



On the Shoulders of Giants: A Shandean Postscript

Robert K. Merton

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With playfulness and a large dose of wit, Robert Merton traces the origin of Newton's aphorism, "If I have seen farther, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." Using as a model the discursive and digressive style of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Merton presents a whimsical yet scholarly work which deals with the questions of creativity, tradition, plagiarism, the transmission of knowledge, and the concept of progress.

"This book is the delightful apotheosis of donmanship: Merton parodies scholarliness while being faultlessly scholarly; he scourges pedantry while brandishing his own abstruse learning on every page. The most recondite and obscure scholarly squabbles are transmuted into the material of comedy as the ostensible subject is shouldered to one side by yet another hobby horse from Merton's densely populated stable. He has created a *jeu d'esprit* which is profoundly suggestive both in detail and as a whole."—Sean French, *Times Literary Supplement*

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