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Philippe Bourdin and Gérard Loubinoux, Eds. *La Scène bâtarde: entre Lumières et romantisme*. Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise-Pascal, 2004. 334 pp. Tables, figures, notes. 25€ (pb). ISBN: 2-913323-91-X.

Review by Elizabeth A. Blood, Salem State College.

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From the mid-eighteenth century through the Revolution and into the early decades of the nineteenth century, profound changes occurred in the French theater that led to a veritable explosion of new stages, publics, subjects, and genres. In particular, the 1791 decree that lifted the state's control of theaters and permitted the opening of new theaters in Paris created unanticipated possibilities for actors, authors, and directors. *La Scène bâtarde* is a collection of nineteen essays, preceded by three introductory articles, which together offer a kaleidoscopic yet cohesive view of the complexity and richness of this often overlooked period of the French theater. This collection offers an important contribution to recent scholarship on the history of authorship, theater history, and cultural studies of the Revolutionary period, as well as to literary studies of dramatic authors and the works they published in the period between Denis Diderot's *Le Fils naturel* (1757) and Victor Hugo's *Hernani* (1830).<sup>[1]</sup> Rather than attempt to define and classify the theater of this period which is inherently indefinable and unclassifiable (p. 7), the collection's editors and contributors embrace and explore its heterogeneity and the irrepressible "libération jubilatoire" (p. 10) that characterized theatrical production in this era.

The three introductory essays by Gérard Loubinoux, Philippe Bourdin and Jean-Louis Jam theorize the concept of the *scène bâtarde*, a term invented for a series of colloquia organized by the Centre de Recherches Révolutionnaires et Romantiques in conjunction with the Centre d'Histoire "Espaces et Cultures" at the Université Blaise Pascal (Clermont II) to examine the theater between the Enlightenment and Romanticism. The introductions explain the choice of the label *scène bâtarde* to represent the uninhibited propagation of genres and blends of genres that dominated the stages of the Revolutionary era, including all permutations and combinations of comedies, tragedies, melodramas, operas, ballets, vaudevilles, pantomimes, acrobatics, parades, marionettes, shadow plays, sideshows, and even fireworks displays. Relating the notion of *la bâtarde* to ancien regime law and classical theatrical genres, the editors note the efforts in French culture prior to the Revolution to establish social hierarchies, to maintain order, to categorize and to classify things, in particular the things of the theater (p. 9). The authors of the introductory articles contrast this desire to classify and categorize with the spirit of freedom, innovation and carnivalesque creation that characterized the Revolutionary period and its theater. The historical lack of critical attention paid to the theater of the Revolutionary period is explained as an "autocensure" (p. 15) that resulted from the inability of critics to neatly categorize and classify its productions in conjunction with a public response to the rapidly changing political regimes and new forms of social control that emerged during the nineteenth century.

While French society from the Third Republic on promoted the cultural prestige of the classical genres of comedy and tragedy at the expense of other types of productions, dramatic authors and theatrical troupes continued to create and stage plays to appeal to the varied tastes of the public, plays that combined the comic and the tragic, music and dance, improvisation and recitation. In the introductory essays to the collection, the editors develop the idea of an "esthétique bâtarde" (p. 22) that is indivisible from the nature of the theater itself. Each staging of a play is unique, each performance merely one combination of tones, sounds, and movements derived from an incalculable number of different possible

variations. The works which are the object of study in this collection are, therefore, not atypical of theatrical production in general. They stand apart only because of the refusal of authors to name their works in accordance with the traditions of labeling genres that were established by the French Academy and ancien regime elite society, both of which were challenged and scrutinized during the Revolution.

Through the lens of a particular author, critic, genre or public, each contributor to this collection of essays explores the history of the *scène bâtarde* and the notion of *la bâtarde* in the literature of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. While the lifting of the state control of theaters in 1791 led to the opening of new theaters and to an exponential rise in the number of plays staged per year--the number of theaters in Paris increased from fourteen in 1791 to thirty-five in 1792 (p. 45)--the reasons for the proliferation of mixed-genre permutations and the effects of that proliferation on French culture are much more complex. On the whole, this collection of essays impressively examines the confluence of historical and cultural forces that led to this unique moment of "jubilation carnavalesque" (p. 51) in the French theater.

In addition to the political changes initiated in 1789 which led to the decree of 1791, there were legal, economic, and esthetic transformations that defined and, in turn, were shaped by the theater in this period. The decree of 1791, along with the lobbying efforts of the Société d'auteurs dramatiques and the creation of the 1791 and 1793 laws defining authors' rights in France, led to economic changes for dramatic authors and theater owners. Authors enjoyed greater protection of literary property and revenue from royalties, while theaters encountered fierce competition from other theaters. Public demand replaced royal approbation as the primary criterion for determining the success or failure of a play (p. 54). The public also changed, as those who had previously found the elite *salles* of the Comédie Française, the Théâtre Italien, and the Opéra inaccessible and had enjoyed the parodies and pantomimes of the *foires* and street theater now influenced the repertoires of the numerous Parisian theaters where genres and styles combined to create the *scène bâtarde*. The esthetic of originality, which grew increasingly more important with the establishment of authors' rights, also influenced the stage in this era. [2] Each contributing author to this collection addresses these various political and cultural changes and offers a unique lens through which to view and understand them.

The collection of essays is impressive in its array of subjects and in its prismatic presentation of the *scène bâtarde*. The essays encounter the specific--each essay focuses on a particular text, author, critic, genre, or institution--but illuminate the whole. The contributors examine successful works as well as failures, important figures, such as Rétif de la Bretonne and Jean-François de la Harpe, as well as minor ones, such as the marionettist Castagna, the composer Castil-Blaze, or the counter-Revolutionary playwright Jean Fenouillot. They study the theaters of Paris, both great and small, as well as those of the provinces. They focus on the Revolutionary period at the heart of the *scène bâtarde* without neglecting to place this moment in theater history within its proper context. Several of the contributors examine the roots of the new genres of the *scène bâtarde* in the theater of the *foires* and the parodies of the earlier eighteenth century. Others study trends in the categorization of genres by contemporary chroniclers of the theater, while others still consider the legacy of the *scène bâtarde* on later periods and genres. The approaches to the subjects are varied and include studies of primary texts, critiques and reviews, histories and archival research, as well as recent scholarly studies.

The collection is divided into three parts, each with its own theme. The five essays comprising part one, entitled "Adaptations et logiques internes," track the evolution and examine the products of the *scène bâtarde*. These essays offer an interdisciplinary view of how the theater changed during the late-eighteenth century and what possibilities were seized by the authors of this era. The contributors examine the lives of authors, the work of musical composers, language usage, and literary history. Particularly notable is Françoise Le Borgne's essay, which offers a comprehensive overview of the

historical, political, cultural, and esthetic factors that shaped Rétif de la Bretonne's *Drame de la vie*, a monstrous text that Le Borgne holds to be a stellar example of the *scène bâtarde*. Part two of the collection, entitled "Les mots pour le dire," offers six essays that focus on how contemporary chroniclers, critics, theoreticians, and other dramatic authors understood and described the productions of the *scène bâtarde*. This section includes an interesting analysis by Catherine Gas-Ghidina of the shifting attitudes of Jean-François de la Harpe towards the neologisms used to describe the genres of the *scène bâtarde*, and it includes a table of the terminology used to describe various types of plays discussed in La Harpe's *Correspondance littéraire* (1774–1791). In part three of the collection entitled "Publics et contrôle social," eight contributors explore how the various publics of the *scène bâtarde* received, understood, applauded, condemned or otherwise appreciated its theatrical creations. This section traces the evolution of the theater into the nineteenth century and concludes with an interesting essay by Jean-Marie Thomasseau on the lingering heritage of the *scène bâtarde* in the melodramas of the Romantic era.

The collection lacks an index, which would make it more useful to scholars interested in a particular author or institution. It also would have benefited from a serious examination of how women authors, such as Olympe de Gouges, contributed to the *scène bâtarde* and what role women played in the theater of this era.[3] These issues notwithstanding, this collection remains an important and useful work. It will be of interest to researchers studying the cultural dimensions of the French Revolution, theater history, eighteenth or nineteenth-century literature, or the history of authorship. *La Scène bâtarde* offers a wealth of critical perspectives and primary research and gives historians and literary scholars starting points for further study, fresh perspectives on old topics, and new ways of understanding authorship, performance, and genre.

#### LIST OF ESSAYS

- Gérard Loubinoux, "La scène bâtarde: un intitulé problématique?"
- Philippe Bourdin, "Introduction"
- Jean-Louis Jam, "Éléments de réflexion sur la notion de bâtardise"
- Henri Rossi, "L'enfer burlesque dans le théâtre de la Révolution"
- Françoise Le Borgne, "*Le Drame de la vie* (1793) de Rétif de la Bretonne, théâtre en crise, théâtre pour la crise"
- Laurent Giraud, "Adaptations et tensions du langage révolutionnaire dans *Le dîné du grenadier à Brest* et *La table d'hôte à Provins* de Jean Fenouillot"
- Gérard Loubinoux, "Castil-Blaze: un Don Quichotte de la bâtardise chez les romantiques"
- Olivier Bara, "Balzac en vaudeville: manipulations et appropriations du roman par la scène parisienne (1830-1840)"
- Herbert Schneider, "Problème de la terminologie dramatique chez les frères Parfaict"
- Andrea Fabiano, "Nicolas-Etienne Framery, théoricien de la parodie de l'opéra italien"
- Michèle Sajous, "L'opéra-comique selon Pierre-Jean-Baptiste Nougaret: des Riens en musique"
- Catherine Gas-Ghidina, "La scène bâtarde: assentiment ou dissentiment de Jean-François de la Harpe"
- Michel Biard, "Le Vacher de Charnois, du juge de la bâtardise théâtrale au juge de la bâtardise politique"
- Jean-Claude Yon, "Offenbach l'inclassable: la question des genres"
- Georgina Letourmy, "L'éventail du succès: le théâtre mis en images à la veille et au début de la Révolution"
- Philippe Bourdin, "Le théâtre, les amateurs, la Révolution"
- Roxane Martin, "La Féerie sur les scènes secondaires du Directoire et du Consulat: Genèse d'un théâtre romantique?"

- Michèle Sajous D'Oria, "Les tréteaux de la corruption"
- Cyril Triolaire, "Cadres et conditions matérielles de production des spectacles provinciaux pendant le Consulat et l'Empire"
- Marie-France Cussinet, "Des salles provinciales au début du XIXème siècle"
- Marie-Claire Mussat, "Le kiosque à musique: une autre scène"
- Jean-Marie Thomasseau, "L'héritage du Bâtard ou la féconde lignée du mélodrame d'Antoine à Vilar"

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## NOTES

[1] Gregory S. Brown, *A Field of Honor: Writers, Court Culture, and Public Theater in French Literary Life from Racine to the Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Emmet Kennedy, ed., *Theatre, Opera, and Audiences in Revolutionary Paris* (Westport, Conn. and London: Greenwood Press, 1996); Martine de Rougemont, *La Vie théâtrale en France au XVIIIème siècle* (Paris: Champion, 1988).

[2] Roland Mortier, *L'Originalité: une nouvelle catégorie esthétique au siècle des lumières* (Genève: Droz, 1982)

[3] Olivier Blanc, *Olympe de Gouges* (Paris: Editions Syros, 1981); Brown, *A Field of Honor*; Catherine Montfort, ed., *Literate Women and the French Revolution of 1789* (Birmingham: Summa Publications, 1994).

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