1998


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Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/rmmra/vol19/iss1/14

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of sixteenth-century literature tend to produce a student body that thinks *The Faerie Queene* is only about Redcrosse, Una, and Duessa, at least such students have a sense of how an entire book of Spenser's epic works. They know how maddening and exciting all the digressions can be and do get at least some sense of how the narrative progresses. I would like them to get the same sense of the *Urania*. And if it is indeed true, as I also believe, that Wroth radically "revises" the conventions of the Petrarchan sonnet sequence (5), why not provide the whole *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* to allow instructors and students the opportunity to compare the sequence to those of Shakespeare, Spenser, or Sidney?

I think it is really difficult to produce an anthology. People—from reviewers to colleagues to students—will always find fault with it. While I may disagree with the editors of this text for several reasons, I do agree with them that anthologies of early modern women authors are necessary. I hope to see many more such anthologies in the years to come.

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In recent years, scholars have paid increasing attention to the question of French national identity. John D. Lyons's *The Tragedy of Origins: Pierre Corneille and Historical Perspective* provides a very important and illuminating historical dimension to this issue. While some scholars view national identity narrowly as a uniquely modern concern brought about by the French Revolution, other scholars see national identity in a larger context that dates back several centuries. Lyons shows that many seventeenth-century historians sought to define France's identity by establishing a national history. In their efforts to trace that history, these historians were primarily concerned with fixing the origin of the French nation since that would shape France's historical narrative and hence its self-image as a nation.

Lyons convincingly demonstrates how Corneille's plays were deeply informed by the seventeenth-century historical debates about the origins of the French nation. Lyons offers close textual readings of five Corneille plays, showing that if analyzed in sequence they form an account of the origin of
France. Lyons first examines three of Corneille’s major canonical texts—Horace, Cinna, and Polyeucte, which dramatize respectively the formation of the Roman royal identity, Rome’s transition from a republic to an empire, and the transformation of the Roman Empire into Romania. One of the original insights of this book is to situate the two least read of Corneille’s thirty-two plays—Sertorius and Attila, within this sequence, for they both dramatize, Lyons argues, the historical link between the Roman Empire and France, portraying France as born out of the merger of the Frankish and Roman Imperial legacies. Analyzing these last two plays as part of a larger sequence in order to understand the origin of France, Lyons makes a striking case for studying these plays in context.

In these plays, as in all his tragedies, Corneille takes his plots from history. However, this observation in and of itself is not necessarily meaningful since French dramatic convention dictated that the only subject matter worthy of tragedy came from history. But Lyons pushes beyond the dramatic convention to search for the deeper connections between history and tragedy. Lyons finds those connections in the concept of origins.

The book begins with a very probing analysis of the paradox raised by the problem of origins. Although an origin is the source of something new, it can be perceived as originating something new only when it has already passed, as historians of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries acknowledged. For example, Corneille situates his play Polyeucte at the origin of Christianity. Central to this story is the moment when Polyeucte acts in the name of a new Christian God and defies the pagan order by publicly destroying the pagan idols in the temple. We, the audience, with our retrospective vision, can clearly see that this moment represents the origin of a whole new order. However, the play’s characters, who are deprived of that retrospective vision, do not have that same clarity. Most of the characters do not know how to interpret Polyeucte’s actions. For them, his behavior constitutes a vile and violent transgression of the accepted order. However, Polyeucte himself sees his behavior as marking the origin of a new order. What is it then that determines whether Polyeucte’s break from paganism represents the origin of a new order? The status of an event as “originary” cannot inhere in the event itself and thus cannot be decided in the present. Rather its status results from the subsequent acts of history that reflect back on that past event to determine whether it gave rise to important consequences persisting over time. Thus a retrospective vision endows the initial event with a meaning it did not and could not have had when it first occurred.
Because the retrospective nature of origins creates a distance between the moment of an event and its subsequent fate, it becomes extraordinarily difficult to determine whether an origin has initiated a new order. Because later groups of individuals "map" or define the past according to their own needs and value systems, the interpretation of that past with its corresponding points of origin can become the battleground of warring factions. In the five plays Lyons analyzes, he shows how each Corneillian tragedy represents the origin of a new cultural institution that provokes different kinds of battles between opposing factions. As tragedies of origin, each play dramatizes the contrast between one group of characters who perceive that a new origin has occurred and now adhere to the new order, such as Christianity, which is replacing the old. In the opposing camp are those who are blinded to the importance of a given event because they remain fixed on their traditional views of the past. Their views are constructed around an older origin that legitimates their values and actions.

The characters' blindness is always of a particular sort—they are blind to historic transformation. Each play dramatizes a confrontation between two different origins to important historic eras. Not surprisingly, the retrospective nature of origins helps us better understand Corneille's view of history, for both are retrospective structurings of human experience. However, Lyons argues, this understanding of origins and history also holds the key to understanding the nature of Corneillian tragedy. The tragic hero first acts based on a lack of information or wisdom, but in time comes to see retrospectively a new historical narrative that would change the meaning and wisdom of his act. For Corneille, tragedy is linked to history in that the tragic comes from a blindness to the new turn of historic events, a blindness to what counts as an origin.

If I had to recommend one book to understand Corneille, this would be it. The complex politics of Corneille's historical plots clearly ask to be read within a political and historical context. Yet, surprisingly few studies have done this comprehensively or successfully. Until recently, the most common approach to Corneille has been to study the psychology of the characters in relation to the dilemmas posed by the heroic ethic or to study the more formal aspects of his classical style and structure. However, as Lyons shows, the psychologically nuanced relationship between, for example, Chimène and Rodrigue in Le Cid exemplifies the problems of adapting to rapid historical change. Chimène and Rodrigue fall into opposing categories regarding their view of the new, emerging political order. Both Chimène and her father,
Le Comte, clinging to the older feudal order whereas Rodrique and his father Don Diègue are partisans of the new monarchical political and historical stance. Rodrique is quick to perceive that an important historical change has occurred whereas Chimène refuses that change and sees in it only a transgression from the old order. Lyons shows how the psychological dynamics among the characters are a function of their varying responses to the evolution of history.

While this book provides a remarkably insightful analysis of Corneille's plays, it offers much more than that. It uses details of Corneille's theater to raise some of the larger questions of seventeenth-century classical culture. It is ultimately a book about why the French were so obsessed with the history of Rome, how they used that history to understand their own history, and how these concerns were an integral part of their developing sense of nation. I feel that Lyons's analysis provides the right framework to understand many parts of Corneille's plays and of classical culture in general that have not previously made sense to me. In other words, I found myself frequently pausing to say, "Aha," and then suddenly some other parts of the puzzle fell into place. Lyons's book was a pleasure to read, not simply because of the "aha" factor but also because he has an uncommonly wonderful writing style that makes abstract concepts palpable and real. He has a gift for taking complex theoretical questions and unraveling them, thread by thread, to examine them in ways that make me remember why I chose to study French literature.

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Jonathan Goldberg’s *Desiring Women Writing*, as its title indicates, is motivated by a "double desire"—the "desire that there should be women writers in the Renaissance and that the desires articulated in their texts be acknowledged" (14). The object of Goldberg's finely tuned polemic belongs to a critical tradition that celebrates female writers as Women Worthies, whose power derives from their conformity to an ongoing Legend of Good Women. Submission