

disparate topics and methodological approaches through the language of blood, this text underscores the valuable synergy of inter-period and interdisciplinary analyses in medieval and early modern studies.

Tristan Alonge. *Racine et Euripide; La révolution trahie*. Genève: Droz, 2017. 414 pp. €69.00. Review by DENIS D. GRÉLÉ, UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS.

In *Racine et Euripide; La révolution trahie*, Tristan Alonge retells the literary meeting between three eminent authors: Aristotle, Euripides, and Racine. Deeply influenced by Georges Forestier, Alonge argues that the confluence of these three exceptional minds gives birth to the “révolution racinienne”: the propensity to privilege the character over the plot. In order to explain this “révolution”, Alonge is led to analyze Racine’s composition in light of three main sources: history, literature, and seventeenth-century French culture. Regarding the historical approach, Alonge exposes how Racine interacts with his Greek models by looking at translations and notes Racine left in the margins of his Greek texts. By examining Racine’s library, Alonge is also able to relate the various possible French influences, especially on plot and characters. Alonge explores likewise how seventeenth-century culture weighs increasingly on Racine’s writings and determines how the tragedian had to modify his plays in order to fit with the expectations of the public and censors.

The first chapter deals with the importance of Greek language and culture in the education of Racine. Many educated people were able to read Latin, but few knew Greek and, in particular, Greek tragedies, and then only through less than trustworthy translations. Racine, however, was able to read the Greek masters without any interference. This direct contact with Antiquity helped him better understand Aristotle and Euripides. Alonge discovers that Racine did not just copy his Greek masters, but actively studied the Greek tragedies and their structures. In looking at Racine’s translations and at the notes in the margins, Alonge is able to show that Racine did not interpret Aristotle loosely, as Corneille did, but was careful to understand what the Greek philosopher was trying to convey, in particular regarding the notion

of character. Alonge successfully establishes that Racine, akin to his Greek models, places the tragic character at the center of the action.

The second chapter is devoted to Racine's early work, *La Thébaine*, a play judged rather unfavorably by critics, but which is fundamental to understanding Racine's originality. In carefully studying Racine's interpretation and writings, Alonge argues compellingly that, rather than being considered a mediocre first attempt, the play deserves to be respected as a true chef-d'oeuvre. This chapter illustrates how Racine was able to rework the Greek myths in order to apply what he had learned from his studies of Greek tragedy: a simple plot; a character who is neither good nor bad; characters who are closely related. Here, Alonge is somewhat unfair towards Corneille, accusing him of being a distracted reader of Aristotle, when the French playwright was really reinterpreting Aristotle to suit his needs. This being said, by looking at Racine's notes as well as at works by other authors in Racine's library, Alonge is able to rebuild the French tragedian's writing process. Not so differently from an archaeologist, the author scrapes the different layers that build *La Thébaine*. In the process, he successfully rectifies R. Knight's studies on Racine (*Racine et la Grèce* [Paris: Nizet, 1950]), in particular on Racine's Greek sources of inspiration. Ultimately, Alonge shows how Racine, very early in his career, favors the rule of the ambivalent character and how *La Thébaine* remains the work that is most faithful to the Greek masters.

In the third chapter on *Andromaque*, Alonge explores the concept of verisimilitude in Racine's characters, for their behavior lies somewhere halfway between antiquity and seventeenth-century France. According to Alonge, Racine's plays, driven by ambivalent characters, start to find their limits with his contemporary critics. In order to satisfy the public as well as the erudite of his time, Racine has to give increasing importance to the plot. *Andromaque*, secretly inspired by Euripides (she is a woman who has to choose between her past with Hector and the future of her son), becomes a turning point in Racine's writings. The tragedian tends then to abandon the mix of vices and virtues in his characters in order to create a hero(ine) in conformity with the notion of verisimilitude to satisfy his most refined critics. This chapter might be the least convincing of Alonge's book. There is much speculation in this chapter about Racine's sources of inspiration,

which leaves the interpretation somewhat uncertain: Racine may or may not have read certain authors; he may or may not have known of specific versions. This being said, if the reader accepts Alonge's theory, his argument is convincing: Racine has created the character of Andromaque, both the widow and the mother, from his own readings.

In the fourth chapter dedicated to *Iphigénie*, Alonge examines whether the main character represents a return to Euripides or whether Racine has finally abandoned his mentor in order to meet the expectations of his public and his critics. After a six-year absence from the Greek plays, Racine comes back to Euripides, inspired by the theme of obedience/disobedience and the almost incestuous relationship between father and daughter. The conclusion of Alonge's analysis is that Racine betrays Euripides and Aristotle in creating a play where Iphigénie is not a conflicted character: she embraces her father's decision and, with the purest stoicism, accepts the sacrifice of her love and her life. In the end, Racine betrays Euripides in imparting the tragic aspects of the play to the plot (as does Corneille) and not to the character.

*Phèdre* closes this remarkable study with the question of the moral influence of theater, a question addressed by Racine for the first time. The problem in this chapter is to decide if the play places the character at its center—as many commentators of the play have stated—or if the play is driven by the plot—as was customary at the time. Alonge brilliantly demonstrates how Racine chooses to be unfaithful to his Greek masters by constructing a play driven by the plot and the *Peripeteias*. In addition, Racine rejects the mixed character (neither angel nor demon) despite what Racine claims in his Preface to the play: Phèdre is a character who, totally possessed by love, has lost all reason. *In fine*, Alonge shows how *Phèdre* wholly belongs to Racine.

Alonge should be commended for the close reading and careful analysis of Racine and his sources of interpretation. The only hesitation one may have with this otherwise outstanding book is that more time should have been spent examining Ancient Greek culture in order to better assess what influence it may have had on Racine's writings. If Alonge offers his reader some understanding of the context in which Greek tragedies were written and played, he could have delved deeper into particular notions such as guilt, destiny, and the relationship be-

tween Gods and mortals during Antiquity. While Alonge shows, for example, how Euripides has to change his tragedy (*Iphigénie*) because of public rejection, a comprehensive explanation of Greek religion as it is portrayed in Euripides would reinforce his claims. This being said, the pointed summaries of the plays as well as the clear and detailed analysis help the reader engage with the texts presented. The structure of the book, while at times conducive to repetition, is clear and easy to navigate. Rather than hiding under theoretical jargon, Alonge offers a breath of fresh air with this logical and well-crafted study on Racine. *Racine et Euripide* is truly a pleasure to read.

Anne Cayuela and Marc Vuillermoz, eds. *Les Mots et les choses du théâtre. France, Italie, Espagne, XVI<sup>e</sup>–XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles*. Geneva: Droz, 2017. 303 pp. 48.00 CHF. Review by PERRY GETHNER, OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY.

This volume, consisting of seventeen articles, comprises the proceedings of a conference held in 2015 by the research organization *IDT—Les Idées du théâtre*, devoted to the study of liminary texts of plays, especially prefaces, dedications, prologues, and critiques. The goal is to examine how playwrights viewed themselves and various aspects of theatrical activity and to compare those ideas across three neighboring countries: France, Italy, and Spain. The articles, focusing on specific points of terminology, are highly technical, and some of them require extensive knowledge of theatrical conventions in one or more of the three countries. However, most are accessible for the general literary scholar.

Sandrine Blondet examines the language used by French playwrights from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to refer to the composition process. Obvious terms such as *labeur*, *effort*, *peine*, and their synonyms may serve multiple purposes, such as letting authors pride themselves on their hard work and professionalism, or instead on the ease and speed of their writing. The playwrights emphasize such features as solitude and help from the Muses, and their attitudes range from modesty (usually false) to vaunting of their creative genius.