
This erudite and timely study makes an exciting contribution to our appreciation of French classical drama, broadening avenues opened earlier by such scholars as Edward Said, Harriet Stone, and Mitchell Greenberg (to name but a few), and affording new perspectives on major works of the canon: Médée, Le Cid, Le Bourgeois gentilhomme, Tite et Bérénice and Bérénice, Bajazet, and Mitridate. As Longino states in her introduction, “The end-product aims to provide a suggestive space of speculation; it hopes to engage the reader’s participation in the ongoing project of making new sense out of old texts and events” (13). Longino has more than met this goal.

Longino’s thesis is predicated on the notion that the development of “Frenchness” as a collective identity, though not instigated in the seventeenth century, makes marked strides in that era and is intimately linked to the theater, the dominant form of both popular and elite entertainment in the period. As mercantilism brought French entrepreneurs into increased contact with the New World, the Caribbean, and India, the earlier perception of France’s identity, shaped largely by its contacts with Mediterranean “Otherness,” needed revision. Longino argues that the seven plays of her study are linked by their deeper probing of that “Otherness” and hence by the simultaneous constitution of “Frenchness” for contemporary theatergoers. Focusing particularly on the countries bordering the southern and eastern Mediterranean shore, Corneille, Racine, and Molière took up a hodgepodge of stories, myths, and earlier texts of many origins to formulate a proto-colonial ideology that would later justify French expansionism. Central to an exploration of this ideology is Said’s concept of “Orientalism” as “an entire apparatus for essentializing, objectifying, and fantasizing the unfamiliar, for constructing and communicating the ‘unknown’/the ‘different’/the ‘Other’ as a body of knowledge that can be controlled and manipulated at will” (7). Of equal importance to
Longino is the reconstruction of the context of her plays, as can be done by reference to contemporary documents of relevance to the scripts and to their audiences’ current preoccupations. Finally, Longino argues that the notion of gender is an unavoidable aspect of the construction of a collective national identity.

Just as her project resists reductive formulation, so too does Longino’s critical methodology, which is not limited to any one approach. Though conversant with “‘The New Historicism’ or ‘Cultural Poetics,’ ‘Cultural Materialism’ or ‘Cultural Studies,’ ‘Post-colonial Theory,’ and especially ‘Orientalism’”(10), Longino presents herself primarily as a critic of seventeenth-century French literature. Congruent with this eclectic methodology is her statement that her chapters may be read as single essays, though reading the book as a whole will affect the reader more and, presumably, drive home the persuasiveness of Longino’s approach.

Before her reading of seven canonical plays, Longino presents an interesting prelude, “Orientation,” which discusses the overweening presence of the Ottoman Empire in the early modern European worldview and the role of the Turk as the principal “Other” for France. Complete with contemporary maps of the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, and Constantinople, this section sets the stage for the chapters to follow. Despite their scorn for the Muslim world, French travelers were quick to recognize in Ottoman mores the same theatricality at work in their own culture. Role-playing was integral to both cultures, and only in tandem could “Otherness” come into awareness. Avidly read by the French public, French travelogs and correspondence relating the customs of the Ottoman Kingdom prepared and heightened the theater audience’s interest in the construction both of a national identity and of the alien “Other.”

Chapter One, “Médée and the traveler-savant,” offers a powerful illustration of new perspectives to be gained when classical drama is read through the prism of contextualization. As is the case with later plays analyzed, a brief plot summary appears first, along with a number of “questions to ponder.” Two aspects of Corneille’s version of the Medea story have caught Longino’s eye:
the introduction of a new protagonist, Pollux, and the fact that Medea no longer gives Creusa the poisoned robe. Rather, Creusa demands it, for her misfortune. Longino contends that Pollux figures the new traveler-savant produced by Richelieu's encouragement of overseas diplomacy and trade. Like Jean Chardin and Jean Thévenot, Pollux is a new kind of anthropologist who returns to his homeland with useful information and understanding of foreign lands and customs. Cognizant of the danger that Asian Medea poses to Greece, Pollux tries in vain to mediate between the sorceress, her faithless husband, and King Creon. Just as Pollux offers "the model of the worldly savant" (61), Corneille's Créuse figures the greedy Western woman of privilege whose materialism apparently justifies the plunder of foreign riches. Longino's reading of Médée thus in no wise contests recent feminist readings, but extends and enriches them by viewing Corneille's script as an early meditation on the ministerial promotion of a "colonialist mentality" (76).

Chapter Two, "Staging Politics: Le Cid," contains an equally original interpretation of Corneille's best-known play. Here, of course, the Muslim "Other" is explicitly targeted, and royal expansionism is heralded at the close. Longino again makes the point that the maritime threat to France, as figured by the play's Moorish invaders, was the Ottoman Empire that controlled not merely Constantinople, but northern Africa as well. She contends that the Christian/infidel conflict is transmuted in Corneille's play into a subtext of Western superiority vs. Oriental inferiority. In this opposition, Chimène is ideologically grouped with the Moors, for she persistently places herself outside the King's law. Longino's reading convincingly conjoins Chimène and the Moors as marginal "Others."

Longino's central but shorter Chapter Three, "Acculturating the audience: Le Bourgeois gentilhomme," presents her study's only comedy. Molière's delightful play lends itself well to Longino's project. The traveler-savant of Chapter One returns with the Marseillais merchant D'Arvieux who served as Molière's consultant (111). The struggle for mastery between East and West, be-
between bourgeoisie and aristocracy, and ultimately between Christian and infidel, is played out in complex patterns in this seemingly frothy *comédie-ballet*. This chapter proves a lynchpin between Longino’s analysis of Corneille’s plays and the chapters which follow.

Chapter Four, “Orienting the World: organizing competition and gendering geography in *Tite et Bérénice* and *Bérénice*,” represents another masterly contribution to the study of classical drama. It is difficult to resist pairing these plays together, for the comparison yields a rich lore of similarities, but most especially differences, between the age’s greatest tragedians. According to Longino, both plays were written at the height of French public interest in Orientalism and both are strongly marked by the conceptualization of the (Oriental) “Other” as female. In Corneille’s version of the love story, the emperor must overcome Bérénice’s feminizing influence to direct the Western State he heads; in Racine, the passive and melancholy Bérénice and Antiochus must be spurned in favor of a manly and ambitious Versallais project.

Chapter Five, “The Stage of France: *Bajazet, Mithridate*, communication and the detour,” is one of this study’s most stimulating chapters. The role of letters in both plays is only one of the links between the two texts, which showcase the failure of all attempts to communicate, to relate, and to overcome ambiguous diplomacy. All the ambivalence of France’s relation to the Ottoman foe seems to come to the fore in these two tragedies of Racine, ostensibly written to position France vis-à-vis her Hapsburg adversaries. Nor has Racine forgotten his old enemy Corneille, with whom he continues to engage in figurative combat, outdoing his predecessor in the presentation of a combat by *détours* in order to arrive again at a concept of “Frenchness.”

Longino’s study is completed by a brief, suggestive “Conclusion,” a lengthy “Bibliography,” and an index. This volume is an indispensable addition to the library of any serious scholar of early modern France, or for that matter, early modern Europe as a whole. It reinvigorates admiration for the genius of three of France’s greatest dramatists while encouraging the reader to relate the sub-
sequent history of France to the preoccupations of the classical period.


Respect for the dignity of the God-man and for an established iconographic tradition combine to impose a certain formalism and restraint on depictions of Christ crucified. Even the suffering Christ of late medieval art, for all his evident pain, still conveys a majestic calm and resignation as he accepts the doom foreordained for him, and for the highest end. No such restraint, however, governed artistic representations of the two thieves crucified with Jesus of Nazareth. Wildly contorted, grossly distorted, broken, writhing, and wracked with unutterable agony, their bodies spoke their pain—indeed, screamed their suffering—from altarpieces and woodcuts, to an audience accustomed to such spectacles of punishment. Of course, no one in late medieval Europe had witnessed an actual crucifixion, since that particular mode of capital punishment had fallen out of use with the fall of the Roman Empire; but crowds did frequent public executions, theaters of cruelty in which condemned criminals suffered and died in nearly every other way the appalling ingenuity of the judiciary could devise. The consequent familiarity with the rituals and spectacle of punitive justice, argues Mitchell Merback, informed both the representation and reception of crucifixion scenes, and fostered “a distinctive mode of judicial spectatorship, fretted with the visual habits and devotional attitudes unique to this period” (128). In particular, the hyper-realistic depictions of Calvary so common in northern European art around 1500 tend to show the two thieves with all the signs of bodies broken on the wheel, a gruesome form of execution that would have been all too familiar to both artists and public.