THE MOTHERS IN RACINE'S PLAYS

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FROM

LA THEBAIDE TO PHEDRE

BY

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PREFACE

There is much about Jean Racine that is mysterious. Fate seems to have willed that this man, the greatest figure of French classical literature, should remain enshrouded in mists which patient research has only partly dispersed. History has left us very few facts with which to work, and yet the curious mind cannot be content to turn away, unconcerned, merely because correspondence is missing or dates are uncertain. The man is too fascinating! And so we continually return to his works, poring over them seeking some insight into a genius whose writing is every bit as stirring to-day as when it first appeared during the reign of Louis XIV. It was while pondering his plays, in the light of what little we do know of his life, that a striking anomaly became evident to us--Jean Racine, who has given us characterizations of such impressive mothers as Andromaque, Jocaste, Agrippine, Clytemnestre and Phèdre, lost his own mother when he was scarcely one year old.

Why did Racine return so persistently to works in which mothers are so fundamentally important? Do these roles, spaced as they are from the beginning to the end of his major creative period, mark stages in the development of this great playwright's turbulent life? What forces filled the vacuum left in his psyche by the lack of a mother? To find answers to such questions, we shall consider each of the mother-roles in its setting. To begin

with, there is Jocaste struggling to re-unite her warring sons in La Thébaïde. We shall next consider Andromaque, in the play of that name, as she strives to protect the life of her son while remaining faithful to the memory of her dead husband. Thirdly, our interest will centre on Agrippine as she plots her devious ways through the life of her son Néron in Britannicus. We then investigate Clytemnestre's determined battle to protect her daughter in Iphigénie. Finally, we shall study the highly complex Phèdre, guilt-ridden because of her incestuous love for her step-son Hippolyte in Phèdre.

We believe firmly that these roles offer us a penetrating insight into the astonishingly creative mind of Jean Racine. The search for answers to our questions has proved fruitful. Whether they be acceptable or not, the quest has been its own reward.

The preparation of this thesis has been an engrossing experience, not only because of the nature of its contents but also because of the opportunity it has afforded to work under the direction of Dr. Arthur W. Patrick of McMaster University. His guidance and encouragement have been of the greatest value.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

LA THÉBAÏDE

Critics do not place La Thébaïde among the greatest plays created by Racine, and justly so, for it is the effort of a very young man. Yet for this same reason it is of the greatest interest if we seek to know the man behind the creation. What better time to search for his inner truths than when he is young and has not yet learned to stand back from his work and eye it dispassionately with the calculating skill of the veteran? And if Racine lacked experience in the writing of tragedies, still he had no doubt already formed most of those facets of the personality which affect one's actions throughout life. Thus an early play may well be most enlightening. We shall take the time to sketch the historical prelude to La Thébaïde, in the belief that the forces and events that shaped his genius had already been active. This is particularly so in the case of Port-Royal, the home of Jansenism, that power which was so constantly to struggle for the soul of Jean Racine.

How misleading it is to think of Racine's childhood as uneventful! Left an orphan at the age of three and passed from relative to relative Racine came to know the sorrow of being unloved.[1]

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1 Mesnard (I, 2-3) quotes Louis Racine's description of his father's presence at "les grandes fêtes de l'année" at the home of the poet's grandfather:"Mon père disait qu'il était comme les autres invité à ces repas, mais qu'à peine on daignait le regarder".

He had received an excellent education from those worthy Jansenist teachers whom he was to flay in later years. But Port-Royal, too, knew hard times. The Convent had been dissolved by royal proclamation in 1660, only to be staggered by a second blow - the death of the Mother Superior Angélique. The superior, M. Singlin, had been forced into hiding. At this time Racine was in Paris enjoying the heady wine of freedom after the somber atmosphere of the Jansenist Collège de Harcourt which he had left in December, 1658. Racine's former tutor, Antoine le Maître, had written him this stern advice two years previously: "La jeunesse doit toujours se laisser conduire, et tâcher de ne point s'émanciper"[2], but Racine, during his sojourn in Paris, was so emancipated that he soon found himself exiled (January, 1661) to Chevreuse, which he thereafter named Babylon. In an effort to obtain a prebend with its attendant income he went to live with his uncle Sconin in Uzès, but his efforts were repeatedly thwarted and there is little doubt that his attitude towards his Jansenist background steadily worsened. With the exception of his uncle Sconin he came to detest his "family".

Most children are judged unfortunate if they are left orphans; Racine was orphaned twice! Early in 1663 Racine returned to Paris to his dying grandmother, Marie Desmoulins. Sincere grief marked his reaction to her death in August, 1663.[3] This was

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2 P. Mesnard, Oeuvres de J. Racine, VI, 372, Letter "D'Antoine Le Maistre à Racine" (1656).

3 Ibid., VI, 500, Letter dated Aug. 13, 1663, to his sister Marie: "J'ai trop de douleur pour songer à autre chose qu'à l'extrême perte que j'ai faite."

the woman he had so often called "mother" in his letters. By leaving Uzès he had, in effect, "lost" the one man who came close to being a father - his uncle Sconin. Racine was again an orphan. (How many orphans there are in his plays!)

Forced to make his own way, Racine turned to poetry with considerable success. With the publication of an Ode sur la Convalescence du Roi and La Renommée aux Muses (1663), the orphan had penetrated the outer defenses of the Court. He was invited to attend the "lever du Roi", and soon was granted a royal stipend. He need never look back. His aunt, Agnès de Sainte-Thècle, wrote him from Port-Royal in 1663: "Vous ne devez pas penser à nous venir voir, car vous savez que je ne pourrais pas vous parler . . ." Let Port-Royal refuse him entry! He had more important things to consider. On the twentieth day of June, 1664, La Thébaïde, tragedy by Jean Racine, was presented by Molière's troup at the Palais-Royal. Racine doubtless thought that this proved, once and for all, that he need never look back. And, but for the absence of the father, Oedipe, but for the insistence on the right to pursue life and love by the young lovers, but for the voice of conscience embodied in the mother Jocaste, we might almost be persuaded that Racine had convinced himself that the past was past, never to be relived.

JOCASTE - THE VOICE OF CONSCIENCE

Jocaste, the mother of Etéocle, Polinice, and of their sister

Antigone, has lived in history as the woman around whom evolved one of the most interesting legends of antiquity, the story of Oedipus. Unwittingly married to her long-lost son, Jocaste gave birth to three children before the death of her husband-son. Oedipus decreed that his sons Etéocle and Polinice should alternate as kings, each reigning for a year before yielding the crown to the other. Difficult though the execution of this decree might be in a normal family, it was absolutely impracticable in this race whose history had been marked by hatred and violence.

As the play opens, Jocaste fearfully awaits news of the imminent battle between Etéocle, who refuses to abandon the throne, and Polinice, who had laid siege to the city of Thebes with the aid of the army of Mycène, king of Argos. Her first words show her self-accusing nature and her strong death-wish:

> Mes yeux depuis six mois étaient ouverts aux larmes
> Et le sommeil les ferme en de telles alarmes!
> Puisse plutôt la mort les fermer pour jamais,
> Et m'empêcher de voir le plus noir des forfaits!
> . . . . . .
> Il faut courir, Olympe, après ces inhumains;
> Il les faut séparer, ou mourir par leurs mains.
> (Act I, Sc. i)

The word "inhumains" seems strange! She soon adds "monstres" to their titles and reveals that she has yet to learn that determined men are not moved by tears. In depicting unsuccessful mothers (and Jocaste is a classic example of the type), Racine has shown clearly that his knowledge of human behaviour could be used negatively, that is, he knew what attitudes and actions would <u>not</u> achieve their intended results.

Jocaste, however, has another problem. She has a guilt complex caused by her incestuous relationship with Oedipus and by the tempestuous history of the "race de Laius" in general. In an apostrophe to the sun she declares:

> Tu peux voir sans frayeur les crimes de mes fils
> Après ceux que le père et la mère ont commis.
> . . . . . .
> Tu sais qu'ils sont sortis d'un sang incestueux,
> Et tu t'étonnerais s'ils étaient vertueux.
> (Act I, Sc. i)

Those guilty of incest usually do not dwell on the fact publicly. Jocaste, however, seems preoccupied with her past sins. Gradually this preoccupation emerges as the motivation of the play. It is the only motive which is advanced to justify why "Les Frères ennemis" are in fact enemies. It is only with her sons, in turn, that Jocaste grows irritable, then violent. Scene ii introduces Antigone, and immediately we sense a difference. Her sons may have been "monstres" but her daughter is "chère Antigone". We see that Jocaste is passing on to her daughter the same attitude to her sex as she herself has revealed. Femininity is not an adornment, but a weapon:

> Allons leur faire voir ce qu'ils ont de plus tendre;
> Voyons si contre nous ils pourront se défendre.
> (Act I, Sc. ii)

Perhaps this criticism is too strong, for Racine wrote in the margin of the Greek version of The Phoenicians by Euripides: "Ces interrogations ne sont point nécessaires au sujet; mais elles

sont tendres et du caractère d'une mère".[4] There are few comments in Racine's own words concerning the character of a mother. This reference to tenderness should be significant. Indeed Jocaste is at first conciliatory:

> La couronne pour vous a-t-elle tant de charmes?
> Si par un parricide il la fallait gagner,
> Ah! mon fils! à ce prix voudriez-vous régner?
> (Act I, Sc. ii)

She evokes the authority of her dead husband:

> Oedipe, en achevant sa triste destinée,
> Ordonna que chacun régnerait son année.
> (Act I, Sc. ii)

Etéocle brushes this aside with the insistence that the will of the people favours him and that his brother, by marrying the daughter of the king of Argos, had proved he stood with the enemies of Thebes. Jocaste's tenderness disappears, to be replaced by denunciation:

> Dites, dites plutôt, coeur ingrat et farouche,
> Qu'auprès du diadème il n'est rien qui vous touche.
> Mais je me trompe encor: ce rang ne vous plaît pas
> Et le crime tout seul a pour vous des appas.
> (Act I, Sc. ii)

She realizes she has failed to win over her son. His blind ambition is at fault:

> . . . que vous pénétrez mal dans le fond de mon coeur.

She proposes that both reign conjointly and even tries flattery:

> Les peuples admirant cette vertu sublime,
> Voudront toujours pour prince un roi si magnanime.

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4 R.-C. Knight, Racine et la Grèce, p. 221.

She sees she has failed and decides to appeal to his brother Polinice:

Par mes justes soupirs j'espère l'émouvoir.

Tenderness is here, true, but only as an interlude between tears and denunciation. Where did Racine find a model for such a mother? R.-C. Knight tends to the belief that it was not in Euripides. In his comments on Racine's annotations of the Greek text, Knight points out that many things criticized in the Greek have been included in La Thébaïde: "On est donc peut-être fondé à penser que cet examen des Phéniciennes n'a pas précédé la composition de la pièce."[5]

If one accepts Knight's conclusion, then one must look elsewhere. Rotrou probably exerted a greater influence on the characterization of the play. The initial scene in which Jocaste awakens to hear that her sons are preparing to do battle, and the reconciliation scene (Act IV, Sc. iii), contain echoes of Rotrou's expressions.[6] The rhymes are occasionally identical. Rotrou and Racine both appear to have translated Seneca freely. It would seem, then, that Racine's characterization which, in this early work, is neither complex nor profound, stems from his French predecessor, Rotrou, and from his own resources. It would be easy to accept the view that Racine did no more than translate whole sections of his sources and then dismiss the play as having no value to an investigator.

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5 Knight, p. 222.

6 Ibid., p. 254.

But even the knowing use of a given situation implies a choice made by Racine. It is in the selection of details and the alteration of the originals that Racine's mind can be seen at work.

As mentioned earlier, Jocaste seems obsessed with her incestuous past. It is interesting to observe in L'Inconscient dans l'oeuvre et la vie de Racine by Charles Mauron the assertion that the "primum mobile" of this first play parallels that of his masterpiece Phèdre, that is, incest and its consequences. Mauron declares: "Le fonds sur lequel travaille l'imagination du jeune homme est, en vérité, le mythe classique d'Oedipe ou plus exactement ses conséquences"[7], and later he mentions the divergence between Racine's work and that of Rotrou: "Il a donc noirci le conflit en ramenant à une seule cause la mort de tous ses personnages et en éliminant du drame toute la valeur morale."

This theme of incest provokes another development which Mauron calls "le conflit des générations". He groups Jocaste, Créon and Etéocle as the older generation (Etéocle is his father Oedipe in another form, taking his father's place and ruling his father's kingdom). Separated from them by more than the walls of Thebes are Polinice and Hémon, and Antigone, whose heart is outside the walls even if she herself remains within them. The new generation is characterized by love, tenderness and hope - the desire to live fully and freely. Thus the political division

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7 C. Mauron, L'Inconscient dans l'Oeuvre et la Vie de Racine, p. 257 f.

within the play is a psychological one as well. The validity of this argument becomes more impressive when one sees the same pattern recurring in Britannicus. Here the element of youth, love, light is represented by Britannicus and Junie (paralleling Polinice plus Hémon and Antigone). Néron's counterpart is Etéocle (note the choice of words - "monstres"), whereas the element of age, possessiveness and darkness as found in Agrippine along with Burrhus, corresponds to Jocaste and Créon. With only slight variations the pattern can be applied to Mithridate (the question of incest, the threat of the parent, the tender, pure nature of young love) and to Phèdre. It is true that in Mithridate the sinning mother never appears. Yet Xipharès' mother and the consequences of her treacherous dealings with Pompey hover over the initial scenes of the play. Mauron argues that a repeated pattern must reveal a basic subconscious attitude. Indeed, he makes it perfectly clear that the aggressive, critical women which mark Racine's creation are a subconscious product of a prolonged inner conflict: "Or il n'existe, semble-t-il, dans la vie de Racine, qu'un seul conflit affectif qui puisse avoir cette profondeur et cette continuité, à travers les péripéties de son existence. C'est sa lutte contre Port-Royal et pour le théâtre".[8]

The attitude of Port-Royal and of Jocaste are, indeed, similar. There is historical evidence that Port-Royal, or at least

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8 Mauron, p. 184.

Racine's paternal grand-mother, Marie Desmoulins, had acted, at the time of the play's composition, as Jocaste does in the play. We have Racine's own statement of his relationship with his Jansenist grand-mother: ". . . il faudrait que je fusse le plus ingrat du monde, si je n'aimais pas une mère qui m'a été si bonne, et qui a eu plus de soin de moi que de ses propres enfants."[9] Port-Royal, in 1663, saw the death of Racine's "mother". It saw a great deal more. For at least three years Port-Royal had seen Jean Racine more and more inclining to the worldly life which it held to be so baleful. The much quoted letter of September 13, 1660, is explicit: ". . . je reçois tous les jours lettres sur lettres, ou pour mieux dire, excommunications sur excommunications à cause de mon triste sonnet".[10] It is significant that Racine felt that the attack was made against the writing of poetry, not dissolute living or immoral company. Racine had always been noted for his inability to accept criticism and especially criticism of his literary works. Many men are known to-day only because Racine skewered them with an epigram and left them to roast. The most sadistic of these epigrams were aimed at his literary critics. It must have hurt Racine deeply that his spiritual parents condemned the one way Racine felt he could achieve distinction. Were these "excommunications" marked by tears as Jocaste's appeals were? It seems likely - to judge by the letter written by Agnès de Sainte-

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9 Mesnard, VI, 498, Letter placed by Mesnard in the year 1663.

10 Ibid., p. 371. The sonnet, according to Lacretelle, La Vie Privée de Racine, p. 49, was written to commemorate the baptism of the daughter of Nicolas Vitart.

Thècle in 1663: "Je vous écris dans l'amertume de mon coeur, et en versant des larmes que je voudrais pouvoir répandre en assez grande abondance devant Dieu pour obtenir de lui votre salut". Did his aunt Agnès, like Jocaste, denounce his ingratitude? In the same letter she writes: "Vous n'ignorez pas la tendresse que j'ai toujours eue pour vous, et que je n'ai jamais rien désiré, sinon que vous fussiez tout à Dieu. . ."[11] Jocaste's denunciation included a reference to crime:

> Et le crime tout seul a pour vous des appas.
> (Act I, Sc. iii)

Sainte-Thècle wrote: "J'ai appris avec douleur que vous fréquentiez plus que jamais des gens dont le nom est abominable à toutes les personnes qui ont tant soit peu de piété. . ."

If the excommunication began in 1660 what would be Racine's frame of mind in 1664 when, probably, he began La Thébaïde? Could he not have struck back subconsciously by picturing his spiritual mother as incestuous? To support this view it should be remembered with what violence he replied when he presumed his artistic creation had been attacked by Nicole in his letters of 1665 and 1666. Mauron sees in the childish petulance of Racine's reply a "querelle de famille" in which Racine assumes "l'attitude d'un enfant devant ses maîtres." "Il attaque sa famille pour s'en libérer franchement. . ."[12]

No doubt Racine felt triumphant about the success of his

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11 Mauron, p. 245.

12 Ibid., p. 252.

previously published works. Did Agnès de Sainte-Thècle remind him as Jocaste reminds Créon:

> La victoire, Créon, n'est pas toujours si belle;
> La honte et le remords vont souvent après elle.
> (Act I, Sc. iv)

It is certain that Racine was haunted by "shame and remorse" over his attack on Nicole.[13] But few critics have pointed out the letter written by Racine in 1659 (or perhaps 1660) to Le Vasseur in which Racine quite unknowingly looked years ahead into his own future. In reference to certain changes in his sonnet he wrote: "Car les poètes ont cela des hypocrites, qu'ils défendent toujours ce qu'ils font, mais que leur conscience ne les laisse jamais en repos".[14]

The view that subconsciously Racine transposed his guilt into the figure of the incestuous Jocaste and thatthis transposition is the motive behind all the possessive, aggressive women which so distinguish Racine's work seems undeniable.

Returning to the play we find Jocaste still striving to conciliate, to recapture her lost sons. She predicts that they would turn from violence to good works if only they could be persuaded to reign together:

> On les verrait plutôt, par de nobles projets,
> Se disputer tous deux l'amour de leurs sujets.
> (Act I, Sc. iv)

But if she seems incapable of understanding her sons, she is not

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13 Racine's son, Jean-Baptiste, relates the following incident: "L'abbé Tallemant s'avisa un jour, en pleine Académie, de lui reprocher cette faute. Oui, Monsieur, lui répondit mon père, vous avez raison; c'est l'endroit le plus honteux de ma vie. ."

14 Mesnard, VI, 373.

blind where politics are concerned (a reference to Port-Royal?). She readily penetrates Créon's facade and sees his ambition to reign when Etéocle and Polinice have been destroyed in war. The first act closes with the somewhat alien scene in which Créon denounces his son Hémon. His violence is reminiscent of Jocaste's "monstres", "inhumains". There is another parallel, in that Jocaste is most violent when she is most aware that she has lost control of her sons, and Créon's violence rages when his possession of tender, virginal Antigone is threatened. (Father and son coveting the same woman - this, too, is an incestuous situation.) One is drawn closer to accepting Mauron's thesis of the "conflit des générations". He sees in the rivalry between father and son for Antigone, Racine's most significant creative act in writing this play. No source contains this picture of Créon. It is pure Racine. Créon's attitude is, in Mauron's terms "l'inceste renversé. . .la mainmise du parent sur l'enfant, le mort sur le vif".[15] The transposition of genders is insignificant. Male or female, the theme of the parent dominating the male offspring, criticising, inhibiting, threatening it, is a recurrent theme throughout Racine's work. So recurrent is the theme that one cannot help recalling the corresponding role of Port-Royal. In all cases the threatened son presents a plea for innocence, love, freedom: (Polinice, Astyanax, Britannicus, Bajazet, Xipharès, Hippolyte, Joas). One keeps hearing the reverberation

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15 Mauron, p. 236.

of Antoine Le Maître's "La jeunesse doit toujours se laisser conduire, et tâcher de ne point s'émanciper."

As Act II progresses it becomes more and more evident that, even if Polinice detests the violence and futility of war, he intends to pursue his "right" to rule supreme. Indeed, he was born to rule.

> Que le peuple à son gré nous craigne ou nous chérisse,
> Le sang nous met au trône, et non pas son caprice.
> (Act II, Sc. iii)

Jocaste pleads for peace, but again, when she sees her arguments and tears have no effect, she reverts to vilification:

> "Ainsi donc la discorde a pour vous tant de charmes?"
> (Act II, Sc. iii)

He is bloodthirsty, heartless, she insists. Eventually it is the young lovers, Hémon and Antigone, who persuade Polinice to meet his brother, but they are interrupted by the news that Etéocle's troops (secretly aroused by Créon) have betrayed the truce. Antigone is sent to plead with "ce barbare" (Etéocle) and the act ends with Jocaste's lines, strangely reminiscent of Phèdre:

> La force m'abandonne et je n'y puis courir;
> Tout ce que je puis faire, hélas, c'est de mourir.[16]
> (Act II, Sc. iv)

The death which she so longs for she pictures as a release from torment. She flees life as did the "solitaires" of Port-Royal. In the soliloquy (Act III, Sc. ii) she rails at the gods for leading her unwittingly into her incestuous life with Oedipus:

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16 cf. Phèdre, Act I, Sc. iii:
"... ma force m'abandonne;"
"Et mes genoux tremblants se dérobent sous moi!"
and later:
"Soleil, je te viens voir pour la dernière fois!"

Vous-mêmes dans mes bras vous l'avez amené!

Hell itself could not equal the tortures she has endured while alive - and simply because the gods so will:

Prennent-ils donc plaisir à faire des coupables,
Afin d'en faire après d'illustres misérables?

The reconciliation scene which begins Act IV marks Jocaste's second attempt to avoid what seems inevitable. As a mother she has gone "the second mile". She begs for peace, for an end to the rivers of blood which flow over the land. Even here there is denunciation. After all, who is responsible for these rivers of blood? When her patience fails, the familiar vocabulary returns - "Barbares, rougissez. . ", "le crime", "cruels", "coupable", "méchant" - even as she pleads for peace. For every plea she can conceive her sons find a reply. Thus she yields, not entirely out of weakness, but out of recognition of the inevitable. Finally she shows how great her torment is by seeking her own death.

La Thébaïde is worthy of more attention than the critics have given it, especially from the point of view of psychological research. In the person of Jocaste it offers us the initial example of the dominant mother role which Racine gradually developed to its height in Phèdre. The fact that one of these figures is found in so important a situation in a work on which Racine relied to begin his career strengthens the view that the role reflects basic forces in his personality. Moreover, the various characteristics of the role link Port-Royal to this aggressive, maternal image. We sense in the mother-son relationship an echo of the relationship of Racine with Port-Royal and,

since incest is so strong a factor in the history of Jocaste, we are prepared to seek in each subsequent return to the theme of incest a new manifestation of the conflict between Racine and Port-Royal. The link between mother, incest, and Port-Royal is a valuable insight. Once this is accepted, Jocaste's denunciation of her offspring must constitute the reproaches which Racine suffered from his own conscience. Whatever he might have protested to the contrary, the orphan who had run away from his foster parents did not achieve freedom.

CHAPTER II

ANDROMAQUE

The Historical Setting

The time lapse between the presentation of La Thébaide and of Andromaque is slightly less than three and one half years (June, 1664, to November, 1667). Much happened in those three years - the characters and complexity of Andromaque reflect a remarkably sudden maturing and an evolution in Racine and in his audience. We shall deal with three major events because they directly influence or explain Andromaque. They are: the production of Alexandre, the appearance in Racine's life of La du Parc, and the "querelle des Visionnaires".

We shall not dwell at length on Alexandre. Principally, of course, because the mother role is missing, but also because the subsidiary roles offer little enlightenment for the succeeding plays. It is worth mentioning that Alexandre like La Thébaide reveals the mood of the audience for which Racine wrote. Both are basically military subjects. The Fronde had subsided in 1659, but the memories of heroic deeds which so favoured Corneille were still present to hamper Racine. Even Alexandre suffered the criticism that its hero preferred wooing to warring. Racine's genius would only flourish when the transition from the Fronde to the splendour of Louis' early reign had been completed. Alexandre did achieve its goal; it won Louis' favour and protection for the young author of suspicious religious background.

That Racine pictures himself as another Alexandre, hence as another Louis, seems obvious. Port-Royal could not have been pleased.

Among the cast of the initial production by Molière's troupe at the Palais-Royal there appears the name of Mlle. du Parc, playing Axiane. Marquise-Thérèse de Gorla, Italian by birth, had lost her husband René Berthelot, called "du Parc", in October, 1664. She was therefore a widow - indeed a very beautiful widow. Her beauty had won her the admiration of Molière, Corneille and his brother Thomas Corneille. That she had winning ways is undeniable - that she was faithful to her husband has never been disproved. Historians seem puzzled that the ravishing actress could have been true to her rotund, jolly but mediocre actor-husband. Tall, graceful, imperious, faithful and widowed, she appears a living Andromaque. She was soon to become Andromaque in fact. Because of his love for her, Racine could justifiably be accused of unfaithfulness (to Molière and the Corneilles). In this respect, Racine and Pyrrhus are alike. There is one other question we should consider. La du Parc was six years older than Racine. Old enough to be his mother? Chronologically no - but psychologically?

Racine was to receive accusations of unfaithfulness from another source - Port-Royal. In 1665 there appeared a pamphlet written by Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin which purportedly urged a crusade against the Jansenists and the Turks.[1] Nicole had already published a series

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1 See Jasinski, 1, 157 ff.

of ten leaflets, from 1664 to 1665 under the title Lettres sur l'hérésie imaginaire. Desmarets attacked their literary pretentions in December, 1665, and Nicole responded with eight more letters entitled Visionnaires. The first of the Visionnaires contained the famous sentence:

"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 coupable d'une infinité d'homicides spirituels. . ."[2]

Racine's son, Louis, explains his father's violent reaction thus: "Mon père, à qui sa conscience reprochait des occupations qu'on regardait à Port-Royal comme très criminelles, se persuada que ces paroles avaient été écrites contre lui, et qu'il était celui qu'on appelait un empoisonneur public".[3]

If Louis is right, Racine reacted because his conscience had reminded him of his unfaithfulness to the teachings which Port-Royal had given him. The murmurings of conscience which began with Molière and the two Corneilles over his affair with La du Parc now extend to his "affair" with the théâtre - his life-blood. Both have earned him accusations of unfaithfulness, but certainly the bitterest came from Port-Royal. Nicole's views applied to one "poète de théâtre" as well as to another. The murmurings became angry tirades, as angry as those of Hermione who in this next play assumes much of the nature of Jocaste.

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2 Mesnard, IV, 260.

3 Ibid., I, 238-9.

Andromaque, An Expression of Love

The plot of Andromaque in Jasinski's words centers on: "un thème dominant: la passion de Pyrrhus pour Andromaque".[4] But the conflict, as Mauron points out, is centred around the question of faithfulness. "Le crime de Pyrrhus est l'infidélité (tout à fait ignoré du personnage antique)".[5] This sends us back to the Greek sources for enlightenment. In Euripides, Andromaque is no more than a concubine. It is she who has a son, but the child's father is Pyrrhus, not Hector. Pyrrhus never appears on stage. Hermione is his wife, insecure in his affections because she has not borne him a child. She seeks to destroy Andromaque and her son to strengthen her own position but is thwarted by the grand-father of Pyrrhus. The plot resolves into a struggle of two women for one man.

In the second half of the play, two men fight for one woman - Hermione. She fears Pyrrhus' anger when he returns and so flees with Oreste (who has secretly had Pyrrhus murdered.) Hermione is the pivot around which both halves of the play revolve. In Racine's version, Pyrrhus is the pivot. The play opens with Oreste, who, as in Euripides, loves Hermione. But Hermione is a rejected fiancee, not the wife of Pyrrhus. Early in the play Oreste reveals the black shadows which threaten him:

> L'amour me fait ici chercher une inhumaine;
> Mais qui sait ce qu'il doit ordonner de mon sort,
> Et si je viens chercher ou la vie ou la mort?
> (Act I, Sc. i)

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4 Jasinski, 1, 182-3.

5 Mauron, p. 56.

He is already linked with death and because he is associated with Hermione we are prepared to link her also with death. This much follows Euripides, but little else. Hermione laments in secret "le mépris de mes charmes" (Act I, Sc. ii) while Andromaque, "veuve inhumaine", has been transformed from a willing concubine into a captive who refuses her master. In order to sway her, Pyrrhus has threatened her son Astyanax whom Andromaque had saved from certain death at the fall of Troy. Pyrrhus' postponing of his marriage to Hermione has aroused her father's anger but Oreste sees in it new hope for him. Sent by the Greeks to claim Astyanax's life, he plans to use the opportunity to abduct Hermione. Pylade, his friend, reveals one of the emotional niceties of the plot:

> . . . parlez, et lui montrez
> Contre le fils d'Hector tous les Grecs conjurés,
> Loin de leur accorder ce fils de sa maîtresse,
> Leur haine ne fera qu'irriter sa tendresse,
> Plus on les veut brouiller, plus on va les unir.
> (Act I, Sc. i)

Andromaque finds herself in this harrowing situation: if she remains true to Hector the child dies; if she is to protect the child she must yield to Pyrrhus (and thus become unfaithful to Hector). So, a threat to the child brings her closer to Pyrrhus, as Pylade maintains, but at the cost of unfaithfulness. Pyrrhus faces the same dilemma. He has promised marriage to Hermione:

> Hermione, seigneur, peut m'être toujours chère,
> Je puis l'aimer, sans être esclave de son père;
> Et je saurai peut-être accorder quelque jour
> Les soins de ma grandeur et ceux de mon amour.
> (Act I, Sc. ii)

This is pure duplicity! He has just refused to yield Astyanax to the Greeks. To protect the child is to possess the mother, but at the cost of unfaithfulness - to Hermione. Or, conversely, when Hermione demands he fulfill his vows, he can rationalize his refusal by maintaining that he cannot sacrifice an innocent child. Thus, faithfulness to Hermione means death to the child just as Andromaque's faithfulness to Hector means death to the child. Pyrrhus, then, emerges as the central figure. If he gains the object of his love, the child lives. If he renounces his love, the child dies. Clearly Racine has weighted the balance in favour of Pyrrhus. Morality demands that he protect the innocent child (and he is eager to obey the voice of morality), but there are two unknowns in the equation which have to be resolved: Hermione and Andromaque.

Oreste's love offers a solution to the question of Hermione, and Pyrrhus quickly sees it:

> Ah qu'ils s'aiment, Phoenix! J'y consens; qu'elle parte;
> Que, charmés l'un de l'autre, ils retournent à Sparte!
> Tous nos ports sont ouverts et pour elle et pour lui.
> Qu'elle m'épargnerait de contrainte et d'ennui!
> (Act I, Sc. iii)

Without Hermione to plague his conscience he would be free to advance his love. But Andromaque is not to be conquered so easily. Pyrrhus somewhat sadistically applies the thumb-screw. The Greeks seek the life of Astyanax, he announces, confident that as a mother she will move to protect her child and the only direction she can move is into his arms. He makes his position clear:

Je défendrai sa vie aux dépens de mes jours.
. . . . . .
Je vous offre mon bras. Puis-je espérer encore
Que vous accepterez un coeur qui vous adore?
(Act I, Sc. iv)

But Andromaque is quick to deflate him. Instead of praising his generosity and mercy she points to his ignoble motives. She sends him back to Hermione (thus threatening her own son):

Souffrez que, loin des Grecs, et même loin de vous
J'aille cacher mon fils, et pleurer mon époux!
(Act I, Sc. iv)

A bold stroke! Instead of retreating meekly, she advances! But to ask Pyrrhus to give up his passion as well as the only excuse he has for refusing Hermione is too much. No courtly politeness now! He is brutal:

Le fils me répondra des mépris de la mère.
(Act I, Sc. iv)

But she, choosing fidelity to her dead husband, accepts the death of Astyanax as inevitable and threatens suicide as well. It is a very hesitant threat:

Et peut-être après tout, en l'état où je suis,
Sa mort avancera la fin de mes ennuis.
(Act I, Sc. iv)

But Pyrrhus knows that the child Astyanax is his strongest ally:

Madame, en l'embrassant, songez à le sauver.
(Act I, Sc. iv)

One central person has yet to be introduced - Hermione. In Euripides she was the axis around which both spheres revolved. Her place has been taken by Pyrrhus. But Racine, who pointed out in his Prefaces "la jalousie et les emportements" of Hermione in

Euripides, has not followed the Greek closely.[6] She rages, true, but because Pyrrhus has rejected her, and has not honored the marriage arrangements made by her father. Yet Hermione, like Jocaste, hopes for a reconciliation:

> . . . Mais si l'ingrat rentrait dans son devoir;
> Si la foi dans son coeur retrouvait quelque place;
> S'il venait à mes pieds me demander sa grâce
> Si sous mes lois, Amour, tu pouvais l'engager;
> S'il voulait . . . Mais l'ingrat ne veut que m'outrager.
> (Act II, Sc. i)

She decides to consider linking forces with Oreste, and, like a shadow standing behind her, he appears. Startled, she exclaims:

> Ah! je ne croyais pas qu'il fût si près d'ici.
> (Act II, Sc. i)

By now all the major forces are at work and the time is opportune to draw certain conclusions. The excerpt quoted which beings "Mais si l'ingrat rentrait dans son devoir. . ." demands investigation. The first remarkable feature is the vocabulary - "devoir", "foi", "grâce", and the attitude of prayer, "à mes pieds". The image of Port-Royal leaps to mind. Returning once again to the letter written by Agnès de Sainte-Thècle (1663) we read:

> Je vous conjure donc. . . de rentrer dans votre coeur, (Hermione: "si l'ingrat rentrait dans son devoir") pour y considérer dans quel abime vous vous êtes jeté. Je souhaite que ce qu'on m'a dit ne soit pas vrai; (Hermione's unfinished wish "s'il voulait . . ." with its subsequent note of discouragement) mais si vous êtes assez malheureux pour n'avoir pas rompu un commerce qui vous déshonore devant Dieu et les hommes, (Hermione, previously: "Mon père et les Grecs m'ordonne de partir") vous ne devez pas penser à venir nous voir: (Hermione: "S'il

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6 Knight, p. 280.

venait à mes pieds me demander sa grâce") car vous savez que je ne pourrais pas vous parler, vous sachant dans un état si déplorable et si contraire au christianisme, (Hermione: "Si la foi dans son coeur retrouvait quelque place").

The connotation of the vocabulary has changed, but the young pupil Racine would have thought of the religious value of "devoir", "foi", and "grâce" immediately. Could the older Racine have been deaf to the echo?

The identification of Hermione with Port-Royal grows stronger. Racine had certainly experienced "emportements" from that direction. The charges of ingratitude correspond (Hermione: "Mais l'ingrat ne veut que m'outrager"). But her principal charge is unfaithfulness. The words "infidèle" and "infidélité" recur endlessly. And who is being accused? It is not difficult to see in Pyrrhus the figure of Racine.

The strongest indication of the Pyrrhus-Racine identification is the new importance of Pyrrhus. In Euripides, Pyrrhus never appeared. In Racine he becomes the central character around whom both groups revolve (Oreste, Hermione, Pyrrhus-Pyrrhus, Andromaque, Astyanax). As Mauron points out, Pyrrhus represents Racine's "ego" since only he is connected to all other persons and only he has the royal power to make decisions (indecisive though he may be).[7] If Hermione (i.e. Port-Royal) is the voice of conscience that plagues Pyrrhus (i.e. Racine), then we can begin to look for Andromaque in Racine's life also.

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7 Mauron, p. 55.

Who could parallel Andromaque - beautiful, queenly, mature, evasive, a faithful mother and widow, pursued by Pyrrhus-Racine and denounced by Hermione-Port-Royal? The answer seems obvious - Andromaque herself - La du Parc! Many contemporaries testify to her beauty. Robinet in his gazette refers to La du Parc as she appeared in Alexandre:

> . . . la grande Axiane
> Brillante comme une Diane
> Tant par ses riches vêtements
> Que par tous ses attraits charmants. . .[8]

As for her haughty, queenly bearing, she was "Marquise" to those who knew her. She must have shared Andromaque's evasiveness to have eluded Molière and the brothers Corneille in that age in which any actress was fair prey and few are known to have resisted. Her faithfulness to her husband has puzzled many, but none has found a single lapse from fidelity. As a mother image she qualified richly with three children. Her widowhood had begun in October, 1664, and with it the necessity to support her family. Jasinski implies that, in effect, Marquise seduced Racine.[9] In view of the many suitors that surrounded her,[10] it would seem more reasonable that Racine was the hunter, not the prey. The character of Pyrrhus is confirmation. As for Port-Royal's attitude to such a liaison, there can be no doubts. Agnès de Sainte-Thècle had already referred to "des gens dont le nom est abominable. . ." whose company Racine was keeping. Actors (and actresses) were automatically ex-

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8 Cited by Jasinski, I, p. 145.

9 Ibid., p. 145.

10 Jasinski cites Corneille's Stances à Marquise, I, 148: "A peine ai-je loisir d'y sentir ma blessure /Grâces à vingt amants dont chez vous on se rit. . ."

communicated. But love of any person was taboo. "Quelque honnêteté qu'on puisse imaginer dans l'amour d'une créature mortelle, cet amour est vicieux et illégitime," wrote Nicole in Les Visionnaires.[11] The identification of Andromaque with La du Parc seems well-founded.

A word of caution here. The identifications which have been made here occur on different conscious levels. Marquise was openly Racine's mistress before the writing of Andromaque.[12] It is permissible to assume that the role was written for her. The parallel, then, was a deliberate, conscious one. It may be that Racine consciously depicted himself as Pyrrhus but this is doubtful. Mauron estimates that this identification was "en partie conscient". There is no doubt, however, that the Hermione-Port-Royal element is subconscious. This view is borne out by R.-C. Knight. He offers copious parallels from Greek and modern sources for virtually all the elements of Andromaque and Pyrrhus. But Hermione and Oreste puzzle him:

> Les deux autres principaux personnages, Oreste et Hermione, peuvent avec moins de droit, tels que Racine les dépeint, se réclamer de la tradition héroïque; aussi bien dans les scènes qui les mettent en présence l'un de l'autre, je ne relève pas un souvenir de la poésie ancienne. Racine a supprimé purement et simplement leur passé.[13]

If Racine did not consciously derive them from Greek sources, he must have derived them from sub-conscious sources. That is, they express an underlying emotional force just as Jocaste did.

It may seem that our route back to the topic of mothers has

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11 Jasinski, I, 173.

12 Jasinski accepts the liaison as a fait accompli by 1665. See I, 145.

13 Knight, p. 278.

been very circuitous but it is important to make various positions secure before continuing, since, between La Thébaïde and Andromaque there have been radical changes. We have advanced the view in the previous chapter that the possessive, censuring, maternal figure of Jocaste corresponds to Racine's guilty relationship with Port-Royal, his spiritual mother. How then can one explain the personality of this second mother, Andromaque? Returning to Mlle du Parc we answer that Racine had found a flesh and blood "mother" whom he loved. Chronologically six years older than Racine but much more experienced in the ways of the world, and of love, she shares nothing with Jocaste. Now the mother image is a source of physical delights - delights which, though never tasted by Pyrrhus, were certainly enjoyed by Racine. How can we explain the divergence? By a return to the consideration of the conscious levels.

Consciously Racine had "emancipated himself" from Port-Royal: as proof of his emancipation he indulged his desire for the experienced charms of Mlle du Parc. Subconsciously, however, he is never free of Port-Royal. Thus Pyrrhus does not overcome Andromaque. Instead the moral indignation of Hermione, dogging his every move, constantly reminds him of his ingratitude and unfaithfulness, forbidding him to taste the delights of "cet amour vicieux et illégitime" (to repeat Nicole's words). Jocaste has found in Hermione a successor who denounces this new-found love.

Pylade points Pyrrhus' way to marriage with Hermione, but Pyrrhus' reluctance proves the power of Andromaque. When Pylade baits him, he protests he is ready to renounce her but the consequences will

be the death of Astyanax - an innocent child - and of its mother:

> J'abandonne son fils. Que de pleurs vont couler!
> Elle en mourra, Phoenix, et je serai la cause:
> C'est lui mettre moi-même un poignard dans le sein.

He has a perfect defense against his conscience! He would, however, prefer to turn his back on both sources of anxiety:

> Faut-il livrer son fils? Faut-il voir Hermione?
> (Act II, Sc. v)

Meanwhile Andromaque seeks another way to protect her son. She pleads with Hermione to persuade Pyrrhus to allow her to exile herself to a deserted island with Astyanax. Hermione scornfully sends her back to Pyrrhus where her helplessness and sorrow melt Pyrrhus again. In these delicately engineered scales it is still Andromaque who can tip the balance, and as we have stated, faithfulness is the decisive factor. Céphise reminds her:

> Madame à votre époux c'est être assez fidèle.
> Trop de vertu pourrait vous rendre criminelle.
> (Act III, Sc. viii)

Mauron has succinctly stated this relationship: Fidélité=enfant mort. Infidélité=enfant vivant.[14] It is clear that Andromaque can see no ready solution. Her confused hesitancy is obvious:

> Mais cependant, mon fils, tu meurs si je n'arrête
> Le fer que le cruel tient levé sur ta tête.
> Je l'en puis détourner, et je t'y vais offrir!. . .
> (Act III, Sc. viii)

Balancing between life (symbolised by the child) and death (symbolised by Hector) she reverts to the one authority she has loved:

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14 Mauron, p. 57.

Allons sur son tombeau consulter mon époux.
(Act III, Sc. viii)

In consultation with his memory she evolves a compromise. She will assure her son's life by marriage to Pyrrhus and atone for this infidelity by suicide. In effect, she barters her life for Astyanax' life and by her renunciation redeems her sin:

Je vais donc, puisqu'il faut, que je me sacrifie,
Assurer à Pyrrhus le reste de ma vie;
Je vais, en recevant sa foi sur les autels,
L'engager à mon fils par des noeuds immortels.
Mais aussitôt ma main, à moi seule funeste,
D'une infidèle vie abrégera le reste.[15]
(Act IV, Sc. i)

With heart-rending tenderness she begs Céphise to take care of her child, to make him proud of his heritage:

Et quelquefois aussi parle-lui de sa mère.
(Act IV, Sc. i)

Meanwhile Hermione prepares a different sacrifice. She seeks to have Oreste assassinate Pyrrhus at the very moment of his infidelity - as he kneels before what was to be his marriage altar.[16] Two deaths, then, are possible - Andromaque's in order to keep faith with Hector - and Pyrrhus', because he has broken faith with Hermione. Shown in this light, it is Pyrrhus' death alone that meets the demands of justice. He confesses to his crime, committed for love's sake:

J'ai cru que mes serments me tiendraient lieu d'amour,
Mais cet amour l'emporte:. . .
(Act IV, Sc. v)

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15 On the question of the rumored marriage of Racine with Mlle du Parc, see Cahiers Raciniens, Vol. IV, "Vie de Marquise du Parc", par M. André Chagny.

16 The altar as centre of marriage-turned-sacrifice recurs in Mithridate, Iphigénie, and Phèdre. The reader is directed to Mauron, p. 56, for an analysis.

Hermione - Port-Royal seems to weaken:

> J'ai cru que tôt ou tard, à ton devoir rendu,
> Tu me rapporterais un coeur qui m'était dû.
> Je t'aimais inconstant; qu'aurais-je fait fidèle?
> . . . . . .
> Ingrat, je doute encore si je ne t'aime pas.
> (Act IV, Sc. v)

But he remains condemned. Flying headlong to his death, he ignores Pylade's advice to beware of Hermione; he sees only the object of his love.

> Il est au comble de ses voeux,
> Le plus fier des mortels, et le plus amoureux.

So reports Cléone (Act V, Sc. ii). But when he openly adopts Astyanax, the angry Greeks, twice cheated of their prey, revenge themselves on Pyrrhus. He dies, not because of his infidelity, but because of his "son".

This death is not easy to explain. Mauron sees Pyrrhus' identification with Astyanax as an acceptance of Astyanax' orphan state: "Tout se passe comme si, profondément, l'état d'orphelin constituait un équilibre instable, une vie en sursis, imméritée, gratuite et, à chaque instant revocable."[17] Granted that Racine was an orphan, and that orphans do appear repeatedly in his works, Astyanax appears here as the son of a loving, protective mother - not an orphan. Even when Andromaque plans suicide, she makes sure that Astyanax will have a "father" Pyrrhus to protect him.

There seems at least one other possibility. Pyrrhus and Andromaque

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17 Mauron, p. 65.

share a son. Hermione and Oreste arrive seeking the life of the child and the honoring of vows. Pyrrhus dies because he protects the child; Hermione (in Oreste's delirium) pardons him. Having identified Pyrrhus as Racine, Andromaque as Marquise, Hermione as Port-Royal, we face the question of what the actress and the "poète de théâtre" shared that Port-Royal condemned, while demanding a return to the faith. What was as precious to Racine as life? There seems only one answer - his life's work - his plays. The pardon which Hermione offers Pyrrhus (in Oreste's vision) eventually was extended to Racine's work by Port-Royal. It was not until the appearance of Phèdre - but it did happen. There was to be much anger and heart-break until the wish was fulfilled but Racine may well have been weary for peace even in 1667.

There remains one element in the character of Andromaque to be considered. Was her fidelity to her dead husband never to be shaken? Racine's self-esteem would surely have pleaded for some show of affection from Andromaque, if he had identified himself with Pyrrhus. The evidence is there - and revealing it is. In 1676, at the time he was writing Phèdre, Racine modified the conclusion, leaving us the current, fleeting reference:

> Andromaque elle-même, à Pyrrhus si rebelle,
> Lui rend tous les devoirs d'une veuve fidèle.
> (Act V, Sc. v)

But in the original version, Andromaque, "deux fois veuve", declares:

> Je ne m'attendais pas que le ciel en colère
> Pût sans perdre mon fils, accroître ma misère,
> Et gardât à mes yeux quelque spectacle encor
> Qui fît couler mes pleurs pour un autre qu'Hector.

The passionate Racine of 1667 had too much "amour-propre" to be rejected even after death. But in 1676 Racine was a different man. His passion had cooled and he saw how this weakness in Andromaque constituted an inconsistency. He was shortly to renounce much more than a few flattering lines.

Widely different in nature though they may be, Jocaste and Andromaque do not alter the view that Racine's greatest struggle was with Port-Royal. On the contrary, the fact that Pyrrhus never possesses Andromaque affirms the belief that, in the depths of his being, Racine accepted the immorality of this love. In the Greek version Pyrrhus possessed his beloved, but then, Euripides had not been educated in Jansenist schools. The mother in Andromaque has taken on a new nature, under the influence of Racine's love for La du Parc. During this brief love affair, he succeeded in portraying a mother who did not denounce him as a faithless ingrate, but he could not escape the accusations of his conscience. Port-Royal in the guise of Hermione follows his every move, never granting him the freedom to love unrestrainedly the enchanting Andromaque.

CHAPTER III

BRITANNICUS: THE RETURN TO THE DOMINEERING MOTHER.

Just two years separate Andromaque (Nov., 1667) from Britannicus (Dec. 13, 1669). Although we are in the period in which very little is known of Racine's daily doings, two events are historically certain. The first is the critical attack on Andromaque in the form of the play La folle querelle, the second is the death of Racine's mistress, La du Parc.

Though it was a popular success, Andromaque provided hostile critics with a whole arsenal to use against Racine. This opposition found expression in La folle querelle, a play purportedly written by Subligny, but in which Jasinski sees the fine hand of Molière and Corneille as well.[1] The surprising thing is not that the play enjoyed a considerable success, but that Racine heeded its criticisms and re-wrote many unfortunate expressions. It is quite possible that such acute, perceptive criticism came from the minds of Corneille and Molière, both of whom Racine had once courted, only to abandon. La folle querelle then would have served as a bitter reminder that he had been unfaithful not only to his religious upbringing, but to his colleagues as well.

The second, and more profoundly touching event was the death,

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1 Jasinski, I, p. 238.

December 11, 1668, of Racine's mistress La du Parc - his true-to-life Andromaque. The theories surrounding her death are many. Racine has been accused of poisoning her out of jealousy - of causing her death directly by administering drugs designed to produce abortion - of guilt by implication in that he may have permitted Marquise to procure and take such drugs. We do not know.[2] If her death were the outcome of a normal birt h, followed by the deadly puerperal fever that was so prevalent at the time, Racine would have seen a repetition of the same death that carried off his mother in 1641. We have advanced the theory that Marquise - Andromaque represented a maternal image to his subconscious mind. What a multitude of emotions would have assailed the tender conscience of Racine! The traditional picture of Racine in Marquise's funeral cortege -"à demi trépassé"-would take on even more somber undertones. He would in that case have been overwhelmed not by the guilt caused by a fatal moment of jealousy but by the guilt that has pursued him since childhood (Monstre! Ingrat! Infidèle! Parricide!). This would be a time of profound introspection; a time to pass in review his whole life, to re-evaluate what he has fought to achieve, a time of awareness of what he has had to do in order to achieve it, a time of questioning.

These developments should be echoed by a development in Racine's work if, as maintained, there was a connection between Racine's affair

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2 For a detailed consideration of this question, the reader should consult Cahiers Raciniens, VIII, "Racine et la mort de la du Parc" by M. Georges Mongredien and "Vie de Marquise du Parc", Chapters X, XI, XII, by M. André Chagny.

with Marquise and his characterisation of Andromaque. Under the spell of Mlle du Parc, Racine portrayed in Andromaque a tender, poised, loving mother. With Marquise dead, did Racine go on to develop a new mother-image? On the contrary! Agrippine in Britannicus and Jocaste in La Thébaïde are strikingly similar. Racine has returned to the past. If Jocaste is the reflection of a guilty conscience, it seems reasonable to assume that Agrippine is as well, their natures being so parallel. The suspicion grows stronger that Racine's conscience at the time of writing Britannicus was as tormented as it had been when he broke with Port-Royal prior to writing La Thébaïde. The source of his torment could well have been the effects of La folle querelle and, to a far greater extent, the death of Marquise.

We have maintained that Jocaste and Agrippine are "strikingly similar". This must be demonstrated. Initially there is the parallelism of the incestuous mother of mutually hostile sons. Their sons even possess the same characters; Néron resembles the violent, evil Etéocle, whereas Agrippine's step-son, Britannicus, loved by the tender, virginal Junie seems modelled on Polinice who was loved by his sister Antigone. But in the matter of incest, Racine shows a changed attitude. Historians have considered Agrippina guilty of incestuous relations both with her uncle Claudius (whom she married) and her son Nero. Racine has greatly diminished this element. Agrippine's greatest sin is her desire to dominate. In this and in other respects she ressembles Jocaste so closely that many of their speeches could be exchanged. In the very first scene, she refers to the Racinien mother's typical complaint - ingratitude:

Mais tout, s'il est ingrat, lui parle contre moi.
(Act I, Sc. i)

She, too, hints at her son's natural perversity:

Cherche-t-il seulement le plaisir de leur nuire?
(Jocaste: Et le crime tout seul pour vous a des appas.)

But everything is more somber here. Jocaste wanted to restrain her sons; Agrippine wants to control her sons in order to control the empire:

Lorsqu'il se reposait sur moi de tout l'Etat,
Que mon ordre au palais assemblait le sénat,
Et que derrière un voile, invisible et présente,
J'étais de ce grand corps l'âme toute-puissante.[3]
(Act I, Sc. i)

We must remember Racine, due to La folle querelle, is paying strict attention to his sources. Nevertheless, the resemblance is striking. The next step, her identification with Port-Royal, follows logically.

Both Jasinski and Mauron see Agnès de Sainte-Thècle hovering behind "L'implacable Agrippine".[4] Néron laments that his mother harangues him with "un long récit de mes ingratitudes". One thinks immediately of the "excommunications" that wearied Racine.

How much more powerful Agrippine is than Jocaste! Néron confesses:

Eloigné de ses yeux, j'ordonne, je menace,
J'écoute vos conseils, j'ose les approuver,
Je m'excite contre elle, et tâche à la braver:
. . . . . .

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3 Néron, invisible and present, spies on Junie and Britannicus. The theme recurs. Mauron (p. 77) mentions its two forms: 1) The parent watches the "plaisirs interdits" of the child (Agrippine outside Néron's door); 2) The child imagines himself as the one he is watching (Néron behind the drapery).

4 Jasinski, I, 323 f.; Mauron, p. 268.

Sitôt que je n'ose encore démentir le pouvoir
De ces yeux où j'ai lu si longtmeps mon devoir;
. . . . . .
Mon génie étonné tremble devant le sien.
Et c'est pour m'affranchir de cette dépendance,
Que je la fuis partout, que même je l'offense.
(Act II, Sc. ii)

This could not be surpassed for accuracy as an account of Racine's relationship with Port-Royal. We have already mentioned Racine's remorse over his cruel reply to Les Visionnaires. What an "offense" this was! How resoundingly such words as "devoir" and "génie" ring! We must avoid giving the impression that Racine consciously considered himself another Nero. He would never publicly have called himself the "monstre naissant" that he considered Néron to be. But in the heat of inspiration, when his genius for "dédoublement"[5] cloaked him with Néron's robes, then all the seething emotions within him could easily have been transferred to the written page.

The question of Racine's second reply to Les Visionnaires, a reply which he stifled when Port-Royal put pressure on him, brings up another subconscious image - Nicolas Vitart. His similarity to Burrhus is striking. A wise, moderate friend from youth, counsellor, intermediary between an errant "son" and an overly protective "mother", Vitart might well have advised Port-Royal:

Les menaces, les cris, le rendront plus farouche.
(Act III, Sc. iii)

after advising Racine:

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5 Mornet, Histoire de la Littérature française classique de 1660 à 1700, p. 247.

On m'aime point, seigneur, si l'on ne veut aimer.
(Act III, Sc. i)

The intervening scene is enlightening. In a soliloquy Burrhus murmurs:

Enfin, Burrhus, Néron découvre son génie;
Cette férocité que tu croyais fléchir,
De tes faibles liens est prête à s'affranchir,
En quels excès peut-être elle va se répandre!

One other identification has yet to be dealt with. Who is Britannicus? It has been maintained earlier in this chapter that something (Marquise's death, probably) drove Racine backward in time. Agrippine's similarity to Jocaste, whose two sons revealed Racine's divided mind, has been noted. We should search, then, in Britannicus for signs of his being half of Racine's ego. And the reader finds Néron's words:

Tant qu'il respirera je ne vis qu'à demi.
(Act IV, Sc. iii)

Thus the pattern of a mother (resembling Port-Royal) opposed by two sons (resembling Racine) is repeated. The lines of battle are beginning to be visible; one can see why Jasinski sees in Britannicus "une terrible crise de conscience".[6] In this struggle of good and evil for Racine's soul, what nature does this persistent mother image reveal? The long-postponed meeting of Néron and Agrippine (Act IV, Sc. ii) is charged with interest in this respect.

Agrippine's first manoeuvre is to "put him in his place". Sitting down first she says: "Approchez-vous, Néron, et prenez votre place." Her next theme is, "All you are, you owe to me.". She married Claudius solely for Néron's sake:

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6 Jasinski, I, 300.

Je souhaitai son lit, dans la seule pensée
De vous laisser au trône. . .

She has humbled herself to intrigue with a freed-man:

Je fléchis mon orgueil; j'allai prier Pallas.

She has seduced the senate:

Le sénat fut séduit; une loi moins sévère
Mit Claude dans mon lit. . .(an incestuous bed!)
. . .et Rome à mes genoux. (A slip! She should have said "vos genoux"!!)

She had Claudius adopt him, and married Claudius' daughter (Octavia)

to him. What if Octavia's admirer did commit suicide!

Silanus, qui l'aimait, s'en vit abandonné,
Et marqua de son sang ce jour infortuné.

She had bribed the friends of Britannicus:

Ma main, sous votre nom, répandait des largesses.

And exiled those she could not bribe:

L'exil me délivra des plus séditieux.

And plagued Claudius to dismiss any who could bring Britannicus to the

throne, substituting her own followers. His popularity is due to her:

Les spectacles, les dons, invincibles appas,
Vous attiraient les coeurs du peuple et des soldats.

When Claudius' suspicion was finally aroused, it was too late:

Ses gardes, son palais, son lit m'étaient soumis.

And so he died:

De ses derniers soupirs je me rendis maîtresse.

Burrhus swayed the army while she tricked the people:

Par mes ordres trompeurs tout le peuple excité
Du prince déjà mort demandait la santé!

Thus he was named emperor, thanks to his mother.

"Voilà tous mes forfaits", she confesses. And a gruesome list it is - beautifully condensed by Racine - a marvel of concision and vigour. Just as Jocaste has chosen the very arguments which would repel rather than persuade, so does Agrippine. She has completely shattered his self-esteem. Nor does she see that, by proving the efficacy of crime, she is making it more attractive to Néron. He might well reason, "If it worked for you, it should work against you." In fact, the last part of her speech shows that Néron has learned his lessons well. Out of the kindness of her heart she had married Junie to Britannicus, and now Néron has abducted Junie. Why should a son do such a thing? The son, of course, knows that Junie, a descendant of Caesar Augustus, is a political force. Burrhus had revealed this motive:

> Vous savez que les droits qu'elle porteavec elle
> Peuvent de son époux faire un prince rebelle.
> (Act I, Sc. ii)

Although Agrippine condemned this move, she had just confessed to the very same stratagem! She has also admitted using her bed to influence Claudius, yet wonders why Néron has rejected Octavie (whom Agrippine put into his bed as a means of influencing him!) She had confessed that Pallas was instrumental in deceiving Claudius and still wonders that Néron has exiled him when she continues to intrigue with him. Her last reproach is that he is restricting her:

> Vous attentez enfin jusqu'à ma liberté.

This actually is the motive behind all of Néron's moves. Néron is asserting his independence from his mother, and using her methods to achieve it. The implication is a defensive self-justification - "Perhaps you are responsible for my lofty position, but you are also

responsible for my viciousness." (Burrhus had spoken of him to Agrippine as "votre fils et même votre ouvrage." (Act IV, Sc. i) .

Scarcely concealing his boredom ("sans vous fatiguer du soin de le redire") he calmly points to his actions as a defence against her lust for power. She avoids the issue by changing the subject to that of his ingratitude:

> Vous ne me trompez pas, je vois tous vos détours;
> Vous êtes un ingrat, vous le fûtes toujours;
> . . . O ciel! qui m'entends aujourd'hui,
> N'ai-je fait quelques voeux qui ne fussent pour lui?
> (Act IV, Sc. ii)

Suddenly he yields to all her demands, partly because he simply delights in deception and partly because he has decided to strike the blow she dreads most. He will deprive her of her power by killing her one hope - Britannicus. He determines to thwart what she seeks, to favour what she denounces.

The next two scenes provide Néron with two opposing paths he may follow. Scene V, Act III, contains Burrhus' eloquent plea:

> Vertueux jusqu'ici, vous pouvez toujours l'être.
> Quel plaisir de penser et de dire en vous-même:
> Partout en ce moment, on me bénit, on m'aime.

The idea of the pleasure of virtue and the charm of being loved seems to shake Néron. But before he declares himself, Narcisse enters and with one telling argument he starts Néron back on the road to evil:

> Agrippine, seigneur, se l'était bien promis:
> Elle a repris sur vous son souverain empire.
> . . . . . .
> Elle s'en est vantée assez publiquement.
> (Act IV, Sc. iv)

By casting doubt on Burrhus' motives and linking him with public scorn of Néron, Narcisse achieves his goal. Thus blame for Néron's misdeed is placed on Narcisse. One other plea of innocence underlies the appearance, first of Junie, then of Agrippine. Junie, the epitome of persecuted innocence, in one day has penetrated the falseness of the court:

Combien ce qu'on dit est loin de ce qu'on pense!

She urges him to beware of Narcisse and the trap set for him at the banquet. But Agrippine, on the contrary, hardened by a life of crime has lost the ability to separate evil from good. She urges Britannicus on to the banquet and, unknowingly, to his death: "Prince, que tardez-vous?". Racine seems to imply that, if he, Racine, were allowed the pure, innocent love he had always sought, he could be saved, but having known only a possessive, (hence blind) love, he is doomed. The death of Néron's innocence (Britannicus) scarcely affects Néron, so hardened is he by his mother's example. Burrhus reports:

> Ses yeux indifférents ont déjà le constance
> D'un tyran dans le crime endurci dès l'enfance.
> (Act V, Sc. vii)

The last words of the play, spoken by Burrhus, have been condemned as superfluous: "Plût aux dieux que ce fût le dernier de ses crimes!" How could Racine, knowing profoundly the later history of Nero, have made him formulate so inane a wish? One wonders. If, however, we return to the idea of the "crise de conscience" theory, the opposite side of the question becomes evident. How could Racine have seen before him a life of futile crime without the plea rising from the depths of his own soul that somehow this cup might be taken away from him?

Let us consider the developments thus far. Passing from La Thébaïde in which the brothers resolutely proclaimed their right to power, to Andromaque in which Pyrrhus proclaimed his will to love, we have seen, in Britannicus, Néron proclaim his desire for innocence. The love motif of Andromaque has been replaced by a somber analysis of guilt in which the gloom is only occasionally pierced by a ray of hope. From the beginning the mother has pursued the hero, deviating from an aggressive, denunciatory nature only under the influence of Racine's passionate but brief love affair. In the wake of this period of love, Racine returns to the themes of his youth, but he is not the same man. Betrayal, criticism and death follow him. The burden of guilt with which he stands before his mother (i.e., his conscience) is almost unbearable. This way lies madness! But if he repented, gave up this life of sin and error and hearkened to the voice of duty, perhaps his "mother" would take him back. Two things point to Racine's considering this possibility. Brunetière maintains that Racine did, in fact, consider renouncing the theatre after Britannicus.[7] Unable to take so drastic a step as yet, he has given us in his next play, Bérénice, a study of renunciation without parallel in any of his previous works. We strongly believe that the death of Marquise, his betrayal of Molière and Corneille, and the cabale which followed Andromaque, represented for Racine a burden of guilt and frustration parallel to Néron's, so weighty that already the idea of renunciation was strong within him and that such thoughts lead to the

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7 Brunetière, Ferdinand, Etudes critiques sur l'Histoire de la Littérature française, I, 158, -- 9.

writing of Bérénice. For a while, forces may alleviate the burden but eventually every frustration, every cabale, every threat to his security will make Racine reconsider his guilt, as he has done in Britannicus, until eventually renunciation restores him to innocence.

CHAPTER IV

BERENICE, BAJAZET, MITHRIDATE: AN ATTEMPT AT COMPROMISE

The task we have set ourselves is the examination of Racine's mother-roles. Obviously this cannot be done in a vacuum; they are an integral part of a larger unity. For this same reason one must consider, however briefly, the plays in which no such role exists. We have not directly mentioned a remarkable pattern: three plays in which mothers are of prime importance are followed by three plays in which they are totally lacking. This is over-simplification, however. The list of characters is not the ultimate mirror of the playwright's mind.

To begin with, in Bérénice we have the question: "Who is Bérénice?" From the historical point of view alone, this is a problem. Is she the twice-married, forty-four year old (though still beautiful) daughter of Agrippa I, king of Judea? Or the Roman Berenice "une incestueuse et l'horreur de l'univers. . ."[1] Whoever she may be historically, it is clear that Racine has suppressed any reference to a maternal or incestuous character.

In any event, Titus, having previously decided to renounce his former mistress, in the course of the play expounds his reasons for so doing. J. J. Rousseau declared: "Titus a beau rester Romain, il est

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1 Mesnard, III, 374.

seul de son parti; tous les spectateurs ont épousé Bérénice."[2] "Rome and the senate" would not have resisted a firm stand by Titus. His fear of a general revolt is ridiculous. Equally ridiculous is his reason for refusing her offer to become his favourite:

> Il faudra. . .sans cesse. . .retenir mes pas/. .que vers vous. . . entraînent vos appas.
>
> (Act IV, Sc. v)

Louis XIV must have chuckled over that!

Titus' renunciation seems as much a flight from an unwanted attachment as Pyrrhus' flight from Hermione and Néron's flight from Agrippine. His attitude to renunciation is not altogether altruistic; virtue has its rewards:[3]

> . . .Songez en ce malheur
> Quelle gloire va suivre un moment de douleur,
> Quels applaudissements l'univers vous prépare,
> Quel rang dans l'avenir.
>
> (Act IV, Sc. vi)

The idea persists among writers that Racine is trying to surpass Corneille. But the long, inner debate which typifies Corneille's heroes is lacking here. Titus had long since decided to renounce Bérénice:

> Vingt fois, depuis huit jours,
> J'ai voulu devant elle en ouvrir le discours.
>
> (Act II, Sc. ii)

Racine seems hard put to justify the renunciation, but determined that there will be one, nevertheless. It appears to be an obsession.

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2 Mesnard, III, 358, cites Rousseau's "Lettre à d'Alembert".

3 Mauron maintains this idea first appeared in Britannicus (Burrhus: "Et ne suffit-il pas. . .que le bonheur public soit un de vos bienfaits?" (Act IV, Sc. iii). Actually, it appeared earlier, in La Thébaide (Agr. "On les verrait plutôt par de nobles projets;/Se disputer tous deux l'amour de leurs sujets." (Act I, Sc. iv)

The points to be retained are: 1) the suppression of incest; 2) the theme of renunciation which ennobles the hero; 3) the distance (but undeniable morality) of the motivating force "Rome et le sénat"; 4) the persistent flight of the hero from emotional bonds; 5) the rewards of virtue.

In Bajazet, most of this has been retained, but often with different or directly opposite emphasis. The traces of the mother-image in Bérénice are much stronger in Roxane. Unlike Bérénice, who was helpless in a foreign country, Roxane has all the delegated power of the Sultan. She is the wife of an older brother of Bajazet. No issue is made of the age difference but in every respect she is shown as different from the young, tender Atalide. In contrast to Bérénice, the situation here is openly incestuous, in that Roxane's love is offered to the brother of her husband. The violence of this woman is breathtaking; she combines the worst of Agrippine and Néron.

In Britannicus the hero's burden of guilt is unbearable. Much of it is charged to Agrippine. In Bérénice this intolerable burden of guilt has been completely displaced: the hero nobly renounces his love out of a sense of duty. Racine appeared to have turned his back on the problem of guilt. But Bajazet reveals that the problem cannot be simply dismissed. Peace of mind can only be gained by maintaining the hero's innocence while putting all the evil of Agrippine and the perversion of Néron into one person - Roxane. She shares with Néron the perverse pleasure of the peeping Tom and the joy of tormenting an innocent young girl. From Agrippine she inherits her smothering aggressiveness and her lack of hesitation to commit incest.

The innocence of Bajazet is preserved when, under threat of death, he turns down the "throne in exchange for love" offer made by the villainous Roxane. In Britannicus it was the hero (?) Néron who made this same offer - to Junie. The threat of death, which traditionally came from a minor character, here springs from the royal figure, the sultan. Roxane, it is true, destroys Bajazet, but Racine has gone to lengths to show that her power comes solely through Amurat, her husband, who seems far removed from the scene of action, like "Rome et le sénat".

Let us retain these points: 1) Roxane marks the return of the aggressive, maternal image. Her fury is greater than ever because she has assumed Racine-Néron's sadistic impulses; 2) the now innocent hero is threatened by a distant royal figure; 3) the "frères ennemis" theme (Amurat-Bajazet) has returned, and with it the element of incest.

In Mithridate, however, the "frères-ennemis" theme has become the core of the action. Where this theme occurs, incest usually is found (La Thébaïde, Britannicus, Bajazet), and it is the central conflict here. The situation, however, is unfolded in an entirely different manner. When the aging king Mithridate returns to his homeland he finds reason to suspect his sons of coveting his young wife Monime. Both sons are guilty of planning this incestuous marriage, but there the resemblance ends. Pharnace deliberately plots to betray his father to Rome. Xipharès, on the contrary, is the faithful son, ready to carry on his father's struggle. Pharnace is rejected by Monime as loathesome, whereas Xipharès had won her love long ago (before she had attracted Mithridate). The mother theme is very vague in this play. There is a hint of Andromaque's self-assurance in Monime, but the only direct reference to mothers concerns

Xipharès. His mother had plotted traitorously with the Roman Pompey and Xipharès suffers profoundly from the memory of such a betrayal.

> . . .J'effacerai le crime de ma mère,
> Seigneur vous m'en voyez rougir à vos genoux.
> (Act III, Sc. i)

Knowing Racine's inclination to balance one force by an equal but opposite one, we should be able to find some "mother" for Pharnace. The only element which corresponds is Rome (the she-wolf?). It is in reference to Rome that Pharnace urges:

> Jetons-nous dans les bras qu'on tend avec joie.
> (Act III, Sc. i)

The image of a welcoming mother is discernible. Moreover, Rome's effect corresponds to what we were seeking, and emphasizes the differences between the sons. Xipharès rejects his mother, is faithful to his father, and is rewarded; Pharnace gives his allegiance to his "mother", rejects his father and is exiled.

The startling development in this play is the compromise which concludes it. This is the first play in which the conflict is resolved by a compromise. Mithridate at his death offers his wife to his faithful son Xipharès, freeing him of all suspected guilt. The dying king prophesies the death of Pharnace at the hands of Rome.

The salient elements are: 1) The hostile brother theme has evolved. Now one brother is pardoned and receives, as reward for his faithfulness to his father, the object of his love, 2) The other brother's love is rejected. His motives are denounced and death is his reward. 3) Submission to the father is possible, in fact rewarding, whereas submission to the will of the mother in previous plays was out of the question.

. . . . . .

From the point of view of our study these three plays would appear to pose a problem. How can the mother image reflect so profound a conflict if three consecutive plays are written in which the mother element is virtually non-existent? Do these three plays destroy the theory? We believe, on the contrary, that they prove it.

In Chapter III, the opinion was advanced, strictly on the basis of textual examination, that the role of Néron in Britannicus reveals Racine almost overwhelmed by guilt, striving to see his way clear to a more stable, peaceful frame of mind, but apparently conceding the hopelessness of such a desire. History had shown what Nero's fate was to be. But if Racine "naissant" could find some solution that would free him of the parallel with Néron he might survive intact. Brunetière has suggested that shortly after Britannicus, Racine did consider one way to escape his fate - renunciation. Bérénice is an exploration of the possibility of such an escape. The hero Titus shows signs of a stability which is new to Racine's post-Andromaque period. By wiping clean the slate of his past (including his past commitments, such as his duty to Bérénice) and by fastening his attention on a future of service to noble causes, he can hope to achieve the peace of mind he seeks.

Someone has said,"If we could not rationalize, we would all go mad." Bérénice shows Racine rationalizing his guilty past away and gaining a respite. But Racine could not achieve in his life what Titus achieved in his play. Racine simply could not renounce the theatre. It alone had earned him a measure of glory. Bajazet shows another rationalization. Racine denies that he is evil. He is not Néron after

all. He is innocent; his love is innocent; everyone else is guilty. But there is a weakness in the wall he builds around himself to hold out those who threaten him. Somehow, someone will discover the pass-word, just as Bajazet's love letter was discovered, and penetrate his defences to overwhelm him.

For the first time, in Mithridate, there is hope of a compromise. Racine gives up the plea that he is entirely innocent. Half of him is evil (Pharnace) but half of him is pure (Xipharès).[4] If his innocent half can atone for his mother's evil doings and can convince his father that he is deserving, he may have the object of his love. Pharnace is an object lesson. To cling to one's "mother" as Pharnace clings to Rome is to court death.

The three plays which precede Iphigénie, far from destroying the belief that Racine's greatest inner conflict was with his conscience (Port-Royal), reveal him desperately trying to compromise, to balance his

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4 Towards the end of his life (1694), Racine himself expressed this split in his nature in the Cantique III from his collection of paraphrases of the Psalms entitled "Cantiques spirituels":

Mon Dieu, quelle guerre cruelle!
Je trouve deux hommes en moi:
L'un veut que, plein d'amour pour toi,
Mon coeur te soit toujours fidèle;
L'autre, à tes volontés rebelle,
Me révolte contre ta loi,
L'un, tout esprit et tout céleste,
Veut qu'au ciel, sans cesse attaché
Et des biens éternels touché,
Je compte pour rien tout le reste;
Et l'autre, par son poids funeste,
Me tient vers la terre penché.
Hélas! en guerre avec moi-même
Où pourrai-je trouver la paix?
Je veux, et n'accomplis jamais.
Je veux; mais (o misère extrême!)
Je ne fais pas le bien que j'aime,
Et je fais le mal que je hais.

career against his conscience. If he could achieve in his life what Xipharès had achieved, he might gain peace of mind. Xipharès' success appears to be a note of optimism.

The key word is "compromise", not "father". The fathers in Racine's plays never reach the emotional heights of the mothers. Mithridate, the mightiest of them does not achieve the vitality of Agrippine or Roxane in his emotional contacts with those around him. He does not even seek to punish Pharnace; his son's fate is left to Rome. He seems more the embodiment of a principle, an influence rather than a person.

It would be easy to identify Mithridate as Louis XIV. Too easy! It is our view that the fathers represent a complex of elements, all of which helped Racine rationalize away his inner conflict. If he could say to himself, "I can be proud of my decision to become a dramatist. Look what it has gained me," he could repulse the attacks of his conscience. In effect he could say, "I was right all along."

What had his career gained him at this time that would be tangible proof of the wisdom of his choice? The first fact that leaps to mind is his growing favour with the young Court. Les Plaideurs, which preceded Britannicus, was only saved by the favour of the King and the Court. As for Britannicus itself, M. Maurice Rat declares: "Seul le roi se déclara hautement pour la pièce, et naturellement, après lui, toute la cour."[4] Therefore twice before Bérénice, Racine had been favoured by the "Rome et le sénat" of his time.

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4 Rat, Maurice, Théâtre Complet de Racine, p. 230.

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1. Rat, Maurice, Théâtre Complet de Racine, p. 290.

Tangible evidence of Racine's political support can be seen in his elevation to membership in the "Académie" on the twelfth of January, 1673, within a few days of the first presentation of Mithridate. It appears certain that the mighty Colbert was influential in arranging Racine's election.[5]

There is one feature of the three plays which we have yet to mention. Titus renounces his love. Bajazet dies knowing he is loved. Xipharès is loved and is granted the woman he loves. The progression is obvious - from renunciation to attainment. The suspicion arises that the renunciation was not achieved in Racine's life because at this time (1670), after Bérénice had been written, Racine also won the object of his love in the person of Marie Desmarès, called La Champmeslé. We do not intend to consider this most interesting personality at length. It is sufficient to note that, with her appearance, there is a return to the "right to love" theme, resulting in the roles of Atalide and Monime. Capricious though she proved to be, La Champmeslé could well have represented, at this time, one more reason for Racine to be pleased that he had chosen the theatre.

To sum up, these three plays and the historical events which parallel them reveal a Racine who appears to have resolved the conflict which had dogged him. If his position of esteem in the theatre, his favour in the eyes of the king and court and his buoyant reaction to being loved persist, he may look forward to at least a truce with his

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5 Lacretelle, p. 112.

conscience - a truce based on compromise.[6]

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6 In this respect it is timely to mention the view of Lucien Goldmann, in his book, Jean Racine, that Jansenism at this time also had accepted a compromise. He quotes Nicole (p. 67): "L'on doit dire qu'un Prince Chrestien est un homme qui prie et qui rend la justice au peuple; qu'un artisan chrestien est un homme qui prie et qui travaille d'un métier. . (The emphasis ours.) Thus perhaps even a "poète de théâtre" could achieve salvation!

CHAPTER V

IPHIGÉNIE: A STUDY OF SACRIFICE

In view of the analysis of previous plays, Iphigénie is of great interest since a glance at the list of "Personnages" reveals that the mother has returned. Clytemnestre is, moreover, the first of Racine's mothers to be surrounded by all of her family. And yet, on reading the play, one is conscious of the fact that no one person has the vitality and drive of the principal characters of the preceding works. No longer is there a villain and a victim about whom all action revolves until a bloody climax is reached. Racine, with more detachment than he has shown before, seems intent on weighing values and evaluating motives. Like a giant chess player moving human pawns he ponders the consequences of each deliberate move with a calmness which is new to him. As a result, it is less profitable to single out one player, so inter-dependent are they all. Thus we must extend this inquiry beyond Clytemnestre to include her family and those whose lives influence it. In each of the plays considered in this study, many characters reflect Racine's thoughts. Eriphile, Iphigénie, Achille, Agamemnon, and Clytemnestre are all involved in this play's central theme - sacrifice. Therefore any one of them, or all of them taken together, may help us to shed light on Racine's mysterious past.

The first member of the family to appear is the father, Agamemnon. Like his predecessor, Mithridate, he is called upon to

kill his own child, not to avenge his pride and honour, however, but to satisfy the gods and obtain the winds needed to carry his ships to the siege of Troy. The two fathers are in vastly different positions. Mithridate suspected his sons of incest but hesitated to punish them until he was certain of their guilty intentions. Agamemnon has to sacrifice a daughter whom he knows to be entirely innocent!

In the Greek play by Euripides, which was probably Racine's main source, this sacrifice had the value of ennobling submission to the divine will of the gods. The physical sacrifice is of little importance compared to the spiritual development of Iphigénie whose nobility of soul inspires the whole assembly with a sense of awe. Silence falls over the site of the sacrifice.[1]

Racine soon reveals a more somber interest in motives than in outcome. The death of his heroine is demanded by the priest Calchas and Ulysse, who by "cruelle industrie" persuades Agamemnon of the political profits to be gained by the sacrifice. Mithridate, brandishing his sword, might have defied them, but Agamemnon is not his equal. He confesses his political ambition:

> Ce nom de roi des rois et de chef de la Grèce
> Chatouillait de mon coeur l'orgueilleuse faiblesse.
> (Act I, Sc. i)

His deception surpasses that of Mithridate. He stoops to forgery. Signing himself Achille, he writes a letter in which he urges Iphigénie to join him at Aulide, where she will be married. The initial image we

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1 For a comparison of sources, see Knight, p. 299 ff.

gain of Agamemnon is that of a weak, ambitious, deceitful father.

The young lovers are typical of Racine's earlier works; Iphigénie and Achille are Antigone and Hémon with new names. We have identified these recurrent couples as the desire of Racine's subconscious for life, love and independence. However, there was a noteworthy development of this element in Mithridate. Xipharès and Monime were united eventually because of Xipharès' submission to his father. In Iphigénie, submission of the father means death on the sacrificial altar. Only a miracle can save Iphigénie - which indicates a lessening of the optimism which had developed with Mithridate. Racine seems already, subconsciously at least, to have less hope for the happy solution that concluded Mithridate.

The next character to appear is Eriphile; immediately we sense a similarity. Like Hermione and Oreste she feels herself the victim of the gods, doomed to suffer while others are happy:

> Et, tandis qu'à l'envi leur amour se déploie,
> Mettons en liberté ma tristesse et leur joie.
> (Act II, Sc. i)

This is the "autre Iphigénie" that Racine declared he had found in the Ancients and that he could represent as he wished, "tel qu'il m'a plu." [2] It appears that it "pleased" Racine to reconsider the theme he had begun in Mithridate for, with a change of gender, Iphigénie and Eriphile are only an extension of Xipharès and Pharnace. Like Pharnace, Eriphile is rejected, driven from her home and eventually doomed. Like him, also, she betrays the young lovers. But there are two striking differences.

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2 Preface to Iphigénie.

Firstly, Racine seems strongly associated - consciously - with Eriphile. It appears a deliberate move that he has her say:

> Et moi, toujours en butte à de nouveaux dangers,
> Remise dès l'enfance en des bras étrangers,
> Je reçus et je vois le jour que je respire,
> Sans que père ni mère ait daigné me sourire,
> (Act II, Sc. i)

A touching description of his own childhood, perhaps.

It is worth stressing that Racine knowingly created Eriphile as she is. We have related certain roles in Racine's plays to subconscious impulses or patterns developed so deeply and so powerfully within him that they found expression in his plays without his knowing it. As pointed out in reference to Britannicus, Racine would never have confessed that he himself was guilty of Nero's foul deeds, but his subconscious showed nevertheless, that he was pre-occupied with guilt, whatever the deeds may have been. Eriphile, however, was depicted "tel qu'il m'a plu", hence, consciously. If she is guilty, Racine is admitting - consciously - his own guilt.

The second manner in which Eriphile differs from Pharnace is in the cause of her guilt. Pharnace had plotted to possess his father's wife and to overthrow his father's throne. His crimes are incest, treachery, parricide. What, then, is Eriphile's crime? It would seem that her only sin is loving Achille. For this weakness she is doomed.

Iphigénie, who represents Racine's ego, as all the tender, pure roles seem to do, has a "double", Eriphile, who must therefore represent another component in Racine's mind. This "Eriphile" factor is concerned

with love; hence with Racine's love of something or someone. But this love is judged guilty and condemned. Since Racine has consciously developed Eriphile to suit himself, it follows that he consciously accepted the guilt of at least part of that which he loved.

Whatever Eriphile signifies, her mere existence is considered a threat to his better half, Racine - Iphigénie:

> . . .offrant ici ma présence importune,
> Peut-être j'y pourrais porter mon infortune;
> Que peut-être approchant ces amants trop heureux,
> Quelqu'un de mes malheurs se répandrait sur eux.
> (Act II, Sc. i)

She prepares us for Phèdre by her reference to shame:

> Dans la nuit du tombeau j'enfermerai ma honte.
> (Act II, Sc. i)

When Clytemnestre appears (Act II, Sc. iv), all the battle forces are arrayed. She soon declares her allegiance and moves to protect her daughter. She refuses to subject Iphigénie to more outrages by Achille, but we know that this "outrage" is the result of the dishonest manoeuvering of Agamemnon. She is superior to Agamemnon in insight, as well, and is fully aware of Eriphile's love of Achille:

> De vos desseins secrets on est trop éclairci;
> Et ce n'est pas Calchas que vous cherchez ici.
> (Act II, Sc. iv)

The only unpredictable element in the battle for Iphigénie's life is Agamemnon. By the beginning of Act III, Agamemnon has aroused the suspicion, if not the hostility of Clytemnestre. When his plans are revealed, the mother's suspicion is turned to horrified certainty and then to anger against her "perfide époux". Dreading her anger, Agamemnon refuses to meet Clytemnestre. Meanwhile, another move has

altered the balance of power: Iphigénie, out of love and pity for her father, has decided to submit to the priest's knife. This disarms Achille, since he would be the murderer of her beloved father if he moved to protect her from the executioner.

When the battle actually begins, Clytemnestre, almost unable to believe her husband capable of the brutal duplicity he has shown, pretends that she is ignorant of the real significance of the altar Calchas has erected. When Agamemnon pursues the grisly masquerade, Clytemnestre's wrath erupts. Her abhorrence of her husband exceeds that of Monime for Mithridate:

> Bourreau de votre fille, il ne vous reste enfin
> Que d'en faire à sa mère un horrible festin.
> (Act IV, Sc. iv)

She heaps scorn on his head:

> Pourquoi feindre à nos yeux une fausse tristesse?
> (Act IV, Sc. iv)

She is prepared to die to save her daughter:

> De mes bras tout sanglants il faudra l'arracher.
> (Act IV, Sc. iv)

No other mother in Racine's works reaches her level of devotion and unselfishness. Even Andromaque is not her equal. But her power is limited. Jocaste, Agrippine and Roxane wielded the power of an absent king, but now the king is present and the queen is deprived of her power:

> Hélas, je me consume en impuissants efforts.
> (Act V, Sc. iv)

Since Clytemnestre's power comes only through the king, her effect will always be in relation to him. If we picture Iphigénie as balanced between her father and Eriphile, who threaten her, and her

mother and Achille (who protect her) we have the diagram of a stalemate. The aims of Eriphile and Achille are constant: Agamemnon is the variable. If he moves to protect Iphigénie, he changes the balance in her favour and she lives. If he listens to Calchas, Ulysse and the army, he upsets the balance, resulting in her death. Clytemnestre's role, then, is to act as Iphigénie's advocate in Agamemnon's inner debate.

Clytemnestre's relationship with Iphigénie is heartwarming. Her tenderness, devotion and lack of selfishness form the essence of the mother that Racine would have wanted as his own. It is not difficult to imagine how much Racine would have loved a mother whose only wish was the happy marriage of her child:

> D'un spectacle si doux ne privez point mes yeux.
> (Act III, Sc. i)

How different from Nicole's words: "cet amour est vicieux et illégitime"!

In view of the possessiveness and violence of such as Jocaste and Agrippine, the figure of Clytemnestre reveals how far Racine has progressed in his emancipation from Port-Royal. His perch may be as precarious as that of a tightrope walker, but he has reached the point where, for the moment at least, the word "mother" does not remind him of the reproaches of Agnès de Sainte-Thècle.

Let us now go back, in order to go forward. We have followed the developments in Racine's inner conflict through Bérénice, Bajazet and Mithridate. We have expressed the opinion that they mark a period of relative stability. The mothers' possessiveness has been counterbalanced by the approval of the father. In Mithridate a new stage is reached: the hero receives the woman of his choice. The "father's" approval seems

to have atoned for the "mother's" disapproval in the previous plays and Racine enjoys a moment of respite. If all these factors remained constant, the moment could become a lifetime. Unfortunately, there are signs in Iphigénie that this will not happen.

The first of these indications is the character of Agamemnon. It is true that he feels great tenderness for Iphigénie, but Racine seems to have gone to some length to show that he is governed also by less noble motives. For example, in Act V, Sc. i, he tells how he has sworn to disobey the gods in order to save Iphigénie. Yet within minutes he reveals how Ulysse has played upon his vanity ("charmé de mon pouvoir") and his weakness ("de mon coeur l'orgueilleuse faiblesse"), eventually persuading Agamemnon to order her sacrifice. Having gone so far, he washes his hands of responsibility:

> Seigneur, de mes efforts, je connais l'impuissance,
> Je cède et laisse aux dieux opprimer l'innocence.
> (Act I, Sc. v)

After a tender reunion with Iphigénie he seeks to persuade Clytemnestre to absent herself from the marriage-sacrifice so that Iphigénie will not be spared. Rather than allowing the gods to do their work, he actively helps them! When Achille declares he will defend her life at the cost of his own, this father replies:

> Et voilà ce qui rend sa perte inévitable.
> Ma fille toute seule était plus redoutable.
> Ton insolent amour, qui croit m'épouvanter,
> Vient de hâter le coup que tu veux arrêter.
> Ne déliberons plus. Bravons sa violence:
> Ma gloire intéressée emporte la balance.
> Achille menaçant détermine mon coeur;
> Ma pitié semblerait un effet de ma peur.
> Holà! gardes, à moi!
> (Act IV, Sc. vii)

A sorry mixture of vanity, ambition and jealousy! Where is the will of the gods now?[3]

One other act of Agamemnon's throws light on his questionable motives - his compromise on the eve of the sacrifice. How can we praise a solution which defies the gods, tramples underfoot Iphigénie's love for Achille, preserving her, not for her sake, but for her father's? Mauron offers the psychologist's opinion:

"Ainsi, derrière la jalousie politique d'Agamemnon, on entrevoit une jalousie amoureuse. Car le châtiment doit répondre au crime. Si le père punit Achille en lui enlevant sa fille, c'est que le fils avait commis la faute de vouloir ravir cette proie au père. Nous retrouvons le thème de Mithridate, le motif du père et du fils révolté se disputant la même femme."[4]

Thus there exists a continuity, from Mithridate through Iphigénie to Phèdre. When Thésée appears in Phèdre, the "father" will show himself capable of the ultimate error - the condemnation of the innocent Hippolyte,

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3 Jasinski, II, 357, cites an anonymous pamphlet, Remarques sur l'Iphigénie de M. Racine, which held the same view. Jasinski paraphrases: "Autrement dit, Agamemnon est un impie; et l'on doit bien entendre qu'il est tel parce que Racine l'a crée à son image, lui qui a rompu avec la religion de ses maîtres et s'est obstiné dans la voie du mal." In addition, he is guilty of "ambition déréglée" (the term used in the Remarques). And who is the author? Jasinski deduces - Port-Royal.

4 Mauron, p. 136.

a judgment which, this time, does lead to death.[5]

Eriphile, as has been mentioned, extends a development which began with Pharnace. Her crime is loving. When she denounces the tender Iphigénie to Calchas she is, like Pharnace and Phèdre, accusing others of what she herself is guilty. If death is the punishment she demands for Iphigénie, then death is the just reward for her own action. She dies by suicide, a form of self-punishment, signifying her acceptance of her guilt. This admission of guilt will reach its ultimate development in Phèdre.

The significance of Clytemnestre arises from the fact that she is a "normal" mother - a warm, tender, protective person. Racine has progressed in emotional stability to the point where the word "mother" does not signify all that is domineering and possessive. He is no longer aroused by guilty thoughts of disloyalty and ingratitude. Freed of his youthful rage to live and love, he has portrayed a mother who is simply a mother. But the calm which has permitted him to do so, has also allowed him to see himself more clearly than before. His next play shows what a gloomy spectacle his past presented.

Finally, one should not lose sight of the basic theme of the play - sacrifice. Racine has explored every motive for the immolation of

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5 We would remind the reader of the opinion expressed in the previous chapter, that the father represents a projection of forces derived from Racine's new position in society - a sort of "flattering unction" (in Hamlet's words). Iphigénie reveals a Racine increasingly aware of the dubious value of such self-flattery in general. Cf. Phèdre, (Phèdre to Oenone, Act IV, Sc. vi)

Et puisse ton supplice à jamais effrayer
Tous ceux qui comme toi, par de lâches adresses,
Des princes malheureux nourrissent les faiblesses.

Iphigénie, from the tender to the brutal, from the basest to the most ennobling. We feel that Iphigénie represents as profound a study of responsibility as Britannicus revealed after the death of Marquise.[6] After considering Phèdre, we will seek to show what forces were active in Racine's life at this time in order to demonstrate that these events parallel the developments within the plays, both pointing to the renunciation of his literary career.

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6 Jasinski, (II, p. 325) agrees with this view. He states:"Constatons seulement à quel point Iphigénie reprend sur un mode proche et pourtant distinct, le thème essentiel de Britannicus. . ."

CHAPTER VI

PHÈDRE: THE TRIUMPH OF PORT-ROYAL

It is with mixed feelings that one approaches this masterpiece. Few works in any language possess its power to stir the imagination. If we have referred occasionally to Shakespeare's Hamlet, it is because it alone, in our experience, possesses the insight and beauty of expression of Racine's play. Both tragedies are, at once, a source of intense fascination and a complex net-work of insights which challenges interpretation. It may not be coincidental that both plays are studies of incest.

Before continuing we must acknowledge our indebtedness to the psychological analysis of Charles Mauron, author of L'Inconscient dans l'Oeuvre et la Vie de Racine, a work already cited in previous chapters. Only a psychologist can show the way through this maze. His basic conclusion is: "Il n'y a qu'un personnage dans la tragédie de Phèdre." (p. 165). All the impulses of the human soul are here, from the most somber, most infernal to the purest, most celestial (the references to darkness and light in the play are legion). From the clear daylight of Aricie, Racine descends by way of Hippolyte, Thésée and Phèdre to the evil blackness of Oenone. This investigation will be centred around Phèdre and Oenone and their role in this study of darkness and light.

Because, as stated in Chapter I, the relative importance of incest within any given play by Racine reflects the bitterness of his

struggle with his "mother", Port-Royal, and because incest is so basic an element in Phèdre, an examination of this recurrent theme is called for. From La Thébaïde on, Racine was, with the exception of Andromaque, unable to depict a mother and son without the presence of incest. This obsessive connection, one of the most profound patterns of his personality, has puzzled many critics. Even the mighty erudition of Jasinski falters here. "Il n'est pas d'inceste, que l'on sache, dans la vie de Racine", he affirms,[1] and proceeds to question Racine's relationship with the two daughters of Marquise, who were young women at this time. But he concludes: "Il faut, non plus peser les culpabilités de fait, mais une dernière fois sonder les âmes." This brings us back to the realm of the psychologist, and this explanation: we are all guilty of incest. For the sake of the parallel with Racine, let us consider the development of a male child. Before and after birth, the child's life depends on its mother. Strong instinctive impulses make it seek its mother for nourishment, security and guidance. At puberty, with the onslaught of sexual impulses, the adjustment must be made away from the mother, in the direction of the mate. This period of turbulence may be marked by sexual impulses, mistakenly directed towards the mother, impulses which are quickly condemned. Gradually, through persistent condemnation of the mother - directed impulses, they become mate-directed. The important point is that the period of adjustment should be as brief as possible. If the wrong impulses persist, accompanying feelings of

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1 Jasinski, II, 455.

guilt will be even more pronounced. As a result, the mother-incest-guilt pattern may be engraved irrevocably on the subconscious.

Hence, we are all guilty of incest, subconsciously, but the sense of guilt, normally, is fleeting. With Racine it must have lasted for years. The responsibility for this lies with Jansenism. Out of the tenets of this sect, there emerged the conclusion that human love was vile. Nicole condemned it as "vicieux et illégitime". It follows that the adjustment from mother-directed to mate-directed thoughts could never, morally, be made, or that any attempt to do so would provoke deep feelings of guilt.

This does not imply that Racine understood Jansenist dogma in his childhood. Nevertheless it is reasonable that a receptive mind such as Racine's would sense that he was surrounded by "mothers". At puberty, the mother-incest-guilt feelings aroused in this heavily female atmosphere would be powerful and prolonged. Racine's only hope, therefore, was to reject such thoughts and flee the source that provoked them. In Mauron's words: "Racine, à douze ans, mis au collège de Beauvais et, pour ainsi dire abandonné pour Dieu par sa grand-mère (après sa mère, son père et son grand-père), n'a presque plus d'objet extérieur à aimer. Il est orphelin et pensionnaire. Toute son énergie interne doit être consacrée à se rêver et à se construire autre que féminin et janséniste."[2]

This effort later produced La Thébaïde, Andromaque and Britannicus. These plays are marked by the absence or suppression of the role of incest (relative to their source), and by cries of "ingrat" and "infidèle"

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2 Mauron, p. 207.

hurled at the fleeing "son".

Bérénice marks a turning point. The hero is willing to yield to duty and so gain respect, innocence. With Bajazet the mother-son obsession returned. The innocence of the hero which had been advanced in Bérénice is retained,but the situation of the "mother" (Roxane) is patently incestuous. How can the hero's (Racine's) innocence be maintained if, as we have stated, the idea "mother" is linked with incest and this connection inevitably produced feelings of guilt? The answer lies in a basic psychological law. If an amorous impulse is condemned, it may accept the condemnation, or if the condemnation is considered unjust, the ego may do one of two things:

1) Submerge the impulse deep in the subconscious where it is a potential source of such maladies as melancholy (cf. Hamlet),or

2) Defend itself by declaring the accuser guilty, not the accused.

Bajazet represents this latter alternative. The "son" Bajazet is declared innocent and all the blame is transferred to the mother image, Roxane.

The next development is the division of the love impulse into two "sons", Xipharès and Pharnace in Mithridate. The earlier attempt to transfer the blame has failed in part. One half of the love impulse (Pharnace) is admitted to be guilty and is condemned. But the existence of social rewards (condemned by Port-Royal but desperately sought by Racine and projected as a "father") allows Racine to rationalize away part of the mother-guilt-incest obsession, and this defence is typical of Xipharès, who is free to the point of envisaging marriage at the play's end.

Iphigénie shows the same division of the love impulse, but the battle for freedom is being lost. The importance of the role of Eriphile reveals Racine's increasing awareness that part of his love is sinful. Even Iphigénie, who typifies innocent love,does not achieve the happiness that her predecessor, Xipharès, attained. The "father" is guilty of weakness, ambition and jealousy. That is to say, Racine sensed that he had no sword of righteousness with which to overcome his sense of guilt, no rewards worthy enough to pacify his conscience. With Phèdre the battle is lost. Incest is everywhere. The "son" (Hippolyte) has dwindled to secondary importance and eventually his life is torn from him by his father's error in judgement. Phèdre dominates the stage. Her love is confessed and condemned. She atones for her guilt by self-inflicted death, the ultimate admission of responsibility for her sins.

Therefore, in terms of incest, Racine's plays present a progression. Initially there is suppression (La Thébaïde, Andromaque, Britannicus); then admission, (Bajazet) through Mithridate; to confession and self-punishment (Phèdre). By a detailed analysis of the mother role in the last of these plays it will be shown that this play contains a summary of the element of incest found in all the previous plays. Phèdre follows the same progression, summing up Racine's poetic career and pointing to its self-inflicted punishment.

The Portrayal of Incest in PHÈDRE

When Oenone (the essence of crime, a figure out of the blackest depths of the subconscious) begs Phèdre to reveal what obsesses her,

Phèdre retraces in one speech (Act I, Sc. iii) the development of her incestuous love for Hippolyte. On first sight she had passionately reacted to his look:

Je le vis, je rougis, je palis à sa vue,

and felt herself exposed, shivering, before him:

Je sentis tout mon corps et transir et brûler.

She tried to sublimate this impulse in good works:

Je lui [à Vénus] bâtis un temple, et pris soin de l'orner.

But a temple to Venus was an obviously poor choice, so she tried another psychological defence, aggression:

Je pressai son exil, et mes cris éternels
L'arrachèrent du sein et des bras paternels.

This is reminiscent of Jocaste's eternal cries, ("barbares", "inhumains").

Indeed, having put away temptation, Phèdre achieved temporary relief:

Je respirais, Oenone. . . .

Like Titus in Bérénice, she has yielded to the demands of her conscience. But it is not sufficient: the amorous impulse has only been partly expended. The rest was repressed:

. . . cachant mes ennuis,

With this, we are at the stage of Bajazet, where no mention of incest occurs, although both incest and adultery lurk beneath the surface. The repressed incestuous desire persisted in Phèdre's subconscious until Hippolyte returned, then it rose to the surface as it did in Mithridate:

Ce n'est plus une ardeur dans mes veines cachée.

We have observed Racine's attempt to compromise by splitting this

amorous impulse into two halves - one seeking social acceptability and the other half openly rebellious, hence justifiably condemned to death. But in Phèdre this compromise is impossible:

> J'ai conçu pour mon crime une juste terreur:
> J'ai pris la vie en haine et ma flamme en horreur.

Both the social and amorous impulses are condemned, and punishment is inevitable, even desirable - a self-inflicted punishment at that (note Ériphile's suicide in the previous play, Iphigénie). She accepts the necessity of her sacrifice:

> Je voulais en mourant prendre soin de ma gloire.

In the progression of plays, we have reached Phèdre.

In one speech Phèdre has summed up all of Racine's dramatic creation. This alone makes us think that it was his poetry that was the centre of his conflict from the beginning. Poetry has long been considered an expression of the erotic impulse. The "love" that Phèdre-Racine has conceived stands condemned, inwardly, and desires punishment. But the last phase of Phèdre's speech marks the final development:

> Je t'ai tout avoué. . .

Now it is in the open. In fact, Racine did confess all after this play was completed and he accepted the same punishment, the sacrifice of his love - his dramatic poetry.

If this view needs additional evidence, it is at hand, for it can be shown that the play is an amplification, a re-statement of this one speech. The speech and the previous plays reveal a subconscious struggle with guilt. Both the last play, Phèdre and Racine's subsequent renunciation are conscious results of that struggle.

There is no doubting the view that Phèdre was a conscious confession of guilt by Racine. In the preface he spoke of a means of reconciling "la tragédie avec quantité de personnes célèbres pour leur piété et par leur doctrine, qui l'ont condamnée dans ces derniers temps, et qui en jugeraient sans doute plus favorablement si les auteurs songeaient autant à instruire leurs spectateurs qu'à les divertir,. . ." Phèdre clearly was written under the ominous shadow of Port-Royal.

Returning to the play, the reader encounters the question of Oenone's significance. Perhaps the best known illustration of her relationship to Phèdre is the Dr. Jekyl-Mr. Hyde complex. From the depths of Jekyl's subconscious rose an incarnation of his repressed criminal instincts - Mr. Hyde. Mr. Hyde is to Dr. Jekyl as Oenone is to Phèdre. She is the criminal part of Phèdre's mind, vicariously enjoying Phèdre's confession of crime and indignant when Phèdre's silence threatens to deny her the fascinating details. In frustration, Oenone shouts:

> Mourez donc, et gardez un silence inhumain.
> (Act I, Sc. iii)

Only shortly before her death does Phèdre realize that she has been obeying the voice of evil:

> Ainsi donc jusqu'au bout tu veux m'empoisonner,
> Malheureuse! Voilà comme tu m'as perdue.
> . . . . . .
> Tes prières m'ont fait oublier mon devoir.
> (Act IV, Sc. vi)

Once Oenone is identified as Phèdre's criminal half, we can understand Phèdre's exhaustion. When she appears, she is returning to the light of day (consciousness) after three days with Oenone, battling

with her blackest, most primitive thoughts:

> Mes yeux sont éblouis du jour que je revois.
> (Act I, Sc. iii)

She has repressed these thoughts so long that the resulting melancholy, like Hamlet's, seeks release either in suicide or madness:

> Oenone: Quoi, madame?
> Phèdre: Insensée! où suis-je? et qu'ai-je dit?

Her erotic impulse is streaked with perversion. Like Néron behind the curtain observing Junie, Phèdre has watched Hippolyte:

> Quand pourrai-je, au travers d'une noble poussière,
> Suivre de l'oeil un char fuyant dans la carrière?

Oenone recognizes the danger of repression:[3]

> Ah! s'il vous faut rougir, rougissez d'un silence
> Qui de vos maux encore aigrit la violence.

Gradually Phèdre allows herself to admit her incestuous love. But this is no public avowal, since Oenone is only part of her subconscious. When the death of Thésée is announced (Act I, Sc. iv), Phèdre's "Ciel!" reveals that she knows how close she is to a conscious admission. In fact, when she approaches Hippolyte, she intends to confess! Her excuse is that she seeks his protection for her son's life but she soon forgets the pretense:[4]

> Le voici, vers mon coeur tout mon sang se retire.
> J'oublie, en le voyant, ce que je viens lui dire.

The voice of Oenone, eager to see the crime committed, urges her forward:

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3 In the progression of the plays, this repression of incest occurs in La Thébaide, Andromaque and Britannicus.

4 The masking of incest brings us to Bajazet.

Souvenez-vous d'un fils qui n'espère qu'en vous.

For eleven lines she manages to plead for her son, but she cannot keep up the sham. She slips into an emotional dialogue, in which only she and Hippolyte are concerned. She verges on confession:

Qu'un soin bien différent me trouble et me dévore!

Then she conceals her impulses in a lie:

Oui, prince, je languis, je brûle pour Thésée.

Then she expresses it in the ags-old symbol of the labyrinth:[5]

Et Phèdre au labyrinthe avec vous descendue
Se serait avec vous retrouvée ou perdue.

Finally her incestuous love is consciously admitted:

Connais donc Phèdre et toute sa fureur.[6]

She seeks punishment:

. . . punis-moi d'un odieux amour.

Seizing his sword she threatens suicide:[7]

Au défaut de ton bras prête-moi ton épée.[8]

But she is stopped by Théramène's approach.

When the expression of an impulse has been rebuffed (Phèdre: "Ciel, comme il m'écoutait"), one of the classic defenses is to denounce the accuser. Oenone sets Phèdre's feet on this path:

Que son farouche orgueil le rendait odieux.
(Act III, Sc. i)

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5 The psychologist sees in the labyrinth a subconscious reference to the womb.

6 This parallels the admission of guilt in Mithridate (Pharnace).

7 Cf. Eriphile, in Iphigénie.

8 This, and the previous seven quotations are from Act II, Sc. v.

But Phèdre prefers to adopt Roxane's methods - a power-for-love barter:

Oenone, fais briller la couronne à ses yeux:

Thésée's arrival makes such a move impossible. Like Monime, when Mithridate returned, she is thrown into confusion, and in this state she accepts the advice Oenone had begun to formulate previously:

. . .: osez l'accuser la première.
(Act III, Sc. iii)

Soon she yields to the impulse to accuse Hippolyte: "Vous êtes offensé," she declares ambiguously to Thésée. Lest Thésée should fail to shed blood, Oenone denounces Hippolyte's "feu criminel." It was this action that Racine had mentioned in his preface as being too heinous a deed to be performed by Phèdre: "Cette bassesse m'a paru plus convenable à une nourrice qui pouvait avoir des inclinations plus serviles,. . ." But Phèdre had already revealed the crime ("Vous êtes offensé"); Oenone only clarifies the accusation. This supports the belief that these two roles are only parts of one personality - the Jekyl and Hyde theory mentioned previously. Racine must have realized the "invraisemblance" of a nurse persuading a king to denounce his son, a prince. But in Racine's mind Oenone was a part of Phèdre. Racine's prefaces repeatedly defend alterations of his sources which he knew intuitively were justified but which he knew, just as clearly, his public would criticize (e.g., Junie, Eriphile).

Convinced by circumstantial evidence, Thésée turns over his son's life to the wrath of Neptune. In his own defence, Hippolyte reveals his love of Aricie; Oenone reports this to Phèdre whose jealousy brings her subconscious impulses to the surface. Before she actually

confesses her guilt there is the startling episode related by Panope to Thésée:

> Elle prend ses enfants et les baigne de pleurs;
> Et soudain, renonçant à l'amour maternelle,
> Sa main avec horreur les repousse loin d'elle.
> (Act V, Sc. v)

This so closely parallels Racine's early relationship with Port-Royal that one might believe that it represents Racine's last, meek self-justification before he accepts his guilt and his punishment.

When the last step in Phèdre's progress towards conscious confession occurs, it is expressed in the symbols of darkness and light which have recurred so frequently. Phèdre reveals that the evil Oenone has been returned, in death, to the black depths of the sea (the subconscious?). She foresees that her own death will restore to the daylight (Racine's conscience) "toute se pureté". Thus all three - the plays from La Thébaïde on, Phèdre's speech, (Act I, Sc. iii) and the play Phèdre, reach their culmination in the conscious admission of the guilt of this love and the vision of a clear conscience after it is destroyed.

For Racine the creation of his dramatic poetry was the expression of an amorous "drive", to use the psychologists' term. This impulse was condemned by Port-Royal, just as it condemned, no doubt, the normal feelings of the child Racine for the "mothers" that surrounded him within its walls. Since the love impulses of the young poet were incestuous in nature (there being, in these surroundings, no possible normal expression of love), love came to be associated with guilt. His love for poetry, by analogy, was guilty. In this frame of mind he would have been attracted to plots which permitted him to protest

his innocence, while portraying the possessive, domineering nature of Port-Royal in such roles as Jocaste, Agrippine and Roxane. But, like Phèdre, try as he might to avoid the inevitable, he was forced to admit that there was only one way to exonerate himself. Reluctantly he came to believe that, for the sake of his immortal soul, he must sacrifice his life as a dramatic poet.

This conclusion comes from examining the plays. What, in fact, happened during the interval from 1673 (the production of Mithridate) to 1677 (Phèdre)? It has been maintained in previous chapters that Racine had achieved a mental compromise at the time of writing Mithridate,[9] but that Iphigénie revealed that he was less assured that his social rewards compensated for his guilty conscience. Does history show that, prior to 1677, Racine had growing reason to regret his career? A consideration of this question forms the next chapter of this study.

9A. Adam, Histoire de la Littérature française au XVII Siècle, IV, 304, observes, concerning Racine (1673-74): Mais Racine était maintenant au-dessus des jalousies et des intrigues. Il vivait dans une confortable aisance. Il habitait, depuis le mois de juin, 1674, au plus tard un bel appartement. . ..Il l'avait meublé avec un véritable luxe. . .L'orphelin pauvre, élevé par charité à Port-Royal, avait lieu d'être satisfait de sa réussite temporelle.

CHAPTER VII

1673-1677: TRIUMPHS OR PYRRHIC VICTORIES?

The period began gloriously. Mithridate was presented for the first time almost simultaneously with Racine's election to the Académie (Jan. 12, 1673). The play was a success from the start, but its later presentation (May 4, 1673), in honour of the English ambassador, must have been an even more memorable event in Racine's life. The French nobility and the English (the Duke of Monmouth) invited by Monsieur and Madame were witnesses to his triumph. Greater acclaim was to follow.

On August 18, 1674, the first performance of Iphigénie formed the culmination of the festivities celebrating Louis' conquest of Franche-Comté.[1] Presented in the Orangerie at Versailles, the play was a dazzling success. One can easily imagine Racine's elation. Following this, in October, 1674, Louis appointed him "Notre Conseiller-Trésorier de France et général de nos Finances en la Généralité de Moulins." With this elevation to the nobility Racine's star shone more brightly than ever before. Where is the source of guilt in all this?

Let us return to Racine's election to the Academy. An unqualified success? Undoubtedly Colbert's support was evident here,

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1 For an account, see Lacretelle, p. 117 f.

but what became of Racine's acceptance speech? Did he, as Louis Racine has suggested, suffer so from embarrassment that he tore up his speech and left the hall?[2] Or did he lose his temper, as Lacretelle theorizes?[3] In any event the records of attendance show that Racine was seldom present. The Academy may well have been a source of irritation, rather than approbation.

But then, Louis had shown him a signal favour by appointing him Trésorier de France. Surely Racine was secure in Louis' affection. And yet, the same Louis allowed Pradon to publish his Phèdre et Hippolyte in open competition with Racine's Phèdre. Pradon wrote in his preface to the play, "J'avoue franchement que ce n'a pas été un effet du hasard qui m'a fait rencontrer avec M. Racine, mais un pur effet de ma volonté."[4] This same Pradon had previously published a "Tamerlan ou la Mort de Bajazet" which must have caused Racine great annoyance. It appears that Louis' favour was granted without concern for Racine's tender conscience.

Even the presentation of Mithridate did not have a lasting salutary effect. By 1675, Barbier d'Aucour had published his Apollon vendeur de Mithridate which contained "des insinuations outrageantes"[5] aimed at Racine. This attack must have been doubly painful since d'Aucour was connected with Arnauld and therefore with Port-Royal.

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2 Lacretelle, p. 115.

3 Ibid., p. 125.

4 Ibid., p. 125.

5 Jasinski, II, 365.

It has never been easy for critics to evaluate the effect of La Champmeslé on Racine. All agree that she was his mistress, although when the liaison began is a matter of theory. It is known, however, that she played in Bérénice. This well-read, intelligent actress could certainly have made Racine's spirit rise, filling him with the buoyancy that comes from being loved. But if this were so, Racine's elation must have been short-lived, for La Champmeslé was incapable of faithfulness to one man for any length of time. Undoubtedly many "galanteries" preceded her elopement with François-Joseph de Clermont-Tonnerre in 1676. The famous quatrain must have wounded Racine deeply:

> A la plus tendre amour elle fut destinée,
> Qui prit longtemps Racine dans son coeur;
> Mais, par un insigne malheur,
> Le Tonnerre est venu, qui l'a déRacinée.[6]

By late 1676, La Champmeslé was undoubtedly a source of bitterness and wounded pride for Racine.

In 1957 new light was shed on another mystery in Racine's life - the death of a daughter born to Racine and Mlle du Parc. In the Cahiers Raciniens, Volume II, were published for the first time the notes owned by Racine's descendant Mr. Jean-Louis de Sévin, notes which Jean-Baptiste Racine had "redigé, dicté ou inspiré".[7] The sentence: "M. Racine en avait eu une fille qui mourut environ à huit ans, et qui fut enterrée à St. Roch," fixes the date of the death of the child as 1674 or 1675.

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6 Mesnard, p. 87.

7 Cahiers Raciniens, II, 58.

What heart-rending memories the death of this child must have evoked! First the mother, now the daughter. The wrath of the God of Port-Royal seemed to pursue him relentlessly.

Fate was proving unkind to Racine's mighty protector Louis XIV as well. The glorious conquests of the new "Alexandre" came to a halt with the death of his great general, Turenne, on July 27, 1675. The Sicilian campaign was in difficulty and Créqui had been repulsed at Kinz-Saarbruck. Louis' Swedish mercenaries were routed and a pall of pessimism settled over the populace.[8] Louis XIV and Mithridate have much in common. At this stage in his reign, Louis was retreating from one disaster after another. His love affairs were more and more a source of public censure as well. Even Racine must have viewed with distaste Louis' inability to carry out his resolution to break with Mme de Montespan. In its siege of Racine's soul, what profit Port-Royal must have made of Louis' sorry example!

Racine was being encircled. He had contributed to the publication of a Bréviaire romain en latin et en français which appeared probably early in 1675. The book was condemned in 1688 as heretical, which confirms its Jansenist flavour. Jasinski comments:"Or ces Hymnes. . . exhalent. . .directement les appels d'une âme anxieuse qui cherche refuge en Dieu."[9] We have no account of how Racine came to participate in the publication of the Bréviaire, but it marks a compromise with

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8 For a detailed account, consult Jasinski, II, 372 ff.

9 Ibid., p. 397.

Port-Royal which historical investigation may one day clarify.

One other publication merits a whole study of its own, the edition of his collected works, which appeared in 1676. We have mentioned, in respect to Andromaque, the suppression of passages which the youthful Racine had written, but which the more mature Racine censured. The most important conclusion to be drawn from the existence of this work is that its preparation would have entailed a detailed and thoughtful examination of his life's work. "Cette édition révisée de près avait non seulement requis du soin et du temps, donc retardé l'élaboration de Phèdre, mais suscité de profondes réflexions", Jasinski observes.[10]

The historical view appears to support, step by step, the development traced in the plays. Initially, triumph led to triumph. Success in the theatre, election to the Académie, elevation to the nobility, all seemed to justify Racine's desertion of Port-Royal. He had been right. This was the approval he needed to salve his conscience. But soon, opposition grew with each play's premiere. Louis granted his favour to Racine's literary enemies. Port-Royal, through Barbier d'Aucour, redoubled the attack. La Champmeslé strained his patience beyond its limits and was rejected. Louis was showing weakness in his private life and ill-fortune in his military campaigns. How long could Racine point to the society around him and say, "This proves I am right."?

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10 Jasinski, Vol II, p. 396.

What lofty values recompensed him for the religious teachings he had abandoned? Had he sold his heritage for a mess of potage? Somehow Port-Royal must have sensed his hesitancy and achieved the minor reconciliation which produced the Bréviaire.

We are convinced that this historical progression is mirrored in the elimination from later plays of the happy ending which marked Mithridate and in the increasing importance of the role of guilt which had begun with Pharnace, was expanded in Eriphile, and which eventually dominated Phèdre. The final support for this belief is the fact that the publication of Racine's Collected Edition maintains what had been deduced from the study of Phèdre, namely that the play reflects a re-examination of all his previous works - such an examination as would have been a necessary preparation for the Collected Edition. When the most violent cabale of his career greeted Phèdre - the play he himself felt to be his greatest[11] - the final blow was dealt, but it struck when Racine was already on his knees.

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11 In his preface he wrote,"Au reste, je n'ose encore assurer que cette pièce soit en effet la meilleure de mes tragédies", but Maurice Rat, Théâtre Complet de Racine, p. 734, relates Racine's later opinion, as told to Boileau: "Je suis pour Phèdre et M. le Prince de Conti pour Athalie".

CONCLUSION

With Phèdre we come to the limit proposed for this study. Throughout we have proceéded in the belief that it is justifiable to seek Racine in his plays. We believe that it is the recurrence of situations or patterns, that permits any conclusions to be drawn. To examine one play apart from all others, and to theorize on the basis of a single event contained therein, is to tread on very precarious ground. But when a poet, who had lost his mother at thirteen months returns constantly to the theme of mother and child, surely this marks a valid area of research. We have dealt with the mothers because of the powerful personalities they possess and their importance within each play.

The role of Jocaste shows Racine, in his first major work, deeply concerned with incest. Of all themes, this is the most basic to his personality. We advanced the view that Racine was fleeing from an authority - Port-Royal - which because of its role in his childhood and because of its predominantly female nature, came to be identified in his mind as a mother image. The situation, in effect, corresponded to his own.

Andromaque, too is a portrait of flight, but the mother Andromaque has become an attractive image. The flight is from a dominant aggressive female, Hermione, who shares all of Jocaste's attitudes. The development, we believe, can be attributed to the

influence of Marquise du Parc. Under her spell Racine was temporarily able to break his association of mother with guilt but he was not able to eliminate the sense of guilt.

Britannicus marked a return to the dominating, incestuous mother and her rebellious sons. The play is a somber self-examination in which the major theme is guilt. This reversion to the pattern of La Thébaïde, we feel, was provoked by the death of Marquise which deprived him of the only tender, mature love he had known. In this play, Agrippine, the voice of Racine's conscience, repeats the charges of betrayal, cruelty and ingratitude which he knew Port-Royal had hurled at his fleeing back. We have suggested, with Brunetière's support, that at the time of Britannicus, Racine had indeed contemplated abandoning his career. Certainly the tone of the play is a profoundly pessimistic one.

In the three plays that followed - Bérénice, Bajazet and Mithridate - we have noted the continuation of Racine's inner struggle. Bérénice showed Racine debating the theme of renunciation. Unlike Titus, however, Racine could not renounce his love - his dramatic career. Hence in Bajazet the hero is threatened once again, by an aggressive, domineering woman of the type that has been provoked repeatedly by Racine's struggle with his conscience. The hero is a model of virtue and the mother is the epitome of evil. From this we deduced that Racine was striving to defend himself by declaring that he was entirely right and his conscience (hence Port-Royal) was entirely wrong. But the defence appears to have a weakness, for the hero is eventually destroyed. In Mithridate, Racine strives for a

compromise. We have interpreted this effort as a reflection of Racine's admission that his dramatic works are a source of guilty conscience, while maintaining that there are rewards involved in them that compensate for this guilt. Historical investigation shows that Racine enjoyed, at this time, the favour of the young Court, of Louis XIV and of La Champmeslé, all of which might well have seemed ample compensation for a troublesome conscience.

Iphigénie was written while the factors just mentioned seemed, outwardly at least, to have continued to produce an atmosphere free of conflict. The mother in the play, Clytemnestre, is a likeable woman and a loving mother. This would be a reassuring development if Racine had not returned to the "frères ennemis" theme which always indicates his mental uneasiness. Moreover, the guilty offspring, Eriphile, has grown in importance. We have adduced historical evidence to support the belief that Racine might well have recognized that his social triumphs were actually hollow victories.

Sometime in the two-year interval between Iphigénie and Phèdre we believe Racine concluded that his poetic career merited the condemnation which Port-Royal had always pronounced upon it. The preface contains clear references to a reconciliation with his former masters but even more overwhelming is the evidence within the drama. The confession of guilt which had begun with Pharnace and had increased with Eriphile now dominates the play.

We have asserted that, for Racine, poetry was a form of amorous expression and that his writings contain repeated references to incest

because the amorous impulses of his early years, stifled by Port-Royal, had been identified subconsciously, as incestuous. Therefore, while portraying the development and eventually the punishment of Phèdre's incest, Racine was also examining his poetic career and accepting its condemnation not only as just, but desirable, leading to the purity and calm which Phèdre prophesied would follow her death. With this acknowledgment his reconciliation with Port-Royal was assured.

And so we have come full circle. This magnificent poetry which began as a defiant protest against the condemnation of Port-Royal reached its zenith with submission to the very power that it had defied. Having examined the mothers Racine has portrayed, it is our belief that, if Port-Royal had not profoundly influenced the young orphan, we would never have known the masterworks of Jean Racine.

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