



Hillman, Richard. French Origins of English Tragedy

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Volume 36, Number 3, Summer 2013

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1091039ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v36i3.20557>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Clark, G. (2013). Review of [Hillman, Richard. French Origins of English Tragedy]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 36(3), 169–171. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v36i3.20557>

prized transformative imitation that did not demand self-erasure. In some ways, Stowell's study is the exception that proves the rule proposed throughout *Inganno*: that is, that the copy is often the vehicle by which makers (intentionally or not) express themselves and flaunt conventional notions of authenticity.

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Hillman, Richard.

French Origins of English Tragedy.

Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010. Pp. 111. ISBN 978-0-7190-8276-4 (hardcover) £50.

As Richard Hillman notes in the introduction to his *French Origins of English Tragedy*, French—not Italian—was the most widely practised vernacular foreign language in Shakespearean England. Hillman has done much to remind us of the literary consequences of this fact. *French Origins* is an invigorating study of the intertextual relationships between various French texts and a select collection of early modern English plays, including *Richard II*, *Sejanus*, *Othello*, and *Tamburlaine*. At fewer than 100 pages, excluding apparatus, it is an intensely compressed but nonetheless fascinating book.

It opens with a chapter summarizing method and content. The author's frequent references to material in his other works make this chapter a little erratic. Hillman explains that his approach contextualizes English tragedy in terms of printed French works so as to assess the "circulation and co-presence of diverse discourses within a common cultural space" with the goal of attempting to "activate hitherto unsuspected material resonances" in the English drama (2,4). While critics tend to insist on stereotypical distinctions between French and English literary cultures, Hillman argues, such distinctions are misleading. English tragedians, especially Shakespeare and Marlowe, found themselves composing out of a variety of contemporary French and ancient sources, and often reading those ancient sources "through and across" French intertexts or their English translations (11). Within the "common cultural space" of French and English literatures, it is the blend of the historical and political with the metaphysical that creates the conditions for the development of tragedy.

Chapter 2 offers a compelling case study of the influence of French humanist tragedy on Shakespeare. Here, Hillman contextualizes the development of the protagonist's complexity in the generically dualistic *Richard II* in terms of the equivalent representation of self-destructive doubt in Pierre Matthieu's 1589 tragedy *La Guisiade*. As the militant Catholic Matthieu historicizes and politicizes neo-Senecan tragedy, he creates the conditions for psychological mimesis within that mix of tragedy and chronicle. While there is no direct evidence for Shakespeare's knowledge of Matthieu, the author suggests that both Marlowe's *Massacre at Paris* and the anonymous *Woodstock* demonstrate English familiarity with the French writer's materials. Hillman briefly, but intriguingly, addresses Richard's likeness to Matthieu's victim-protagonist Guise, a likeness in which the French play mediates between Shakespeare's Richard and the Gospel of John's Christ. The bulk of the chapter convincingly demonstrates the similarity between Richard and Matthieu's villain, Henri III. Both characters suffer inward torments that are partly the result of the deflation of their own highly-charged rhetoric; they suffer the "discovery of the fragility ... of a previously impervious self-image" and for both "feelings of inadequacy cannot dissemble straightforwardly" (27, 30).

Chapter 3 attends to the French origins of the grotesque humour arising from the incongruous imposition of pagan imagery onto Christian conventions in Elizabethan neo-classicism. After reviewing two French political pamphlets that invoke in almost parodic excess the punishments in the pagan underworld, and that anticipate both Kyd and Marlowe in mixing tones and metaphysics, Hillman turns to François de Chanteloupe's 1575 *La Tragédie de Feu Gaspard de Colligny*, featuring Europe's first comic Machiavel. In his parody of Senecan horror, Chanteloupe even more clearly anticipates "the standard stuff of Elizabethan theatrical villainy" (42–43). Such humour reveals the instability of absolute truth in cultures enduring religious conflict. The chapter closes with an energetic analysis of the relations between the classical invective of Claudian's *In Rufinum*, Du Bartas's *La Judit* and its English translation, Chanteloupe's *Colligny*, and Jonson's *Sejanus*, largely to "activate" the risible ironies generated as Jonson reads the classics through French intertexts.

The final chapter assesses the ironic intertextual impact of Du Bartas's 1574 rendering of the biblical story of Judith and Holofernes on *Othello* and *Tamburlaine*. *La Judit*'s influence is evident in each warrior's suspiciously heightened self-presentations. Hillman demonstrates that the problematization

of truth in Shakespeare's tragedy affixes itself to Othello, whose stories are dubious and who cannot recognize the spiritual truth represented by Desdemona. This leaves him subject to a moralized fate similar to that inflicted upon the French Huguenot's Holofernes, for whom boastful self-fashioning led inevitably to blasphemy and then to death. Hillman's reading importantly reveals Shakespeare's play as a "psychological adaptation of Reform theology" (74), but unexpectedly leaves Desdemona as little more than an idealized function. The chapter moves on to consider Tamburlaine, who like Holofernes is threatened with emotional defeat by the beautiful captive Zenocrate. But Tamburlaine is able to "co-opt Zenocrate's [divinely-imbued] strength" and master the divinity that normally humbles the avatars of Holofernes (88). Marlowe conjures the tradition only to invert it and thus to emphasize the indeterminability of truth.

French Origins offers no conclusion, though something further might be said about the tragic interactions of history and metaphysics, as well as about the "circulation" of discourses between France and England. It is surprising, as well, that the author never returns to the issue addressed in the book's opening paragraphs, that of the "process of disengagement" obliquely visible in the discursive engagement between France and England. There is very little room for formal textual analysis anywhere in the book, which diminishes the force of some claims, particularly those involving the humour in hyperbolic neo-Senecanism. Nevertheless, *French Origins* offers a persuasively nuanced critique of what Hillman calls the "Myth of the Single Source," and memorably demonstrates its central premise that writers read and wrote "through and across" multiple texts.

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King'oo, Clare Costley.

Miserere Mei: The Penitential Psalms in Late Medieval and Early Modern England.

Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012. Pp. xix, 283. ISBN 978-0-268-033248 (paperback) \$38.

The Latin translation of Psalm 51 begins with *Miserere mei, Deus*, and from this opening King'oo has derived the title of an exemplary interdisciplinary study of