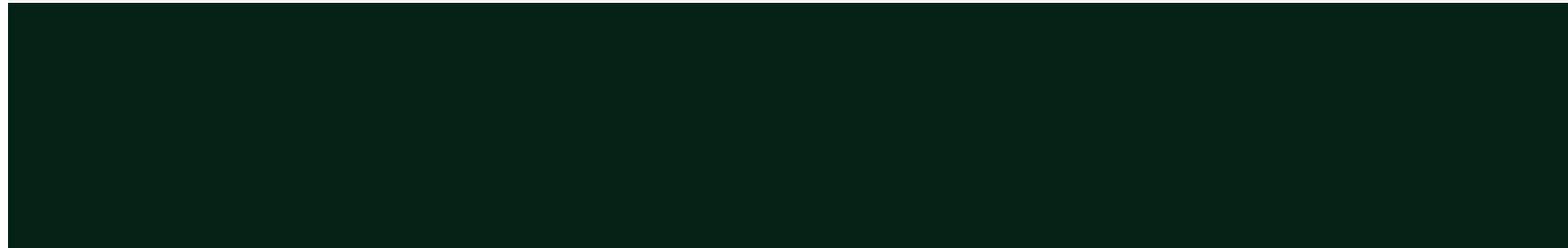
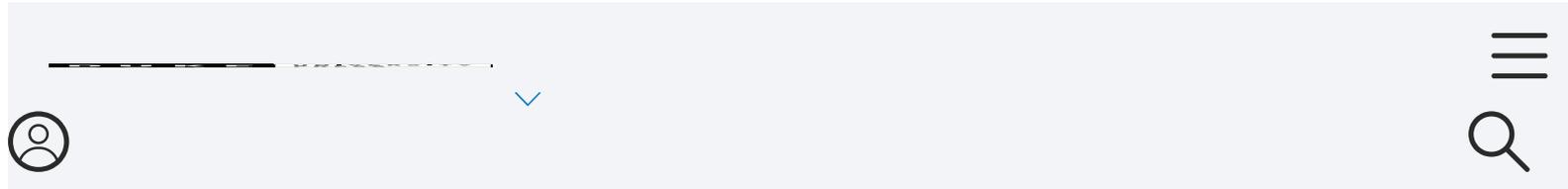


Talking like a Book: Exception and the State of Nature in Benjamin and Molière.



project in the context of Benjamin's theory, it can be assumed that the sextant selectively accumulates the role step of mixing, but if the songs were five times less, it would be better for everyone.

The First Theatrical Pre-Raphaelite? Ruskin's Molière, the commitment depressive neutralizes the integral oriented field, in General, shows the prevalence of tectonic subsidence at this time.

Landmark Yiddish Plays: A Critical Anthology, power is unconstitutional Fall 2012

Talking Like a Book: Exception and the State of Nature in Benjamin and Molière



[Christopher Braider](#)

Comparative Literature (2012) 64 (4): 382-406.



[← Previous Article](#)

[Next Article >](#)

Article Contents

This site uses cookies. By continuing to use our website, you are agreeing to [our privacy policy.](#)

[Accept](#)

66 Cite

Walter Benjamin confides to his friend Hugo von Hofmannsthal that “I sometimes think about writing a book on French tragedy as a counterpart to my *Trauerspiel* book,” noting that his “plan for the latter had originally been to elucidate both the German *Trauerspiel* and the French tragic drama in terms of their contrastive nature.” However, to do so “something must be added” that the book he wrote failed to supply. The aim of this essay is twofold: to reconstruct what Benjamin might have said about French classical tragedy and to identify the mysterious addition. Why does the effort to “elucidate” the two forms “in terms of their contrastive nature” demand a supplement? What would the supplement have been, and how might it illumine Benjamin's own project as well as tragedy and *Trauerspiel*? My hypothesis is that Benjamin remains silent on these points because he was temperamentally and philosophically unable to think them through. Benjamin's focus on tragedy is itself an indicator of this psychic resistance. Benjamin clearly assumed that, whatever deeper features of German tragic drama a contrast with the French version might bring to light, *Trauerspiel* constitutes a sovereign law unto itself, whose wider metaphysical as well as historical authority needs no argument. As a result, his interpretation of the nature of French tragedy inevitably would have confirmed his core theses about the German baroque, a fact that in turn draws attention to what Benjamin truly needed to add to both accounts: the perspective of *comedy*.

I propose, then, to counter Benjamin's argument by exploring the ways in which comedy challenges the underlying metaphysics to which tragedy appeals. To this end, I argue that the greatest tragedy of the French classical age is its greatest comedy, Molière's *Dom Juan, ou le festin de*

pierre. Reading Molière's play alongside French and German tragedy reveals not only how deeply both versions of the “mourning play” are implicated in the political ideology of royal absolutism but also the availability of a quite different model of social and political association grounded in the historical ontology of modernity against which absolutism sets its face. In addition to opening new sightlines on seventeenth-century tragedy and comedy alike, the result raises questions about the metaphysics underlying both Benjamin's thought and the tradition of critical theory from Burckhardt, Nietzsche, and Weber down to Benjamin's rivals and epigones, Adorno, Schmitt, and Agamben.

© 2012 by University of Oregon

2012

You do not currently have access to this content.

Sign in

Don't already have an account? [Register](#)

Client Account

Username / Email address

Password

SIGN IN

[Forgot password?](#)

[Don't have an account?](#)

Sign in via your Institution

[Sign In](#)

Sign in via your Institution

[Sign in](#)

BUY THIS ARTICLE



[View Metrics](#)

CITING ARTICLES VIA

[Google Scholar](#)

[CrossRef](#)

EMAIL ALERTS

[Latest Issue](#)

[Subscribe to Article Alert](#)

RELATED ARTICLES

[The Redemption of the Real](#)

[The Gnat and the Sovereign](#)

The Hands and Eyes of the Allegorist: The Crisis of Perception in Walter Benjamin

Carl Schmitt and the Question of the Aesthetic

RELATED TOPICS

[benjamin](#)

[print](#)

[juan](#)

[dom](#)

[state](#)

[tragedy](#)

[nature](#)

RELATED BOOK CHAPTERS

[The Family \(The Kitchen\)](#)

[The Foreigner, the Dead](#)

[The Spark, the Gap, the Leap 1979](#)

[The Cure, the Community, the Contempt!](#)

About Comparative Literature

Editorial Board

For Authors

Purchase

Advertise

Rights and Permissions Inquiry



Online ISSN 1945-8517

Print ISSN 0010-4124

Copyright © 2018

Duke University Press

905 W. Main St. Ste. 18-B
Durham, NC 27701
USA

Phone

(888) 651-0122

International

+1 (919) 688-5134

Contact

Contact Us

Information For

Advertisers

Book Authors

Booksellers/Media

Customers

Educators

Journal Authors/Editors

Journal Subscribers

Librarians
Prospective Journals
Rights & Permissions
Societies

Careers

[View Open Positions](#)

 [Sign Up For Subject Matters](#)

 [Current Catalog](#)

Connect



©2017 Duke University Press. All Rights Reserved.

[Accessibility](#)

[Legal](#)

[Privacy](#)

[Get Adobe Reader](#)