

Paulson, Michael G. *The Queen's Encounter: The Mary Stuart Anachronism in Dramas by Diamante, Boursault, Schiller and Donizetti* (New York and Bern: Peter Lang, 1988. *Currents in Comparative Romance Languages and Literatures*, 1). 237 pp.

This monograph continues Michael Paulson's investigation into the subject matter of Mary Stuart that began in his earlier work on French seventeenth-century plays and in his edition of Lope's *La Corona trágica*. The first half of the book consists of a summary of existing historical data on the ill-fated queen and her relationship with Elizabeth I, and establishes the background for the dramatic interview between the two monarchs. Though Paulson refers to this scene as an anachronism, it may more properly be called a fictive encounter, since it does not involve a misplacement of chronology, but merely an imaginative exercise that falls well within the limits of verisimilitude. The subsequent sections of the text present analyses of the dramas by the four playwrights indicated in the title (*La reina María Estuarda*, *Marie Stuard*, *Marie Stuart*, and the opera *María Stuarda*), including a biography of each writer.

Despite the comparative intentions announced by the author, the reader will perhaps be surprised to find that the treatment of the plays is strictly limited to the four titles selected, as though no other influences could come to bear on a drama about a Scottish queen. The confrontation scene between Mary and Elizabeth is, after all, a monumental "scène à faire" that has as much to do with dramaturgy as with history. It would be only reasonable to consider, for example, major French influences on Boursault's scene, such as victim-tyrant conversations in Tristan L'Hermite's *La Mariane*, Corneille's *Rodogune*, and Racine's *Andromaque* and *Bajazet*. Schiller, for his part, was in all likelihood impressed by Shakespeare's dramaturgy, especially the fatal encounter between Richard II and Bolingbroke at Flint Castle, which involves a symbolic lowering of the sinful monarch similar to the one in the Mary Stuart

plays and evolves toward a final defiance of the usurped power that governs the post-Feudal totalitarian state.

In focusing almost entirely on the psychological characteristics attributed to the characters of the queens and on the idea that, at least until Schiller, these portraits are formed exclusively by religious motivations, Paulson misses much of the political interest of the dramas. Mary Stuart's demise had functioned in the European imagination as a case study on the problems of a female monarch ever since John Knox attacked her in his famous "Blast of the Trumpet." The fact that Knox had to modify his extremely misogynistic views after Elizabeth came to power only sharpened the contrast between the two figures and their approaches to government. Apart from the issue of whether a female could legitimately serve as sovereign and serve the best interests of her subject, the conflict underlines the entire ideology of *raison d'état* that had permeated French theatre since the time of Richelieu, forming an indispensable context for Boursault's play, and to some extent for Diamante and Schiller, as well. If anything, the cross-cultural appeal of the Stuart dilemma sprang from the universal questions of gender and sovereignty, of national priorities and personal honor codes, that cut across the frontiers of Catholic-Protestant polemics.

Paulson himself is forced to admit that rigorous, old-fashioned standards for tracing literary influences do not account very well for the transmission of this *matière* from the obscure, renegade Spanish cleric Diamante to the genial hack Boursault, the passionate moralist Schiller, and the neglected, but insightfully lyrical Donizetti. Lacking a definitive signature at any stage of the evolution, he is forced to deal in the shadowy realm of what could have been. On the other hand, it is certain that the element of regicide, which proved so controversial for the *Stuartstoff* at several points in its history, exercised an ongoing fascination on audiences of various nationalities and persuasions.

Throughout the age of absolutism, regicide represented the spectre of the unmentionable, since, theoretically, no motive could be strong enough to justify the deposition and murder of a divine-right monarch. The marginal nature of the confrontation, a show-down between two women rulers, with unclear claims to sovereignty, both flawed by the possibility of moral misbehavior in their past, both enmeshed in a matrix of good and bad political advice, made it allowable for the stage and at the same time wrapped it in tantalizing layers of ambiguity. In view of Jean-Marie Apostolidès's theories about the modification of the early modern political conscience through theatre, the Mary Stuart drama emerges as a nearly-ideal instance of the quasi-medieval *princesse sacrifiée* who is immolated by a ruthlessly pragmatic *reine-machine*.

Paulson's study will be useful for those seeking a very general perspective on the question and a point of departure for future work. It is much to his credit that he has brought the texts to view, albeit partially, and the critical inquiry can now go on to further investigations. In fact, his own considerable acumen in the field of Stuart studies can add to the dialogue, should he wish to direct it to a wider comparative viewpoint.

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