

Gaines, James F. *Pierre Du Ryer and his Tragedies: From Envy to Liberation* (Geneva: Droz, 1987 [sic] read, 1988). 208 p. Paper.

Pierre Du Ryer is one of the few authors of second-yet-respectable rank who, until recently, was unjustly relegated to oblivion. Within the last ten years or so, however, some of his better plays have been edited with care--and a few of these with very fine critical introductions. New, thanks to James Gaines, there is a modern work on Du Ryer to go with these editions. One may question why this sensitive critic so aware of the dramatist's important role in the development of several genres has chosen to limit himself to one in which that role may not be as important as in others, but for all that, this volume is well written and Du Ryer's tragedies sensitively--even lovingly--analyzed.

The word is not too strong; indeed, it may be this "love" that is so. Time and time again, I found myself rebellious to assertions which can only be ascribed to an excess of zeal. "The great value of Du Ryer" may well spring "from his position as an outsider," (23) but to suggest that as such he is a relatively rare phenomenon is to forget writers such as Viau, Cyrano, Tristan, to name but a few of the many who used their plays to voice unorthodox political views. Categorical statements abound, almost all intended to make of this dramatist a worthy rival of Corneille as well as a beater of new paths. At best such statements bespeak an excessive zeal for Du Ryer; at worst, they suggest a disregard--or worse--for his contemporaries. For example, to say that "with the exception of a few plays directed as criticism against enemy regimes, such as La Calprenède's *Comte d'Essex*, it was ancient history which furnished the vocabulary of allusions ... to current political conditions: (1923) is to forget Mareschal, La Serre and Tristan to name but those that come to mind instantly. By the same token, to contrast Du Ryer's characters who "do not derive their glory from a familial tradition, but have grasped it in spite

of their antecedents" to "Corneille's dominant leaders" (1945) is to forget that Corneille, after the famous tetralogy, created quite a few of those self-made men ... and women. Without wishing to belabor the point, it does not serve credibility to describe a writer of the second "rayon" with words such as "outstanding," "unquestionably among the most proficient masters," "grand tragedies that disputed the supremacy of the great Corneille." Furthermore, to suggest that *Les Vendanges de Suresne* strikes a blow for the bienséances is to gloss over the racy advice that Lisette gives to Florice or the Tircis, on stage, takes from Dorimême "une fleur qu'on doit laisser cueillir." *Vendanges* is a very funny play, but I suspect that this was not the opinion of the denizens of the *chambre bleue*.

Cavils, unfortunately, always take more space than praise, if only because they have to be documented in detail. The above should not discourage the potential reader. True, the excesses might mislead a beginning student; but why would a beginner need to read a book on Du Ryer? The expert will know how to disregard such expressions of excessive zeal. If I made so much of them, it is precisely because they came very close, early in the book, to make me set the book aside, and that would have been a grave error, for there is much intelligent and sensitive analysis in these 200 pages. A careful reading of these will not only lead to a better understanding of Du Ryer's work, but also encourage the reader to rethink old ideas on that dramatist's contemporaries.

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