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# Abstracts

**David L. Sedley**, Sublimity and Skepticism in Montaigne 1079

This essay argues that two early modern phenomena, the rise of the sublime as an aesthetic category and the emergence of skepticism as a philosophical problem, are interrelated. This argument, introduced through a study of Montaigne's meditation on the ruins of Rome in his *Travel Journal*, takes on complementary forms. The first is that sublimity motivated skepticism: the sense that a force existed outside the aesthetic categories conventional in the Renaissance (such as wonder) drove authors into a skeptical frame of mind. The second is that skepticism created sublimity: the skeptical mindset offered alternative resources of aesthetic power as authors quarried the fragmentation and distraction embedded in skepticism to fashion a sublime style. These claims revise standard views of skepticism and the sublime, suggesting a mandate for an enriched aesthetics behind late-Renaissance loss of belief and exposing the Renaissance impulse behind the modern career of sublimity. (DLS)

**W. B. Worthen**, Drama, Performativity, and Performance 1093

There is a crisis in drama studies that is reflected in the ways different disciplines understand dramatic texts and performance. Literary studies, absorbed with the functioning of language, often betrays a desire to locate the meanings of the stage in the dramatic text. Performance studies has developed a vivid account of nondramatic performance, which appears to depart from textual authority. Both disciplines, however, view drama as a species of performance driven by its text; as a result, drama appears as an unduly authorized mode of performance. Here, I read a range of critics (Andrew Parker, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Judith Butler on J. L. Austin; Dwight Conquergood on ethnography; Joseph Roach on surrogation) to suggest ways of rethinking the relations of authority that inform texts and performances. I conclude with a glance at the representation of the text in Baz Luhrmann's recent film *William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet*. (WBW)

**John Ernest**, The Reconstruction of Whiteness: William Wells Brown's *The Escape; or, A Leap for Freedom* 1108

Focusing on William Wells Brown's one published play, *The Escape; or, A Leap for Freedom* (1858), I address Brown's decision to supplement his antislavery lectures with dramatic readings of original plays. In this effort to challenge the terms of a representative identity as a black antislavery lecturer, Brown presented a conception of social life grounded in what I term multiply contingent identity. By this formulation, one's social identity is always contingent and is always in danger of being undermined as one's performance of selfhood awaits verifying responses in the form of reciprocal performances in the field of social relations. In *The Escape*, Brown turned his own performance of identity on the antislavery lecture circuit into a commentary on performance itself, especially on performances both shaped and veiled by the ideology of race. In this way, Brown attempted to reposition white northern antislavery sentiment, reconstructing whiteness by emphasizing its contingent relation to a reconfigured vision of African American identity. (JE)