

**Jennifer Tamas:** *Le Silence trahi. Racine ou la déclaration tragique.* Geneva: Droz, 2018. 261 p.

Racine's anguished characters continue to speak to us across the centuries. Like ghosts of neoclassical theater, Jennifer Tamas argues, they *haunt* us, both by their words and, significantly, their silence. After a brief introduction that frames the discussion both in terms of seventeenth-century dramaturgy and the hermeneutic demands of the present, this book's first chapter examines the temporalities revealed in the pervasive tension between silence and utterance in Racine's tragedies. Much of the focus is on the expansive past time frames that are invoked in exposition scenes, moments both evoked and lost to history, both articulated and couched troublingly in the unsaid and the unspeakable. The next chapter turns to space as the second key parameter of Racine's theater. Tamas argues that places are in collusion with silence, that onstage space acts as a mute witness to the dramatic action unfolding therein. Two contrasting examples of present-absent characters provide a fascinating illustration of the idea of space in combination with silence. In *Andromaque*, Hector haunts the stage while never appearing on it; in *Britannicus*, Néron frequently hides from onstage space, only to exercise a power that increasingly pervades the places the other characters uncomfortably occupy. In general terms, the chapter argues that it is silence that connects spaces interior and exterior to the drama at hand. The third chapter makes perhaps the strongest argument of the book. Drawing on d'Aubignac's notion that to speak is to act, Tamas interestingly reverses the concept to show how refusal or inability to communicate becomes the basis for action in Racine. The best example is Phèdre who experiences the unspeakable horror of her illicit love for Hippolyte, a difficulty of enunciation notably dramatized in Seneca's version of the tragedy. Tamas shows how in Racine silence becomes the driving force of the action as characters find themselves trapped in language. As the following chapter on interrogation demonstrates, the characters then lash out at one another, often to no avail, as for example when Bérénice reacts to Titus' stubborn silence by lying to herself about their shared destiny. The characters Tamas calls "les inquisiteurs amoureux" (143) seek answers and most often find only a devastating silence. In the fifth chapter, the nearly impossible declarations of love that torment the characters take the form of an existential crisis. Phèdre confesses her passion to Hippolyte in order to come into existence in his eyes. Interestingly, Roxane tries to do much the same thing vis-à-vis Bajazet, although her ontological fragility in relation to him creates a puzzling tension with her near-absolute power over him. The final body chapter, on

the failures of characters to gain the recognition of their interlocutors through language, analyzes some of the consequences of the prevalence of silence in Racine's tragedies, where protagonists engage in both aggressive and suicidal behaviors as language continues to tempt, mislead, and ultimately fail them. The focus on silence in dialectical tension with utterance provides in this study for a wide range of close readings of Racine's dialogues. Some of the topics treated, such as the three unities, have received far more scholarly attention than the book's bibliography reflects. To cite but one example, John Campbell's *Questioning Racinean Tragedy* might have provided some critical context for the discussion of the specificity of Racine's dramatic art. Nonetheless, this study will substantially inform students, readers, and performers of Racine who must necessarily grapple with the fundamental tension in the tragedies between what can and cannot be said.

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