

Passing Judgment: The Politics and Poetics of Sovereignty in French Tragedy from Hardy to Racine. H  l  ne Bilis.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016. xx + 258 pp. \$65.

This book fills a lacuna in the scholarship on seventeenth-century French tragedy, while offering a fresh perspective on the renowned tragedians of the age, such as Corneille and Racine. Bilis seeks to better understand the phenomenon of the royal judge as an ever-changing character type in drama, while investigating the relationship between this fictional character's portrayal and contemporary political theories of absolute power. This brief monograph is packed with insight into French theater of the classical period. These plays have long been part of the literary canon in French, with Corneille and Racine holding strong positions as the preeminent tragedians of the period. In examining their tragedies, as well as those of Hardy and Rotrou, Bilis demonstrates how much valuable discussion remains about these masterpieces, and how these tragedies continue to prove their literary value. As Bilis concludes, staging royalty influenced Corneille, Racine, and Rotrou to restructure their plots over the course of their careers, which ultimately contributed to their artistic success (202).

The book is divided into six chapters that analyze the role of the royal judge from a variety of perspectives. Chapter 1 aims to provide new insight into the "quarrel of *Le Cid*" by viewing this infamous debate through the lens of how public trials and royal judgments are staged. Chapter 2 digresses historically to Alexandre Hardy, a playwright whose tragedy *Sc  dase ou l'hospitalit   viol  e* was published twenty years before *Le Cid*, and the quarrel that ensued. Here Bilis takes a step back to provide a more comprehensive vision of the image of kingship, one that *Le Cid*'s critics were rejecting. Chapter 3 adopts a broader view of the tragic genre to illustrate the overlapping and sharing that often takes place between tragedy and comedy. In chapter 4, the author takes the opposite approach by zooming in on Corneille and this tragedian's struggle with portraying the royal judge and maintaining the king's dignity, both on- and offstage. Chapter 5 analyzes the apparent shift in Corneille's staging of royal judgment, from employing this theatrical device strictly as a denouement to recasting the royal judge in a more complex role as "clement prince." In this chapter, Bilis also argues for a more sophisticated understanding of Jean Rotrou's tragedies as demonstrating a world of tension between law and chaos. The final chapter offers a new perspective on Racine's tragedies, *Ph  dre* and *Mithridate*, by demonstrating how the tragedian enhances the royal judgment scene from simple denouement to a critical element of the plot.

Throughout the book, Bilis investigates how the rise of monarchial power in seventeenth-century France caused a response in theater—more specifically, how portraying the character of the royal judge posed a challenge to playwrights, because it was essential to maintain this character type's dignity. The issue was more than just a theoretical concern, since two kings (Henry III and IV) had been assassinated in the recent past. Bilis first situates this problem in the history of tragedy to show not only the development of

the type but also the continuous adjustments by tragedians. Beginning with the turbulent context of early seventeenth-century French politics, the author points out the stark contrast between the reenactment of violent punishment in humanist tragedy (late sixteenth century) and the transition to less graphic displays of royal judgments (20, 47, 51). This judgment typically centers on a trial scene, at first a static convention, but developing into “the only basis for the survival of a nobleman-hero” (132).

Furthermore, Bilis analyzes the royal judge to cast light on *bienséance* and the rules of tragedy. She reminds us that the royal decision is a performance (11). Bilis contests other studies that assume the royal judge disappears in tragedy, proving the role is fulfilled by anyone to whom the other characters look for a legal decision. This conclusion is supported by a close reading of Rotrou’s *Crisante* (154). Bilis concludes that these tragedians are doomed to failure in their endeavor to stage a completely dignified king. Yet this failure leads to their great artistic success (203). Finally, this character type neither subverts nor reinforces power; it reproduces the values of the dominant class (202). This book is an excellent addition to scholarship on both humanist and classical French theater.

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Secrets of Pinar’s Game: Court Ladies and Courtly Verse in Fifteenth-Century Spain. Roger Boase.

2 vols. Medieval and Renaissance Authors and Texts 17. Leiden: Brill, 2017. xxxii + 916 pp. \$260.

Secrets of Pinar’s Game deciphers some of the court poetry of fifteenth-century Spain. This ambitious two-volume book blends elements of the scholarly monograph with those of a critical edition. It provides the text and an English translation of Gerónimo Pinar’s *Juego trobado*, a card game composed for Queen Isabel, members of the royal family, and ladies of the court. Boase sets out to solve the puzzles of the identities of the forty-six players of the game. Through a combination of literary and historical research, Boase dates the *Juego trobado* more precisely than previous scholars have. He argues that Pinar composed this entertainment in the summer of 1496 and that the court played it during late July of that year. Although this was a card game about love, relationships, and marriage, Boase claims that his research goes far beyond explaining those aspects of this game. Indeed, his study sheds light on a number of other topics, including jousting tournaments; the characters in and authors of a number of other poetic texts, most importantly the *Carajicomedia*; and the complicated status of conversos in early modern Iberia.