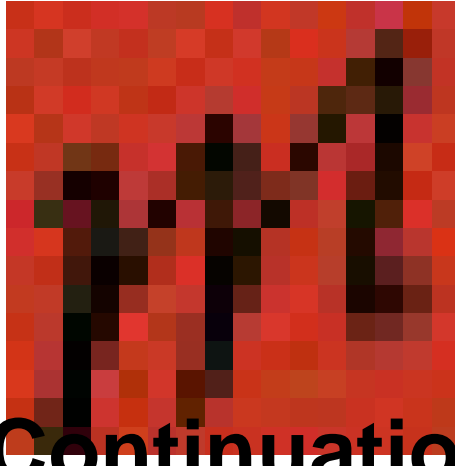


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XXVI.4 Continuation of the same subject

- The Spirit of Law - Book XXVI. On laws in the relation they must have with the order of things on which they bear -

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XXVI.4 Continuation of the same subject

The law of Recessuinthus allowed the children of an adulteress, or her husband's, to accuser her, and to have the household slaves put to the torture. [1] What an unjust law, which to preserve morals overturned nature, the source of morality !

We take pleasure in seeing a young hero on our stages manifest as much horror at discovering his mother-in-law's crime as he had had for the crime itself ; in his surprise, accused, judged, condemned, proscribed and covered in infamy, he scarcely dares make a few observations on the abominable blood from which Phædra has sprung ; he abandons what is dearest to him, and the tenderest object, everything that speaks to his heart, everything that can infuriate him, to go deliver himself up to the vengeance of the gods which he has not deserved. [2] It is the voice of nature that causes this pleasure ; it is the sweetest of all sounds.

[1] In the code of the Visigoths, book III, tit. 4, §13.

[2] [Reference is to Racine's tragedy *Phèdre* (1677).]