

# Racine and Barthes: The Power of Love

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What does a seventeenth-century playwright share with a modern literary critic? Not much, one would think. Yet Jean Racine and Roland Barthes owe a debt to each other. When in 1963 Barthes writes *Sur Racine*, the essay contributes to the notoriety of its author, who, in return, dusts off the work and image of Racine. Central for both writers' success is their account of the love theme in tragedy. The passions assure Racine's triumph during his life and his poetic legacy in the centuries to come, until Barthes daringly shakes their foundations. In this essay, I want to show the importance of the love theme both for the plays of Racine and for Barthes' essay on them, for it divides critics and public, from the seventeenth century to the twentieth century.

## To Love or Not to Love

The seventeenth century bore witness to a growing interest in passion and love.<sup>1</sup> Philosophers (Malebranche, Descartes)<sup>2</sup>, theologians (François de Sales, Fénelon)<sup>3</sup>, and moralists (Pascal, La Rochefoucauld, La Bruyère)<sup>4</sup> engaged in fierce debates on the theme of love and passions. The numerous publications of love stories, in chronicles and novels, reflect the new taste and demands of the educated part of society: the idyllic novel of the pastoral, the gallant discussions on *questions d'amour*, the libertine genre and Madame de Lafayette's masterpiece, *La Princesse de Clèves*, all represent heroes exploring the delights and the torments of (erotic) passion.<sup>5</sup>

The genre of tragedy is a bit more reluctant to embrace this love theme.<sup>6</sup> Until the mid-century Pierre Corneille decides on the tragic genre. Recognising that love always brings 'beaucoup d'agrément', he nevertheless subordinates it to 'quelque passion plus noble et plus mâle que l'amour, telles que sont l'ambition ou la vengeance' (a more noble and virile passion than love, such as ambition and vengeance).<sup>7</sup> Love is never a purpose in itself. The traditional Cornelian heroic tragedy is, however,

challenged by a more modern, explicitly gallant tragedy. Dramatists such as Philippe Quinault and Thomas Corneille show a gentler kind of invincible love that was more likely to move the audience.<sup>8</sup> Theatre critics admit – often to their regret – that love brings closer the actors and the audience: ‘Rejeter l’amour de nos Tragédies comme indigne des Héros, c’est ôter ce qui leur reste de plus humain, ce qui nous fait tenir encore à eux un secret rapport’ (To reject love in our Tragedies as unworthy of Heroes is to deprive them of their most human character, of what installs a secret bond between those heroes and ourselves).<sup>9</sup> Advocating for a virtuous theatre without love, the abbé Pierre de Villiers sighs: ‘Je sais bien qu’il est difficile d[']entreprendre [la Tragédie sans Amour], et encore plus d’y réussir dans un siècle où l’on veut de l’amour et de la galanterie partout’ (I know very well that it is difficult to undertake a Tragedy without Love, and even more to succeed in it, in a time where one wants love and gallantry everywhere).<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, while Racine’s first tragedy, the cruel *La Thébàïde*, did not please the public; the gallant *Alexandre le Grand* was more successful. Eventually the third play, *Andromaque* (1667), marks the birth of the actual Racinian tragedy. Its première has a tremendous impact on the audience. The résumé – Oreste loves Hermione who loves Pyrrhus who loves Andromaque who loves Hector who is dead – is revealing: love lies at the core of the play. In this way, Racine may tend to the gallant vogue in tragedy, but he combines this prominent love with the classical and heroic tragic ingredients. Racine’s loyalty to ancient and historical sources, for instance, contrasts with the bulk of the invention in the work of his gallant colleagues. In short, to rephrase Jean-Christophe Cavallin: from *Andromaque* onwards, Racine seeks to ‘attendrir et [...] convertir à l’amour l’ancienne tragédie héroïque’ (to *endear* and [...] to convert to love the old heroic tragedy).<sup>11</sup> This Racinian love surpasses by far pure gallantry, given its extent, its violent and often jealous nature and the fact that it spares not even the greatest heroes.

Precisely this ‘abnormal, almost monstrous character’ of the love relationships in Racine pleases Barthes.<sup>12</sup> Even later on, when Barthes radically changes his opinion on Racine, he thinks that the passions are still appealing: ‘Autant j’aime Michelet, autant je n’aime pas Racine; je n’ai pu m’y intéresser qu’en me forçant à y injecter des problèmes personnels d’aliénation amoureuse’ (As much as I love Michelet, I don’t love Racine; I could only take interest in his work by forcing myself to inject it with my personal problems of amorous alienation).<sup>13</sup>

Despite Barthes' penchant for the Racinian passions, *Sur Racine* emphasizes that love is *not* the essence of Racine's plays: 'Le rapport essentiel est un rapport d'autorité, l'amour ne sert qu'à le révéler. [...] le théâtre de Racine n'est pas un théâtre d'amour' ('The essential relation is one of authority, love serves only to *reveal* it. [...] Racine's theatre is not a theatre of love').<sup>14</sup> Hence, Barthes continues, 'il n'y a chez lui d'autre constellation érotique que celle du pouvoir et de la sujétion' ('there is no other erotic constellation in his theatre but that of power and subjection').<sup>15</sup> Barthes represents this general power relation as an equation: 'A a tout pouvoir sur B. A aime B, qui ne l'aime pas' ('A has complete power over B. A loves B, who does not love A').<sup>16</sup> This fragment is the foundation and main idea of *Sur Racine*, for Barthes reveals a core set of power relations, followed by their implications, in each and every play. In *Bajazet*, for instance, the equation accurately defines the relationship between Roxane and Bajazet. Roxane (A), the sultan's favourite and ruler in his absence, has to determine the fate of her prisoner, Bajazet (B). She is madly in love with him, but Bajazet loves another woman, Atalide.

Barthes summarizes the stake of the entire tragic universe by one 'parole profonde': the unhealthy power relations generally stem from the mythical father-child conflict, from the customs of a primitive horde, governed by power and lust.<sup>17</sup> When it comes to love, Barthes therefore defines the true Racinian love as a violent, disruptive Eros-Event, in opposition to a sweet 'sororal' Eros. In *Bajazet*, for instance, Roxane would be possessed by Eros-Event, while the reciprocal love of Bajazet and Atalide would be sororal. Tragedy is the desired but impossible passage from Eros-Event to the more enduring sororal Eros:

Ces deux Éros sont incompatibles, on ne peut passer de l'un à l'autre, de l'amour-ravissement (qui est toujours condamné) à l'amour-durée (qui est toujours espéré), c'est là *l'une des formes fondamentales de l'échec racinien*.

This double Eros is incompatible, one cannot proceed from one to the other, from love-as-rape (which is always condemned) to love-as-duration (which is always coveted), and this impossibility constitutes *one of the fundamental forms of Racinian failure*.<sup>18</sup>

Subsequently Barthes does acknowledge the 'fundamental' role of love in Racine: it actually triggers the tragic proper in the play. Despite this

apparent contradiction, readers of *Sur Racine* particularly admired Barthes' attempt to question the importance of love in Racine's theatre. According to Louis Althusser, this insight made Barthes' book: 'Enfin quelqu'un pour dire que la fameuse "psychologie" racinienne, que les fameuses, et si violentes, et si pures et si farouches, passions raciniennes, *ça n'existe pas!* (Finally someone who says that the famous Racinian 'psychology', that the famous and so violent, and so pure and feral Racinian passions *don't exist!*).<sup>19</sup> Yet, rather than the lack of passions, Althusser's exclamation applauds the controversy and the resistance to the traditional studies of Racine. In short, while Racine owed his fame to the elaboration of the love theme in his tragedies, Barthes makes a name for himself by denying the importance of love. In this way both break with tradition.

### 'Plus d'amour': More Love or No More Love?

In contrast to their prototypically classical image today, Racine's plays were perceived as far from conventional by their contemporary audience. Pious seventeenth-century France was divided in two ways of considering theatre.<sup>20</sup> The first, following Augustine, condemned all kinds of theatre because of its pernicious effects on the morals; the second, Thomist perception supported the possibility of a Christian and edifying theatre. Both condemned the representation of violent amorous passions on stage, in opposition to the audience who requested an elaborate love theme. Consequently Racine was caught between two fires and often had to cope with fierce criticism. Two important '*querelles*' illustrate his relation with these two categories of critics.

The first conflict, the '*querelle des Imaginaires*', opposes the young Racine to the adherents of the severe Augustinian rejection of theatre. The *querelle* is sparked by the moralist Pierre Nicole, a prominent member of the 'Jansenist' community at Port Royal, who censures all work of fiction:

Un faiseur de romans et un poète de théâtre est un empoisonneur public, non des corps, mais des âmes des fidèles, qui se doit regarder comme coupable d'une infinité d'homicides spirituels, ou qu'il a causés en effet ou qu'il a pu causer par ses écrits pernicioeux.

A writer of novels or of theatre is a public poisoner, who infects not the bodies but the souls of the faithful, and who

has to plead guilty to an infinity of spiritual homicides, whether he has caused them or could have caused them with his pernicious writings.<sup>21</sup>

Taking these reproaches of his former instructor at Port Royal personally, Racine – who had just started his career in theatre – puts forward a case for theatre in an aggressive and deliberately polemical response. In this way Racine sides with the Thomists, pleading for a virtuous theatre. Racine follows this lead in the prefaces to his plays, his only poetical texts. In the preface to *Phèdre*, his last profane and most controversial play, he assures the moral value of his play by rephrasing what the abbé d'Aubignac's 'principal rule of the dramatic Poem':<sup>22</sup>

Les faiblesses de l'amour y passent pour de vraies faiblesses.  
Les passions n'y sont présentées aux yeux que pour montrer  
tout le désordre dont elles sont cause. Et le vice y est peint  
partout avec des couleurs qui en font connaître et haïr la  
difformité.

The weaknesses of love pass for real weaknesses. The passions are only presented in order to show all the disorder they caused. And sins are everywhere painted in colours that expose and make one hate their deformity.<sup>23</sup>

In this preface, Racine is actually defending his play against the critics of *Phèdre*'s violent and 'incestuous' passion for her stepson, Hippolyte. This love was said not to belong on a seventeenth-century stage: 'la pureté de nos mœurs, et la délicatesse de notre Nation, ne peuvent envisager Phèdre sans frémir' (the purity of our morals, and the sensitivity of our Nation can't consider *Phèdre* without shivering).<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Racine's moralising objections don't convince: *Phèdre*'s love makes the audience both 'freeze' and 'blush'.<sup>25</sup> Racine is said to be 'fort dangereux, s'il avait fait cette odieuse Criminelle, aussi aimable et autant à plaindre, qu'il en avait envie, puisqu'il n'y a point de vice, qu'il ne pût embellir et insinuer agréablement après ce succès' (really dangerous, if he had made this hateful Criminal as lovely and pitiful as he would have wanted to do, because there is no vice that he couldn't adorn and present agreeably after this success).<sup>26</sup>

Is Racine a 'public poisoner'? Even the Thomist theatre critics have to abandon Racine when it comes to love. For the Jesuit abbé de Villiers, love stories are particularly provocative because they fill the mind with vain ideas of tenderness, which pervert morals in no time.<sup>27</sup> Villiers even makes a clear distinction between love and other passions, such as ambition and

vengeance, which he calls 'point si engageantes' (much less engaging).<sup>28</sup> Indeed, fearing and decrying at all costs the corrupting effects of love theatre, the critics actually highlight the importance and the power of identification of the love theme.

The presence and extent of love was also at stake in a greater cultural conflict: the notorious 'querelle des Anciens et des Modernes'. Some of these discussions cast a new light on the perception of the use of love in theatre, and especially in tragedy. The Moderns were blamed for adapting and lowering ancient masterpieces to the standards and taste of the seventeenth century. Racine was the first to correct these authors if they went too far in distorting the original myth or story: in the prefaces to his tragedies he not only parades his own fidelity to his sources, but he also dares to attack the modern adaptations by his colleagues.<sup>29</sup>

Yet Racine has frequently been a target of the same kind of criticism himself. Charles de Saint-Évremond openly criticizes the changes made in Racine's *Alexandre le Grand* to the main hero's character: 'Nous pouvons mêler de la passion avec leur gloire [des Héros]: mais [...] ne ruinons pas les Héros établis par tant de siècles, en faveur de l'amant que nous formons à notre seule fantaisie' (We can mix passion with the glory of Heroes, but [...] let us not ruin centuries-old Heroes, in favour of the lover we create at our own discretion).<sup>30</sup> Racine guilty, not only of modernization, but also of 'galanterization' of ancient heroes. Beside Alexander the Great, the ancient hero Pyrrhus<sup>31</sup> and the Turk prince Bajazet were found too gallant and sensitive, in short, too French.<sup>32</sup> Love, whether it was perceived as cruelly shocking or, on the contrary, as overly tender, was almost always found too dominant in Racine's plays, and it was not easy to defend it against severe or simply jealous critics.

Racine's trademark, both eulogized and decried, is love, while Barthes, on the other hand, insisted on the inferiority of the love theme in Racine. Notwithstanding its appreciated originality, this bold assertion was an important point of contention for other critics following a more traditional approach. Accordingly, the twentieth century had its own 'querelle des Anciens et des Modernes'.<sup>33</sup> Sorbonne professor Raymond Picard's response to Barthes' *Sur Racine* initiated the 'querelle de la nouvelle critique'. In his pamphlet entitled *Nouvelle Critique ou nouvelle imposture*, Picard mainly attacks the 'pseudo-scientific' analytic method of *Sur Racine*, known today as 'la nouvelle critique'.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, he expresses his indignation at the way in which Barthes treats the passions and love in Racine's plays. On the one hand, Picard thinks that Barthes neglects the love theme in Racine in favour of the father-child conflict – for instance

in *Andromaque*, where, Picard counters, there isn't a father listed amongst the characters:

Les personnages [d'*Andromaque*] sont des individus forcenés que la violence de leur passion, lorsque la tragédie commence, a déjà libérés presque complètement de leurs devoirs politiques et moraux. Faire d'*Andromaque* un drame patriotique, parce que *patrie* et *père* ont la même racine, c'est prendre l'accessoire pour l'essentiel, et par surcroît, c'est tomber dans le ridicule.

The characters of *Andromaque* are obsessed individuals who, at the beginning of the tragedy, are almost entirely delivered from their political and moral duties by the violence of their passion. To make *Andromaque* a patriotic drama, because *patrie* [the home country] and *père* [father] have the same root, is to mistake the accessory for the essential, and what's more, to be ridiculous.<sup>35</sup>

On the other hand, Picard derides Barthes' obsession with sexuality in Racine's work: 'Obsédante, débridée, cynique, elle intervient [...] partout, et il faut relire Racine pour se persuader qu'après tout ses personnages sont différents de ceux de D.-H. Lawrence [sic]'. (Haunting, unbridled, cynic, sexuality intervenes everywhere, and one has to reread Racine to persuade oneself that his characters are, after all, other than those of D. H. Lawrence).<sup>36</sup> Picard mocks, amongst other things, Barthes' example of the phallic aspect of the 'bras ensanglanté' (bloody arm) of Achilles who would have 'possessed' Ériphile in the play *Iphigénie*.<sup>37</sup>

According to Picard, there is both too little and too much (erotic) love in *Sur Racine*. Indeed, Barthes' denial of the genuineness of the love between *Bérénice*'s two protagonists, Titus and Bérénice, contests the traditional appreciation of a play often called the most beautiful love story ever written. Yet Barthes designates also as 'love' relationships where there seem to be none: Néron and Britannicus are confined by the erotic tension between them, and the cruel Athalie would be in love with the little Joas who tried to kill her in her dreams.<sup>38</sup>

Even after the notorious 'querelle de la nouvelle critique', *Sur Racine* was still criticized for its presentation of love in Racine's tragedies. René Pommier made it his own personal goal to run the essay and its author to the ground. Several of his works elaborate on the contradictions and so-called blunders in Barthes' conception of Racinian love.<sup>39</sup> After meticulously examining each and every Racinian play in order to test out,

for instance, Barthes' distinction between the two kinds of Eros, Pommier shoots Barthes' theories down in flames.

### A Threefold 'Rebellion': Racine, Barthes and 'L'Homme racinien'

Although both Barthes and Racine provocatively turn away from tradition, their 'rebellion' does not entirely come as a surprise, for they sacrifice the applause of the critics for a more general applause. Racine and Barthes capitalize on the evolutions of their time and on their audience's changing taste and needs.

The seventeenth-century popular inclination for love and gallantry springs from two important historical shifts that define the constellation of the public. On a philosophical and moral level, there was a '*crise de conscience*', sparked by various destabilizing events such as the Wars of Religion of the past century, scientific progress and the discovery of other worlds.<sup>40</sup> Some literary critics even make mention of a slow process of de-Christianization, where Christian points of reference assumed an ever-diminishing importance in everyday life.<sup>41</sup> This raising of doubts led many educated people to think that everyday life had lost its dignity. Materialist philosophy or libertinage provided no escape for them. These people thus came to search for a new philosophy, a new ideal, situated between two extremes: the iron rigour of religion on the one hand and the detached freedom of amoral libertines on the other.

Secondly, the seventeenth century underwent a socio-political transformation.<sup>42</sup> The centralising politics of the king caused the old feudal aristocracy to lose its power and its autonomy. The *gentilhomme* who previously preferred weapons to culture found himself obliged to adapt to life at a court governed by taste, by gallantry and by refinement. The political decline of the nobility went hand in hand with the economic rise of the bourgeoisie. Defined principally by social ambition, this new mercantile class sought to distinguish itself from the masses by imitating ostensibly aristocratic models for living. Eventually, the bourgeoisie also preferred the life of leisure at court to active economic functions and began to aspire to the same standards of *bon goût* as the nobility.<sup>43</sup> The 'novel' of *préciosité* or of the pastoral, a vehicle for 'the desire for a life freed from all chains and entirely devoted to love', provided a fitting response to this new demand.<sup>44</sup>



This overview of the century shows how a significant sector of society, the cultivated and educated part, progressively came to see that the founding principles of its social and moral identity had been shaken. Racine capitalizes on this feeling. The playwright endows his characters with a self-awareness that goes beyond the dignity and pride that had previously been represented, for instance by Corneille. Racine's success stems from his presentation of the passions, his 'cult of the passions': his heroes feel and make others feel passions that come from deeper within, almost from a place of instinct.<sup>45</sup> Racine thus moves away from daily reality and the Augustinian rigour of Port Royal and creates 'a world of sublime life, free from Christian thought',<sup>46</sup> where 'God is love' becomes 'love is God'.<sup>47</sup>

In his very first article, 'Culture et tragédie' (1942), Barthes also makes the link between tragedy and dignity:

Dans les grandes époques de la tragédie, l'humanité sut trouver une vision tragique de l'existence et, pour une fois peut-être, ce ne fut pas le théâtre qui imita la vie, mais la vie qui reçut du théâtre une *dignité* et un style véritablement grands.

In the great eras of tragedy, humanity knew to find a tragic vision of existence and, perhaps for once, it wasn't theatre which imitated life, but life which obtained from theatre a truly great *dignity* and style.<sup>48</sup>

According to the young Barthes, the apparition and re-appearitions of the tragic genre can mainly be interpreted by means of the spatial and temporal context in which they appear. Likewise, Barthes' own analysis of Racine – although the 'nouvelle critique' actually rejects this kind of extra-literary analysis – makes sense in a certain period or movement. The early sixties introduce a climate where traditions are questioned and taboos broken. This is exactly what Barthes intends to do when studying Racine, the literary personification of the splendour of the Grand Siècle. Picard's reaction, once he understood that *Sur Racine* was more than a provocative exercise, proves that Barthes was right: to touch Racine is to touch the core of French literature. Afterwards Barthes confides to the *Figaro*: 'En Racine converge tout un ensemble de tabous qu'il me paraît excellent de lever' (In Racine converges a collection of taboos that I found excellent to break).<sup>49</sup> Michael Moriarty sums up these broken taboos:

Barthes [...] refuses to show in his text that he too 'loves Racine'. Worse than that, he profanes the cultural monument by what Picard calls an 'obsessive and cynical preoccupation with sexuality'; worst of all, he reduces the magic of a great artist to the working-out of a few algebraic formulas. No passions, no characters, no beauty, just sex, just As and Bs.<sup>50</sup>

Instead of confirming the myth of the Racinian passions, Barthes adopts the more objective gaze of an anthropologist, trying to unravel the relations that connect the *homines raciniani*. Those characters, according to Barthes, are defined by the situation in which they find themselves: almost exclusively a situation of power conflicts. Barthes argues that the power/love relationships in Racine are defined by the mythical father-son conflict. The son refuses to love the one to whom he is destined by his ancestral or political duty; instead he falls in love with a forbidden other. In this way the love of the son is seen as an act of rebellion against his ancestors' suppressing power. Hence, 'where there is no power, desire cannot spark': by subordinating love to situation, Barthes creates a whole new perception of love.<sup>51</sup>

Moriarty argues that this perception is without any doubt influenced by existentialism. This assertion may seem paradoxical, since Barthes' portrayal of the Racinian characters shows very confined human beings. Yet the claim that these characters operate in accordance with 'a certain set of relationships' is less confining for the human will than the idea of almighty passions. Just like Jean-Paul Sartre, Barthes does not believe in the blind forces of love. Instead, he argues that feelings are '*constructed* by the acts we perform'.<sup>52</sup> Barthes' reading of the Racinian hero conveys a certain idea of freedom, for the latter tries to free himself from the parental yoke.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, Barthes' Racine would actually be more humanist than that of his adversaries.

Without mentioning existentialism or humanism, Barthes himself confirms that his reading of the seventeenth-century dramatist is embedded in a relation to the here and now:

C'est moi le vrai gardien des valeurs nationales. La nouvelle critique pose, en effet, une question brûlante: l'homme d'aujourd'hui peut-il lire les classiques? Mon *Racine*, c'est une réflexion sur l'infidélité, et il n'est donc en rien coupé des problèmes qui nous intéressent immédiatement.

It is I, the real guardian of the national values. The nouvelle critique asks indeed a burning question: can we still read the classics today? My *Racine* is a reflexion on infidelity and he is thus on no account cut off from the problems that take our immediate interest.<sup>54</sup>

This interest in the infidelity of the fictional characters receives a second dimension when taking into account Barthes' personal 'infidelity' towards traditional criticism. Nonetheless, *Sur Racine* is never entirely subjective and appears even to be reconcilable with the proper historicising readings of Racine, such as, for instance, Auerbach's essay insisting on the instinct of the characters. Indeed, to reinsert Racine in his Cartesian era – i.e., the beginning of subjectivity – is to look for humanism in Racine, not precisely in the way the characters stoically control their passions as Descartes prescribes – they can't – but in endowing them with a great self-consciousness providing them dignity.

Barthes' *Sur Racine* completes rather than refutes previous studies on the passions in Racine's oeuvre. Moreover, it was not the aim of this essay to prove *Sur Racine* wrong in showing the importance of love for the seventeenth-century audience. Like Racine, Barthes wasn't afraid of controversy in order to seduce his audience. By daring to look past the myth of the passions, the myth of 'Racine est Racine', Barthes doesn't necessarily seek to deny it, but reinvents and reactivates it, when revealing a new idea of freedom in apparent contradiction with the powerful passions.<sup>55</sup> This freedom – also a freedom in loving – is a source of dignity.

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<sup>1</sup> See: Denis de Rougemont, *L'Amour et l'Occident* (Paris: Plon, 1939); Simon May, *Love: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> See: Susan James, *Passion and Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Pierre-François Moreau, *Les Passions à l'âge classique* (Paris: PUF, 2006); Denis Kambouchner, *L'Homme des passions. Commentaires sur Descartes*, 2 vols (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Michel Terestchenko, *Amour et désespoir. De François de Sales à Fénelon* (Paris: Seuil, 2000); Jacques Le Brun, *Le Pur Amour. De Platon à Lacan* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Michael Moriarty, *Fallen Nature, Fallen Selves* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Michael Moriarty, *Disguised Vices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Louis Van Delft, *Littérature et anthropologie* (Paris: PUF, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> In *La France galante* (Paris: PUF, 2008), Alain Viala shows and explains the rise, extent and interests of gallantry in seventeenth-century France. See also: Jean-Michel Pelous, *Amour précieux, amour galant (1654-1675)* (Paris: Klincksiek, 1980); Jean-Pierre Van Elslande, *L'Imaginaire pastoral du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: PUF, 1993); Michel Jeanneret, *Éros rebelle* (Paris: Seuil, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> See: Carine Barbaferi, *Atrée et Céladon, La galanterie dans le théâtre tragique de la France classique (1634-1702)* (Rennes: PUR, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Pierre Corneille, *Discours de l'utilité et des parties du poème dramatique*, in *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. by Georges Couton, 3 vols (Paris: Pléiade, 1980-1987), vol. III, p. 124.

<sup>8</sup> For the influence of the gallant model on seventeenth-century theatre, see Viala, *La France galante*, pp. 308-16.

<sup>9</sup> Charles de Saint-Évremond, *Dissertation sur le Grand Alexandre*, in Jean Racine, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. I, ed. by Georges Forestier (Paris: Pléiade, 1999), p. 186. My translation.

<sup>10</sup> Pierre de Villiers, *Entretien sur les tragédies de ce temps*, in Jean Racine, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. I, p. 793.

<sup>11</sup> Jean-Christophe Cavallin, *La Tragédie spéculative de Racine* (Paris: Hermann, 2014), p. 38.

<sup>12</sup> 'Il dit aimer Racine pour le caractère anormal, presque monstrueux, des amours qu'il met en scène': Tiphaine Samoyault paraphrases a letter of Barthes to his friend Philippe Rebeyrol in 1934. See Tiphaine Samoyault, *Roland Barthes. Biographie* (Paris: Seuil, 2015), p. 115. My translation.

<sup>13</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Réponses', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Éric Marty, 5 vols (Paris, Seuil, 2002), vol. III, p. 1033.

<sup>14</sup> Roland Barthes, *Sur Racine* (Paris: Seuil, 1963), pp. 34-35; *On Racine*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1983), pp. 24-25.

<sup>15</sup> Barthes, *Sur Racine*, p. 102; *On Racine*, p. 100.

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- <sup>16</sup> Barthes, *Sur Racine*, p. 35; *On Racine*, p. 24.
- <sup>17</sup> Barthes, *Sur Racine*, pp. 20-22; *On Racine*, pp. 8-10.
- <sup>18</sup> Barthes, *Sur Racine*, pp. 22-23; *On Racine*, p. 11. My emphasis.
- <sup>19</sup> Louis Althusser, *Lettres à Franca*, quoted in Samoyault, pp. 400-01.
- <sup>20</sup> See: Laurent Thirouin, *L'Aveuglement salutaire. Le réquisitoire contre le théâtre dans la France classique* (Paris: Champion, 1997).
- <sup>21</sup> Pierre Nicole, *Les Visionnaires ou Seconde partie des lettres sur l'hérésie imaginaire* (Liège: Adolphe Beyers, 1667), p. 51. My translation.
- <sup>22</sup> François-Hédélin d'Aubignac, *La Pratique du théâtre*, ed. by Hélène Baby (Paris: Champion, 2001), p. 40 : 'La principale règle du Poème dramatique, est que les vertus y soient toujours récompensées [...], et que les vices y soient toujours punis, ou pour le moins toujours en horreur' (The principal rule of the dramatic Poem is that virtues are always rewarded and vices always punished, or at least abhorred).
- <sup>23</sup> Jean Racine, Preface to *Phèdre et Hippolyte*, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. I, p. 819. My translation.
- <sup>24</sup> *Dissertation sur les tragédies de Phèdre et Hippolyte*, in Jean Racine, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. I, p. 880. My translation.
- <sup>25</sup> *Dissertation sur les tragédies de Phèdre et Hippolyte*, p. 881: 'Leur idée [d'inceste et d'adultère] glace nos cœurs. J'ai vu les Dames les moins délicates [...] rougir' (The idea of incest and adultery freezes our hearts. I have seen the most delicate Women blush).
- <sup>26</sup> *Dissertation sur les tragédies de Phèdre et Hippolyte*, p. 881.
- <sup>27</sup> Villiers, *Entretien sur les tragédies de ce temps*, p. 781.
- <sup>28</sup> Villiers, *Entretien sur les tragédies de ce temps*, p. 782. My translation.
- <sup>29</sup> Racine uses almost the entire preface of *Iphigénie* to criticize the way in which Quinault adapted Euripides' *Alceste* and dared to point out the original's shortcomings (see: *Œuvres complètes*, vol. I, pp. 697-701).
- <sup>30</sup> Saint-Évremond, *Dissertation sur le Grand Alexandre*, p. 186.
- <sup>31</sup> For Boileau, Racine's Pyrrhus is but a 'Héros à la Scudéri', Scudéry being the authority for the gallant novel. See: Jacques de Losme de Monchesnay, *Boleana ou Bons mots de M. Boileau* (Amsterdam: Lhonoré, 1742), p. 59.
- <sup>32</sup> Racine pretends not to have changed the morals and customs of the Turk (see: Preface to *Bajazet*, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. I, p. 625), but his censors ridicule Bajazet for being a 'Turc aussi doux qu'un Français [et un] Musulman des plus courtois' (a Turk as soft as a Frenchman and one of the most courteous Muslims). Robinet, *Lettre en vers à Monsieur*, 30 janvier 1672, cited in Raymond Picard, ed., *Nouveau Corpus Racinianum*, (Paris: CNRS, 1976), p. 66.
- <sup>33</sup> Serge Doubrovsky was one of the first to draw the parallel between the 'querelle de la nouvelle critique' and the 'querelle des Anciens et des Modernes'. See: *Pourquoi la nouvelle critique. Critique et objectivité* (Paris, Mercure de France, 1966).
- <sup>34</sup> However, one should not overestimate the influence of *Sur Racine*: the actual 'querelle de la nouvelle critique' only started two years after its publication.

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Antoine Compagnon explains that the Barthes of the heat of the conflict – the Barthes establishing the fundamentals of his new method – was already another person than the one who wrote *Sur Racine*. See: ‘Lequel est le vrai?’, in *Roland Barthes*, ed. by Bernard Comment, Antoine Compagnon, Georges Didi-Huberman, et al. (Paris: Le Magazine littéraire, 2013), pp. 9-14. Yet critics didn’t make such a distinction. After the publication of Barthes’ polemical *Essais critiques* (1964), they reread and reevaluated *Sur Racine*, this time having Barthes’ theories at the back of their mind. Antoine Compagnon, ‘Barthes versus Picard’, in *1966: Annus mirabilis*, lecture at Collège de France, Paris, online video recording, 8 February 2011, <https://www.college-de-france.fr/site/antoine-compagnon/course-2011-02-08-16h30.htm> [accessed 24 July 2018].

<sup>35</sup> Raymond Picard, *Nouvelle Critique ou nouvelle imposture* (Paris: Pauvert, 1965), p. 30. My translation.

<sup>36</sup> Picard, *Nouvelle Critique*, pp. 30-31. My translation.

<sup>37</sup> Barthes, *Sur Racine*, p. 34, cited in Picard, p. 33; Barthes, *On Racine*, p. 23.

<sup>38</sup> Barthes, *Sur Racine*, pp. 25, 35; *On Racine*, pp. 13, 24.

<sup>39</sup> See: René Pommier, *Roland Barthes. Ras le bol!* (Paris: Roblot, 1987), pp. 47-90; René Pommier, *Le « Sur Racine » de Roland Barthes* (Paris: SEDES, 1988), pp. 17-126.

<sup>40</sup> Paul Hazard, *La Crise de la conscience européenne* (Paris: Boivin, 1935).

<sup>41</sup> See: Erich Auerbach, ‘La Cour et la ville’, in *Le Culte des passions*, ed. and trans. by Diane Meur (Paris: Macula, 1998), pp. 115-79. Although contested for its strong assumptions, Auerbach’s analysis of this evolution is confirmed by, amongst others, specialists of the French libertinage. (See the works of René Pintard and Jean-Pierre Cavaillé.)

<sup>42</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

<sup>43</sup> See: Viala, *La France galante*; Michael Moriarty, *Taste and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>44</sup> Auerbach, ‘La Cour et la ville’, p. 168. My translation.

<sup>45</sup> Erich Auerbach, ‘Racine and the Passions’, in *Time, History and Literature*, ed. by James I. Porter, trans. by Jane O. Newman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 241.

<sup>46</sup> Auerbach, ‘La Cour et la ville’, p. 178. My translation.

<sup>47</sup> I owe this formulation to Irving Singer, *The Nature of Love*, 2 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), vol. II, p. 294. Singer uses it to describe the evolution from the medieval Christian love conception to Romantic love, but he sees forms of this Romantic love conception in the sixteenth century already, e.g. in the thought of Luther.

<sup>48</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘Culture et tragédie’, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. I, pp. 29-30. My accentuation and translation.

<sup>49</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘Au nom de la “nouvelle critique”. Roland Barthes répond à Raymond Picard’, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. II, p. 750. My translation.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Moriarty, *Roland Barthes* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991) p. 60.

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<sup>51</sup> Moriarty, *Roland Barthes*, p. 66.

<sup>52</sup> Moriarty, *Roland Barthes*, p. 66.

<sup>53</sup> I owe thanks to Michael Moriarty for making me see this personally.

<sup>54</sup> Barthes, 'Au nom de la "nouvelle critique"', p. 752.

<sup>55</sup> It is no surprise that this is the title of one of Barthes' *Mythologies*.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Delphine Calle completed a doctorate in literary studies in 2018 at Ghent University. She works on early modern French thought and literature. Her thesis investigated how seventeenth-century French love conceptions illuminate the theatre of Jean Racine. She is currently working as a postdoctoral researcher at Rutgers University with a fellowship of the Belgian American Educational Foundation. Her new research project examines friendship in seventeenth-century France.

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