

Florence Dobby-Poirson. *Le pathétique dans le théâtre de Robert Garnier*. Bibliothèque Littéraire de la Renaissance 66. Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2006. 662 pp. index. bibl. €119. ISBN: 2-7453-1419-X.

Robert Garnier (1545?–90) is universally regarded today as the foremost dramatist of the French Renaissance stage. His reputation in his own time was unrivaled, both in terms of his literary powers and his productivity, with seven tragedies and one tragicomedy to his credit. Because he lived in a time of unprecedented civil turmoil, the themes of his plays invariably mirrored current events. While early critics found Garnier's stagecraft to be characterized by stasis — the tragic event has either already taken place, or is imminent, and the tragic interest lies in the reaction of the characters to this inevitable fate, treated from a multitude of viewpoints — more recent scholarship has attempted to show how Garnier cleverly interleaves themes, images, and linguistic effects to create a drama within the drama. Florence Dobby-Poirson's new book on the primacy of pathos in Garnier's theater builds upon previous studies to offer a greater appreciation of the tragedian's art in producing an emotional impact upon his audience.

An initial chapter sets out to define "pathos" and to sort through the complex and ambivalent heritage of the term in the writings of the ancients and Church Fathers. Although sixteenth-century humanists also tended to view direct appeals

to the passions with suspicion, most notably in juridical or political spheres, theater was regarded as the privileged domain for pathetic discourse and paroxysmal effusions became the loadstone of the tragic art. Dobby-Poirson goes to considerable lengths to show that Aristotle's theories were better known in France in the sixteenth century than had been previously thought. She believes Garnier may even have had an approximate understanding of catharsis. As for the main body of her work, unlike previous critics such Moufflard, Gras, and Holyoake, who either analyzed the plays individually or according to thematic groupings, such as the Roman trilogy, the Greek cycle, followed by the Romanesque tragicomedy *Bradamante* (1582) and the biblical tragedy *Les Juifves* (1583), Dobby-Poirson is chiefly concerned to classify and catalogue the incidence of pathos in all its many-faceted manifestations throughout the Garnier corpus. Among the innumerable topics covered are the choice of tragic subject, the use of space and time, the types of scenes, the types of characters, the manipulation of dialogue, lexical markers, etc. At more than 600 pages, *Le pathétique dans le théâtre de Robert Garnier* is a weighty volume. While the overviews to each section are clear and informative, while the documentation is painstakingly compiled and carefully edited, and while the observations are often astute if not brilliant, the nonspecialist who is not readily familiar with the Garnier corpus will labor through the material, since illustrations are drawn from all the plays simultaneously. In some respects, this is a work whose parts may be greater than the whole. As a veritable compendium to Garnier's theater, since Dobby-Poirson's study is chock-full of detail and lavish cross-references, it is destined to be an invaluable tool for any scholar henceforth working on the French tragedian.

Somewhat lost in the onslaught of information is Dobby-Poirson's concluding thesis, which is that Garnier's emphasis on pathos — even through the interplay of contrastive scenes, the juxtaposition of characters, and the savant use of dialogue — does seem to transform an oratory and poetic theater into one which displays a semblance of dramatic tension and a hint of psychological coherence. Another salutary byproduct of Dobby-Poirson's approach is simply its freshness, or the extent to which the study of pathos is oriented outward, taking into account how an audience shapes the composition of a text or responds to its message. While we know that Garnier's works were indeed written for the stage in mind, so often they are critiqued as if they were mere armchair plays.

In spite of the obvious toil and moil that went into Dobby-Poirson's study, her bibliography is surprisingly skeletal. Much previous scholarship on Garnier is ignored, which, in turn, might have enriched or modified some of her findings. In particular, Dobby-Poirson appears unaware that two key figures in *Les Juifves*, the Royné d'Assyrie and the Prevost, were not created by Garnier *ex nihilo*, for recent articles have attempted to show that they had clearly identifiable biblical models. These quibbles aside, *Le pathétique dans le théâtre de Robert Garnier* would be a worthy addition to institutions with graduate programs in French or Comparative Literature.

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