

**Sylvie Romanowski and Monique Bilezikian (eds.).**

*Homage to Paul Bénichou.* Birmingham, AL: Summa Publications, 1994. Cloth. Pp. 340.

Rarely does one find a *festschrift* which can harmoniously meld divergent topics and a multiplicity of critical approaches as does this one. This fact alone attests to the influence of Paul Bénichou on his students and colleagues. Stimulating, not stifling, Bénichou's presence unfolds as a canvas uniting ideology, sociology, history and, above all, literature and criticism, one on which the authors in this volume expand each according to his or her own inspiration.

The first part of the book, "Plays and Context," comprises nine articles on theater and seventeenth-century society and ideology:

My Brother, My Self: Heroic Ideology and Heroic Difference in Corneille and Racine	Richard E. Goodkin
The Decorum of Horror: A Reading of La Mesnardière's <i>Poétique</i>	John D. Lyons
Sacred and Heroic Blood and the Religion of Monarchy on the Cornelian Stage	Harriet Allentuch
Sociological Aspects of "La Querelle du <i>Cid</i> "	Milorad Margitic
Strategies of Seduction in <i>Cinna</i>	Susan Read Baker
La <i>Bérénice</i> de Pierre de Corneille: <i>Pulchérie</i>	Éléonore M. Zimmermann
Banditry, Madness, and Sovereign Authority: <i>Alexandre le Grand</i>	Timothy J. Reiss
Sacrifice and Truth in Racine's Iphigénie	Sylvie Romanowski
Render unto Caesar: Historical and Sacred Representation in <i>Esther</i>	Barbara R. Woshinski

As would be expected in an homage to Paul Bénichou, heroism, decorum, the *code des généreux*, and royal power are among the themes which tie the first half of the book together—as do underlying, “hidden” themes, which motivate and belie them, such as sexuality, jealousy, and rivalry.

In the first article, Richard Goodkin uncovers unsuspected corollaries and “différences” between traditional *frères rivaux*, Racine and Corneille, tracing them in their development through to Louis XIV and the society of the time. Lyons’s article on the esthetics of horror evokes the salient contradictions of La Mesnardière’s attempts to deal with this necessarily repulsive and spectacular element of tragedy, as well as the inherent incongruities within the society and theater of the time.

Harriet Allentuch considers the three stages of Corneille’s career, and concludes that his last plays demonstrate a total demystification of sacred blood, in which the “merveilleux royal” no longer works as a driving force in Corneille’s kingly personages. Although richly argued, more on popular beliefs and magic would have provided a forceful backup to her work. “La Querelle du Cid” provides Margitic, in the next article, with ample evidence of aristocratic and bourgeois antipathy. The author reveals the sociological undercurrents of the various interested parties as they are translated into esthetic positions. The humor he finds in some notably serious people helps him succeed in relating this famous micro-sociological/esthetic contest. We remain inside Cornelian dramaturgy in Susan Read Baker’s excellent reading of *Cinna*. She combines broad critical knowledge with a close reading of the play, ably taking the reader from the level of the text itself to the external motivating forces. Seduction within the play’s structures thus becomes a *mise en abyme* of representational efficacy in the socio-political realm. On a final Cornelian note, *Pulchérie* is eruditely paralleled with *Bérénice* (and not the flop *Tite et Bérénice*) in Eléonore Zimmermann’s article. Racine comes under the microscope in articles by Timothy Reiss, Sylvie Romanowski and Barbara Woshinsky. In a detailed article, Reiss investigates numerous historical and intertextual themes in *Alexandre le Grand*,

searching Racine's sources and comparing them to Senault, Hobbes and others in order to further remind us of subtlety and complexity of the text's relation to itself and the universe of Louis XIV. The ritual of sacrifice, history and truth in *Iphigénie* are examined for their representational power and content by Sylvie Romanowski. The use of ritualistic discourse —and discourse as ritual —calls into question knowledge itself simply by its enactment and its effect on imagination. In the last article of this first part of "Plays in context," Barbara Woshinsky develops the "utopian" geography of St.-Cyr during the representation of *Esther*. Women's, monarch's and Christianity's space are examined as converging spatially, in an unexpected manner, at Madame de Maintenon's convent while temporally crossing millenia.

The second half of this collection, "Values in process," contains the following pieces:

Réécriture et transvalorisation dans les nouvelles de Sorel	Gabrielle Verdier
Certaine thématization de la liberte dans les <i>Fables</i> de La Fontaine	Marcel Gutwirth
Madame de Motteville and War	Charles G. S. Williams
From Hawk to Dove in Seventeenth-Century French Literature	Marlies K. Mueller
From Folklore to Hyperbole in the French Fairy Tale	Judd. D. Hubert
Tartuffe, Dufresny and Dancourt	Gérard Gouvernet
Molière républicain: La réception critique et scolaire de son œuvre au XIXe siècle.	Ralph Albanese
Tropes of Stage Writing: Aspects of Roger Planchon's Classical Stagings	Laurence Romero

In her article, Verdier delineates the traditional examination of realism and class differences in Sorel's *nouvelles*, bringing to light

the “motivation” of changes brought to Sorel’s second versions of these stories. In so doing, she rightly and adeptly refutes many voices who have deemed the transformation from *Nouvelles françaises* to *Nouvelles choisies* as unimportant. Marcel Gutwirth writes with his usual verve about liberty in La Fontaine’s *Fables*. While his choice of certain poems is inevitable, liberty as an existential and psychological unit arises unforeseen in *L’Astrologue qui s elaisse tomber dans un puits* or *Les Devineresses*, for example, and gives us further insight into the poet. Madame de Motteville’s increasing regard for pacifism and her own inner battles are well documented by Williams, and his article forms an excellent pair with Mueller’s. The latter gives an extremely engaging overview of the transition from a feudal/military society to one with growing literary and philosophical concerns about war. Judd. D. Hubert not only unearths some little-known folk tales; his remarks on the functions of superlatives and hyperbole become all the more interesting as he delves into ambivalent sociological and sexual factors. Gérard Gouvernet, Ralph Albanese and Laurence Romero have in common the metamorphoses undergone by the canonical figures Bénichou so well described. Gouvernet examines intertextual links between *Le Tartuffe* and plays by Dufresny and Dancourt, uncovering in the process Molière’s unique genius. Instead of a literal *réécriture* of Molière, the nineteenth century re-incarnates the comic playwright as a literary and historical French icon in Ralph Albanese’s article. Finally, *réécriture* takes on its more Barthesian sense when L. Romero looks at Roger Planchon’s productions of Molière as reinterpretation and questioning of the great playwright’s texts, come to reflect modern problems and dilemmas. As in the writings of Bénichou, clarity and a general avoidance of jargon make these articles at once accessible and extremely erudite additions to the texts and contexts of the seventeenth century. Both editors and authors have given us an overall outstanding collection, deeply scholarly and beautifully researched, certainly one that belongs in any serious research library.

Andrew H. Wallis

