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Takeshi Kubota, *Montaigne lecteur de la Cité de Dieu d'Augustin*. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2019. 392 pp. Appendices, figures, and bibliography. €58.00. (pb). ISBN 978-2745350220.

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“Tolle lege, tolle lege”—take up and read. This famous imperative from Augustine’s *Confessions*—the words that brought him to a single verse from Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, and that, upon reading, left him converted—might just as well be taken as a motto characterizing Montaigne’s own project, one of endlessly reading and rereading in which the reading of the Ancients is blurred, through processes of revision, with the reading of his *Essais*. Montaigne certainly knew his Augustine, as Takeshi Kubota’s analysis and concordance of borrowings amply demonstrates, though it has long been noted that Montaigne seems not to have read the *Confessions*, that book that resonates so deeply with the *Essais*. On this matter, Kubota’s study confirms those that have come before. Kubota’s attention rests rather with the *City of God*, expanding on and updating earlier studies, most notably Andrée Comparot’s *Augustinisme et Aristotélisme de Sebond à Montaigne* (Paris: Cerf, 1984).

*Montaigne, lecteur de la Cité de Dieu d'Augustin* is a welcome addition to a rich field within Montaigne studies attending to the essayist’s reading. Kubota focuses principally on points of philosophical and theological connection, establishing lines of correlation, influence, and textual borrowing, though not without some valuable prefatory reflection on the material conditions of this intertextual encounter and the practices of humanist scholarship that made it possible. This is a study of Montaigne’s reading that is notable in its attention to a Christian figure and one that productively reframes a number of well-established themes within Montaigne scholarship—suicide, for instance, and human ignorance—by foregrounding the Church Father where we might more readily expect to see Seneca, Plutarch, or Cicero. Recognizing Montaigne’s engagement with such a figure, while going beyond his relationship with Sebond, the fifteenth-century natural theologian whom he translated and who stands at the center (ostensibly, at least) of his “Apologie,” makes this a valuable study for scholars within Montaigne studies and beyond.

Kubota’s analysis, establishing the cultural and bibliographic context within which Montaigne read the *City of God* before considering first broadly secular and then theological points of connection between the two authors, is complemented by a concordance detailing Montaigne’s borrowings from the text, each identified as belonging to one of four categories: quotation in Latin, translation into French, adaptation, and resemblance. In introducing this appendix, Kubota, citing Barthes, notes that such an approach is often seen these days as “une aberration du scientisme,” “démodée et naïve” (p. 255). For Kubota, though, such source work offers a mode

of understanding the early modern text as a site of transformation, a view that, we might note, echoes a recent edited volume on *Montaigne in Transit*.<sup>[1]</sup> The concordance itself is split into four sections, separating each major edition (1580, 1588, and 1595) and the manuscript additions on the “exemplaire de Bordeaux,” and is crossreferenced with page numbers for both the Villey-Saulnier edition and the Pléiade edition of the *Essais*.<sup>[2]</sup> The separation of the chronological strata seems to suggest a broader, underlying argument about Montaigne’s shifting relationship with Augustine and the *City of God*, though this is not an argument that emerges in the body of Kubota’s study. This is nevertheless an exhaustive concordance and one that marks a return to the sort of valuable source work within Montaigne studies as first developed in Pierre Villey’s *Les Sources et l’évolution des Essais de Montaigne* (Paris: Hachette, 1908) and that shares a structural principle consonant with that of Isabelle Konstantinovic’s study of *Montaigne et Plutarque* (Geneva: Droz, 1989). Kubota’s appendix lays the groundwork for future scholarship that might look closely at the stylistics of imitation and borrowing in this particular reading relationship.

Kubota’s analysis begins with a useful introduction to the place of Augustine in Renaissance humanism considering the publication history of the *City of God* and of the *Opera omnia* in Latin (part one, chapter one) and vernacular editions (part one, chapter two). Montaigne’s Augustine, Kubota shows, is shaped by Erasmus and Juan-Luis Vivès, giants of humanist scholarship who collaborated on a critical edition of the *City of God* with commentary by Vivès. Drawing on textual variation, Kubota narrows down the list of possible editions through which Montaigne came to know the *City of God* to one of the Erasmian editions published between 1550 and 1570 (the 1556 Froben edition, printed in Basle, is used in Kubota’s appendix); and Montaigne’s relationship with commentary, and with Vivès’s commentary in particular, is considered in detail (part two). Kubota’s study of French editions of the *City of God* does not look to suggest that Montaigne himself read Augustine in translation but instead considers how humanist interest in this work intersects with religious and political conflict in the sixteenth century. Montaigne’s own place amid the French Wars of Religion is not considered in the subsequent chapters of the book, though this is a significant context and its introduction in framing the relationship between Augustine and the essayist is welcome.

It is in Kubota’s study of commentary practices in the early modern period and in the *Essais* specifically (part two) that questions of style, imitation, and rhetoric emerge most clearly. Kubota reconsiders key themes within Montaigne studies, such as Montaigne’s dislike of mindless erudition and his distinction between quotation as an invocation of authority and quotation as a form of self-expression. His suggestion is that it is precisely in a particular form of commentary—the commentary as practiced by Vivès—that two aspects of the *Essais* are seen to coincide: a mode of commenting personally on the books and ideas of the Ancients and a means of recording his own opinions (p. 93). These arguments, which resonate strongly with those of André Tournon,<sup>[3]</sup> are complemented by a number of case studies showing exactly how Montaigne reappropriates his quotations and gives them a second life, using lines lifted from Augustine to speak about himself (p. 97). In being used in this way, Augustine is by no means unique among Montaigne’s ancient interlocutors, though Kubota identifies a number of rich examples that are complicated by their double mediation, having passed first through Vivès commentary. In Kubota’s reading, and perhaps also in Montaigne’s, Vivès and Augustine seem regularly to interlock and overlap, and it is this confluence of different layers of reading that is central to the *Essais*. As Kubota puts it, “Cette absence de frontière textuelle entre le texte, le métatexte et l’hypertexte montre que chez Montaigne, il n’y a plus de frontière entre le statut de l’auteur et celui du lecteur” (p. 100). And for Kubota, this “liberté de circulation” (p. 100) emerges from

Montaigne's reading of the Spanish humanist's commentary. Such a reading, which builds on that of Tournon, invites further consideration of how Montaigne's relationship with this particular instance of early modern glossing might be situated within a broader culture characterized by commonplacing, imitation, and the circulation of literary "communia" (common property).

Parts three and four, the remainder of Kubota's study, consider the substance of Augustine's text and its "presence" in Montaigne's own thought and writing. Kubota's framing of this encounter as one of presences, rather than influences, elegantly balances his focus on textual borrowing with the reality of Montaigne's somewhat distant relationship with the Church Father: it allows Kubota to uncover different perspectives from which to consider familiar themes without insisting that Montaigne's thinking is actually--and counter to what we have long understood--distinctively or definitively Augustinian. Part three considers Montaigne and the theory of the passions, and here major Montaignian interlocutors--Seneca and the Stoics, Cicero, as well as Petrarch and Erasmus, "lecteurs d'Augustin"--are seen to be mediated by the *City of God* and the glosses supplied by Vivès. Principally, Kubota suggests that Montaigne's rejection of Stoic *apatheia* is the product of his reading of Augustine, though a significant feature that emerges is Augustine's role as a textual intermediary between Montaigne and the Ancients, providing Montaigne with quotations from Cicero, for instance, which make their way into the *Essais* without declaring their Augustinian provenance (p. 118). In reading Montaigne through Augustine, Kubota encounters at almost every juncture a community of Ancients rather than a tête-à-tête, and the significance of Augustine's "presence" varies depending on the subject, though highlighting this often overlooked figure is certainly worthwhile. We see this in the chapter on suicide (part three, chapter two) where Montaigne's sustained engagement with Seneca is complicated by the introduction of Augustine, with Kubota noting "la divergence d'opinion entre Saint Augustin et Montaigne" on this controversial topic (p. 142). Here, Montaigne uses passages from the Church Father arguing against suicide and, thinking "anthropologically" rather than theologically, repurposes them in service of a more Senecan approach.

Augustine's presence, perhaps unsurprisingly, is more pronounced in the apologetic and theological aspects of Montaigne's thinking (part four). Once again, we see that Augustine's text serves to illustrate Montaigne's thinking rather than to shape it. This is particularly clear in Kubota's exploration of Montaigne's "dévalorisation de la science humaine," in which Montaigne's borrowings from the *City of God* "l'aident à consolider sa défense de la foi chrétienne et sa dénonciation des rationalistes" (p. 203). Using textual variation between the Vulgate and the *City of God*, Kubota shows how biblical quotations in the "Apologie" are taken indirectly from Augustine and Vivès. These aspects of Kubota's study may well be taken further by asking how far Montaigne's reading of Scripture is shaped by Augustine, and Kubota's concordance certainly provides the tools for such a line of inquiry.

The study culminates in a reading of Montaigne's conception of God as immobile and immutable, in direct contrast to human instability (part four, chapter three). Here, it is Montaigne's engagement with Platonic thought that comes to the fore, and Kubota suggests that Montaigne's conclusion to the "Apologie," lifted wholesale from Plutarch's own conclusion to his opusculum "On the Ei at Delphi," constitutes "un écho du commentaire de Vivès" (p. 244). We might ask why Montaigne's engagement with this passage, and with the key ideas it encapsulates, benefits from or warrants the intercession of Augustine, given that Plutarch is Montaigne's stated author

of choice and one of the authors, along with Seneca, whom he has plundered so that he might build up his own book, made entirely from their spoils (II.32, “Defence de Seneque et de Plutarque”). Indeed, such a question points to a broader one: how much of Montaigne’s engagement with Augustine could be read as an engagement with ideas that are in the air, circulating and proliferating across and between multiple early modern sources and commentaries?

In concluding, Kubota points to just such a question, suggesting that Montaigne’s reading of the *City of God* exemplifies Augustine’s reception in the Renaissance: one structured by Vivès’s commentary and integrated with pagan, classical learning where “les idées d’Augustin cohabitent bien avec toute la pensée antique” (p. 251). This is a study that aligns Montaigne not just with Augustine but with humanist practices of commentary, and that shows how classical interlocutors and key themes pertaining to human nature are shaped by Montaigne’s Christian, theo-philosophical reading: “traiter exclusivement de la pensée philosophique de Montaigne en l’opposant à sa conception théologique [...] n’aurait aucun sens dans l’étude idéologique des *Essais*,” writes Kubota (p. 249). In siting Montaigne within this syncretic, humanist context, Kubota’s study offers new readings of key themes in the *Essais* while uncovering perspectives and interlocutors that have hitherto been overlooked. Kubota’s attention to Augustine at times occludes more significant presences—Plutarch is notably absent not only in the analysis of the conclusion to the “Apologie” but also in the comments on animal and human intelligence in the same chapter, where Montaigne’s principal interlocutor is Plutarch’s opusculum “Whether Land or Sea Animals are Cleverer,” a key text also for Vivès in his *De anima et vita* (1538). More generally, there is a tendency to present medieval intellectual culture, and particularly the commentary genre before the age of Vivès, as one in which scholars tend to “suivre aveuglément l’enseignement des *auctoritates*” (p. 65), subscribing to a model of the “Renaissance” as a clear and distinct break with a medieval past. This is nevertheless a useful addition to Montaigne studies and to the study of the early modern period’s intellectual inheritance. The concordance of borrowings, and particularly the attention to the role of Vivès, will play a valuable role in further research on this intertextual relationship while contributing more broadly to scholarship within early modern studies concerned with practices of reading and modes of textual circulation.

## NOTES

[1] Neil Kenny, Richard Scholar, and Wes Williams, eds., *Montaigne in Transit* (London: Legenda, 2016).

[2] Michel de Montaigne, *Les Essais*, ed. Pierre Villey and V.-L. Saulnier (Paris: P.U.F., 1992); Michel de Montaigne, *Les Essais*, ed. Jean Balsamo, Catherine Magnien-Simonin, and Michel Magnien, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade 14 (Paris: Gallimard, 2007).

[3] André Tournon, *Montaigne: La glose et l’essai* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1983).

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