this justifies, then, that Eloquence and the Beauty of spirit also existed beyond Athens and Rome. And if this is true for the past, why would not it be the same for the present?"

64 Boileau, "Traité du sublime," 21-22.

65 Ibid., 280-81: "Il peut dire de cette Ville immense, & particulièrement de la Maison Royale, qui en est la plus noble & la plus belle partie, ce qu'Auguste disoit de Rome, Je l'ay trouvée de Brique, je la laisseray de Marbre. [...] [N]ous pouvons dire aujourd'huy dans Paris, ce qu'Horace disoit autrefois dans Rome peut-estre avec moins de verité que nous." Charpentier here refers to a statement attributed to Augustus that was recorded by the historian Suetonius (born c. 69 AD) in his *De Vita Caesarum* (Augustus, 28). See, also for the English translation used above: Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1990), 139.

of the enchanted palace in an intellectual context, thereby reinforcing the sense of sheer wonder, nobility, magnificence and vastness that is manifested here:

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Il a trouvé le Louvre petit, irregulier, composé de vieux & de nouveaux Edifices, indigne, à n'en point mentir, de servir de Siege à la Majesté de l'Empire. Aujourd'huy il en fait un Palais admirable, & qui ne trouvera point son égal dans ces Bastimens à qui l'Antiquité donna le nom de Merveilles du Monde. Que peut-on opposer encore au fameux Chasteau de Versailles, qui semble n'estre fait que pour justifier la possibilité des Palais enchantez, si l'on peut se deffaire de l'opinion qu'il n'ait esté fait luy-mesme par enchantement? Tout y est surprenant, soit qu'on regarde la beauté de sa Situation, le riant aspect de ses Dehors, la noblesse de l'Architecture, la magnificence des Appartemens, la richesse des Meubles, le grand amas de Peintures & des Statuës excellentes, la vaste estenduë des Jardins.<sup>66</sup>

The question whether Versailles was constructed to justify the possibility of enchanted palaces, or that it may very well be an enchantment itself, is a rhetorical question that seems almost too metaphorical and poetic to be taken seriously. Nevertheless, he explains, like French literature the palace's grand structure is the product of the grand ideas of its builders, which, in turn, emanate from the sublime spirit ("un Esprit plus relevé") of Louis XIV himself:

Tout cela n'avoit point esté veu en France jusqu'à nos Jours; nos Ouvriers n'avoient point encore eu de si grandes Idées, & cela fait bien comprendre, qu'ils ont esté guidez d'un Esprit plus relevé, d'une Intelligence plus éclairée qu'à l'ordinaire. Tous les autres beaux Arts se ressentent de ce Progrez merveilleux. La Poësie, l'Eloquence, la Musique, tout est parvenu à un degré d'excellence où il n'avoit point encore monté.<sup>67</sup>

Together, the French arts share in the same "marvellous progress," which constitutes for Charpentier a definitive sign of a French sublime, and one that can

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66 Charpentier, *Deffense*, 331-32: "He found the Louvre small, irregular, composed of old and new Buildings, unworthy, no doubt, to serve as Seat to the Majesty of the Empire. Today, it is an admirable place, and will find no equal in those buildings that Antiquity called Wonders of the World. Also, what can we oppose to this famed Castle of Versailles, which seems to have been made only to justify the possibility of enchanted Palaces, if one could only, in the first place, disprove the idea that it created itself by enchantment? Here, everything is amazing, whether you look at the beauty of its location, the pleasant appearance of its Exterior, the nobility of the Architecture, the magnificence of the Apartments, the richness of its furniture, the great collection of Paintings and excellent Statues, the vast expanse of its Gardens."

67 *Ibid.*, 332-33: "France has until now never seen such things; our Workmen had not yet had such great Ideas, and one can easily see that they have been guided by a more elevated Spirit, an Intelligence that is more enlightened than usual. All the other fine Arts are influenced by this marvellous Progress. Poetry, Eloquence, Music, they all have reached a degree of excellence to which they had not yet ascended."

be virtually independent from the classical tradition (“Et il ne faut pas que nous nous imaginions ne pouvoir rien dire de grand ni d’eslevé, sans emprunter leur Eloquence”).<sup>68</sup> Compared to the rather poor arguments that had been used by his colleagues earlier on in the *Querelle des Inscriptions*, Charpentier here puts forward a much more productive fiction on the relationship between a sublime spirit and a sublime representation, since he generates the idea of a *Roi architecte*. The mind and intelligence of the monarch himself, he argues, guides the arts.

Charpentier continued his defence of the French language and its use on royal architecture by publishing his *Excellence de la langue françoise* in 1683. In his second volume of his *Excellence*, he returns to his praise of Longinus’ emphasis on simplicity, ordinary language and promptitude (“celerité”) – an example with which he also wants to clarify that his criticism of ancient works is not at all absolute, and that one should pursue a balanced and respectful approach in a debate.<sup>69</sup> This emphasis on the importance of ordinary language plays an important role in the *Excellence*, and Charpentier returns to this argument in his comparison between medals and public monuments. He seems to build on Bouhours’ writings on devices when he explains the mysterious and sublime power of medals. Ideally, Charpentier argues, the various layered meanings of a medal present themselves simultaneously to the beholder’s mind, but because of its subtle and mysterious nature they demand a learned taste and a penetrating genius (“goust exercé & un genie penetrant”).<sup>70</sup> This reduces the number of people who are able to grasp the medal’s “image sublime” to a milieu of learned intellectuals, who would fully understand the language, the image, and the hidden references.<sup>71</sup> In comparison, he argues, a public monument is much more inclusive, since, in addition to the use of language, it approaches the idea and experience of elevation in a more understandable manner: by evoking moral grandeur through physical grandeur. Here, Charpentier adds to the argument of his *Deffense*, which underlines the capacity of the French language to mirror the elevated spirit and virtue of the nation and the king himself. In addition to the powerful and more easily understandable message of a French inscription, the *height* of the statue of the king placed on top of the same structure (such as a triumphal arch or column)

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68 Ibid., 334.

69 François Charpentier, *De l’Excellence de la langue françoise*, vol. 2 (Paris: Veuve Bilaine, 1683), 548–50: “[O]n pouvoit donner de la sublimité au discours, en ne se servant que des termes ordinaires. La principale beauté de l’Expression consiste à la rendre convenable à son sujet. [...] Qu’on y adjouste encore d’autres ornemens, plus il y aura de Pompe, moins il y aura de Sublimité.”

70 Ibid., 783: “Il est donc tres-assuré que les Medailles ne sont point des Monumens Populaires, quoy-qu’elles se respandent parmi le Peuple, & qu’on ne peut en bien juger à moins que de sçavoir un nombre infini de choses tres-curieuses, qui eschappent mesme au commun des Gens de Lettres, & qui demandent un goust exercé & un genie penetrant.”

71 Ibid., 777: “Car l’assemblage de ces Figures & de cette Inscription, produit dans l’Esprit une image sublime de cet evenement; mais ce n’est que dans l’esprit de ceux qui sçavent la Fable.”



creates a similar effect in the beholder. The distance between the spectator's eye and the king's sculpture represents and evokes the manner in which the king's virtue elevates itself above all other subjects:

Les Inventeurs de ces Edifices, aussi bien que des Colomnes Triomphales, n'ont point eu d'autre objet que d'eslever fort haut les Statuës des Heros, & les exposer, de là, à la veuë des Peuples, afin que les yeux s'accoustumant à les regarder de bas en haut, l'esprit s'accoustumant aussi à les considerer avec un profond respect, & que la distance qui se rencontre entre l'œil du regardant & la Figure regardée, fust comme la mesure de la distance qu'il y a entre la Vertu de ces grands Personnages & le merite des autres hommes.<sup>72</sup>

In a manner very similar to Marolles' reflection on the relationship between the Louvre's physical grandeur and the king's moral grandeur, Charpentier uses the example of the triumphal arch to discuss the moral elevation of art, language and spirit. Moreover, his *Excellence* thus enables him to build on his thoughts on Versailles published in his *Deffense*, which refer to the unity between Louis XIV's elevated spirit ("esprit relevé") and the grandeur of his architecture.<sup>73</sup>

#### BOUHOURS ON LOUIS XIV:

##### THE SUBLIME, THE INSCRIPTION AND THE DANGER OF HYPERBOLE

Although Charpentier was at pains to emphasise that he disapproved of the absolute, unqualified criticism and hasty generalisations he recognized in some of his peers, he made his position in the *Querelle* very clear. There were, however, a great number intellectuals who did not take position at all in the developing quarrel between the ancients and the moderns. One of these authors was Bouhours, whose *La manière de bien penser dans les ouvrages d'esprit* (1687) opted for a more balanced approach to the close interrelationship between rhetoric and architecture under Louis XIV. As Nicholas Cronk explains, Bouhours already attempted to resolve contemporary critical problems in his *Entretiens*, partly by launching the term of the *je ne sais quoi*, but this concept ultimately "had nothing like the

72 Ibid., 783: "The Designers of these Buildings, as well as of Triumphal Columns, aimed only at raising the Statues of Heroes very high, and to thus display them to the Public, so that they get used to looking upwards at them from below, and that their minds also become accustomed to considering them with a profound respect, and that the distance between the eye of the beholder and the Figure were like the measure of distance between the Virtue of these great Characters and the merit of other men."

73 Perrault's Arc du Triomphe du Trône (for the Place du Trône), the triumphal arch that would bear the new inscription, was only partially built and thus never completed. These parts were eventually demolished. See Michael Petzet, "Der Triumphbogenmonument für Ludwig XIV auf der Place du Trône," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 45, no. 2 (1982): 145-94.

success or the impact which the *sublime* had enjoyed in the wake of the *Œuvres diverses* [by Boileau].<sup>74</sup> With Bouhours' bold critical aspirations of the *Entretiens* in mind, the *Manière*'s many allusions to Boileau can rightly be interpreted, as Cronk does, as an "attempt to rebut the *Traité du sublime* and to regain the critical initiative."<sup>75</sup> But instead of focusing on the relationship between Bouhours and Boileau, which has already been extensively studied, we need to inquire into the *Manière*'s relationship to the arguments put forward during the earlier *Querelle des Inscriptions*. Even though Bouhours' publication does not form part of this debate, which had already ended by then, it very much focuses on the same issue. Most notably, Bouhours' "Troisième Dialogue" of his *Manière* focuses on the question of sublimity in the interrelationship between architecture and literature under Louis XIV, particularly in laudatory poems and inscriptions. But before we turn to these reflections, let us first consider his thoughts on the Longinian sublime and Louis XIV from his preceding, second dialogue.

The dialogues in Bouhours' *Manière* consist of three conversations between the fictional characters of Philante and Eudoxe, two figures that Maarten Delbeke respectively described as "an enthusiastic defender of novelty" and "the more moderate voice of Bouhours."<sup>76</sup> At the very beginning of the second dialogue, the two friends continue their discussion on ingenious thoughts ("pensées ingénieuses"), which, Eudoxe states, should not be characterised by truth alone. What should be added, he continues, is something extraordinary that strikes the mind.<sup>77</sup> To explain this idea, Eudoxe uses the example of architecture: "Truth," he argues, "is to a thought what the foundations are to a building; it sustains it, and renders it solid. But a building that is only solid would not have enough to please those who are familiar with architecture."<sup>78</sup> Bouhours here transcends the usual comparative architectural *topos* of foundations, by attributing to an accomplished building the three key elements that will structure his central argument

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74 Cronk, *The Classical Sublime*, 132.

75 *Ibid.*, 132.

76 Maarten Delbeke, "Elevated Twins and the Vicious Sublime. Gianlorenzo Bernini and Louis XIV," in Van Eck, Bussels, Delbeke and Pieters, *Translations of the Sublime*, 133.

77 Dominique Bouhours, *La manière de bien penser dans les ouvrages d'esprit. Dialogues* (Paris: Sebastien Mabre-Cramoisy, 1687), 78: "[L]e vray ne suffisoit pas, & qu'il y falloit ajoûter quelque chose d'extraordinaire qui frappast l'esprit."

78 *Ibid.*, 78-79: "Nous l'avons dit, & on ne scauroit trop le dire : la vérité est à la pensée ce que les fondemens sont aux édifices; elle la soutient, & la rend solide. Mais un bastiment qui ne seroit que solide n'auroit pas de quoy plaire à ceux qui se connoissent en architecture. Outre la solidité, on veut de la grandeur, de l'agrément, & mesme de la délicatesse dans les maisons bien-basties; & c'est aussi ce que je voudrois dans les pensées dont nous parlons. La vérité qui plaist tant ailleurs sans nul ornement, en demande icy; & cét ornement n'est quelquefois qu'un tour nouveau que l'on donne aux choses. Les exemples vous feront comprendre ce que je veux dire. La mort n'épargne personne. Voilà une pensée fort vraye, & qui ne l'est que trop par malheur, ajoûta Eudoxe; mais c'est une pensée bien simple & bien commune. Pour la relever, & la rendre nouvelle en quelque façon, il n'y a qu'à la tourner de la manière qu'Horace & Malherbe ont fait."

on accomplished texts: the elements of *grandeur* (or *la sublimité*), *agrément* and *délicatesse*, which make up Bouhours' three genres of thought (*espèces de pensées*). "In addition to solidity," Eudoxe states, "one desires grandeur, pleasure and even a sense of delicacy in well-built houses – and this is also what I would like to find in the thoughts of which we will speak."<sup>79</sup> As an example of such an elevating turn (*tours*), he mentions the verses by Horace and Malherbe on the indiscriminating knocking of Death at the door of both huts and palaces (see chapter 3).<sup>80</sup>

The other key aspect of Bouhours' argument is that a *pensée* should always suit the subject (*sujet*) of a text. It is therefore quite fitting that he chooses the comparison between architecture and literature mentioned above, since a significant portion of the examples of *pensées* he uses in his *Manière* have as their *sujet* royal buildings and their patrons, and Louis XIV in particular. In other words, the sublimity of a subject (a grand royal building for instance) needs *pensées* that attain the appropriate level of grandeur. Bouhours explains:

Pour moy, repliqua Philante, j'aime sur tout les pensées qui ont de l'élévation, & qui ne représentent à l'esprit que de grandes choses. Vous n'êtes pas en cela de trop méchant goust, dît Eudoxe. La sublimité, la grandeur dans une pensée est justement ce qui emporte, & ce qui ravit, pourveû que la pensée convienne au sujet : car c'est une regle générale, qu'il faut penser selon la matière qu'on traite ; & rien n'est moins raisonnable que d'avoir des pensées sublimes dans un petit sujet qui n'en demande que de médiocres : il vaudroit presque mieux n'en avoir que de médiocres dans un grand sujet qui en demanderoit de sublimes.<sup>81</sup>

In fact, Bouhours is very clear on the subject of the king; he later mentions in his second dialogue that the *sujet* of Louis XIV is a particularly sublime and therefore elevating subject ("Mais c'est sur le Prince qui nous gouverne [...] que nos meilleurs Écrivains ont pensé peut-estre plus noblement; commi si la hauteur du sujet avoit élevé leur génie"), which therefore inspires the noblest *pensées* of all.<sup>82</sup> It is no surprise, in this respect, that the architectural inscription plays a

79 Ibid., 78-79. See note 446.

80 Ibid., 79: "La mort n'épargne personne. Voilà une pensée fort vraie, & qui ne l'est que trop par malheur, ajoûta Eudoxe ; mais c'est une pensée bien simple & bien commune. Pour la relever, & la rendre nouvelle en quelque façon, il n'y a qu'à la tourner de la manière qu'Horace & Malherbe ont fait."

81 Ibid., 80: "Personally, Philante replied, I especially like those thoughts that have elevation, and which represent only great things in the mind. That does not at all show bad taste, said Eudoxe. The sublimity, the grandeur in a thought is precisely what carries away, and what ravishes, provided that the thought suits the subject; for it is a general rule that we must think according to the matter we treat. And nothing is less reasonable than to express sublime thoughts in a small subject that requires only mediocre ones. One would almost prefer expressing only mediocre thoughts in a grand subject that would require sublime ones."

82 Delbeke, "Elevated Twins," 133. See Bouhours, *Manière*, 108: "Mais c'est sur le Prince qui nous gouverne, ajoûta Eudoxe, que nos meilleurs Ecrivains ont pensé peut-estre le plus noblement; comme si la hauteur du sujet avoit élevé leur génie, & que Louïs le Grand leur eust inspiré luy-mesme des pensées dignes de luy."

vital role in Bouhours' argument. Inscriptions not only express a close alliance between architecture and literature (which is cemented by the fact that the inscription forms part of the material structure of the building itself), but usually also express the close relationship between the building and the grandeur of its royal patron. "Longinus," Bouhours argues, "not only provided rules for the sublime in speech but also in thoughts [*pensées*]," which Longinus explained by means of numerous grand subjects from both nature and art. A more recent example of such grandeur, Bouhours adds, would be the foundation medals that Louis XIII produced for the Église des Jésuites de Saint Louis in Paris. They featured the lines "Vicit ut David, ædificat ut Salomon" ("Il a vaincu comme David, il bastit comme Salomon"), evoking the grandeur of the king's enterprise.<sup>83</sup>

However, in literature, grandeur can also become too grand, and Bouhours is at pains to stress that the three genres of *pensées* are prone to exorbitance, and that they are far too often exaggerated in literature. One of the causes of this excess, Bouhours explains, lies in the fact that one can push the sublime much further in poetry than in prose, since the first allows a writer to be much bolder (*hardi*) in his expressions.<sup>84</sup> Still, this gives the poet no licence whatsoever to ignore the rules. Small works of poetry, Philante argues, fall outside of the rules that govern the epic poem, but Eudoxe is quick to add that "grave and serious small poems do have to be as exact as grand poems with regard to their *pensées*. Hyperbole and exaggeration that are not within the rules should be banished."<sup>85</sup> One is never allowed to exaggerate, even when the treated subject is elevated and pompous.<sup>86</sup>

The examples he provides in his third dialogue are, yet again, royal subjects, which are appropriate cases, Delbeke writes, "to determine the tipping point of greatness."<sup>87</sup> Bouhours uses the example of Martial's *pensées* on grand palaces to illustrate his concerns. "Martial would not share the sentiment of Longinus," Philante states, for "he usually exaggerates in grand subjects, and I confess that his amplifications have nothing that shock me."<sup>88</sup> Eudoxe replies by reciting one of Martial's poems ("Ce Palais est aussi grand que le ciel, mais plus petit que le

83 Bouhours, *Manière*, 118-19: "Sur une des médailles que l'on jetta dans les fondemens de l'église des Jésuites de Saint Louïs, que Louïs le Juste faisoit bastir, ces paroles estoient gravées: Vicit ut David, ædificat ut Salomon. Que peut-on imaginer de plus grand? Il a vaincu comme David, il bastit comme Salomon."

84 *Ibid.*, 267.

85 *Ibid.*, 267: "Je ne croy pas, dît Philante, que les petits ouvrages de poésie soyent assujétis aux regles rigoureuses des poèmes Epiques. Dés que ces petits ouvrages, repartit Eudoxe, sont graves & sérieux, ils doivent estre aussi exacts que les grands poèmes pour ce qui regarde les pensées. L'hyperbole & l'exagération qui ne sont pas dans les régles, en doivent estre bannies."

86 *Ibid.*, 254.

87 Delbeke, "Elevated Twins," 133.

88 Bouhours, *Manière*, 254: "Martial n'est pas du sentiment de Longin, dît Philante. Il s'enfle d'ordinaire dans les grands sujets, & pour moy je vous avoûë que son enflure n'a rien qui me choque."

Maistre qui l'habite"), which leads Philante to exclaim: "Could there be an even higher idea of a superb Palace, and of an august Monarch?"<sup>89</sup> Unconvinced by his friend, Eudoxe replies that it would be better to produce a proper and decent idea, instead of exaggerating one.<sup>90</sup> By placing Domitian next to or even above Jupiter, Eudoxe continues, Martial demonstrated that his temperament and tendency to flatter knew no boundaries whatsoever.<sup>91</sup> This leads the two friends to discuss the role of the sublime, hyperbole and exaggeration in French poetry ("on peut pousser le sublime plus loin en vers qu'en prose [...] mais cette hardiesse poétique doit avoir ses bornes"), and here, Bouhours employs Martial's verses on Domitian's palace in order to address the subject of the enlargement of the Louvre. "As far as I am concerned," Eudoxe admits, "I hardly consider the epigram of one of our poets on the Louvre's new buildings better than that of Martial on the palace of Domitian":

Quand je vois ce Palais que tout le monde admire :  
 Loin de l'admirer, je soupire  
 De le voir ainsi limité.  
 Quoy, prescrire à mon Prince un lieu qui le resserre !  
 Une si grande Majesté  
 A trop peu de toute la terre.<sup>92</sup>

Philante attempts to relieve Eudoxe's contempt by quoting several of the proposed inscriptions for the Louvre's colonnade ("Jupiter ne s'est jamais veû à Rome un tel Palais ; & Rome n'a jamais adoré un tel Jupiter" and "Que nos Neveux étonnez de la magnificence de cet Edifice, cessent d'admirer: c'estoit le Palais du Soleil.").<sup>93</sup> Eudoxe admits there are some less opulent and less dazzling ones that nevertheless possess much nobility, which leads him to mention a few other proposals that appear more classical and are more beautiful ("Ouvrez

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89 Ibid., 255.

90 Ibid., 255.

91 Ibid., 256: "Pour flatter Auguste, il [Horace] se contente de dire, en parlant à Jupiter: Les destins vous ont chargé du soin de César, & il fait seulement ce souhait : Que César tienne la première place après vous dans le gouvernement de l'univers. Ces pensées ménagent la Divinité de Jupiter en relevant la grandeur d'Auguste, & ce sont-là les tempéramens qu'un esprit juste sçait prendre dans le genre sublime. Martial ne connoît guéres ces tempéramens ; & quand il se jette dans la flatterie, il met Domitien audessus, ou du moins à costé de Jupiter; fort éloigné en cela d'Horace, qui ne donne à Jupiter ni de supérieur, ni d'égal."

92 Ibid., 267-68. "There's an Epigram on the Louvre, which out-does that of Martial on the Palace of Domitian, in Exaggeration. [...] When this Palace I behold/ Which all the World admire;/ Far from admiring it, I sigh,/ To see it so confin'd./ What to my Prince a Place so close prescribe,/ In the whole Earth there is no Room/ For so much Majesty?" This translation is derived from a re-edition of Oldmixon's translated text: John Oldmixon, *The Arts of Logick and Rhetorick... Interpreted and Explain'd By...Bouhours* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1976 [1728]), 251.

93 Bouhours, *Manière*, 268.

vos portes aux peuples, Louvre superbe; il n'est point de maison plus digne de l'Empire du monde" and "Cent villes prises font voir ce que LOUIS peut dans la guerre; une seule maison montre ce qu'il peut dans la paix."<sup>94</sup>

In order to demonstrate true hyperbole in contemporary inscriptions, Bouhours diverts the attention away from the Louvre towards the example of Bernini's bust of Louis XIV. Bouhours employs the term "sublime vicieux" to characterise the proposed Italian verses meant for the sculpture's pedestal. This criticism, Delbeke rightfully argues, "is aimed at the poems explaining the pedestal, but in the process brings down the contraption itself as well," and thereby "bares the weakness of the underlying invention and by extension Bernini's artistic capacities."<sup>95</sup> In other words, in its aim to evoke the grandeur of its subject or patron, a façade or a pedestal is dependent on the accomplished interplay of its constituent elements – therefore, when pushed towards extravagance and hyperbole, the inscription can easily backfire and will thus tarnish the rest of the artwork or building, as well as the subject, in the process. In this regard, Bouhours' example should also remind the reader that the art of inscriptions constitutes not only the closest but also the most public interrelationship of art and literature under Louis XIV, which is why it requires a high degree of control and nobility. The case of Bernini also leads Bouhours to address other examples of exaggerated Italian laudatory poems on the French monarch. Bouhours is thus able to point at the dangers of poetry, but without criticising French poetry too much, let alone placing the noble merit and spirit of French poets under that of their Italian colleagues. In fact, his comparison between French and Italian poetry enables him to divert the attention away from the errors and impurities of French poetic praise of Louis XIV, towards the pompous hyperbole of the Italians. One Italian poet of a panegyric of the king is even pardoned by both Eudoxe and Philante for the extravagancy of his verses; not only, Bouhours states, because it is understandable that an "incomparable monarch" evokes in the poet such an elevated idea, but also because the *spirit* of the Italians has a different moral and intellectual character.<sup>96</sup> The French, on the contrary, "appreciate true grandeur." Here, Bouhours' central argument clearly shines through – one that is in line with Charpentier's defence of the French language, architecture and people on the grounds of a shared noble virtue; the monarch's sublime grandeur elevates his people, which is the reason why French poets best evoke this royal grandeur, much better than their foreign colleagues.<sup>97</sup>

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94 Ibid., 268.

95 Delbeke, "Elevated Twins," 134.

96 Bouhours, *Manière*, 272.

97 The declaration in his *Entretiens* (1671) of the superiority of the French language and culture with regard to other European civilisations already stirred up a heated debate. Moreover, Bouhours' *Manière* played a key role in instigating a French-Italian controversy between the French author and the Bolognese marquis Gian Giuseppe

Boileau's translated edition of Longinus introduced the notion of *le sublime* as a critical concept, and it is primarily in the sphere of polemic debate or quarrels that it became used as such. Contemporary readers recognised that *Peri hypsous* was first and foremost a treatise on poetic aesthetics, emphasising the extraordinary grandeur of thought and its overwhelming effect. In Longinus, this grandeur is often represented by images of grand actions and grand spaces (the idea of height), or a combination of both. These examples stimulated early modern writers to contemplate the elevated nature of subjects in art and architecture, and to extend this thought to the level of elevated (and elevating) virtue, be it the king or his nation. The creation of public architecture under Louis XIV united all of these aspects, and therefore constituted one of the most potent political instruments of power. The *Querelle des Inscriptions* departed from this very idea – the grandeur of space to evoke the grandeur of virtue – a thought which all of its participants could agree on. Perhaps surprisingly, the *Querelle's* central question on the most appropriate language to serve this visual and literary rhetoric of power, gave rise to appropriations of Longinus on both sides of the quarrel. In the modern camp, the poet Desmarets used Longinus as the unfortunate victim of an incompetent translator (and his “sublime” as the irrefutable feature of Louis XIV himself), while his fellow modern colleague Charpentier saw in Longinus an illustrious companion in his defence of languages other than Greek or Latin.

However, similarly to Chéron, writers such as Bouhours also pointed at the dangers of exaggerated thoughts and forms, which exceed the grandeur of the subject and thus achieve the exact opposite effect. The unfortunate consequences of these types of excess in visual and literary rhetoric became particularly acute in the architectural manifestations of Louis XIV around the turn of the century, which will be the topic of the following, and last chapter.

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Orsi. In this public debate, commonly labelled as the “Orsi-Bouhours polemic,” the *Manière*, in particular, “caught the Italians’ and Arcadians’ interest and enmity,” and turned Bouhours into an “emblem of French chauvinism.” See respectively: Vernon Hyde Minor, *The Death of the Baroque and the Rhetoric of Good Taste* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 32, and Paola Gambarota, *Irresistible Signs: The Genius of Language and Italian National Identity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 59.