

THE  
INFLUENCE OF SENECAAN DRAMA  
ON  
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY  
FRENCH TRAGEDY

by

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Thesis submitted to the University  
of London for the degree of Ph. D.

BEDFORD COLLEGE

1982

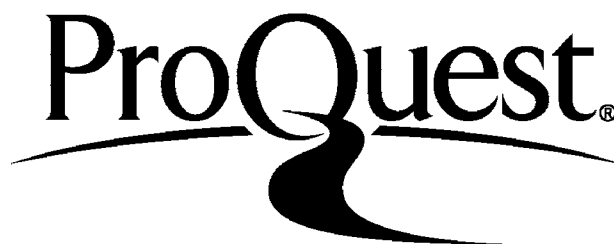
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis provides a sequel to studies relating to the influence of Senecan drama in sixteenth and seventeenth-century France, and although charting a final stage in the history of Seneca's importance as a literary source, strives to prove that the eighteenth century still offers substantial material for discussion. The influence which the Roman tragedies exerted during this period is assessed firstly by means of reference to contemporary editions and translations of the dramas, educational treatises, and works of criticism on the ancient and modern theatre, which allow us to judge how widespread knowledge of Seneca's work was, and secondly by detailed analysis of eighteenth-century tragedies based on Senecan themes.

Evidence shows that critical reaction to the plays as a whole was very frequently unfavourable, but this did not prevent French dramatists appropriating any elements suited to their particular needs. The nature of these borrowings can best be understood by being discussed in relation to the general development of French tragic drama during this period, and must also be weighed against the considerable interest which was shown in the Greek tragedians, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, at this time.

Tragic dramatists of the eighteenth century inherited the neo-classical tradition established in the preceding century, but also reacted against its restrictions and sought to explore new territory. There was a manifest desire to increase the emotional and visual impact of tragedy, and this atmosphere was more conducive to a real appreciation of the strong themes which Seneca offers than the earlier century had been. Crébillon's exploitation of the horrific elements

of the Thyestes in Atrée et Thyeste is one example of the new way in which the tragedies could be used, and the Latin writer's vivid descriptions of supernatural or spectacular phenomena, as well as the originality of some of his scenes, also appealed to other dramatists (and operatic librettists) of the period.



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am extremely grateful to the University of London for funding me throughout my three years of research with a Postgraduate Studentship, and especial thanks must be paid to the Central Research Fund of the University for providing extra aid during an extensive visit to Paris in search of material.

It would not have been possible for me to complete my thesis without the invaluable assistance of Dr. Eva Jacobs, who offered judicious criticism throughout and helped clarify many of my views. I would like also to express my gratitude to Professor F. R. D. Goodyear for answering many of my queries regarding Seneca.

CHAPTER I

The Senecan Heritage

As the only substantial remains of the tragic drama of so important an ancient civilization as Rome, it is hardly surprising that Seneca's dramatic works should have held a powerful fascination for tragedians of the modern era. Certainly the monumental importance of Senecan tragedy as a founding force in the rebirth of serious drama in Europe, from the first beginnings in fourteenth-century Italy to the establishment of the form in England and France in the sixteenth century, has long been recognized, and the weight of modern critical analysis points to an almost universal desire in dramatists of the period to emulate their revered model both in form and expression.<sup>(1)</sup> Julius Caesar Scaliger's advocacy of the superiority of Seneca to the tragedians of ancient Greece:

(Seneca) quem nullo Graecorum maiestate inferiorem existimo: cultu verò ac nitore etiam Euripide maiorem. Inventiones sanè illorum sunt: at maiestas carminis, sonus, spiritus, ipsius.

(Poetics (1561), book VI, Hypercriticus, p. 323) is indicative of the enthusiasm of response which the Latin writer could evoke during this period. That this pre-eminence could not be sustained indefinitely

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(1) General studies on Seneca's influence in the Renaissance include Carl Boehm's 'Beiträge zur Kenntnis des Einflusses Seneca's auf die in der Zeit von 1552 bis 1562 erschienenen französischen Tragödien' (Münchener Beiträge 24 (1902)); H. B. Charlton's very useful The Senecan Tradition in Renaissance Tragedy (Manchester 1946); and Les Tragédies de Sénèque et le théâtre de la Renaissance (Paris 1964), edited by Jean Jacquot, which also covers part of the seventeenth century.

was inevitable, and the following centuries witnessed a process of decline, as tragic drama began to evolve beyond the limits of the Senecan form. In focusing our interest on French tragedy of the eighteenth century,<sup>(1)</sup> we are choosing a period which has less obvious links with the drama of Seneca, but which offers, nevertheless, a significant epilogue to the study of the fortunes of the Roman theatre in France and to the evolution of neo-classical tragedy in general.

Throughout the second half of the sixteenth century Seneca's style of tragedy proved an indispensable guide to tragedians aspiring to re-establish the serious genre in France. Not only did they adopt his five-act form and his lyrical choruses, but they also imitated the Latin writer's preference for long opening monologues (which were often assigned to supernatural figures in emulation of the Thyestes and Agamemnon) and his static characters, who frequently declaim their speeches in a dramatic void, seemingly isolated from the reactions of their fellow players. Although French dramatists of the period draw on a wider spectrum of subjects than merely those which the Roman writer offers, their works are linked by an obviously Senecan structure and a tendency towards rhetorical poetry. The Renaissance years saw a considerable number of French translations as well as adaptations of Seneca's theatre, and the dividing line between the two is often extremely narrow. Nevertheless, the most talented interpreters of Senecan themes, such as Garnier<sup>(2)</sup> and La Péruse,<sup>(3)</sup> succeeded in infusing some originality into their works,

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(1) Discussions of eighteenth-century drama often conclude with the outbreak of the Revolution in 1789, but since the Revolutionary period is of interest and relevance to this thesis, the 'eighteenth century' will signify the years up to and including 1799.

(2) See his Hippolyte (1573), La Troade (1579), and Antigone (1580).

(3) See his Médée (1553).

as well as introducing elements from the corresponding Greek tragedies, with which they seem to have been well acquainted.

After the Renaissance, Seneca's decrease in importance as a dramatic model was neither as gradual nor as continuous as one might expect. The first years of the seventeenth century marked the birth of new, irregular genres such as tragi-comedy, and baroque dramas with macabre, horrific themes echoed the most sensational aspects of the Senecan theatre, although specifically Senecan subjects were not frequently dramatized. The years between 1630 and 1640, however, marked a large-scale return to direct imitation of Seneca, and saw no less than eight adaptations of his plays.<sup>(1)</sup> Why there should have been such a resurgence of interest in the Latin dramas during this time is unclear, but it may denote a desire in dramatists to return to a more regular form and to the classical models which had been adopted by the Renaissance humanists. The recent appearance of a new French translation of the Latin tragedies (by Benoît Bauduyn in 1629) may also have been a deciding factor. By this stage the choral element of Seneca's dramas had been discarded, and in structure the new adaptations look forward to the regular, neo-classical form which was beginning to be established in France. However, their style still preserves some baroque elements, and there is a certain freedom from restraint, which allows Monléon to echo in his Le Thyeste the most horrible elements of the Thyestes, and to have Atrée describe to his unfortunate brother the grisly preparations for the human banquet which has just been consumed:

I'ay moy-mesme arraché le coeur à ces infames;

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(1) These are Rotrou's Hercule mourant (1634), La Pinelière's Hippolyte (1634), Corneille's Médée (1635), Monléon's Le Thyeste (1638), a play on the same theme by Montauban which does not survive, Rotrou's Antigone (1639), L'Héritier de Nouvelon's Hercule furieux (1639), and Sallebray's La Troade (1640).

I'ay moy-mesme allumé les charbons & les flames,  
Sur qui i'ay veu rostir les mets qui ton (sic) repeu; (V,5)(1)

or La Pinelière to conjure up a macabre image of Phèdre sitting  
before

un cercueil ouvert accommodé de noir, & entouré de Cyprés  
où sont les membres d'Hippolyte.

(stage direction to Hippolyte V,2)<sup>(2)</sup> A taste for visual spectacle  
is demonstrated in Rotrou's Hercule mourant, where the action concludes  
with Hercule descending from Heaven on a cloud,<sup>(3)</sup> and in Corneille's  
Médée, where we see the sorceress exercising her magical powers.

The establishment of a fixed code of rules for tragedy towards  
the middle of the seventeenth century proved to be a decisive factor  
in Seneca's decline in importance, for although based on ancient  
authority, these rules provided for the growth of a genre which was  
no longer predominantly Senecan, but which became an expression of  
purely French taste. They were by their very nature restrictive,  
and in purifying the indiscriminate mass of material which had hitherto  
been considered suitable for portrayal on stage imposed a severe  
discipline on aspiring dramatists. The aesthetic demands of vrai-  
semblance ruled that only that which could reasonably have happened in  
a given situation might be depicted, while the bienséances, or  
proprieties, imposed the necessity of respecting prevailing moral  
standards. This effectively excluded horror from the stage, and  
thereby a good deal of Seneca's material. No-one, for example,  
dared to dramatize the Thyestes during the second half of the seven-  
teenth century, and Corneille, in his first Discours sur le poème

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(1) Paris (Pierre Guillemot) 1638.

(2) Paris (Antoine de Sommaville) 1635.

(3) The elaborate stage setting for Hercule mourant is described in  
Le Mémoire de Mahelot, Laurent et d'autres décorateurs de l'Hôtel de  
Bourgogne et de la Comédie-française au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle (edited by Lancaster  
(Paris 1920)), p. 102-3.

dramatique (1) recognized that, 'Notre théâtre souffre difficilement de pareils sujets'. The spectacle of a hero driven by madness to murder his own family was also held to exceed the bounds of acceptability, and the Hercules Furens incurred the same fate as the Thyestes.

Corneille, who was an admirer of Seneca and deeply influenced by the Roman dramatist's rhetorical style, realized that concessions had to be made to popular taste, and his approach to dramatizing the story of Oedipus in 1659 was fundamentally different from his manner of tackling Medea in 1635. Whereas he had imitated Seneca extensively in the earlier play, he saw when dealing with Oedipus that it was necessary to temper fidelity to the spirit of the ancients with consideration of the prevailing trends of the day. In the preface to Oedipe (Au Lecteur) he writes:

J'ai reconnu que ce qui avoit passé pour miraculeux dans ces siècles éloignés pourroit sembler horrible au nôtre, et que cette éloquente et curieuse description de la manière dont ce malheureux prince se creve les yeux, et le spectacle de ces mêmes yeux crevés ... feroit soulever la délicatesse de nos dames, qui composent la plus belle partie de notre auditoire, ... (2)

He also notes the necessity of introducing romantic love into the plot, something which became an indispensable adornment of French tragedy in the seventeenth century, but which is essentially alien to both Seneca and ancient tragedy in general.

This policy of compromise extended to almost all regular adaptations of Senecan subjects in the seventeenth century, and often had the unfortunate effect of weakening (or on occasion totally destroying) the original force of the particular theme in question.

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(1) See Pierre Corneille: Writings on the Theatre, ed. Barnwell (Oxford 1965), p. 6.

(2) Ed. Marty-Laveaux (Paris 1862-8), volume VI, p. 126.



The story of Phaedra's incestuous love for her stepson Hippolytus, for example, offered a morally unsatisfactory situation, and a succession of dramatists worked to remodel the details until they succeeded in rendering it almost totally unrecognizable. It was only when Racine chose to dramatize the theme in 1677, and to stake his reputation on a more faithful version of the legend, that it was largely restored to its original colours. However, for Racine, imitation of Seneca no longer implies frequent paraphrase of the Latin writer's mode of expression, but a discriminating selection and reshaping of the best lines and dramatic situations of the play, so that they become indistinguishable from the poetic fabric of his own work.

It is hardly surprising that the evolution of a set of authoritative rules for French tragedy coincided with the expression of a less subservient attitude towards Senecan drama. From about the middle of the seventeenth century literary critics began to adopt a more outspoken attitude towards the Roman author's work, and to point out its weaknesses as a model for tragedy. Thus abbé d'Aubignac, in his Pratique du théâtre (1657) complains that Seneca does not understand the art of drama,<sup>(1)</sup> while père Rapin comments that Seneca does not succeed in making his characters appear as human beings (Réflexions sur la poétique (1674), p. 43)<sup>(2)</sup>:

c'est un beau parleur, qui veut dire de belles choses: il n'est point naturel en ce qu'il dit, et les personnes qu'il fait parler, ont toujours un certain air guindé de personnages.

Père Le Bossu also censures the writer's tendency towards redundant description (Traité du poème épique (1675), II, 202):

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(1) P. 68 in the original edition of 1657.

(2) Ed. E. T. Dubois (Textes littéraires français, Geneva 1970).

S'il a quelque récit à faire, si triste & si épouvantable qu'il soit, il le commence par des Descriptions, non seulement inutiles, mais enjouées & badines.

In his Jugemens des sçavans sur les principaux ouvrages des auteurs (1685-6), Baillet weighs the balance of critical opinion, and concludes that Seneca does indeed have fundamental weaknesses as a dramatic poet, but that he still has a number of enthusiastic admirers (IV, ii, 363-71).

The overall significance of Seneca's influence as a dramatic source during the pre-classical and classical period of the seventeenth century has yet to be investigated in a single, comprehensive study. Much has been done on individual dramatists, such as Rotrou,<sup>(1)</sup> Corneille,<sup>(2)</sup> and Racine,<sup>(3)</sup> but even here there is a tendency to

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(1) A very full survey of the sources of Antigone has been undertaken by Fr. E. Buchetmann in his 'Jean de Rotrou's Antigone und ihre Quellen. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des antiken Einflusses auf die französische Tragödie des XVII Jahrhunderts' (Münchener Beiträge 22 (1901)). Morel examines Hercule mourant in his chapter 'L'Hercule sur l'Oeta de Sénèque et les dramaturges français de l'époque de Louis XIII' (Sénèque et le théâtre de la Renaissance, p. 95-111).

(2) Numerous studies have been devoted to the sources of Médée. See, for example, Th. C. H. Heine's 'Corneille's Médée in ihrem Verhältnisse zu den Medea-Tragödien des Euripides und des Seneca betrachtet' (Französische Studien 1 (1881), 433-68); L. M. Riddle's The Genesis and Sources of Pierre Corneille's Tragedies from 'Médée' to 'Pertharite' (Johns Hopkins Studies in Romance Literatures and Languages, no. 3 Baltimore 1926); André Stegmann's 'La Médée de Corneille' (Sénèque et le théâtre de la Renaissance, p. 113-26); and R. W. Tobin's 'Médée and the Hercules Tradition of the Early Seventeenth Century' (Romance Notes 8 (1966), 65-9). Oedipe is discussed in H. G. Francq's 'Les Malheurs d'Oedipe' (Revue de l'Université Laval 20 (1965), 211-24).

(3) Most attention has been paid to Phèdre. See Lecouturier's Examen de 'l'Hippolyte' d'Euripide, de 'l'Hippolyte' de Sénèque, et de la 'Phèdre' de Racine (Paris 1818); and J. White's 'Racine's Phèdre: A 'Sophoclean' and Senecan Tragedy' (Revue de littérature comparée 39 (1965), 605-13). Léon Herrmann discusses the Latin source of Britannicus in his 'Octavie source de Britannicus' (Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé 7 (April 1925), 15-28). John Lapp offers a more general outline in his 'Racine est-il sénéquien?' (Sénèque et le théâtre de la Renaissance, p. 127-38).

concentrate on individual plays rather than on general questions. André Stegmann's chapter entitled 'Seneca and Corneille' in Roman Drama (edited by T. A. Dorey and D. R. Dudley (London 1965)), p. 161-92, is informative, but the subject merits a more extensive treatment. Ronald W. Tobin has produced a Racine and Seneca (Chapel Hill 1971), but unfortunately this work overstates the Roman writer's influence, and has none of the authority of R. C. Knight's Racine et la Grèce (Paris 1950), which offers useful incidental material on the French dramatist's debt to Seneca. After Racine, critical discussions of Seneca's influence have usually come to an abrupt and rather arbitrary close. In the preface to Les Tragédies de Sénèque et le théâtre de la Renaissance Lebègue writes that it is probably suitable to end a study of the influence of Seneca's theatre with Racine's masterpiece Phèdre (p. xii), and Stegmann, in the same work, asserts that the Latin dramatist's influence was no longer significant at an even earlier date (p. 126):

En 1644, les deux pièces de Tristan, La Mort de Sénèque et La Mort de Crispe, variation moderne sur le thème de Phèdre jouées par la troupe de Molière, avaient connu un grand succès et ramené l'intérêt du public, très momentanément d'ailleurs, vers la tragédie antique et Sénèque. Dernier éclat sans lendemain.

That Seneca was no longer a crucial influence on tragedy in the latter part of the seventeenth century is not disputable. However, it is inaccurate to assume that he immediately disappeared without a trace. After Phèdre seven tragedies were produced on Senecan subjects before the end of the century,<sup>(1)</sup> and the Latin writer's influence is especially important in Pradon's La Troade (1679),

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(1) Pradon's La Troade (1679), Pader d'Assézan's (or Boyer's) Agamemnon (1680) and Antigone (1687), La Thuillerie's Hercule (1681), Dancourt's La Mort d'Hercule (1683), Longepierre's Médée (1694), and La Fosse's Polixène (1696).

Longepierre's Médée (1694), and La Fosse's Polixène (1696). The comparative insignificance of these authors means that their work has received little attention,<sup>(1)</sup> but the fact that they all used Seneca to a greater degree than the corresponding Greek tragedies<sup>(2)</sup> shows that the Roman theatre continued to be regarded as a worthy model for tragedy.

The approach of the eighteenth century marked no sudden change of attitude towards tragedy. Serious drama maintained its prestige, and Corneille and Racine were accorded a position of honour which gave added impetus to aspiring poets seeking to follow in their footsteps. Lancaster (Sunset (Baltimore 1945), p. 27) writes that during the period 1701 to 1715 an average of about 127 performances of tragedy were given at the Comédie-française each year, although these were by no means all new plays. From 1701 to 1792 he records a total of 234 new tragedies,<sup>(3)</sup> which is, of course, only a small percentage of the actual number written, since many dramatists were not successful enough to have their plays performed by the comédiens. La Harpe, looking back on the eighteenth century, notes a veritable mania for composing tragedies, although he is extremely scathing about the standard of much of the work produced (Lycée, ou Cours de littérature

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(1) Pradon's play is dealt with in T. W. Bussom's A Rival of Racine: Pradon, his Life and Dramatic Works (Paris 1922). Baron Roger Portalis' study entitled Bernard de Requeleyme, baron de Longepierre (1659-1721) (Paris 1905) offers a biography of Longepierre, and J. D. Hubert discusses Médée in his article 'Une Tragédie de la sensibilité: la Médée de Longepierre' (Romanische Forschungen 69 (1957), 28-48). La Fosse's plays, apart from Manlius Capitolinus (1698), have largely been ignored.

(2) Longepierre was a noted Hellenist, and there is evidence of the use of Euripides in Médée, but his major sources were Seneca and Corneille.

(3) See the lists of plays in the appendices of Sunset, French Tragedy in the Time of Louis XV and Voltaire, 1715-1774 (Baltimore 1950), and French Tragedy in the Reign of Louis XVI and the Early Years of the French Revolution, 1774-1792 (Baltimore 1953).

ancienne et moderne (1799-1805), XI, 154):

On a représenté ou imprimé, depuis la mort de Racine, environ un millier de tragédies. Combien en est-il resté au théâtre, en mettant à part celles de Voltaire qui a pris son rang à côté des deux maîtres du dernier siècle ? A-peu-près une trentaine, avec plus ou moins de succès et de réputation, plus ou moins de bonheur ou de mérite;

Of the numerous writers devoting part or all of their energies to the composition of tragedy during the eighteenth century, a fair number earned some success with their efforts,<sup>(1)</sup> but the most consistently admired tragedian of the century was without doubt Voltaire, who far surpassed his competitors both in the amount and quality of the work he produced.<sup>(2)</sup> Although not usually remembered for his dramatic productions today, Voltaire considered this aspect of his work to be immensely important, and devoted enormous effort both to the establishment of his own pre-eminence in the theatre and to the denigration of his most serious rival, Crébillon.<sup>(3)</sup> Voltaire's deep interest in the tragic genre is explained by his own (and generally accepted) view that tragedy is the most pleasing of all the poetic forms (Dictionnaire philosophique (Exagération), M. XIX, 45):<sup>(4)</sup>

De tous les genres de poésie, celui qui charme le plus les esprits instruits et cultivés, c'est la tragédie.

and that which confers the greatest renown on the successful practitioner. He sees tragedy as an enormously difficult pursuit, and thus a profession for the élite (Commentaires sur Corneille (Remarques sur 'Le Comte

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(1) Such as La Grange-Chancel, La Motte, Piron, Le Franc de Pompignan, La Noue, Marmontel, Châteaubrun, Guimond de La Touche, Saurin, Lemierre, de Belloy, La Harpe, Ducis, and in the post-Revolutionary period, Legouvé, Marie-Joseph Chénier and Lemercier.

(2) Out of a total of 55 plays, Voltaire composed 32 tragedies. He was generally ranked second or even equal to Corneille and Racine.

(3) The nature of the hostility between the two writers is discussed by Paul O. Le Clerc in 'Voltaire and Crébillon père: History of an Enmity' (Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 115 (1973)).

(4) Moland edition of the complete works (Paris 1877-85).

d'Essex'), III, 1026):<sup>(1)</sup>

Tant de pièces, ou refusées au théâtre depuis cent ans, ou qui n'y ont paru qu'une ou deux fois, ou qui n'ont point été imprimées, ou qui, l'ayant été, sont oubliées, prouvent assez la prodigieuse difficulté de cet art.

The successful tragedy must contain numerous qualities (Candide ch. XXII (M. XXI, 192)):

L'homme de goût expliqua très-bien comment une pièce pouvait avoir quelque intérêt, et n'avoir presque aucun mérite; il prouva en peu de mots que ce n'était pas assez d'amener une ou deux de ces situations qu'on trouve dans tous les romans, et qui séduisent toujours les spectateurs; mais qu'il faut être neuf sans être bizarre, souvent sublime et toujours naturel, connaître le coeur humain et le faire parler; être grand poète, sans que jamais aucun personnage de la pièce paraisse poète; savoir parfaitement sa langue, la parler avec pureté, avec une harmonie continue, sans que jamais la rime coûte rien au sens.

Although indissolubly linked with the tradition of the seventeenth century, tragedy by no means remained a static form in the eighteenth century. Writers were keenly interested in the mechanics of the process in which they were engaged, and the volume of theoretical works, in addition to critical prefaces, which practitioners of tragedy produced<sup>(2)</sup> bears evidence to this fact. The best writers of the period were convinced of a need to review the stereotyped limits into which the genre had fallen towards the end of the previous century, and they directed their efforts towards a redefinition of the aims of tragic drama. This conscious desire for a new direction in tragedy, together

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(1) Ed. David Williams (The Complete Works of Voltaire, volumes 53-5 (Banbury 1974-5)). This edition will be used for all references to the Commentaires.

(2) Many tragedians were also important critics. See, for instance, Marmontel's Poétique française (1763) and Eléments de littérature (collection of articles from the Encyclopédie in Oeuvres choisies de Marmontel (Paris 1824-7), vols. VII-X); Clément's De la Tragédie, pour servir de suite aux lettres à Voltaire (1784); and La Harpe's Lycée, ou Cours de littérature ancienne et moderne (1799-1805). Other works by critic/dramatists include abbé Nadal's Observations sur la tragédie ancienne et moderne (in Oeuvres mêlées (Paris 1738), vol. II); Le Franc de Pompignan's Lettre de M. Le Franc à M. Racine (1751); Diderot's Discours de la poésie dramatique (1758); and Mercier's Du Théâtre, ou nouvel Essai sur l'art dramatique (1773). Both Diderot and Mercier were especially interested in the establishment of the drame.

with the necessity for fresh ideas imposed by the great success which Corneille and Racine had already achieved, led inevitably to a great deal of experimentation and a successive widening of the genre.

Much energy was devoted to the question of the proper emotional effect which tragedy should achieve. The seventeenth century had interpreted Aristotle's *ἔλεος* and *φόβος* as pity and fear, whilst remaining at variance over the specific sense of the notion of the purgation of these passions, and had rejected extreme terror and horror as unsuitable for the stage. In the eighteenth century, however, the possibility of achieving a more intense emotional effect with the introduction of stronger action was put forward. Crébillon, in particular, who was without doubt the most original dramatist of the first part of the century, experimented with the introduction of horror in his *Atrée et Thyeste* (1707), and such was the boldness of his undertaking that he felt the need to offer an apology in the preface to the play:

Je vois bien que j'ai eù tort de concevoir trop fortement, la Tragédie, comme une action funeste qui devoit être présentée aux yeux des Spectateurs sous des images intéressantes, qui doit les conduire à la Pitié par la Terreur, mais avec des mouvemens & des traits, qui ne blessent ni leur délicatesse, ni les bienséances. (1)

Voltaire, too, although opposed to the introduction of gratuitous horror, felt that the French had long been too timid in the type of spectacle they portrayed on stage. On his visit to England he had been able to compare his native tragedy with the Shakespearean theatre, and although revolted by much of what he saw, found vital lessons for the broadening of his own genre. He returned to France with a determination to infuse more life into French tragedy, and was outspokenly critical of the fact that

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(1) Edition of 1711 (A La Haye, chez T. Johnson).

Nous craignons de hasarder sur la scène des spectacles nouveaux devant une nation accoutumée à tourner en ridicule tout ce qui n'est pas d'usage.

(Discours sur la tragédie (preface to Brutus), M. II, 315). His contention was that visual spectacle of however horrible a nature can provide pleasure if treated with consummate skill (Spectacles horribles chez les Grecs, II, 318):

Je suis bien loin de proposer que la scène devienne un lieu de carnage, comme elle l'est dans Shakespeare et dans ses successeurs, qui, n'ayant pas son génie, n'ont imité que ses défauts; mais j'ose croire qu'il y a des situations qui ne paraissent encore que dégoûtantes et horribles aux Français, et qui, bien ménagées, représentées avec art, et surtout adoucies par le charme des beaux vers, pourraient nous faire une sorte de plaisir dont nous ne nous doutons pas.

This admittance of a greater degree of terror into the theatre, which Clément notes with regret as having become widespread by his time (De la Tragédie, I, 216):

Non seulement on s'accoutuma aux noires couleurs de Crébillon, on voulut encore des émotions plus fréquentes, des secousses plus fortes; on eut besoin de toutes sortes de ressorts extraordinaires, pour remuer des coeurs froids, & pour attacher des esprits distraits, ...

amounts to a more liberal interpretation of the bienséances, and allows for the dramatization of a whole new range of themes hitherto seen as untouchable. This encompasses much of Greek drama, which often deals in strong emotion (the Orestes theme, for example, which had been largely ignored by the seventeenth century, was now dramatized by Longepierre, Crébillon, Voltaire, and Lauraguais), as well as the more terrifying themes of Senecan drama.

In order to affect the emotions of the spectators it was seen to be necessary to maintain a fundamental truth in the portrayal of passion. Voltaire held that French tragedy was too concerned with images of insipid gallantry, and he rejected the stereotyped romantic situations which were so common in tragedy at that time. In his Dissertation sur la tragédie ancienne et moderne (preface to Sémiramis)



he writes that of some 400 tragedies performed in France since the genre had acquired some status only ten to twelve were not based on a romantic plot (M. IV, 497-8). He himself, however, was only prepared to admit love where it is a furious, criminal, or unfortunate passion. It should either appear as a tyrannical force and dominate the stage or not appear at all. That Voltaire succeeded in his attempts to portray emotion in a forceful and interesting manner is evidenced by Mme. de Staël in her De la Littérature, considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales (1800), II, 35:

Voltaire a fait faire des progrès à l'art dramatique, quoiqu'il n'ait point égalé la poésie de Racine. Mais sans imiter les incohérences des tragédies anglaises, sans se permettre même de transporter sur la scène française toutes leurs beautés, il a peint la douleur avec plus d'énergie que les auteurs qui l'ont précédé. Dans ses pièces les sentimens sont plus pénétrants, la passion est peinte avec plus d'abandon, et les moeurs théâtrales sont plus rapprochées de la vérité.

La Motte, on the other hand, felt that romantic love, such as that shared by Inès and Dom Pedre in Inès de Castro, could be a successful means of arousing pathos. In his Troisième Discours à l'occasion de la tragédie d'Inès (Oeuvres de Monsieur Houdar de La Motte (Paris 1754), IV, 271-2) he advocates the building up of a crescendo of pity, whereby the audience is finally reduced to tears. This emphasis on arousing visible emotion in the spectators is indicative of the influence of sensibilité, which was to play an important part in eighteenth-century tragedy.

Voltaire's interest in rejuvenating tragedy was not merely limited to the question of the nature of tragic emotion, for when he writes (Discours sur la tragédie (M. II, 314)):

Nous avons en France des tragédies estimées, qui sont plutôt des conversations qu'elles ne sont la représentation d'un événement.

he is concerned to recall Aristotle's precept that tragedy should be the representation of an event. During his stay in England he had

been impressed by the dynamic nature of the English theatre, and he was eager to render French drama more interesting by increasing its amount of action. This desire for greater action is linked with a conviction that pomp and visual spectacle should be an important aspect of tragedy. He was angered by the fact that seats for spectators restricted a good deal of the stage area of the Comédie-française, and when the stage was eventually cleared in 1760 due to the generosity of M. de Lauraguais he felt this to be an enormous boon for dramatists and audience alike. The introduction of a chorus in Oedipe (1718) was an attempt to add pomp and dignity to the drama, and the ghost introduced into Sémiramis (1748) was a visual means of evoking terror. Voltaire's interest in a greater realism of setting and costume is reflected in his introduction of red robes for the members of the Senate in Brutus (1730).

Reforms were in general not aimed at the external rules of tragedy. La Motte theorized on the advantages of replacing the alexandrine verse form by prose (see his Quatrième Discours à l'occasion de la tragédie d'Oedipe, IV, 390 ff.), and the three unities by a single unity of interest (Premier Discours sur la tragédie, IV, 37 ff.), but in practice he obeyed the rules.<sup>(1)</sup> Freer forms, such as the drame bourgeois appeared later in the century as an alternative to the stricter demands of aristocratic tragedy.

It is particularly interesting, in the light of the expressed desire of eighteenth-century dramatists to widen the scope of tragedy, to examine whether Seneca has any significant role to play, and whether the possibility of exploiting new and more forceful subjects opened the door to fresh imitation of the more sensational elements of

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(1) Although he did compose an alternative prose version of his Oedipe (1726).

the Senecan theatre, and indeed of the ancient theatre in general. It will be our task to assess the diverse texts available, and to decide whether there is any evidence of a renewal of interest in Seneca, or whether the Latin dramatist merely continued a slow and uninterrupted glide into oblivion. The lack of any previous work on this subject makes it a fascinating topic for investigation.

Needless to say, a widening of the scope of tragedy also involved the introduction of more varied subjects for dramatization, and the ancient theatre was forced to compete with a variety of other sources of inspiration. European history, for example, from the medieval period onwards became an important source of material, and the dramatization of events from recent history, primarily during the Revolutionary period, demonstrates how relevant to contemporary life tragedy was becoming. Plays taken from European history comprise about 16% of the total number noted by Lancaster;<sup>(1)</sup> plays based on English history or English drama account for a further 6%. Tragedies set in the New World form less than 4% of the total, but the Orient, including China, India, and the Muslim states, accounts for another 10%. Characters of Oriental antiquity, such as Xerxes, Cyrus, Amasis, Cosroës, Semiramis, and Cleopatra, continued to be popular figures of drama, and 16% of all plays were based on these. Biblical subjects (apart from Racine's Esther and Athalie) aroused little enthusiasm, and account for only 5% of plays, although a vigorous tradition of Biblical drama was maintained in the Jesuit colleges. Antiquity still had much to offer, and subjects from Roman history up to the fall of the Empire amount to 18% of the total. Plays based on Greek subjects (usually from

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(1) See p. 15 of this chapter. These percentages should not be considered as anything more than a general guideline, for they only include plays performed at the Comédie-française (and for the Revolutionary period the theatres of Paris) between 1701 and 1792. Inevitably some plays also fail to fall into a precise category.

mythology) form a further 25%, and of this 25% nearly half were dramas drawn from the themes of the Greek or Senecan theatre.

During the neo-classical period of the seventeenth century the majority of dramatists had tended not to make direct use of the Greek tragedians. Knowledge of Greek was on the whole quite limited, and often the only means of access to Sophocles and Euripides (Aeschylus was generally neglected) was through inadequate Latin translations. Where dramatists refer to Greek dramas they seem frequently to possess only a broad knowledge of the general story-line, while drawing on Latin sources for specific material. Racine springs to mind as the only tragedian to have made consistent use of the Greeks, although there were other Hellenists, such as Gabriel Gilbert and Longepierre, whose work shows they were directly acquainted with Euripides. The eighteenth century, however, saw an enormous increase of interest in Greek drama, and père Brumoy's Le Théâtre des Grecs (1730)<sup>(1)</sup> and subsequent translations into the vernacular did much to disseminate knowledge of the nature of Greek tragedy. The second half of the century, in particular, saw the production of a series of plays in imitation of Sophocles and Euripides, and the dramatists of the last decades of the century demonstrate an even greater enthusiasm for these models. This renewal of interest in ancient Greece is of immense importance for this study, for whereas the majority of seventeenth-century dramatists knew only Seneca's dramatizations of mythological themes, eighteenth-century tragedians often had a considerable knowledge of the corresponding Greek versions, and if they so desired could use these to the exclusion of the Latin works.

Seneca himself was unquestionably a controversial figure in the eighteenth century. Coupé,<sup>(1)</sup> a translator of the Roman tragedies at

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(1) For further information see the following chapter.

the end of the century, tells us that (Théâtre de Sénèque (1795), I, 5)

Cet auteur, élevé jusqu'au ciel par les uns, et regardé seulement par les autres comme un déclamateur sublime, est arrivé jusqu'à nous avec une réputation fort equivoque; on le connoît à peine au bout de dix-sept siècles.

La Harpe, writing at roughly the same period, asserts that Seneca's dramas no longer find many readers (Lycée, I, 506):

Les heureux larcins qu'on a faits à Sénèque, font voir aussi que, comme poète, il n'est pas indigne d'attention ni de louange; mais le peu de réputation qu'il a laissé en ce genre, et le peu de lecteurs qu'il a, sont la preuve de cette vérité, toujours utile à remettre sous les yeux de ceux qui écrivent, que ce n'est pas le mérite de quelques traits semés de loin en loin qui peut faire vivre les ouvrages, et qu'il faut élever des monumens durables pour attirer les regards de la postérité.

However, this view is exaggeratedly pessimistic, for knowledge of the tragedies does seem to have been widespread in the eighteenth century. Notable men of letters of the period display a facility for recalling verses from the plays - Montesquieu, for example, quotes the best known lines of the Thyestes (1005-6) in Mes Pensées (V, I, Langage et langues),<sup>(1)</sup> and Marmontel cites an extract from the Medea in his Eléments de littérature (Essai sur le goût), I, 261,<sup>(2)</sup> as does Voltaire in his Commentaires sur Corneille (Médée), II, 20 ff.. Rousseau's familiarity with the Thyestes is demonstrated by his reference to the Latin drama in the Lettre à Mr. d'Alembert sur les spectacles (1758), p. 41.<sup>(3)</sup>

Seneca's personal life came under close scrutiny in the eighteenth century. It was a period in which his philosophical works were topical, and there was a general interest to see how the writer's Stoic beliefs could be reconciled with the known facts of his involvement with a

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(1) Pléiade edition (ed. Roger Caillois, Paris 1949-51), I, 1215.

(2) Oeuvres choisies, volume VII.

(3) Ed. M. Fuchs (Textes littéraires français, Geneva 1948).

tyrannical regime. Violent differences of opinion were engendered on this subject, for while some asserted that Seneca was a crass hypocrite, others defended him with the utmost vigour. Diderot was perhaps the philosopher's most distinguished admirer in the eighteenth century, and in his Essai sur la vie de Sénèque le philosophe, sur ses écrits, et sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron, which was published in 1778 as a preface to La Grange's translation of Seneca's philosophical works, and then reprinted in 1782 in revised form, he sets out to defend every aspect of Seneca's life against his detractors. He is also enthusiastic in his praise of the Roman Stoic's writings and their ability to offer moral instruction (A.-T. III, 371):<sup>(1)</sup>

O Sénèque! c'est toi dont le souffle dissipe les vains fantômes de la vie; c'est toi qui sais inspirer à l'homme de la dignité, de la fermeté, de l'indulgence pour son ami, pour son ennemi, le mépris de la fortune, de la médisance, de la calomnie, des dignités, de la gloire, de la vie, de la mort;

Other attempts were also made to rehabilitate Seneca's reputation. The marquis d'Argens, in his Mémoires secrets de la république des lettres, ou le Théâtre de la vérité (1737-48), volume III, lettre septième, had already attempted to refute charges against the philosopher, and had concluded with the emphatic assertion that (p. 574)

S'ily a eu des personnes qui ont calomnié ce Philosophe, c'est une suite du malheur attaché à la condition des Ministres & des Favoris des Princes: la jalousie & la haine s'unissent pour tâcher de temir l'eclat de leurs plus belles actions.

Further favourable interpretations of Seneca's life appeared in the Vie de Sénèque preceding Angliviel de La Beaumelle's Pensées de Sénèque (1752), the section of the same title in Ansquer de Ponçol's Analyse des traités des bienfaits et de la clémence de Sénèque (1776), the Discours préliminaire of Naigeon's Morale de Sénèque (1782), and the Discours préliminaire of Coupé's Théâtre de Sénèque.

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(1) Assézat and Tourmeux edition of the complete works (Paris 1875-7).

Seneca seems generally to have prompted extreme reactions, and those who considered he had betrayed his philosophical ideals denounced him in violent terms. Louis de Sacy, for instance, in his Traité de la gloire (1715) argues that Seneca was corrupted by material possessions (p. 197):

Cét homme en qui, avant que son disciple fût élevé à l'Empire, on avoit cru voir revivre Zenon, se laissa corrompre par les délices & par les richesses. Il seroit difficile de dire s'il les décria avec plus d'éloquence, ou s'il les amassa avec plus d'avidité.

while Du Castre d'Auvigny, the author of the Anecdotes galantes et tragiques de la cour de Néron (1735), portrays the philosopher as a devious coward. He is seen in the preface as

...un Seneque adroit, flatteur, & pourtant Philosophe, qui cache son amour propre par vanité, & son ambition par crainte; que l'on voit lâchement applaudir aux crimes de son élève, pour garantir ses jours, & qui complotte aussi lâchement contre ce même Prince, pour sauver sa vie une seconde fois.

Diderot's Essai sur Sénèque aroused an extremely hostile reaction amongst Seneca's critics. Fréron, for example, countered Diderot's defence of the philosopher with a long article of refutation in which he gave his own impression of Seneca's character (Année littéraire (1779), i, 38):

Nous avons avancé que la conduite de Sénèque démentoit ouvertement les maximes sublimes que cet orgueilleux stoïcien étaloit avec tant de faste, & que sous le masque de la sagesse il cachoit les foiblesses, les passions, les vices même qui maîtrisent le commun des hommes.

La Harpe was another notable critic to join in denouncing Seneca (see Lycée III, ii, 160 ff., Sénèque). His remarks were aimed especially at the Latin writer's prose style, and he dismisses him as a hollow sophist (p. 223-4):

À la marche naturelle, facile et décente de Platon et de Cicéron, comparez celle de Sénèque; c'est un homme sur des échâsses: au premier aspect il paraît haut; mais toisez-le, et vous voyez qu'il vacille, parce qu'il n'a qu'une base factice;

There was a certain reaction against the style and content of the

philosophical writings, and the most obvious example of this is Offray de La Mettrie's Discours sur le bonheur (1748),<sup>(1)</sup> which was later re-handled and entitled Anti-Sénèque, ou le Souverain Bien (1750). However, as one of the most influential of the Stoic writers, Seneca continued to be considered as a philosophical figurehead in the eighteenth century, and remained an important authority and influence on the philosophical thought of the period. Rousseau, for instance, clearly felt an affinity for Seneca's ideas, and there is no doubt that in some of his works he was inspired by the Roman writer.<sup>(2)</sup> His interest in the language of Seneca is demonstrated by his translation of the Apocolocyntosis,<sup>(3)</sup> in which he seeks to reflect the spirit of the original. Montesquieu was a great admirer of the ancients, and throughout his life continued to explore classical literature. In Mes Pensées (I, IV, Ses Lectures)<sup>(4)</sup> we see Sénèque noted under 'Livres originaux que j'ai à lire', although

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(1) It appeared as a preface to his translation of the De Beata Vita.

(2) The question of Seneca's influence on Rousseau has been discussed in several articles. See P. Thomas, 'Sénèque et J.-J. Rousseau' (Bulletin de l'Académie royale de Belgique, classe des lettres (1900), 391-420); Léon Herrmann, 'Jean-Jacques Rousseau, traducteur de Sénèque' (Annales de la Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau 13 (1920-1), 215-24); J.-B. Barrère, 'Sénèque et Rousseau: le thème des mines' (in Mélanges d'histoire littéraire offerts à Daniel Mornet (Paris 1951), p. 155-62); and G. Pire, 'De l'Influence de Sénèque sur les théories pédagogiques de J.-J. Rousseau' (Annales 33 (1953-5), 57-92).

(3) Rousseau was only one among many to translate Seneca's prose works in the eighteenth century. In all I have been able to find Jean de La Barre's Traduction nouvelle du livre de Sénèque de la brièveté de la vie (1705); Spiridion Poupert's L'Apotéose (sic) de Claude, Empereur (1708); Julien Offray de La Mettrie's Traité de la vie heureuse, par Sénèque (1748); Pierre-Nicolas Desmolets' Traduction de l'apothéose de l'Empereur Claude (in Mémoires de littérature et d'histoire (1749), I, ii, 253-84); Laurent Angliviel de La Beaumelle's Pensées de Sénèque (1752); Pierre F. X. Denis' Selecta Senecae philosophi Opera, in Gallicum versa, operâ & studio (1761); Charles Sablier's Extrait des épîtres de Sénèque (1770); H.-S.-J. Ansquer de Poncol's Analyse des traités des bienfaits et de la clémence de Sénèque (1776); J.-B.-J.-F. Dureau de Lamalle's Traité des bienfaits, de Sénèque (1776); La Grange's Les Oeuvres de Sénèque le philosophe (1778); the anonymous Pensées morales, littéraires et philosophiques de Sénèque le philosophe (1780); and J.-A. Naigeon's Morale de Sénèque extraite de ses oeuvres (1782).

(4) Pléiade edition, I, 995.



a remark by Usbek in the Lettres persanes (1721) suggests that Montesquieu may not have considered his thoughts particularly effective (Letter XXXIII):

Lorsqu'il arrive quelque malheur à un Européen, il n'a d'autre ressource que la lecture d'un philosophe qu'on appelle Sénèque; mais les Asiatiques, plus sensés qu'eux, et meilleurs physiciens en cela, prennent des breuvages capables de rendre l'homme gai et de charmer le souvenir de ses peines. (1)

Nevertheless, Seneca was one among the many classical sources of De l'Esprit des lois (1748).

Vauvenarges, a philosopher whose name is often linked with Stoicism, recalls a youthful enthusiasm for Seneca, Plutarch, and Cicero in a letter to Mirabeau (1740).<sup>(2)</sup> Although he later moderated this ardour, his ideas continued in many areas to reflect Stoic theories. Voltaire, too, seems to have felt a certain respect for Seneca.<sup>(3)</sup> Quotations from the philosophical works appear in several of his writings, and in Candide (ch. XXV) Pococurante, who in general echoes Voltaire's own views, preaches the superiority of the Stoic thinker to the theologians of modern time (M. XXI, 204):

Pour ces recueils de sermons, qui tous ensemble ne valent pas une page de Sénèque, et tous ces gros volumes de théologie, vous pensez bien que je ne les ouvre jamais, ni moi, ni personne.

D'Holbach offers several illustrations from Seneca in his Système de la nature (1770), Essai sur les préjugés (1770), and Morale universelle (1776), but in company with numerous other classical authorities, and in the preface to the Morale universelle (p. ii-iii) he professes severe doubts regarding the practical effectiveness of the austere tenets of Stoicism. Mme. de Staël, however, decided in her De la

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(1) Pléiade edition, I, 179.

(2) Oeuvres, ed. D.-L. Gilbert (Paris 1857), volume II, 193-4.

(3) See the article of Stephen Werner, 'Voltaire and Seneca' (in Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 67 (1969), 29-44).

Littérature (I, 120) that the post-Augustan writers exhibit a greater force and concision of style than their predecessors, and that (p. 122)

La philosophie de Sénèque pénètre plus avant dans le coeur de l'homme.

than does that of previous philosophers such as Cicero.

No complete work has as yet been devoted to Seneca's role as philosopher in the eighteenth century, and this would prove an extremely fruitful avenue to pursue. However, its relevance to the present study is rather limited, in that the philosophical prose and the verse dramas were usually considered as two separate entities, and the repute accorded to one set of writing did not necessarily extend to the other. Indeed, by even discussing the philosopher and his philosophical treatises we are assuming a fact which the eighteenth century did not always take for granted, that is that the philosopher and the author of the tragedies were one and the same person. An exploration of this issue is clearly essential to the present study, and as such will be undertaken in some detail, but in order to clarify the context in which critical analyses of Seneca's work are made, it is first necessary to give some account of the extent and type of material concerned either directly or indirectly with the ancient theatre during this period.

## CHAPTER II

### The Fortunes of Senecan Drama in Eighteenth-Century France

#### (i) Sources of reference

Of primary importance to the successful dissemination of an ancient author's work is the establishment of a lucid text together with explanatory notes on points of linguistic and literary interest, and from the first flowering of the Renaissance in Italy scholars applied their efforts to producing new editions of Seneca's dramas. Editions of the tragedies appeared in abundance throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the most notable experts on the subject being Erasmus, Julius Caesar Scaliger and his son Joseph Justus, Del Rio, Lipsius, Heinsius, Farnaby, and Gronovius. By the eighteenth century a vast array of scholarly material had already been amassed, and earlier works continued to be viewed with respect by commentators and educated men in general <sup>(1)</sup> throughout this period. The edition of the Englishman, Thomas Farnaby, which had first appeared in 1624 (1625 in France), was reprinted at least twice in the eighteenth century (Nürnberg 1702, and Breslau 1754), and critical notes by other scholars continued to be given prominence in many new editions of the tragedies. <sup>(2)</sup> An edition published in Amsterdam in 1713, for example, includes the notes of

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(1) It was not unusual for men of letters to possess seventeenth-century editions in their libraries. Voltaire, for example, owned a 1611 text of the tragedies in which the notes of Heinsius and Joseph Scaliger appear (L. Annaei Senecae et aliorum Tragoediae serio emendatae. Cum Josephi Scaligeri, nunc primum ex autographo auctoris editis, & Danielis Heinsii animadversionibus et notis (Leiden 1611).)

(2) For a full list of eighteenth-century editions of the tragedies see Appendix I.

Farnaby as well as chapters by Avantius and Fabricius, who both date back to the sixteenth century. The Schröder edition of 1728 (Delft), which was the most substantial new edition of the Roman dramas produced in the eighteenth century, also relies greatly on earlier scholarship, and names Gronovius, Lipsius, Del Rio, Gruterus, Commelinus, Joseph Scaliger, Daniel and Nicolas Heinsius, Farnaby, and Grotius as contributors of information. The same is true of an edition produced at Zweibrücken in 1785, where the views of a wide range of the above-mentioned scholars are cited.

In addition to these new editions of the complete dramatic works, some of the plays were printed individually. The Troades appeared in a version especially abbreviated for performance at the Merchant Taylors' School (London 1763), while the Medea was linked with the Captivi of Plautus and selections from Catullus in an edition of Paolo Soderini (s. l., 1770). The Agamemnon was included in the Nova Chrestomathia Tragica of Johann Carl Volborth with the Choephor of Aeschylus, the Electra of Sophocles, and the Electra of Euripides (Göttingen 1776). Hercules Furens was edited by Torkel Baden (Kiel 1798). The dramas also featured in a number of anthologies of Latin poetry. That of Michaël Maittaire (Opera et Fragmenta Veterum Poetarum Latinorum Prophanorum et Ecclesiasticorum (London 1713 and reprinted in 1721)) included Seneca's tragedies in its second volume, as did the Collectio Pisarenensis of Latin poetry edited by Pasquale Amati (Pesaro 1766). The fact that no editions seem to have been produced in France is interesting, but not overly significant, since all those in existence offered a Latin critical apparatus, and were thus universally intelligible to cultured men and women. Diverse questions of style and subject matter are treated in the notes accompanying these editions, but for our purposes those sections dealing with the authorship of the tragedies are of the most immediate use.

For those unable to cope with the subtleties of Seneca's poetic style in the original Latin, French translations were an absolute necessity. Yet throughout the greater part of the eighteenth century no new translations were undertaken, and the most commonly used version seems to have been the seventeenth-century text of abbé Michel de Marolles (Paris 1660). It is this work which is noted by the marquis d'Argenson in his bibliographical outline of ancient and modern drama (Notices sur les oeuvres de théâtre).<sup>(1)</sup> This neglect continued until the last decades of the century, when a prose rendition of the plays appeared in the Histoire universelle des théâtres de toutes les nations, depuis Thespis jusqu'à nos jours (1779-81), volumes VI-VIII, a comprehensive history of world drama in thirteen volumes produced by 'une société de gens de lettres' (Coupé, Testu, Desfontaines, and Le Fuel de Méricourt). Here it is suggested that little has previously been done to make Senecan drama accessible to a wide audience, a fact which prompted the new translation (VI, 254):

Séneque n'est presque pas connu, & Séneque est vraiment un homme extraordinaire: que fallait-il de plus pour nous déterminer ?

It is likely that responsibility for the translation rested largely with Coupé, for it shows marked, but not total, similarity to the later version he offered in his Théâtre de Séneque (1795). Jean-Marie-Louis Coupé (1732-1818), a cleric who pursued a distinguished scholastic and literary career as tutor to the prince de Vaudémont and later as Royal censor and conservateur des titres et généalogies, was a committed admirer of Senecan drama, and with his translation and the notes by which it is accompanied he strove to replace the sixteenth and seventeenth-century texts which he considered unworthy of the Latin writer's

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(1) Edited by H. Lagrave (Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 42-43 (1966)). The Tragédies de Séneque are discussed in volume 42, pages 95-8.

name.

Other translations<sup>(1)</sup> dealt only with individual plays, and appeared as much as literary exercises on the part of their authors as attempts to sway public opinion. Morelly linked a free translation of the Medea with his minor epic L'Hymen vengé (1778), while Boufflers offered a selection of extracts from the Phaedra in his Poésies et pièces fugitives diverses (1782). The latter approached his work in the manner of a censor, excising what he saw as the 'descriptions inutiles', 'froides réflexions' and 'détails dégoûtans' (p. 110) of the play. Another offering was the Oedipe of de Limes (1783), which appeared either by chance or design at a time when dramatists were showing a great interest in the Oedipus theme.<sup>(2)</sup> De Limes' own interest in the subject was clearly considerable, for he concludes his translation with a comparative analysis of the plays of Sophocles, Seneca, Corneille, Voltaire, Folard, and La Motte on that theme.

Prior to the eighteenth century the Greek theatre had benefited from considerably less attention than had Seneca, and no complete French translation of either Aeschylus, Sophocles, or Euripides had been undertaken. Père Pierre Brumoy (1688-1742), a Jesuit scholar and teacher who was keenly interested in the ancients, sought to remedy this situation, and was the first to make a concrete attempt at popularizing the work of the Greek tragedians.<sup>(3)</sup> In his Théâtre des Grecs (1730) he translates seven dramas (Oedipus Tyrannus, Electra, Philoctetes (Sophocles), Hippolytus, Alcestis, Iphigenia in Aulis, and

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(1) For a complete list see Appendix II.

(2) For further details see Oedipus chapter.

(3) He writes in his introductory Discours sur le théâtre des Grecs (I, iv):  
Mon dessein est de les tirer (i.e. the Greek poets), du moins en partie, des ténèbres où nous paroissions les avoir condamnés, & de les citer de nouveau au tribunal, non du petit nombre, mais du Public;

Iphigenia in Tauris (Euripides)), while summarizing the rest. Later scholars continued Brumoy's work, and Le Théâtre des Grecs was subsequently expanded until a complete version of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides was offered. Although primarily concerned with the Greeks, Brumoy's work is of great relevance to Senecan studies, for the Jesuit father includes an analysis of each of the Latin plays which has a Greek counterpart alongside its corresponding tragedy. In similar vein, Le Franc de Pompignan, in the preface to his translation of Aeschylus' Agamemnon (in Tragédies d'Eschyle (1770), p. 203-8), also makes some reference to Seneca's play on the same theme. This tendency to link together the Greek and Roman dramas gives us a valuable insight into the manner in which the eighteenth century viewed Seneca's work.

Study of the Latin language and literature was an intensely important aspect of French education, and it is not surprising to find Seneca, as a prominent Latin writer, included within the school curriculum. Educational practices for the Jesuit colleges were laid down in the Ratio Studiorum (1586), which was later interpreted and brought up to date by the De Ratione discendi et docendi<sup>(1)</sup> of the Jesuit teacher, père Joseph Jouvancy. This first appeared towards the end of the seventeenth century, and was published in Paris in 1711. Seneca's dramas are discussed in the section entitled Poëtarum praestantiorum nomina, aetas, stilus, and although Jouvancy believes that the dramatist 'Artem tragicam ignorat' (p. 123), Seneca tragoedus appears on the syllabus for the Rhetorica Schola, or senior class of the Jesuit college. Père Thomassin, a priest of the Oratory, also argues in his Méthode d'étudier et d'enseigner chrétiennement & solidement les lettres humaines par rapport aux lettres divines et aux

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(1) Magistris scholarum inferiorum societatis Jesu de ratione discendi et docendi ex decreto congregationis generalis XIV.

Écritures (1681-2) that Seneca's dramas are suitable for use in schools, for they (I, 178)

impriment par tout l'horreur que les hommes & les Dieux ont du crime, les natures mesmes insensibles semblent devenir sensibles pour le detester & pour le condamner.

Charles Rollin, who became Rector of the University of Paris in 1694, echoes his scholastic counterparts in discussing Senecan drama in his De la Manière d'enseigner et d'étudier les belles lettres, par rapport (sic) à l'esprit & au coeur (1726-8), and he agrees (with some reservations) that these works should be studied by his pupils (I, 318-9):

Je voudrois qu'on y joignît quelques tragedies de Sénèque, ou du moins quelques endroits choisis de ses tragedies, ...

Interest in the civilizations of ancient Greece and Rome spread beyond the educational establishments in the eighteenth century, and works such as abbé de Mably's Observations sur les Romains (1751), and his earlier Parallèle des Romains et des François par rapport au gouvernement (1740), offered a view of the ancient world to the cultivated reading public. Throughout this period there was a prevalent desire to classify and disseminate information on a wide scale, and numerous ambitious projects were undertaken. This resulted in a series of dictionaries,<sup>(1)</sup> bibliographies, and literary compendia, which aimed to provide extensive information in a readily digestible form. The range and degree of detail in these collections varies, of course, enormously. Of those dealing with literature, the Histoire universelle des théâtres de toutes les nations (see above) investigates the ancient theatre in depth, while the Petite Bibliothèque des théâtres (1783-9) is primarily concerned with French drama. Even so, Seneca is briefly discussed in the first volume (Essais historiques sur l'origine et

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(1) Without doubt the most famous is the Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers compiled by Diderot and d'Alembert (1751-80).



les progres de l'art dramatique en France (p 48-54)). The Nouvelle Bibliothèque d'un homme de goût in four volumes (1777), compiled by Louis Chaudon, aimed to offer a universal view of ancient and modern literature, but the writer's enthusiasm was limited by the amount of space available. Senecan drama merits less than two pages (I, 116-7), and the reader is referred to père Brumoy for further information. The Bibliothèque universelle des dames (1785-97), on the other hand, ran to 156 volumes, and was aimed specifically at the female population. It encompasses a wide range of educational topics, both artistic and scientific,<sup>(1)</sup> and a section of the Troisième classe (Mélanges (i.e. Belles-Lettres), tome XV) is devoted to the Roman comic and tragic poets. Here we find a biography of Seneca, together with summaries, critical opinions, and translations of brief extracts of the dramas (p. 271-361), which provide an outline of the nature of his work for women unable to read him in the original.

The French theatre proved a popular subject for historical analysis and classification, and compilations such as Maupoint's Bibliothèque des théâtres (1733), Mouhy's Tablettes dramatiques (1752-3), de Lérís' Dictionnaire portatif des théâtres (1754), the anonymous Bibliothèque du théâtre françois (1768), and Babault's Annales dramatiques (1808-12) offer largely bibliographical material. More detailed histories appear in the frères Parfaict's Histoire du théâtre françois (1745-9) and Mouhy's Abrégé de l'histoire du théâtre françois (1780). From here we can derive invaluable information on eighteenth-century adaptations of Senecan dramas, although modern works of a comparable type usually present the material more efficiently.

Diverse material on the theoretical aspects of French tragedy

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(1) For further information see Vivienne Mylne's chapter ('The Bibliothèque universelle des dames (1785-97)') in Woman and Society in Eighteenth-Century France (ed. E. Jacobs and others, London 1979), p. 123-36.

can be found in the many critical works of the period. One rarely discovers any detailed discussion of Senecan drama here, although passing references offer often useful sidelights. This is true of texts such as abbé Batteux' Cours de belles-lettres, ou Principes de la littérature (1753), Clément's<sup>(1)</sup> De la Tragédie, and Marmontel's Eléments de littérature.<sup>(2)</sup> La Harpe's Lycée, ou Cours de littérature, which had originally been delivered as a series of lectures at the Lycée, provides more substantial help in the form of an eight-page Appendice sur la tragédie latine, which follows the critic's discussion of the Greek theatre in the opening volume (I, 499-506). Lemercier's Cours analytique de littérature générale (1817)<sup>(3)</sup> also began life as a series of lectures, but offers less detailed information on the Roman theatre. The critical prefaces which accompany a great number of the tragedies of the period are a further source of information. These allow us to evaluate the dramatist's personal conception of his subject, and, in the case of dramas based on Senecan themes, grant a valuable insight into the manner in which writers viewed the efforts of their Roman predecessor.

This then is a survey of the type of material which will enable us to form a picture of the degree of importance which was attached to Seneca's theatre during the eighteenth century. Modern scholarship has, of course, advanced considerably further towards a real understanding of the writer's aims and of the context in which his work was produced in the intervening centuries, and we are now in a position to know that the eighteenth century was hampered by a number of basic misapprehensions, which limited their ability to regard these Roman dramas

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(1) He also composed a tragedy on the Medea theme. For further details see Medea chapter.

(2) See chapter I, p. 17, n. 2.

(3) This work is discussed more fully in the chapter on the Agamemnon.

in a balanced manner. Nevertheless, it is only by exploring the views which writers of the time maintained, and the prejudices under which they laboured, that we can gain a true insight into the atmosphere of the period. To this end, modern scholarship can only serve as a point of reference, and as a means of highlighting the frequent deficiency of understanding which Seneca suffered during this time.

(ii) Authorship of the Tragedies

The most fundamental question of who is to be credited with the authorship of the ten Latin tragedies we possess was answered with an astonishing degree of variation in the eighteenth century. Today the most commonly accepted view is that eight tragedies are the work of the Stoic philosopher and tutor to Nero, Lucius Annaeus Seneca. These are the Hercules Furens, Troades, Phoenissae, Medea, Phaedra, Oedipus, Agamemnon, and Thyestes. The excessively long Hercules Oetaeus has been judged to be of doubtful or only partial authenticity, and the Octavia is definitely the work of a post-Senecan dramatist. However, the situation was less straightforward in the eighteenth century, for this period inherited the remnants of an age-old confusion surrounding the identities of the various members of Seneca's family, which led in turn to confusion over the authorship of the plays.

Seneca himself made no reference to his composition of tragedies in the philosophical works, although the testimony of Quintilian (Institutio Oratoria IX, 2, 8)<sup>(1)</sup> designated him as the author of the Medea. In failing to spell out 'L. Annaeus Seneca philosophus', however, Quintilian's words did nothing to prevent a great deal of

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(1) "ut Medea apud Senecam: 'quas peti terras iubes?'"

confusion arising in late antiquity. The initial source of the confusion seems to have been Martial's reference to 'two Senecas' when writing of the great men of Corduba (Epigrams I, 61, 7). Martial clearly meant by this the Elder Seneca, often known as the rhetorician, and his son, the philosopher and author of the tragedies, but later readers threw a wholly incorrect interpretation upon these words. By the fifth century A. D. the Elder Seneca had largely fallen from view, and his works were generally assigned to the philosopher. This, unfortunately, left one of Martial's two Senecas to be accounted for. Since there were two distinct bodies of writing extant, the philosophical prose and the verse tragedies, it did not seem unreasonable to assume that the second Seneca was responsible purely for the dramatic works. This completely erroneous view is given expression in a poem of Sidonius Apollinaris, a fifth-century bishop of the Auvergne, who like Martial writes in praise of the sons of Corduba (Carmen IX, 230 ff.):

Non quod Corduba praepotens alumnis  
facundum ciet, hic putes legendum,  
quorum unus colit hispidum Platona . (i.e. the philosopher)  
incassumque suam monet Neronem,  
orchestram quatit alter Euripidis, (i.e. the tragedian)  
pictum faecibus Aeschylon secutus  
aut plaustris solitum sonare Thespin, ...

The churchman's inaccurate division of the two Senecas exerted an unwarranted influence on later discussions, and provided the most authoritative statement of a myth which was to persist for more than 1300 years. It was given weight by being cited with other ambiguous references in the Testimonia veterum ... de L. Annaeo Seneca in many early editions of the tragedies, and is quoted as late as 1811 in the article Séneque Lucius Annoeus Novatus of the Annales dramatiques (VIII, 299).

Many of the early humanists accepted this division of the moral and tragic Seneca, although Petrarch attributed the tragedies to the

philosopher.<sup>(1)</sup> A number of sixteenth-century scholars such as Crinitus<sup>(2)</sup> and Del Rio<sup>(3)</sup> were also substantially correct in their attribution of the plays, although there was no consensus of opinion at this point. In the latter years of the sixteenth century and the early part of the seventeenth, Lipsius, Heinsius, and Farnaby all postulated multiple authorship of the corpus, while still maintaining to some degree the notion of a Seneca tragicus. Lipsius, in his Animadversiones in Tragoedias quae L. Annaeo Senecae tribuuntur (Decem Tragoediae (1589)), puts forward the idiosyncratic viewpoint that the Phoenissae is the most perfect of the ten plays. This he assigns to an unknown writer, possibly of the Augustan period. He attributes the Medea alone to the philosopher, and the bulk of the others to a Seneca living at the time of Trajan or later. The Octavia he dismissed as the work of a child. These views differed in many respects from those of Daniel Heinsius. In his In L. & M. Annaei Senecae ac reliquorum quae extant Tragoedias animadversiones et notae (1611 edition of the tragedies) Heinsius attributes the Troades, Phaedra, and Medea, the finest of the dramas, to the philosopher, and the Hercules Furens, Thyestes, Oedipus, and Agamemnon to a 'Marcus Annaeus Seneca', called the tragicus. He classed the Phoenissae, Octavia, and Hercules Oetaeus as the weakest of the plays and the work of various idle declaimers. Farnaby agreed substantially with Heinsius, except that he assigned the Oedipus to Lucius Annaeus the philosopher, instead of to 'Marcus Annaeus', and the Phoenissae to 'Marcus Annaeus', instead of an anonymous writer.<sup>(4)</sup>

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(1) See the articles of P. J. Toynbee ('Seneca morale' in Il Giornale storico della letteratura italiana 25 (1900), 334) and Guido Martellotti ('La Questione dei due Seneca da Petrarca a Benvenuto' in Italia medioevale e umanistica 15 (1972), 149-69).

(2) In De Poetis Latinis (1505).

(3) In Syntagma Tragoediae Latinae (1593/4). Published in Paris in 1607 and 1619.

(4) See the preface to his edition of the tragedies.

As has been stated earlier, great reliance was placed on the scholarship of Lipsius, Heinsius, Farnaby, and their contemporaries in the eighteenth century, and just as these scholars had reached no firm agreement on the authorship of the ten Roman dramas, so French critics, authors, and literary historians maintained often differing opinions throughout the later period.

The separation of the philosopher from the tragedian still persisted to a certain extent, and was the view maintained by the Jesuit teachers. Père Jouvancy, in his De Ratione discendi et docendi, discusses the philosopher and the tragedian in two separate areas, and while L. Annaeus Seneca is 'Philosophus vulgo dictus, patria Cordubensis' (Auctores optimi linguae latinae (p. 36)), the writer of the tragedies is assumed to be his son, 'patria Cordubensis, Lucii Annaei Senecae Philosophi, ut multis placet, filius' (Poëtarum praestantiorum nomina, aetas, stilus (p. 123)). The same view was adopted by Voltaire, although it may have been no more than a coincidence that he was a pupil of the Jesuits. When, in the Commentaires sur Corneille, he has cause to mention the Medea of Seneca in connection with that of Corneille, he designates the Roman dramatist as Séneque le tragique (II, 20, and elsewhere). When, on the other hand, he refers to the De Clementia in connection with Cinna (II, 109), he calls the author Séneque le philosophe. In similar vein the baron d'Holbach divides the philosophical works from the dramas, although noting a similarity of thought in one area (Système de la nature, I, 288):

Enfin voici un passage tres décisif de ce philosophe, il mérite bien l'attention du lecteur. ... (De Ben. VII,1)  
Séneque le Tragique s'explique de la même façon que le philosophe. ... (Troades 397)

Diderot also felt that the tragedies which we possess are not the work of the philosopher. This conviction was no doubt strengthened by his admiration for Seneca's prose writings and his dislike of the dramas. He states in his Essai sur Séneque (A.-T. III, 194):

Les tragédies publiées sous le nom du poète Sénèque, sont un recueil de productions de différents auteurs; et il n'y a point d'autorité qui nous permette de les attribuer à Sénèque.

Here he suggests multiple authorship, but in his Plan d'une université pour le gouvernement de Russie (A.-T. III, 484) he censures 'le dur, sec et boursouflé Sénèque le tragique', uniting the plays under the authorship of the mythical 'tragic Seneca'.

There were many who inclined towards the view of multiple authorship. Ansqer de Ponçol, for example, chose the position of Farnaby, and in his Analyse des traités des bienfaits et de la clémence de Sénèque notes that (p. 77, n. 1)

De toutes les Tragédies latines que nous avons sous le nom de Sénèque, les Critiques ne lui en attribuent que quatre: Médée, Oedipe, La Troade & Hippolite.

This seems to be a well accredited viewpoint, for La Harpe states (Lycée, I, 500):

Les critiques les plus versés dans l'étude de l'antiquité croient qu'Oedipe, Hypolite, Médée et les Troyennes sont de Sénèque le philosophe, qu'on a voulu mal à propos distinguer du tragique; et beaucoup de témoignages anciens qui attribuent au même auteur le talent de la poésie ainsi que celui de la prose, confirment cette opinion. On croit que les six autres sont de divers auteurs qui, dans la suite, firent passer leurs tragédies sous un nom accredité, ...

Although he is right to reject the notion of a separate tragedian, he assumes, nevertheless, that the majority of the dramas were written by a hand other than that of the philosopher. In the preface to his translation of the Medea Morelly writes that some scholars regard this play as the only genuine drama of the philosopher (p. 104).<sup>(1)</sup> His personal opinion is not stated, although he does describe Seneca as a Philosophe-Poète.

Père Brumoy discussed Senecan tragedy at some length in his Théâtre

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(1) This had been the view of Lipsius.

des Grecs, but he made it clear that he considered this a second-rate product, useful only as a point of comparison with its Greek predecessors. Thus it is not surprising that he is largely unconcerned to make a judgement on the identity of their author, although he does pause to consider this matter. He accepts that there were two Senecas who flourished at the same time under Nero, but he is unsure of their relationship (I; 99):

chose qui ne scauroit être bien éclaircie. Il est certain qu'ils étoient du moins alliés par le caractere d'esprit.

as well as to whom the tragedies should be attributed (ibid):

Il est aussi peu nécessaire, & encore plus difficile, d'éclaircir auquel des deux Senèques on doit attribuer les Tragedies, & si plusieurs des dix ne sont point de quelqu' autre main.

In the Nouvelle Bibliothèque d'un homme de goût (I, 116) the same uncertainty is expressed:

Nous avons des Tragédies sous le nom de ce Philosophe. Les Auteurs de ces Pièces, quels qu'ils soient, montrent, en beaucoup d'endroits, des sentimens fort beaux, ...

Some writers, whether by perspicuity or luck, did come close to a correct attribution of the tragedies. The author of the section devoted to Senecan drama in the Bibliothèque universelle des dames decides that the majority of the plays belong to the philosopher (Mélanges, tome XV, p. 271-2):

Sans prétendre fixer ces points d'érudition, & entrer dans de minutieuses discussions avec les Scaliger & les Heinsius, pour attribuer tantôt une Tragédie à Sénèque le Philosophe, tantôt une autre à son fils, à son frere, ou à son neveu, nous croyons, avec les Critiques les plus éclairés, qu'on ne doit rejeter du Théâtre de Sénèque, que l'Octavie, l'Hercule furieux & la Thébaïde, & que les sept autres Tragédies appartiennent au Gouverneur de Néron.

However, he is wrong in rejecting the Hercules Furens and the Phoenissae.

The percentage of writers whose views on this subject were entirely correct is impossible to compute. In his Notices sur les oeuvres de théâtre d'Argenson states it as a widely held belief that 'l'on croyt Sénèque le philosophe auteur de ces tragédies' (I, 97 ),



but Coupé showed that no firm agreement had been reached by his time (1795) by giving full consideration to the opposing views of various scholars. (1) His own opinion was that Seneca the philosopher composed all the dramas except the Octavia, although he was incorrect in assuming that the Stoic concealed his authorship of the plays and published them under the name of his brother, who thus came to be known as Sénèque le tragique. Coupé had also played a significant role in the production of the Histoire universelle, and here the attribution of the tragedies is totally accurate. Indeed the Histoire anticipates modern scholarship by casting doubt on the Senecan authorship of the Hercules Oetaeus. The criterion for assigning the majority of the other plays to the philosopher is the similarity of idea and style in the prose and dramatic works (VI, 238):

Le fond des idées & des images est absolument du même génie, & par-tout on retrouve le Philosophe dans le tragique, excepté dans Octavie & dans Hercule sur le mont Oëta. Quant à cette dernière où il paraît lui-même sur la Scène, il est certain qu'elle n'est pas de lui; mais d'après les autorités que nous venons de citer, & sur-tout d'après le style qui nous semble la plus déterminante de toutes les raisons, il n'est guères possible qu'il ne soit pas l'Auteur des autres.

The Petite Bibliothèque des théâtres, whose material on Seneca seems to be based to a certain extent on the Histoire universelle, gives almost the same analysis, although the writer seems to believe that a 'tragic Seneca' did exist (I, 48-9):

On n'a pas encore pu décider, d'après des preuves sans réplique, lequel des deux Sénèque, ou celui qui mérita l'épithète de Philosophe, ou celui qui obtint le surnom de Tragique, est le véritable et l'unique Auteur des meilleures Tragédies qui nous soient restées des Romains.

.....  
L'opinion le (sic) plus généralement reçue, est d'attribuer au premier Sénèque les dix Tragédies qui ont pour titre: Hippolyte, Médée, Les Troyennes, Thyeste, Hercule Furieux, Oedipe, Agamemnon, La Thébaïde, Hercule sur le mont Oëta et Octavie. Cependant, l'avant-dernière de ces Pièces, où il

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(1) See Théâtre de Sénèque, I, 6 ff..

paroit lui-même en scene, semble ne pas devoir être de lui. Mais on retrouve dans les autres la même morale qu'il a répandue dans tous ses écrits; ce qui doit persuader qu'il est l'unique Auteur de ces Pieces.

The general failure to reach conclusive agreement on the question of the attribution of the tragedies denotes a certain deficiency in the field of Senecan scholarship in the eighteenth century, although it did permit writers to maintain individualistic opinions and to colour their views with personal prejudices or predilections. The fact that influential figures such as Voltaire and Diderot separated the philosophical from the tragic works, and considered Sénèque le tragique to be a far inferior writer to le philosophe could not but influence the repute in which the dramas were held at this time, for it implicitly removed the aura of respectability which they gained from their association with the great Stoic thinker. By reassigning them to the philosopher Coupé sought in some measure to redress the balance.

### (iii) Performance of the Tragedies

Central to any discussion of Senecan drama, and particularly to an investigation of its influence on later European tragedy, is the question of the mode of representation and the type of audience, if any, for which these plays were intended. The title of 'drama' is normally applied to a dynamic production involving action<sup>(1)</sup> and the portrayal of character by actors. Tragic drama, in the Aristotelian canon, limits this action to that which is heroic and the characters to those of noble station. It is therefore forgivable to assume that Senecan drama falls within certain prescribed limits. However, the most authoritative of the modern scholars<sup>(2)</sup> have argued conclusively that

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(1) In Greek τὸ δράμα is a deed, act, or action represented on the stage.

(2) Otto Zwierlein's Die Rezitationsdramen Senecas (Meisenheim am Glan 1966)/  
contd. overleaf

although Seneca observes the external demands of tragedy,<sup>(1)</sup> he uses the form not to create a dramatic spectacle to be viewed on a theatrical stage, but rather to provide a purely poetic and auditory sensation (akin to that afforded by epic poetry), achieving its effect from its recitation before a group of listeners by one or possibly more reciters.

Internal evidence from the plays shows that Seneca had no interest in details of stage business or any of the other features which make up a tragedy intended for performance. That he has no particular stage in mind is demonstrated by his lack of attention to defining place. The scene often shifts within individual plays without notice being taken of such a shift. Contradictions can be found in the placing of objects and geographical phenomena and in the movements of characters. This elasticity in the use of place is matched by a distortion of real time, which is possible only in a narrative form, not in a visual spectacle. Scenes which contain action are often noticeably compressed, while the purely narrative<sup>(2)</sup> is expanded at the expense of this action. This gives the tragedies their peculiarly static and undramatic feel. The characters, too, seem intangible. Often we do not know whether they are thought to be present or not, for their exits are not marked. As he has no stage, Seneca has no real need to heed technical details of this nature. His characters only become important when they speak, and

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contd. from p. 45 / gives the fullest discussion, but see also Gaston Boissier's much earlier Les Tragédies de Sénèque ont-elles été représentées? (Paris 1861), and W. Beare's 'Plays for Performance and Plays for Recitation: A Roman Contrast' (Hermathena 65 (1945), 8-19) and The Roman Stage (London 1950). Arguments have also been put forward for the suitability of the dramas for performance, but these provide a far inferior explanation of the material at hand. See, for example, Léon Herrmann's Le Théâtre de Sénèque (Paris 1924), ch. II, 'La Représentation des tragédies', p. 153-232.

(1) Such as the five act division, the rule of the three actors etc..

(2) See, for instance, Hercules Furens 658-827, Agamemnon 421-578, Oedipus 530-658.

here, too, there are illogicalities, for they often utter long monologues apparently unheard by their interlocutors. The violence within the plays is also of a type not readily adapted for the stage, for examination shows that this horrific element is usually of a descriptive rather than a visual nature.

In spite of this internal evidence, it was long assumed that Seneca's dramas had either been performed in antiquity or were intended for performance.<sup>(1)</sup> Thus, during the Renaissance, some of the tragedies were actually staged,<sup>(2)</sup> and their imitation by sixteenth-century French dramatists explains the particularly lyrical and undramatic character of Renaissance tragedy in France. After the Renaissance, Senecan drama ceased almost completely to be acted. A three-act version of the Troades was produced in England at the Merchant Taylors' school in 1763,<sup>(3)</sup> but there is no evidence for a performance of Seneca in France during this period. In the Remarques accompanying his translation of the Medea Morelly makes the intriguing statement that (p. 210)

Nous avons sur l'un des plus brillans & des plus riches  
Théâtres de Paris les deux Scènes du quatrième Acte de  
SÉNÉQUE & le cinquième Acte en entier, très-bien exécutés  
en pantomime;

but it seems likely that this refers to a ballet adapted from the Medea<sup>(4)</sup> rather than a direct rendering of the Latin play.

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(1) However, Charlton (The Senecan Tradition in Renaissance Tragedy) writes that the earliest humanists saw the Roman dramas as closet-plays for reading only (p. XXIV, n. 1).

(2) Phaedra was performed in Rome as early as 1471, and several times subsequently. In England Seneca was performed frequently at Cambridge University from the middle of the sixteenth century, and at Oxford towards the end of the century. In Germany the Thyestes was acted in the school of Melanchthon. The evidence for a performance of Seneca in France is less clear. We know that Latin translations of Greek tragedies were produced in the school of Buchanan at Bordeaux, and it seems likely that performances of Seneca also took place.

(3) The text for this production is preserved in the British Library.

(4) Probably the Médée et Jason or the Médée of Jean-Georges Noverre, a ballet and a ballet tragi-pantomime performed at the Académie royale de musique in 1776, and 1766 and 1780 respectively.

In eighteenth-century France the fact that Seneca wrote for the stage was never questioned, although critics did begin to be worried by undramatic elements in his work. It was thought that his dramas were intended for performance in the great theatres of Rome, such as the stone construction built by Pompey in 55 B. C.. The tragic actor's customary attire of mask and high-soled boots (cothumi)<sup>(1)</sup> was familiar to writers, and abbé Batteux is one among many to give a description of the nature of the Roman theatre.<sup>(2)</sup> He tells us that (Cours de belles-lettres, II, 235)

Tous les acteurs jouoient masquez. Leurs masques étoient une tête entiere, comme un casque, ayant un visage peint, des cheveux, des couleurs, & une grande bouche, disposée tellement qu'elle grossissoit beaucoup la voix.

....  
(p. 237) La chaussure de la tragédie étoit le cothume, chaussure haute qui relevoit la taille des acteurs, & les faisoit approcher de l'héroïque.

The erroneous view that one actor recited or sang the words of the tragedy while another accompanied him with the appropriate gestures, which seems to date back to the Middle Ages,<sup>(3)</sup> still persisted in some quarters in the eighteenth century. Mercier writes in his Du Théâtre (p. 301-2, n. (b)):

On est fondé à croire que les anciens parloient en vers sur la scene, parce que l'acteur, armé d'une espece de porte-voix, & obligé de se faire entendre fort loin, s'étayoit de la cadence du vers, ... Mais nous faudra-t-il ressusciter aussi les instrumens qui soutenoient la voix, & verrons-nous un acteur caché déclamer hautement, tandis que l'autre fera des gestes ?

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(1) These boots had high wooden blocks like stilts for soles.

(2) See also the Discours sur les théâtres des Romains, printed in Le Théâtre de Monsieur de La Fosse (Amsterdam 1745); the Encyclopédie, articles Théâtre and Geste; the Histoire universelle, V, 76-113; and Coupé, Le Théâtre de Sénèque, I, 45-7.

(3) According to the article of H. A. Kelly ('Tragedy and the Performance of Tragedy in Late Roman Antiquity' in Traditio 35 (1979), 21-45), it seems more likely that it was in the mime or ballet that the dancer was accompanied by an actor or chorus who sang or declaimed the story.

Not surprisingly such a spectacle appeared grotesque and highly artificial to those who compared it with the French tragic theatre, and Marmontel emphasized the ludicrousness of such a costume (Eléments de littérature (II, 19-20):<sup>(1)</sup>)

Pour concevoir comment un usage (i.e. the mask) qui nous paraît si choquant dans le genre noble et pathétique, a pu jamais s'établir chez les anciens, il faut supposer qu'à la faveur de l'étendue de leurs théâtres, la dissonance monstrueuse de ces traits fixes et inanimés avec une action vive et une succession rapide de sentiments souvent opposés échappait aux yeux des spectateurs. On ne peut pas dire la même chose du défaut de proportion qui résultait de l'exhaussement du cothurne; car le lointain, qui rapproche les extrémités, ne rend que plus frappante la difformité de l'ensemble. Il fallait donc que l'acteur fût enfermé dans une espèce de statue colossale, qu'il faisait mouvoir comme par ressorts; et dans cette supposition, comment concevoir une action libre et naturelle ?

Nevertheless, some held that these exaggerated devices were needed to gain the attention of the audiences in the huge theatres. The opinion expressed in the Petite Bibliothèque des théâtres (I, 52) is that

Il falloit frapper la multitude: on agrandit les personnages, en les exhaussant sur des cothurnes; on leur donna des portevoy, on couvrit leur visage de masques ressemblans à ceux qu'ils représentoient. Tout cela étoit devenu nécessaire pour produire quelque illusion sur une Nation, composée de Citoyens qui ne faisoient pas un geste qui fût indigne des Souverains du Monde, et qui même, en riant, conservoient leur dignité, a dit Balzac.

Coupé, writing in his Théâtre de Sénèque (I, 46-7),<sup>(2)</sup> explained the rhetorical exaggeration in Seneca's style ingeniously, but as we now know wrongly, by arguing that this was calculated to complement the impressive size of the circuses:

C'est ainsi que la tragédie, qui n'avoit que les proportions humaines chez les Athéniens, devint successivement un géant à Rome, ... Or le style devoit nécessairement se ressentir de ces accessoires gigantesques. Ce fut dans ces circonstances et il ne faut pas l'oublier, que Sénèque composa ses tragédies.

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(1) Oeuvres choisies, volume VIII.

(2) The same sentiments were also expressed in the Histoire universelle, VI, 247-8.

... Ainsi cette époque où le théâtre Romain étoit si exagéré et si magnifique; cette époque où le maître du monde se faisoit gloire, non seulement de composer des tragédies, mais encore d'être acteur dans ses propres pièces; cette époque est le point duquel nous devons partir pour bien juger Sénèque: ce qu'on devoit faire naturellement selon les principes de la saine critique, et ce que personne n'a jamais fait.

Heinsius had believed that Seneca's dramas were performed before Nero, and that real actors were used in the scenes of violence to satisfy the bloodlust of the Emperor (Animadversiones et notae (p. 495)).<sup>(1)</sup> Many writers in the eighteenth century imitated him in referring to Senecan tragedy as a visual rather than an aural genre. Brumoy, for example, in his Théâtre des Grecs (II, 203) says:

Au reste, l'art de Senèque est par tout à peu près le même; & qui a vû une de ses Pièces, peut se vanter de les sçavoir toutes, ...

Voltaire, when referring to the Troades, imagines the play broadcast before a vast public. He writes in a letter to Mme. du Deffand (December 5th 1770, D 16805):<sup>(2)</sup>

On chantait à Rome sur le théâtre public devant quarante mille auditeurs, où va t-on après la mort ? où l'on étoit avant de naître.

The Histoire universelle goes so far as to offer engraved plates of the type of costumes which the characters would have worn, and these are explained in detail in the notes appended to the translations of the tragedies (in volumes VI-VIII).

In spite of their assertions regarding the performance of the dramas, critics were sensitive to Seneca's failure to observe dramatic norms.<sup>(3)</sup>

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(1) He writes,

Qualis erat iste Icarus, qui (verba sunt Tranquilli) primo statim conatu iuxta cubiculum eius (i.e. Nero) decidit, ipsumque cruore respersit. Idem cum Insanum Herculem cantaret, evenisse putamus.

(2) All quotations from Voltaire's correspondence will be taken from the definitive edition of Besterman (The Complete Works of Voltaire, volumes 85-135 (Geneva 1968-77)).

(3) Ansquer de Ponçol (Analyse des traités des bienfaits et de la clémence / contd. overleaf

In his analyses of the Latin plays Brumoy highlights the tragedian's tendency to compress real time, although he explains the occurrence of this in the Phoenissae<sup>(1)</sup> as a fault in the transmission of the text (Théâtre des Grecs, II, 435):

il y a ensuite sept ou huit vers absolument inintelligibles (i.e. 433 ff.), & qui apparemment sont déplacés, & mis ici par hasard. Car le même Officier, en disant que Jocaste part comme une Bacchante, ajoute tout de suite, (& malheureusement cela paroît une suite,) "que Jocaste est arrivée au milieu des deux armées; qu'elle les a séparées à l'instant; que les deux freres prêts à fondre l'un sur l'autre, tiennent leurs javelots suspendus; qu'on parle de paix;" & choses pareilles qu'on ne voit pas qu'il puisse sçavoir si vite, à moins qu'en effet Jocaste n'ait été enlevée subitement dans les airs, comme elle le souhaitoit, & que l'Officier ne soit guindé sur une haute tour pour voir tout ce qu'il raconte.

The Jesuit scholar notes, too, the extreme brevity of Hercules' first appearance in the Hercules Furens (592-640), and ponders why Seneca is less interested in the action than in the seemingly pointless scene between Amphitryon, Megara, and Theseus (II, 731):

En effet Hercule étant venu & parti comme un éclair, que peuvent se dire Amphitryon, Megare, & Thesée, qui soit capable de dédommager les Spectateurs. (2)

He is also sensitive to the difficulties of staging some of Seneca's extravagant ideas. He says of the sacrificial scene in Oedipus 297 ff. (I, 103):

L'Exécution sur le Théâtre en seroit impossible. ... En un mot c'est un détail d'anatomie païenne, dont le seul récit (all that Seneca had in fact intended) feroit fremir.

To Brumoy these examples were merely instances of Seneca's ineptitude as a dramatist (or more charitably errors in the transmission of the text),

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contd. from p. 50/ de Sénèque, p. 77, n. 1) writes that 'les règles ordinaires du théâtre n'y sont point observées', and La Harpe (Lycée, I, 501) states that 'on trouve en général peu de connaissance du théâtre et du style qui convient à la tragédie.'

(1) Jocasta is imagined as rushing from the palace and arriving at the battlefield, where her sons are, within less than ten lines of the text (427 ff.).

(2) The reference to Spectateurs reinforces the idea of a visual performance.



and he failed to evolve any theory as to the real aims of the Roman writer. It is interesting that the German scholar Zwierlein happens to incorporate these same examples into his own study, and with the benefit of modern scholarship is able to offer a more satisfactory explanation of their presence.

The same tendency to condemn Seneca for failing to observe the normal rules of tragedy can be seen in the Histoire universelle. Here it is noted that the dramas would produce little effect on the stage (VIII, 172):

Nous sommes convaincus en même-tems, qu'elles produiraient peu d'effet à la représentation, & qu'en rendant justice à plusieurs scènes dont le dialogue renferme des traits singuliers, on condamnerait généralement la conduite des autres, & les récits pompeux, les longues descriptions qui en arêtent (sic) la marche.

Then, in a more perceptive statement, the writer seems to recognize that it was Seneca's aim to provide a descriptive rather than an active spectacle (VIII, 117):

Le but de l'Auteur étoit de faire des descriptions, & delà, cette lenteur qui règne dans la marche de ses oeuvres dramatiques où rarement les bienséances Théâtrales se trouvent observées.

Yet such a type of drama could only seem alien to writers of the eighteenth century, for it went against their instinctive as well as inculcated notions of what a tragedy should be.

#### (iv) Rhetoric and the Senecan Style

As modern scholarship has established that Seneca was writing for listeners rather than spectators, it becomes clear that it is the words themselves and their arrangement which are all important in his work. He strives to maintain a consistently elevated style of writing, and in his dramas a facility for uttering eloquent, clever phrases is attributed to master and servant alike. Seneca's style is linked indissolubly with the art of rhetoric as taught in the schools of the

period, and he was, moreover, instructed by his father, who was a member of that profession.<sup>(1)</sup> His characters therefore have the ability to declaim forcefully and to argue for or against any given proposition. Yet, for all this, they do appear as something more than puppets for rhetorical expression. The dramatist's preference for short, epigrammatic phrases is characteristic of the first-century reaction against the smooth periods of Cicero, and the sententiae,<sup>(2)</sup> or pithy moral maxims, for which Seneca was so admired in the Renaissance, appear in abundance, often being showered on the reader in the passages of stichomythia, or brief exchanges of equal length between characters. Ornamentation is a fundamental facet of rhetoric, and as such of Seneca's work. Examination of a given passage within the plays may furnish examples of the use of simile or metaphor, apostrophe, interrogation, antithesis, chiasmus, asyndeton, or any of the less obvious figures of rhetoric,<sup>(3)</sup> and this contributes to a carefully contrived, somewhat artificial arrangement.

The teaching of rhetoric did not cease with the end of the Roman Empire, but passed into the Medieval system of education, and for a long while formed the cornerstone of French methods of instruction. In the colleges Cicero, in particular, and Quintilian were the most revered sources of information, and became the models for the written style. It is significant that Quintilian's Institutio Oratoria, which was composed towards the end of the first century A. D., conveys a warning against corrupt and potentially corrupting elements in Seneca's

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(1) H. V. Canter deals very fully with Seneca's rhetoric in his 'Rhetorical Elements in the Tragedies of Seneca' (Illinois Studies in Language and Literature 10 (1925), 1-185).

(2) See p. 85-99 of Canter.

(3) Canter gives an exhaustive enumeration of these.

philosophical style (X, 1, 129):

Multae in eo claraeque sententiae, multa etiam morum gratia legenda, sed in eloquendo corrupta pleraque, atque eo perniciosissima, quod abundant dulcibus vitiis.

This criticism helped erect a formidable barrier of prejudice against Seneca's mode of expression, and special attention was paid to Quintilian's pronouncement in the educational establishments of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In this domain, Seneca, although held to be useful for the moral content of his writings, was not used as a stylistic model. Père Jouvancy writes that the Roman philosopher should not be studied until the pupil's Latin style has already been ingrained (De Ratione discendi et docendi, p. 36):

multa edidit ingeniosè ille quidem & splendidè, sed abruptâ oratione & confragosâ; quare legi, nisi jam confirmato stilo, non debet.

Different adjectives are used to describe the tragedian's style ('Ampullata sunt ejus carmina, plerumque tamen plena spiritus & ardoris' (p. 123)), but here, too, the Jesuit discerns stylistic faults.

Rollin echoes Jouvancy's cautious attitude, and weighs carefully the merits and failings of the philosopher's style (De la Manière d'enseigner et d'étudier les belles lettres, II, 211):

Cela (i.e. Quintilian's criticism) n'empêche pas que la lecture de Sénèque ne puisse être fort utile aux jeunes gens, quand ils commenceront à avoir le goût et le jugement formés par celle de Cicéron. Sénèque est un esprit original, propre à donner de l'esprit aux autres, & à leur faciliter l'invention.

Unlike Jouvancy he held at least some of the tragedies to be the work of the philosopher, and in these he recognized the same originality of style (I, 318-9):

On y reconnoitra facilement le stile de l'auteur: c'est-à-dire qu'on y trouvera des endroits admirables, pleins de feu & de vivacité, mais qui n'ont pas toujours toute la justesse & toute l'exactitude qu'on pourroit souhaiter.

It became a commonly held view that the end of the Golden Age of Latin literature had coincided more or less with the death of

Augustus, <sup>(1)</sup> and that the ensuing period had seen a gradual decline in literary genius. It was a serious charge, but one that was frequently levelled against Seneca in eighteenth-century France, that he had been a primary force in this degeneration. Abbé Batteux, for example, held the Latin philosopher to be more guilty than the barbarian hordes which swept across Europe for contributing to the corruption of taste (Cours de belles-lettres, I, 59):

Ce fut toujours par ceux qu'on appelle beaux esprits que la décadence commença. Ils furent plus funestes aux arts que les Goths, qui ne firent qu'achever ce qui avoit été commencé par les Plines & les Seneques, & tous ceux qui voulurent les imiter.

The Nouvelle Bibliothèque d'un homme de goût confirms this view (II, 323-4):

Après Cicéron, l'Éloquence ne fit plus que dégénérer, comme il étoit arrivé en Grece après Démosthenes. Sénèque en fut le premier corrupteur.

Although these references were primarily to the philosopher, the same stigma was attached to the tragedies by those who believed them to be the work of the Stoic writer. Thus the Bibliothèque universelle des dames says of Seneca in the section devoted to his poetic works <sup>(2)</sup> (p. 293):

Sénèque n'auroit point corrompu l'Éloquence & la Poésie Romaine, s'il n'eût été qu'un homme médiocre; mais malheureusement il avoit beaucoup d'esprit: il réunissoit une infinité de qualités brillantes. Son imagination vive, ardente & déréglée gâta tout.

Seneca's work found a yardstick against which it could be measured in the Greek theatre, although the inadequacy of this point of comparison is demonstrated by the fact that the circumstances in which Seneca composed his tragedies were widely different from those of the Greek

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(1) Fénelon, in his Lettre sur les occupations de l'Académie françoise (1714) (ed. Despois, Paris 1871), writes that (p. 28)

Le goût commençoit à se gâter à Rome peu de temps après celui d'Auguste. Juvénal a moins de délicatesse qu'Horace; Sénèque le tragique et Lucain ont une enflure choquante.

(2) That is, Mélanges, tome XV, p. 271-361. All subsequent allusions to the Bibliothèque universelle refer to this section of the collection.

tragedians.<sup>(1)</sup> In Sophocles and Euripides (Aeschylus was held to be largely unintelligible) readers of the eighteenth century discovered a simplicity of structure, yet grandeur and purity of emotion, which highlighted all the more the dramatic inadequacies and exaggerated style of Senecan drama. Comparisons of the two sets of writing produced some lively and expressive images, such as that offered by père Brumoy, who was not noted for his admiration of the Roman theatre (Théâtre des Grecs, I, 100):

je crois devoir avertir en général, qu'il y a autant de difference entre les Tragedies Grecques & les Latines qui nous restent, qu'entre le goût sain de l'architecture Ionienne, Dorique, ou Corinthienne, & le goût dégénéré de l'architecture Gothique;

In discussing the Oedipus plays of Sophocles and Seneca, Batteux describes that of the Latin dramatist as an obese body bedecked with jewels:<sup>(2)</sup>

Sophocle ne dit pas un mot qui ne soit nécessaire, tout est nerf chez lui, tout contribue au mouvement. Sénèque est par-tout surchargé, accablé d'ornemens, c'est une masse d'embonpoint qui a des couleurs vives & point d'action.

Many saw Seneca's tragedies as, at best, inferior imitations of the Greek dramas, or, at worst, grossly deformed caricatures. La Harpe (Lycée, I, 501) describes the plays as

ces imitations mal-adroites et malheureuses qui ont laissé leurs auteurs si loin de leurs modeles.

and Marmontel suggests an even more biting disparagement (Poétique françoise, II, 172):

Nos premiers Poètes, comme le Sénèque des Latins, ne savoient rien de mieux que de défigurer les Poèmes des Grecs en les imitant;

The main body of criticism was focused on the rhetorical adornments

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(1) R. J. Tarrant ('Senecan Drama and its Antecedents' in Harvard Studies in Classical Philology 82 (1978), 213-63) argues (p. 213) that Seneca's artistic aims and methods 'have been shown to be so different from those of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides that any assessment of Senecan tragedy based on competition with his fifth-century predecessors now seems naive and misguided'.

(2) Cours de belles-lettres, II, 294. The same description features in the Encyclopédie (article Tragédie), XVI, 515.

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of Seneca's drama. That the Roman writer strained after an exalted style was not disputed, but it was held that the effect he achieved was of a series of rhetorical exercises or declamations, <sup>(1)</sup> and he himself was described as a déclamateur. <sup>(2)</sup> His rhetoric was seen largely as empty and meretricious, for it was asserted that he dealt not in truth but in exaggeration, and thereby achieved not le sublime but merely bombast. The description of enflure, defined in the Encyclopédie (article Enflure (Rhétoriqu.)), V, 673, as 'vice du discours & de ses pensées; fausse image du grand, du pathétique, que le bon sens réprouve', was frequently applied to Seneca's style. In the Encyclopédie Medea's furious request to the Sun to entrust his reins to her so that she may consume Corinth in flames (Medea 28 ff.) is cited as an example of bombast, and akin to this is Hercules' emphatic prayer to Jupiter to grant him his rightful place in Heaven (Hercules Oetaeus 1 ff.). <sup>(3)</sup> Brumoy diagnoses this Hercules as a 'prometteur ampoullé' (Théâtre des Grecs, II, 319). La Harpe denounces this apparent fault in the Senecan style in energetic terms (Lycee, I, 501):

Ce sont les plus beaux sujets d'Euripide et de Sophocle, ... le plus souvent transformés en longues déclamations du style le plus boursoufflé. La sécheresse, l'enflure, la monotonie, l'amas des descriptions gigantesques, le cliquetis des antithèses recherchées, dans les phrases une concision entortillée et une insupportable diffusion dans les pensées, sont les caracteres dominans de ces imitations ...

The adjective boursoufflé had already been applied to Seneca by Mercier in his Du Théâtre (p. 24):

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(1) See Le Franc de Pompignan (preface to his translation of Aeschylus' Agamemnon (Tragédies d'Eschyle, p. 208)); Voltaire (preface to Les Pélopidés (M. VII, 103)); Clément (preface to Medée, p. vi); and the Bibliothèque universelle des dames, p. 298.

(2) See Brumoy (Théâtre des Grecs, I, 394); Le Franc de Pompignan (Lettre ... à M. Racine in Louis Racine's Remarques sur les tragédies de Jean Racine (1752), II, 403); and L. Racine (Remarques, I, 168).

(3) This may well not have been written by Seneca, but by a later imitator of his style.

Le boursoufflé Senèque (improprement appelé le tragique) eut le style du mauvais goût & de la servitude.

as well as by Diderot (Plan d'une université pour le gouvernement de Russie (A.-T. III, 488)), who writes of 'la boursoufflure du tragique Senèque.'

That rhetoric promotes an artificiality of expression is demonstrated by Fénelon in his Lettre sur les occupations de l'Académie française (p. 20). Here he argues that Hecuba would not naturally in the midst of her grief have digressed into a geographical survey of the various forces which aided Troy in her bid for survival (see Troades 8 ff.):

Le genre fleuri n'atteint jamais au sublime. Qu'est-ce que les Anciens auroient dit d'une tragédie ou Hécube auroit déploré ses malheurs par des pointes ? La vraie douleur ne parle point ainsi.

This remark is based on Boileau's attack on Seneca in his Art poétique (chant III, 134 ff.):

L'Abattement s'explique en des termes moins fiers.  
Que devant Troye en flamme Hecube desolée  
Ne vienne pas pousser une plainte empoulée,  
Ni sans raison décrire en quel affreux país,  
Par sept bouches l'Euxin reçoit le Tanais.  
Tous ces pompeux amas d'expressions frivoles  
Sont d'un Declamateur amoureux des paroles. (1)

The question which Boileau raises of appropriateness of expression is a fundamental issue in literary criticism. Seneca had been eager to introduce erudite digressions on geographical and mythological subjects<sup>(2)</sup> into his work, and he had subordinated to this desire the consideration of natural dialogue in his characters. To French critics this seemed an unsatisfactory procedure, and their disapproval was strengthened by Horace's warning against the introduction of indiscriminate purple patches in his De Arte Poetica (14 ff.):

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(1) Pléiade edition (ed. Antoine Adam/Françoise Escal, Paris 1966), p. 172.

(2) See, for example, Medea 705 ff., or Hercules' erudite madness in Hercules Furens 939 ff..

inceptis gravibus plerumque et magna professis  
purpureus, late qui splendeat, unus et alter  
adsuitur pannus, cum lucus et ara Dianae  
et properantis aquae per amoenos ambitus agros  
aut flumen Rhenum aut pluvius describitur arcus;  
sed nunc non erat his locus. (1)

The strong reaction against Senecan rhetoric in the eighteenth century is, without doubt, a manifestation of a more general and wide-ranging reaction against rhetoric as a purely decorative ornament. Just as doubts were raised regarding the appropriateness of passages such as the récit de Thérémène in Racine's Phèdre, so it was questioned whether Seneca's rhetoric could be sanctioned in a dramatic form which seeks to arouse emotion in the spectator, rather than a purely intellectual appreciation of well-turned phrases. That tragic sentiments need to be expressed in often simple and heartfelt tones in order to touch the audience is recognized by Horace (De Arte Poetica 95 ff.):

et tragicus plerumque dolet sermone pedestri,  
Telephus et Peleus cum pauper et exsul uterque  
proicit ampullas et sesquipedalia verba, (95-100)  
si curat cor spectantis tetigisse querella.  
non satis est pulchra esse poemata: dulcia sunt  
et quocumque volent animum auditoris agunto.

.....  
si vis me flere, dolendum est (102-3)  
primum ipsi tibi:

This thought was brought up to date by Boileau:

Vos froids raisonnemens ne feront qu'attiedir (A. P. III,  
Un Spectateur toujours paresseux d'applaudir, 21-4) (2)  
Et qui des vains efforts de vostre Rhetorique,  
Justement fatigué, s'endort, ou vous critique.

.....  
Il faut dans la douleur que vous vous abbaissiez. (141-2) (3)  
Pour me tirer des pleurs, il faut que vous pleuriez.

It was certainly heeded in the eighteenth century, and Boileau's last line was quoted by Voltaire in a letter to La Harpe on the decadence

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(1) Horace's work had an immense influence on French tragic criticism, but in Seneca's time it had not yet been adopted as a manual for dramatists, and the Roman philosopher was under no such onus to obey its precepts.

(2) p. 169.

(3) p. 172.



of taste prevalent in Paris at the time of writing (April 23rd 1770, D 16308).

It was held that the truly great stylist can convince the heart as well as the head, and Seneca's misfortune was that, unlike Euripides and Racine, he did not address the heart of the reader. This failing is noted by the writer in the Bibliothèque universelle des dames (p. 295):

C'est un beau parleur qui remplit l'oreille, & qui touche rarement.

In order to touch it is necessary to express emotion which is common to all mankind. However, Seneca concentrates rather on extreme characters who devise means of revenge or murder, or who endure suffering beyond the normal range of human experience. Thus Medea envisages revenge which is unspeakable:

                                  efferata ignota horrida,  
tremenda caelo pariter ac terris mala ...      (Medea 45-6)

while Atreus' vengeance will be such as normal anger cannot conceive:

Nil quod doloris capiat assueti modus;  
nullum relinquam facinus et nullum est satis.      (Thyestes 255-6)

Such characterization earned for the Latin dramatist further charges of exceeding the bounds of nature. The Nouvelle Bibliothèque d'un homme de goût (I, 116) accused Seneca of precisely this:

(The tragedies) ...montrent, en beaucoup d'endroits, des sentimens fort beaux, s'ils n'étoient presque toujours hors de la nature.

That Senecan drama had lost most of the prestige it held in the Renaissance is entirely indisputable, and the bulk of eighteenth-century evidence points to a hostile critical reaction towards his work. However, it is incorrect to assert that nothing good was said or written about the tragedies. It was largely their rhetorical clothing which had incurred criticism, and even the harshest of Seneca's critics were forced to admit that, if nothing else, he possessed a fertile imagination, and that certain of his scenes contained a force of thought and originality

of conception which could be translated effectively onto the French stage. Thus Ansquer de Ponçol, an admirer of the philosophical works, praised in the dramas 'des pensées mâles & hardies, des sentiments pleins de grandeur, des maximes de politique très-utiles', while expressing reservations about the emphatic style (Analyse des traités des bienfaits et de la clémence de Sénèque (p. 77, n. 1)). D'Argenson noted 'des vers ingénieux et forts, de belles pensées, des sentences graves et morales' (Notices sur les oeuvres de théâtre, I, 96), and the Bibliothèque universelle des dames concluded that (p. 332):

Lorsqu'il s'agit de philosopher & de débiter des maximes de politique & de morale, Sénèque a de la force & de l'énergie, & peut passer pour un modèle.

Even La Harpe, who was generally scathing about Seneca's abilities, remarks that (Lycée, I, 501)

Il y a des beautés, et les bons esprits qui savent tirer parti de tout, ont bien su les apercevoir. On y remarque des pensées ingénieuses et fortes, des traits brillans, et même des morceaux éloquens et des idées théâtrales.

The most enthusiastic champion of the tragedies in the eighteenth century was undoubtedly abbé Coupé, who set out to restore Seneca's fading reputation. His involvement with the Histoire universelle meant that a predominantly favourable account of Seneca's theatre was given here (VI, 246):

Tout homme sensé trouvera de l'enflure dans cet Auteur, & s'apercevra qu'il n'est sublime qu'avec effort; mais il l'est souvent, mais il a plus d'excès que de défauts, & il sera lu avec plaisir par ceux qui préfèrent à la marche compassée du raisonnement, la fougue d'une imagination qui s'égaré quelquefois, mais qui étonne toujours:

This in turn influenced a later compilation, the Petite Bibliothèque des théâtres, where the author writes (I, 51):

On trouve de l'enflure dans les Tragédies de Sénèque; mais les vraies beautés dont elles sont remplies rachètent bien ces défauts, qui prouvent seulement qu'il a sacrifié au goût de son siècle.

But the most positive statement of Coupé's admiration for the Latin

dramatist is found in his Théâtre de Sénèque. Here he strives to refute the weight of adverse criticism, and affirms that the plays offer both useful instruction and pleasurable entertainment (I, 51):

Mais les pièces dont nous donnons la traduction, renferment sous le cadre le plus simple, la peinture vivante des passions fortes, de grandes leçons de morale et de philosophie, les tableaux ravissans de la vertu, de l'innocence, du bonheur, mis en opposition avec le trouble et le tourment de (sic) ames criminelles; ... elles renferment tout ce que la mythologie peut offrir à l'imagination de plus voluptueux et de plus enchanteur. C'est une pépinière féconde de vers harmonieux, sublimes, pleins de pensées, et que tous les tragiques de l'Europe moderne se sont empressés de mettre à contribution.

Although Coupé is perhaps inclined to over enthusiasm, he does show that even by the end of the eighteenth century the dramas had not been totally forgotten. That these plays were by no means entirely neglected by dramatists during the century, in spite of prejudice against their rhetorical tendencies, will be demonstrated in the ensuing chapters.

Preface to the Treatment of Individual Plays

Much can obviously be learnt of eighteenth-century attitudes to Senecan drama by the examination of contemporary critical material, but the ultimate source of reference must be the tragedies of the period themselves, which either by their subject matter, the type of action they portray, or the degree of emotion which they seek to arouse, show some links with the Roman tragedies. The most convenient method of approach is to deal with each of the ten Latin plays in turn, although it is vital not to lose sight of the overall picture, and of the prevailing trends in eighteenth-century tragedy in general.

There are no fixed criteria for deciding upon the order in which to discuss the dramas. We have no real knowledge of the chronological order in which they were composed, and, in the manuscripts and printed editions<sup>(1)</sup> in which they appear, <sup>they</sup> seem linked neither by logic nor by theme. In a study of this kind it is probably best to approach the matter from a thematic angle, and we have linked together the two dramas dealing with the offspring of the House of Pelops, the Thyestes and Agamemnon; the two Theban plays, the Oedipus and Phoenissae; the two Hercules dramas, Hercules Furens and Hercules Oetaeus; the tragedies dealing with female characters, the Medea, Phaedra, and Troades; and finally the pseudo-Senecan Octavia. Beyond this the connection between the dramas must seem somewhat arbitrary, and no special significance should be attached to the order in which our 'sets' of plays are

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(1) In the edition of Friedrich Leo (Berlin 1878), which will be used throughout this thesis, they appear as follows: Hercules Furens, Troades, Phoenissae, Medea, Phaedra, Oedipus, Agamemnon, Thyestes, Hercules (Oetaeus), Octavia.

discussed.

Since Senecan tragedy is most popularly known for its excursions into the realms of the sensational and the horrible, it seems perhaps appropriate to open our discussion of the influence which individual dramas exerted on tragedians of the eighteenth century with a consideration of the Thyestes, the most obviously horrific of the Latin plays.

### CHAPTER III

#### Legends of the House of Pelops (i):

#### 'Thyestes' and Horror in the Theatre

The family of Atreus and Thyestes was noted in ancient mythology for its succession of criminal actions, the first of which had been perpetrated by Tantalus, their grandfather, and gained for his offspring the enduring hatred of the gods. Tantalus had dared to test the omniscience of the inhabitants of Olympus by serving them a meal concocted from his own son Pelops. For this atrocity he was condemned to suffer everlasting thirst and hunger in the underworld, being tempted but never allowed to drink from the water of the lake in which he stood, or to pluck the fruit boughs above his head (see Thyestes 152-75). It is his accursed spirit which opens the Thyestes, and sets the scene for further crimes amongst his descendants. His two grandsons had long been implacable enemies, and Atreus lists a formidable array of grievances against Thyestes (Thyestes 221-41). The nature of Atreus' revenge is dramatized in the Thyestes, where he imitates Tantalus in preparing a human feast, this time of Thyestes' own sons, to be served up to their father.

It would be incorrect to assume that Seneca was alone in dramatizing so bloodthirsty an episode from ancient legend, for although his is the only complete play we now possess, we know of numerous other versions. Greek Thyestes dramas<sup>(1)</sup> were composed by Agathon, Apollodorus,

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(1) See August Nauck's Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta, with a supplement by Bruno Snell (Hildesheim 1964).

Cleophon, Chaeremon, and Diogenes, in addition to an Aerope by Agathon, a Thyestes or Aerope by Carcinus, and a Pelopidae by Lycophron. Both Sophocles and Euripides also wrote tragedies on the subject. In Rome the theme was no less popular.<sup>(1)</sup> We know of Thyestes plays by Ennius, Varius,<sup>(2)</sup> Cassius Parmensis, Gracchus, Curiatius Maternus, and Bassus, as well as Atreus plays by Accius, Pomponius Secundus, Aemilius Scaurus, and Rubrenus Lappa. Accius also produced a Pelopidae.

We can only speculate on the degree of horror which was admitted into these dramas. A fragment of Accius' Atreus<sup>(3)</sup> describes Atreus' preparations for the human feast (Ribbeck, p. 189, fragment XII):

cóncoquit  
Partém vapore flámmae, veribus ín foco  
Lacérta tribuit.

but this seems to offer far less detail than does Seneca.<sup>(4)</sup> However, the brevity of the fragments makes significant deductions difficult. Seneca's own interest is clearly in the actual method of revenge, for the messenger's speech relating the murder of Thyestes' children by Atreus and the horrible preparations for the feast begins just after half way through the Thyestes (623 ff.). In all some five hundred lines are devoted to the accomplishment of Atreus' vengeance (623-1112), and there is a wealth of macabre and horrific description of tom flesh and roasted entrails. Horace had recommended that the cooking of the children's bodies not be shown on stage ('ne ... aut humana palam coquat exta nefarius Atreus' (De Arte Poetica 186)), and theoretically Seneca complies with this precept, although it is largely

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(1) See Otto Ribbeck's Scaenicae Romanorum Poesis Fragmenta, volume I, Tragicorum Romanorum Fragmenta (Leipzig 1897).

(2) An Augustan poet whose play was much admired in Rome, and which may well have been a source of Seneca's tragedy.

(3) A Republican dramatist who lived c. 170-85 B. C..

(4) See lines 760-775 of the Thyestes.

irrelevant to his work, since he has no stage as such, and there is no real distinction between action and narrative in his type of tragedy.

Graphic descriptions of physical violence are found throughout Seneca's dramas, but nowhere in as much detail as in the Thyestes. In the Hercules Furens Amphitryon describes Hercules' bloody murder of his wife and children (991-1026), while the closing scene of the Phaedra sees Theseus lamenting over the unrecognizable remains of his son (1247-79). In the Oedipus we are treated to a detailed description of Oedipus wrenching out his eyes (961-79), and the Troades and Agamemnon also present violent images, although in considerably less detail (see. Ag. 900-5; Tro. 1110-17). Medea's gesture of throwing her children from the roof of the house to Jason's feet (Medea 1024) offers a startling image, but in this case Seneca fails to dwell on its horrific implications.

It is interesting to speculate on the reasons for the presence of this element of horror in Seneca's work. It was felt by some in the eighteenth century to be an inevitable product of a society which delighted in gladiatorial spectacles. Mercier, in his Du Théâtre (p. 24), writes:

Un peuple qui goûtoit le spectacle des gladiateurs, n'étoit pas né pour sentir & cultiver cet art comme les Grecs. Le peuple Romain eut dans tous les tems quelque chose de féroce; il eut plutôt des héros que de grands hommes.

Clément assumes that strong action was needed to move such a nation (De la Tragédie, I, 212):

Plus un peuple est sensible & facile à émouvoir, plus il faut tempérer la terreur par la pitié; plus il faut toucher son coeur par l'imagination, & moins il faut étaler à ses yeux de meurtres & de tableaux effrayans. ... Il n'est pas étonnant que, chez les Romains accoutumés aux combats des Gladiateurs, & aux atrocités des proscriptions, Sénèque, en dépit du précepte d'Horace, ait présenté Médée tuant de sang froid un de ses enfans aux yeux de son époux.

However, in reality there is an important distinction to be made between the popular entertainments of the circus and the sophisticated



milieu for which Seneca wrote, although this is not to say that a taste for horror was not common to both strata of society. J. P. Poe, in his article entitled 'An Analysis of Seneca's Thyestes',<sup>(1)</sup> shows that a preoccupation with carnage and death can be seen to be a characteristic feature of the literature of the early Empire, and he views this as an inevitable result of the dangerous times in which writers lived. It is certainly true that Seneca led an often precarious existence, and it seems likely that the Thyestes was coloured to a degree by his experiences of political life. It is probable that he sought not merely to startle his audience with his horrific, sensationalized depiction of Atreus' revenge, but to generate revulsion, and thereby achieve some kind of moral effect, or indeed purgation.

In Atreus Seneca offers a clear portrait of the worst excesses of tyranny. His rule is based on fear, not on the establishment of mutual trust, and he is warned that this cannot but recoil against him at some point:

SAT. Quos cogit metus  
laudare, eosdem reddit inimicos metus. (207-8)

The vanity of his power is highlighted by the chorus' ode on the virtues of the Stoic Wise Man, who attains true kingship by rising above base emotions such as ambition (339-90). On a personal level he bears the hereditary taint of unnatural sin, and he and Thyestes are involved in a self-perpetuating spiral of evil:

fratris et fas et fides  
iusque omne pereat. (47-8)

According to the Fury they are driven on by a kind of madness, or furor (line 27), and this is entirely opposed to Stoic ideals of right thinking.

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(1) In Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association 100 (1969), 355-76.

Thyestes is as inherently evil as his brother, and as such is not an obvious object of sympathy. He has stooped to considerable depths to steal the throne from Atreus in the past (see lines 221 ff.), and Atreus himself is convinced that given an alteration of roles Thyestes would delight in exacting the same revenge as he has enjoyed. In the final moments of the play Atreus taunts his brother with this fact:

Scio quid queraris: scelere praerepto doles,  
nec quod nefandas hauseris angit dapes; (1104-6)  
quod non pararis:

However, Thyestes does have one advantage over his brother. He has experienced misfortune and lived in extreme poverty, and in so doing has learned that absolute power is not synonymous with absolute happiness. Seneca writes in his Letters to Lucilius (XVII) that poverty is not necessarily something to be feared, but can be conducive to philosophical thought (XVII, 3):

Nempe hoc quaeris et hoc ista dilatione vis consequi, ne tibi paupertas timenda sit: quid si adpetenda est? Multis ad philosophandum obstitere divitiae: paupertas expedita est, secura est.

Thyestes has travelled sufficiently far on the road to Stoic wisdom to recognize that a state of poverty is superior to the false glitter of the throne:

clarus hic regni nitor  
fulgore non est quod oculos falso auferat: (414-5)

...  
modo inter illa, quae putant cuncti aspera,  
fortis fui laetusque; nunc contra in metus  
revolvor: (417-9)

The eighteenth century saw in Atreus an unflattering portrait of Nero, and Coupé diagnosed Seneca's aim as that of teaching his pupil a moral lesson (Théâtre de Sénèque, I, 15). However, it was the element of horror which produced the strongest reactions. D'Argenson writes of the Thyestes in his Notices sur les oeuvres de théâtre (I, 93):

certes c'est de toutes les tragédies la plus horrible et qui révolte plus tous sentimens humains. ... La vengeance que l'on expose icy est inconüe chez les peuples les plus

sauvages; la barbarie et la cruauté raffinées sont ce qu'il y a de plus terrible sous le ciel.

The Histoire universelle maintained a balanced approach, and found elements to praise in the tragedy (VI, 356-7):

Cependant il faut convenir qu'il y a de très-belles idées dans cette Tragédie, & nous croyons sur-tout devoir y admirer l'évocation de l'ombre de Tantale, ...

although professing shock at the degree of horror (p. 356):

on ne peut voir sans indignation le tableau de l'horrible repas qu'Atrée prépare à son frère, & le seul moyen d'en sauver l'atrocité, c'est de se persuader qu'il n'a jamais existé que dans l'imagination du Poète;

The same feeling of shock was expressed in the Bibliothèque universelle des dames (p. 345):

Rien n'égale l'horreur du V<sup>e</sup> Acte. Il est impossible de lire sans frémir, sans être révolté, le morceau qui commence ainsi:

Hoc quoque exiguum est mihi  
Ex vulnere ipso sanguinem calidum in tua  
Diffundere ora debui, &c.

#### French Adaptations of the 'Thyestes'

The subject of Thyestes was, understandably, approached with some trepidation by French playwrights. From the sixteenth century we have only Roland Brisset's Thieste, a free translation of the drama, which appeared with three other Senecan plays in the Premier Livre du théâtre tragique de Roland Brisset, gentilhomme tourangeau (Tours 1590), and from the seventeenth century Monléon's Le Thyeste (1638). Another tragedy on the subject of Atreus and Thyestes, by Montauban, seems to have been written at about the same time as that of Monléon,<sup>(1)</sup> although it was neither performed nor printed. In the preface to Le Thyeste Monléon outlines the basic difficulties which the French dramatist faces with a subject of this kind. Not only is the horror

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(1) See de Lérès, Dictionnaire portatif, p. 322.

a stumbling-block, but the actual amount of material (given the fact that Seneca's choruses were not used and that his lengthy descriptive passages were of necessity curtailed for the French stage) was found to be insufficient. Monléon tells us that many had already abandoned the task, but that his own aim was to adapt the theme to contemporary tastes and to (Au Lecteur)

rendre supportable aux yeux, & aux cœurs des moins cruels de la Nature, ce que la Nature mesme abhorre, & ce qu'on n'auroit jamais peu croire s'il n'estoit arrivé dans la race de Tantale.

However, he obviously did not go far enough in this direction, for his play met with little success and the Bibliothèque du théâtre françois (II, 79) commented that

Il n'y a jamais eu sans doute rien de plus affreux, que le spectacle de cette Tragédie, ...

Le Thyeste exercised no significant influence on later tragedy of the seventeenth century, and the subject was totally ignored until Crébillon elected to startle the public with what could legitimately be seen as a new theme for neo-classical tragedy in the first years of the eighteenth century.

Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon<sup>(1)</sup> first became known to the theatre-going public with Idoménee (1705), which demonstrated the author's predilection for strong, sombre themes (it tells the story of Idoménee's tragic duty to sacrifice his own son Idamante to the gods). Nevertheless, it was with Atrée et Thyeste (1707) that he made his reputation as a master of horror. Crébillon appeared on the scene at a time when

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(1) (1674-1762). He was the most successful dramatist of the first years of the eighteenth century. After his initial failure to get La Mort des enfants de Brutus (1703) performed at the Comédie-française he gained great success with Atrée et Thyeste, Electre (1708), and Rhadamiste et Zenobie (1711). For a fuller study of his life and work see Maurice Dutrait's Etude sur la vie et le théâtre de Crébillon (Bordeaux 1895), and Jürgen Langefeld's Das Theater Crébillons: Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon 1674-1762 (Cologne 1967).

there was a dearth of new talent, and it was to this fact that he owed a certain measure of his success. La Fosse, Campistron, La Grange-Chancel, Mlle. Barbier, Danchet, and Nadal had gained momentary success, but their works tended to be pale reflections of Racinian tragedy with the addition of romanesque elements. Crébillon's own instinct, and one which proved to be sound, was that something new was needed on the stage. He could not fail to feel the pervasive stylistic influence of Racine, as did all his contemporaries, but he sought to ally this with a new genre, the genre terrible. This involved the introduction of extreme terror, often going as far as horror (which in its worst form can be manifested as macabre sensation seeking or melodrama). When asked after the first performance of Atrée et Thyeste why he had adopted this genre, Crébillon is supposed to have replied:

Je n'avais point à choisir: Corneille avait pris le ciel,  
Racine la terre; il ne me restait plus que l'enfer; je m'y  
suis jeté à corps perdu.

His exact reasons for choosing Seneca as a model are unclear, although it is likely that the Thyestes seemed to him a respectably ancient precedent to follow in his venture to launch a new and 'meatier' type of tragedy.

Atrée et Thyeste does not, however, stand in complete isolation from other dramas of the period. Both the Cyrus of Danchet (1706) and the Tomiris of Mlle. Barbier (1707) allow a limited intrusion of horror, and point to a certain taste for descriptions of violent bloodshed at that time. In the first act of Cyrus Harpage describes how his own son was murdered and served up before him:

Ce cher fils ... J'en frissonne & d'horreur & d'effroi, (I,2) (1)  
Par son ordre égorgé fut offert devant moy:

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(1) Paris (Pierre Ribou) 1706 (B. N. Yf 6371).

This is in fact not borrowed from the Thyestes, but forms a part of the Cyrus story as told by the Greek historian Herodotus (Book I, 119). In Tomyris the final scene provides a description of the barbaric queen's treatment of her dead enemy Cyrus:<sup>(1)</sup>

Une troupe barbare entoure Tomyris,  
Tandis que par trois fois, sans qu'aucun cri l'arrête,  
Dans un vase de sang elle plonge une tête, (V,10)  
Et dit, à chaque fois, d'un ton mal assuré: (2)  
Saoule-toi de ce sang dont tu fus alteré.

The darkening of the heavens at this hideous spectacle has a parallel in Thyestes 776 ff., but this does not necessarily mean that Mlle. Barbier referred to Seneca. There is a distinction to be made between the two Cyrus dramas and Atrée et Thyeste, for neither Danchet nor Mlle. Barbier seeks to exploit horror on a general level. Danchet, in particular, plays down the violent elements of his theme, and Mlle. Barbier limits her horrific description to the last scene of the play, where it serves to highlight the barbarity of Tomyris' character and to render the dénouement all the more tragic for the heroine Mandane. Crébillon was the first to use horrific revenge as the central theme of his play.

Not surprisingly, Atrée et Thyeste deeply shocked the spectators when it received its first performance on March 14th 1707. Charles Collé reports Crébillon's own description of the audience reaction, and tells us that even the parterre was too stunned to either applaud or hiss (Journal et mémoires, I, 359-60).<sup>(3)</sup> Following the play Crébillon went to the café de Procope, where he addressed an Englishman as follows (op. cit., p. 360):

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(1) Based on Herodotus, I, 214.

(2) Paris (Pierre Ribou) 1707.

(3) Journal et mémoires de Charles Collé (1748-1772), ed. Honoré Bonhomme (Paris 1863).

'Monsieur, Atrée est une tragédie trop forte pour le caractère de notre nation; elle eût mieux réussi chez vous. Cette tragédie est faite pour des hommes, et nous n'avons que des femmes en France. Mais pour vous, monsieur, oserois-je vous demander ce que vous en pensez ? Je la trouve fort belle,' lui répondit l'Anglais, 'très-belle, monsieur; mais la coupe.... la coupe .... Ah! monsieur de Crébillon, Transeat a me calix iste.' (1)

However, Parfaict (Histoire du théâtre françois, XIV, 427) tells us that as performances of the play continued reactions became a great deal more favourable. Atrée et Thyeste was acted a total of ten times between March 14th and April 8th 1707, and then a further eight times in 1712. In all it received thirty-four performances during the eighteenth century, and it was revived at the Comédie-française as late as 1866. Although gaining a total of forty-seven performances<sup>(2)</sup> it did not equal the success of Electre (153) or Rhadamiste et Zénobie (272 performances). One of the chief attractions of the play seems to have been its originality, and by the second half of the century, when this type of drama had gained more practitioners, audiences became considerably smaller.

The words 'horror' and 'terror' were those most frequently on the lips of critics when referring to Atrée et Thyeste, and Crébillon himself admitted in his preface that

l'on me regarde encore dans quelques endroits, comme un homme noir, avec qui il ne fait pas sûr de vivre: (3)

Mlle. Barbier, for example, who gave a detailed analysis of Crébillon's play in her Dissertation critique sur la tragédie d'Atrée & Thieste (1722),<sup>(4)</sup> emphasized the audacity of the dramatist's undertaking (p. 2):

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(1) The same anecdote appears in the Annales dramatiques (I, 399) and the Anecdotes dramatiques (I, 124-5).

(2) According to Dutrait (p. 563). Lancaster (Sunset, p. 104) gives the total as forty-four.

(3) Text from 1711 edition of the play (A La Haye, chez T. Johnson).

(4) In the Recueil des saisons littéraires (Rouen 1722), tome II.

vous n'auriez jamais cru qu'il se fut trouvé d'Auteur assez hardi pour la mettre sur la Scène; mais rien n'épouvante Mr de Crébillon, les sujets les plus horribles flâtent son imagination, ...

Many were noticeably stunned by the contents of Atrée et Thyeste.

Frederick of Prussia insists on the fearful elements of Crébillon's theatre in a letter to Voltaire (April 19th 1738, D 1482), and Collé, an admirer of the play, was moved to emphatic exclamations (Journal, I, 359):

Quelle tragédie! quel génie! quelle force! mais quelle horreur! ...

Some felt that the dramatist had gone too far in the direction of horror. Clément, in particular, argued that Crébillon had found an unsuitable guide in Seneca (De la Tragédie, I, 216):

Crébillon, égaré par Sénèque, passa le but presque en entrant dans la carrière; voulant aller plus loin que Racine, il alla trop loin, & fut obligé de revenir sur ses pas;

La Harpe held the only merit of the play to be 'des momens de terreur', but stated that it was the opinion of most people that 'l'horreur y était poussée trop loin' (Lycée, XI, 12-13).

Since Atrée et Thyeste was unlike the majority of French tragic productions, critics had to look to the foreign theatre to find apt comparisons. The licence of the English stage, where scenes of unbridled violence could be portrayed, offered obvious similarities, and Marmontel's view that spectacles such as the cup of blood in Atrée et Thyeste were more suitable for the English than for the French theatre was echoed by many (Réflexions sur la tragédie (affixed to Aristomène (1750)), p. 121):

..leur (i.e. the English) Théâtre a porté la Tragédie à un degré d'horreur inconnu aux anciens. Rien ne les choque de tout ce qui peut les émouvoir. Les François aussi délicats que s'ils étoient plus sensibles, n'ont pu souffrir des spectacles si effrayants. La coupe d'Atrée a fait détourner les yeux à toutes nos femmes, ...

However, the Annales dramatiques (I, 399) saw the dénouement of



Atrée et Thyeste as even more horrible than anything English tragedy could offer.

Although Seneca, rather than any of the Greek tragedians, inspired Crébillon's work, critics discerned a kind of primitive force and strength in Atrée et Thyeste which cohered with their somewhat confused and misguided conception of the nature of Aeschylus' talent. La Porte (Anecdotes dramatiques, III, 129) says:

Crébillon rappella sur la Scène tout le Tragique d'Eschyle, avec une régularité de plans qu'Eschyle ne connut jamais.

The writer in the Annales dramatiques (III, 40) neatly describes Crébillon as the French Aeschylus to complement the Sophocles of Corneille and the Euripides of Racine:

Avant lui, notre scène tragique nous retraçait Sophocle et Euripide; il nous manquait Eschyle, et Crébillon ne nous a rien laissé à envier à la Grèce. Corneille avait élevé le coeur de l'homme; Racine l'avait attendri; Crébillon y a répandu la terreur, ...

In view of the reaction which Atrée et Thyeste aroused, one would expect to find much of the spirit of Seneca's Thyestes reflected in Crébillon's drama, although however daring the French dramatist wanted to be, he could never hope to find an audience for portions of pure, undiluted Senecan horror. Indeed, it should be remembered that the Roman writer's own tragedy was only ever intended for narration and not for visual performance. Crébillon's aim was to steer a path between excessive horror and pure insipidity, whereby he retained enough sensationalism to startle and thrill his spectators, but insufficient to repulse them and to condemn his play to dismal failure. In his preface the tragedian contended that he had been sensitive to prevailing tastes:

Je n'ai rien oublié pour adoucir mon Sujet, & pour l'accommoder à nos moeurs. ....

J'ai alteré par tout la Fable, pour rendre sa (Atrée's) vengeance moins affreuse; & il s'en faut bien que mon Atrée ne soit aussi cruel que celui de Sénèque. Il m'a suffi de faire craindre pour Thyeste toutes les horreurs de la Coupe que son Frere lui prépare; & il n'y porte pas seulement les levres.

There was no question of Crébillon offering a description of the dissection and preparation of Thyeste's son (as Seneca had done in Thyestes 623-775), or of the unfortunate father consuming Plisthène's flesh, and the dramatist decided to limit Atrée's revenge to the murder of Plisthène and the offering of a cup filled with his blood to Thyeste. He had discovered this cup of blood in the Thyestes, where Atreus decides to cap his revenge by offering his brother this bloody drink to wash down the flesh of his children:

restat etiamnunc cruor  
tot hostiarum; veteris hunc Bacchi color (914-17)  
abscondet - hoc, hoc mensa cludatur scypho.  
mixtum suorum sanguinem genitor bibat:

The first mention of the fateful cup in Atrée et Thyeste is in act IV scene 4, where Atrée feigns reconciliation with his brother, and offers to seal the bargain with a draught from an ancestral cup:

Thyeste, en croiras-tu la Coupe de nos Peres ?  
Est-ce offrir de la Paix des garants peu sincères ?

The greater part of the French play is, in fact, lacking in horror, for Atrée's choice of this barbaric mode of revenge is not made until the latter half of the action. Atrée's first plan had been for Plisthène, who believes himself to be his son, to kill Thyeste, his true father,<sup>(1)</sup> which would have been followed by Atrée's murder of Plisthène. The first intimations of a more memorable form of revenge do not occur to Atrée until the end of the third act. It is at this point that Crébillon begins to amass the ingredients for a terrifying dénouement. Atrée takes on the full force of the Senecan Atreus, and the French writer echoes the rhetorically striking expressions of the Latin dramatist. Yet the Roman Atreus is perhaps ultimately the more effective of the two characters, for he has been determined on a

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(1) Crébillon probably found this idea in Hyginus, Fable 88, where Atreus sends Aegisthus, who is unaware that he is the son of Thyestes, to murder his own father.

barbaric form of vengeance from the outset. Atrée gradually works up to the conclusion that

Je ne punirois point vos forfaits differens, (III,7)  
Si je ne m'en vengeois pas par des forfaits plus grands.

while Atreus has been convinced all along that

- scelera non ulcisceris, (195-6)  
nisi vincis.

Atrée's desire to torment his brother:

Qu'il vive, ce n'est plus sa mort que je médite, (III,7)  
La mort n'est que la fin des Tourmens qu'il mérite.

was also suggested by Atreus'

De fine poenae loqueris; ego poenam volo. (246) (1)

Atrée wants his brother to beg for death:

Que le perfide en proye aux horreurs de son sort, (III,7)  
Implore comme un bien la plus affreuse mort:

as does Seneca's character:

perimat tyrannus lenis: in regno meo (247-8)  
mors impetratur.

His intention to astound even the gods:

Que ma triste vengeance à tous les deux cruelle, (III,7)  
Etonne jusqu'aux Dieux qui n'ont rien fait pour elle.

derives from Atreus' extravagant design:

fiat hoc, fiat nefas (265-6)  
quod, di, timetis.

Atreus is convinced that Thyestes is equally anxious to destroy him:

aliquod audendum est nefas (193-5)  
atrox, cruentum, tale quod frater meus  
suum esse mallet -

and this thought is transferred into the French play, although its appropriateness is a little suspect, since Thyeste is generally seen as an eminently harmless character:

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(1) The majority of these verbal borrowings are noted by Franz Jakob in his article 'Die Fabel von Atreus und Thyestes in den wichtigsten Tragödien der englischen, französischen und italienischen Literatur' (Münchener Beiträge 37 (1907)).

Vengeons tous nos affronts, mais par un tel forfait (III,7)  
Que Thyeste lui-même eût voulu l'avoir fait.

Thyeste himself begins to feel a premonition of impending doom in the middle of the fourth act. He feels an inexplicable fear for Plisthène:

De noirs pressentimens viennent m'épouventer:  
Je sens à chaque instant, que mes craintes redoublent,  
Que pour vous en secret mes entrailles se troublent; (IV,3)  
Je combats vainement de si vives douleurs,  
Un pouvoir inconnu me fait verser des pleurs.

His ancient predecessor felt these same warnings after consuming the infamous feast:

mittit luctus signa futuri (957-8)  
mens, ante sui praesaga mali:

.....  
nolo infelix, sed vagus intra (965-7)  
terror oberrat, subitos fundunt  
oculi fletus, nec causa subest.

This all serves to create a mood of expectation, as we await with trepidation the accomplishment of Atrée's terrible revenge in the final act.

The fifth act of the play opens with Plisthène's fears of disaster, and his perception of Atrée's criminal intentions:

À travers les détours de votre Ame parjure, (V,3)  
J'entrevois des horreurs dont frémit la Nature:

evokes the same aura of unnatural sin which pervades the Thyestes. Atrée's gloating in the following scene serves only to reinforce this mood. Here he anticipates in solitude his imminent triumph ('Que je suis satisfait!' he cries). Atreus shares this feeling only after he has seen Thyestes gorge himself on his sons ('bene est, abunde est, iam sat est etiam mihi' (line 889)). Atrée imagines Thyeste as about to swallow down the gore of Plisthène, and his intention to restore the son to his father contains a horrible irony:

Ce fils infortuné, cet objet de ses vœux,  
Va devenir pour lui l'objet le plus affreux: (V,4)  
Je ne te l'ai rendu que pour te le reprendre,  
Et ne te le ravis que pour mieux te le rendre.

In just the same way Atreus had said to Thyestes in the Latin play:

                                nulla pars prolis tuae  
tibi subtrahetur. ora: quae exoptas dabo   (977-9)  
totumque turba iam sua implebo patrem.

Any of Crébillon's audience acquainted with the Thyestes must at this point have visualized the horrible human feast which Seneca describes so graphically. The French dramatist contrives to suggest such horror, but minimizes concrete details. To Atrée's frenzied mind his revenge seems just:

                                Quel qu'en soit le forfait, un dessein si funeste,   (V,4)  
                                S'il n'est digne d'Atrée, est digne de Thyeste.

                                dignum est Thyeste facinus et dignum Atreo:   (271)

as well as acceptable:

                                Il faut un terme au crime, & non à la vengeance.   (V,4)

                                Sceleri modus debetur ubi facias scelus,   (1052-3)  
                                non ubi reponas.

but he has long since passed the bounds of reason. He rejoices in his chance to see the onset of Thyeste's misery:

                                Il faut pour bien jouir de son sort déplorable,   (V,4)  
                                Le voir dans le moment qu'il devient misérable;

just as had Atreus:

                                miserum videre nolo, sed dum fit miser.   (907)

Atrée's jovial greeting to Thyeste in the fifth scene of the final act belies the events which are to follow, and which make this scene the most horrifying of the play. Thyeste is foolish enough to trust his brother, but cannot rid himself of a vague unease. His plea for Plisthène to be brought to him:

                                Rendez-moi mes enfans, faites venir mon fils ?   (V,5)  
                                Qu'il puisse être témoin d'une union si chère,

which is an echo of Thyestes 974-5:

                                augere cumulus hic voluptatem potest  
                                si cum meis gaudere felici datur.

serves to render the dénouement all the more tragic. This concern is later repeated, as in the Latin play (line 997), and Atrée is allowed

to answer ironically:

Vous serez satisfait, Thyeste, & votre fils  
Pour jamais en ces lieux va vous être remis. (V,5)

as does Atreus (Thyestes 998):

Reddam, et tibi illos nullus eripiet dies.

By now Crébillon would hope to have the audience on the edge of their seats, and he has prepared a sufficiently terrifying atmosphere for the appearance of the fateful cup. This cup is accepted by Thyeste, but as he raises it to his lips the situation is saved, for he recognizes the liquid as blood. This part of the play also derives its effect from imitation of Seneca. Thyeste exclaims:

Mais que vois-je, perfide ? Ah, grands dieux! quelle horreur!  
C'est du sang! Tout le mien se glace dans mon coeur;

sed quid hoc ? nolunt manus  
parere, crescit pondus et dextram gravat; (985-6)

Le Soleil s'obscurcit, & la Coupe sanglante  
Semble fuir d'elle-même à cette main tremblante. (V,5)

vix lucet ignis; ipse quin aether gravis  
inter diem noctemque desertus stupet. (990-1)

.....  
admotus ipsis Bacchus a labris fugit ... (987)

Je me meurs. Ah! mon fils, qu'êtes-vous devenu ? (V,5)

adeste, nati, genitor infelix vocat, (1002)

The sad remains of Plisthène are discovered by Théodamie, and she rushes to tell her father of the fact. There was no question of pieces of his body being brought on stage, and thus far lip-service is paid to the bienséances. However, Théodamie's description of her brother was sufficient to strike terror into the audience:

J'ai vu ce malheureux, victime de sa rage,  
De son corps dispersé m'offrir la triste image;  
Ses restes divisez, livides & tremblans, (V,6)  
Offrent de toutes parts cent spectacles sanglans;

This is considerably less graphic than Thyestes' description:

abscisa cerno capita et avulsas manus  
et rupta fractis cruribus vestigia - (1038-40)  
hoc est quod avidus capere non potuit pater.

but must, nevertheless, have appeared too daring, for Crébillon excised these lines after the first performances and the first editions of the play.<sup>(1)</sup> As Thyeste begins to comprehend the extent of Atrée's vengeance, he wonders how the Earth can endure so inhuman a crime:

O terre! en ce moment peux-tu nous soutenir ? (V,6)

This echoes the Thyestes, lines 1006-7:

sustines tantum nefas  
gestare, Tellus ?

The moment of total tragic realization occurs when Thyeste recognizes the blood as that of Plisthène:

THYESTE  
Mon fils, est-ce ton sang qu'on offroit à ton pere ?  
ATREE  
Méconnois tu ce sang ? (V,6)  
THYESTE  
Je reconnois mon frere.

This forceful expression is a direct translation of Seneca's

ATR. natos equid agnoscis tuos ? (1005-6)  
THY. Agnosco fratrem.

and marks the climax of the drama.

Voltaire, who was ever eager to belittle his literary enemy, later pointed out in his Eloge de M. de Crébillon (1762) that there was nothing new in the use of a cup to inspire horror: Comeille had already done the same in his Rodogune (1645).<sup>(2)</sup> This is certainly true to a certain extent, for Comeille's tragedy is expressly mentioned by Crébillon in his preface as a precedent for his own dénouement. Yet there are important distinctions to be made between these two examples. In Rodogune Cléopâtre seeks to poison Antiochus by offering him a poisoned coupe nuptiale. This poison is in itself not as startling as Plisthène's blood, and the horror is further saved by the fact that

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(1) They do not appear in the 1716 edition of the text.

(2) M. XXIV, 346.

the tables are turned on Cléopâtre, and the play ends with the criminal dying from her own poison. The crux of the matter is that justice is seen to be done, while in Atrée et Thyeste we see the criminal triumphant. Indeed the latter play draws to a close with Atrée deriving positive joy from his brother's suffering:

Par tes gemissemens je connois ta douleur,  
Comme je le voulois tu ressens ton malheur;  
Et mon coeur qui perdoit l'espoir de sa vengeance,  
Retrouve dans tes pleurs cette chere esperance. (V,6)

These words are based on Thyestes 1096-8:

Nunc meas laudo manus,  
nunc parta vera est palma. perdideram scelus,  
nisi sic doleres.

Seneca offers no facile morality, but sees this revenge as merely one round in the continuing cycle of fraternal strife. Crébillon's imitation of the moral ambiguity of this ending makes his play all the more daring, and therefore more controversial than the dénouement of Rodogune. By having Thyeste commit suicide (in legend he lived on to plan his revenge on the Atrides) the dramatist also denies the wronged brother a chance to seek personal satisfaction. He will instead entrust his revenge to the gods:

Consolez-vous, ma fille; & de ces lieux  
Fuyez, & remettez votre vengeance aux Dieux.  
..... (V,6)  
Les Dieux, que ce parjure a fait pâlir d'effroi,  
Le rendront quelque jour plus malheureux que moi;

They had also been invoked by Thyestes in the Latin play:

Vindices aderunt dei;  
his puniendum vota te tradunt mea. (1110-11)

although he remained alive to avenge his own wrong. So far the role of the gods has been entirely passive. Daylight has fled, indicative of divine dismay at the unspeakable crime perpetrated, and there is no answer to Thyeste's request to Jupiter to hurl his thunderbolt:

Grands Dieux! pour quels forfaits lancez-vous le tonnerre ? (V,6)  
tu, summe caeli rector, aetheriae potens  
dominator aulae, ... (1077-8)



... omni parte violentum intona, (1080)

Crébillon had intended to let his audience find no respite from the emotion of horror at the end of Atrée et Thyeste, and he is largely successful in his bid to build up and maintain an atmosphere of extreme fear. His constant use of Seneca in this area is totally unparalleled in the French theatre at this time, and he can justifiably lay claim to being the first tragedian writing within the framework of the neo-classical rules to use Seneca to evoke a mood of extreme emotion. Others had sought only to appropriate poetically effective scenes or phrases. It has been asserted that Crébillon could read neither Latin nor Greek (Coupé, Théâtre de Sénèque, I, 204), but there seems little real reason to assume that he had no direct access to the Thyestes. He had received a Jesuit education, and afterwards studied law, and the prodigious memory with which he was credited would doubtless have enabled him to absorb easily the extensive instruction in Latin which his studies would have involved. La Place, who claims to have been well acquainted with the poet, testifies to his thorough knowledge of the ancient language, although suggesting a certain reluctance to exercise this knowledge (Eloge historique de M. de Crébillon, p. 182):<sup>(1)</sup>

Sa mémoire étoit prodigieuse; jamais il n'avoit rien oublié de ce qu'il avoit appris. Dans ses dernières années même, il sçavoit encore très-bien le Latin, quoique depuis qu'il étoit sorti de ses classes, il n'en eût fait que fort peu d'usage.

Although we have concentrated on the evocation of horror in the latter part of Atrée et Thyeste, there is evidence of imitation of the Thyestes throughout the play.<sup>(2)</sup> It was obviously inappropriate for

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(1) In the Mercure de France (July 1762), p. 149-201.

(2) Verbal imitation is found in act I scene 2; act II scenes 1,4; act III scenes 1,7; act IV scenes 3,4; act V scenes 4,5,6.

Crébillon to open his drama with the appearance of the ghost of Tantalus, but it is clear that he was interested in the structural arrangement of the human events in the Latin tragedy. In both plays the action proper commences with the expression of Atreus' determination to gain lasting revenge on Thyestes, and Crébillon's portrait of Atrée is closely modelled on that of his ancient predecessor. The scene between Atrée and his confidant Euristhène (I,2) forms a parallel to Atreus' discussion with the satelles (176-335), and both Atrée and Atreus are clearly obsessed by the thought of revenge. Where Thyestes is concerned there are no bounds of moderation to be observed:

Contre Thyeste enfin tout devient légitime, (I,2)

Fas est in illo quidquid in fratre est nefas. (220)

Even their children cannot escape involvement:

Plisthène né d'un sang au crime accoutumé,  
Ne démentira point le sang qui l'a formé; (I,2)

ne mali fiant times ? (313-4)  
nascuntur.

Atrée's indifference as to whether or not his plan is approved by others sums up Atreus' attitude in the Thyestes:

Que l'on approuve, ou non, un dessein si fatal,  
Il m'est doux de verser tout le sang d'un Rival. (I,2)

SAT. Fama te populi nihil  
adversa terret ? ATR. Maximum hoc regni bonum est,  
quod facta domini cogitur populus sui (204-7)  
tam ferre quam laudare.

As in the Latin play, silence is imposed on Euristhène at the end of the dialogue.

Later on, when Atrée has Thyeste in his power, he can freely express his joy:

Enfin, graces aux Dieux, je tiens en ma puissance,  
Le perfide ennemi que poursuit ma vengeance; (III,1)

as does Atreus in Seneca's third act, when he compares Thyestes with a hunted animal trapped in the nets:

Plagis tenetur clausa dispositis fera:  
et ipsum et una generis invisi indolem (491-3)  
iunctam parenti cerno.

Atreus' ploy of feigning reconciliation with his brother is also imitated by Crébillon. However, whereas this takes place only once in the Thyestes, the French dramatist has Atrée 'forgive' his brother twice. Atrée pretends firstly to be prevailed upon by Plisthène, and says magnanimously to Thyeste:

Je veux bien oublier une sanglante injure; (II,4)

This may owe something to Atreus' 'quidquid irarum fuit transierit' (509-10). More importantly in the fourth act (just prior to the catastrophe as in the Thyestes) Atrée offers to restore Thyeste's throne to him:

De mon Sceptre aujourd'hui je détache le tien. (IV,4)

This derives from Seneca, lines 525-7:

.. omatus cape  
pares meis laetusque fraterni imperi  
capesse partem.

Atrée is seen throughout as the more dangerous of the two brothers, and indeed the more interesting. Thyeste, on the other hand, is a rather passive character, who never offers significant opposition to his brother. His crimes have been greatly minimized by Crébillon, and we are told that he has striven on several occasions to heal the rift with Atrée:

Qui de nous deux, cruel, poursuit ici son Frere ?  
Depuis vingt ans entiers, que n'ai-je point tenté, (II,4)  
Pour calmer les transports de ton coeur irrité ?

His character is modified in such a way that he can become a legitimate object of pity at the end of the play, although Seneca had not sought to introduce this type of emotion, and it is doubtful whether there is room in Crébillon's drama for attendrissement amid scenes of such obvious horror.

Thus far we have discussed Atrée et Thyeste purely in relation to

the Latin drama of Seneca, yet in certain respects the play was very obviously French, and contains many of the conventional features of drama of the day. The emotion of love, for instance, which was largely alien to the Thyestes, yet so important on the French stage, is given a fundamental role in this play. The implacable hatred of Atreus for his brother derives primarily, in the Roman tragedy, from Thyestes' usurpation of Atreus' power, although the seduction of his wife, Aerope, was a further cause for anger (see lines 221 ff.). In the modern version Atrée's thirst for revenge is brought about purely by disappointed love. Thyeste had stolen Aerope from the very altars of marriage, thus casting Atrée into a frenzy of rage:

Tes yeux furent témoins des transports de mon coeur;  
A peine mon amour égalait ma fureur,  
Jamais Amant trahi ne l'a plus signalée. (I,2)

....  
Mon amour outragé me rendit inhumain.

This was a more easily recognizable emotion for the audience than Atreus' frustration at being robbed of his kingdom, and also had the advantage of allowing Crébillon to exclude Seneca's contrast between tyranny and the Stoic ideal of true kingship, which might well have been interpreted in 1707 as an attack on Louis XIV.

Plisthène, brought up as the son of Atrée, but in reality the child of Thyeste's union with Aerope, is also a recognizable character. He fulfils the role of the noble young hero, and is endowed with a sensitive love for Théodamie, the imaginary daughter of Thyeste. His original role in the Thyestes had been minimal (he has a non-speaking part, and is mentioned by name only once, as he is being murdered (line 726)), and his introduction into the forefront of the action is a move by Crébillon to increase interest in the relatively simple plot of Seneca's drama. His character is based ultimately on that of Aegisthus, as described in Hyginus, Fable 88, but Crébillon sees him as a linking device between the brothers, and as a means of

rendering more dynamic the rather static action of the Thyestes.

The French dramatist was sensitive to the somewhat unvaried material in the Latin play, as indeed were all adaptors of ancient tragedies. Structurally he circumvents this problem by having Atrée conceive of two plans of revenge, the first of which is discarded when a more bloodthirsty alternative springs to mind, and feign two moments of reconciliation (II,2 and IV,4). On a dramatic level it was not practical for him to open his play with the appearance of Tantalus' ghost, but he strives to conserve something of this foreboding atmosphere in a terrifying dream which Thyeste relates to Théodamie (II,1).<sup>(1)</sup> As appropriate to its nature the dream lacks the precision of the Fury's prophecy of impending doom in the Thyestes, but it suffices, nevertheless, to send a thrill of expectation through the spectators, for its gloomy setting:

Près de ces noirs détours, que la rive infermale  
Forme à replis divers dans cette Isle fatale, (II,1)  
J'ai cru long-tems errer parmi des cris affreux,  
Que des Mânes plaintifs pousoient jusques aux Cieux;

evokes the underworld of Tantalus' torture. Thyeste's vision of Atrée covering him with his own blood:

Le cruel d'une main sembloit m'ouvrir le flanc, (II,1)  
Et de l'autre à longs traits m'abreuver de mon sang:

is an obvious foreshadowing of the horror to come.

Further variety is introduced in the form of romanesque elements, which are an obvious reflection of current tastes in tragic entertainment. These include the shipwreck which has brought Thyeste and Théodamie to the island of Eubée, where Atrée also happens to be, the scene of recognition between the two brothers (II,3), the cri du sang which Plisthène experiences for Thyeste before he knows him to be his father

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(1) The use of a dream to portend disaster was a very common device in eighteenth-century tragedy.

(III,4), and also the potentially incestuous love shared by Plisthène and Théodamie.

To the reader of today Atrée et Thyeste seems to strike a sometimes inharmonious balance between ancient and modern, but it received considerable praise at the time and was a not unimportant influence on later drama.<sup>(1)</sup> Certainly Crébillon's achievement in branching out into a new field should not be underestimated. He was the most daring and original dramatist to emerge in the first years of the eighteenth century, and with his reputation for exploiting horror established by Atrée et Thyeste and sustained by Electre (1703) and Rhadamiste et Zénobie (1711), he was seen as being the founder of a new type of tragic drama. That a play of Seneca should have been a guiding force in the establishment of this new genre is extremely significant. La Place, who was eager to emphasize Crébillon's importance, writes (Eloge historique, p. 156):

Il fut décidé de ce moment (i.e. from the success of Atrée et Thyeste), qu'il avoit un genre à lui; & c'étoit beaucoup sans doute, pour un homme qui venoit après Corneille & Racine.

Fréron (Mort de M. de Crébillon, p. 133-4)<sup>(2)</sup> describes the late dramatist as

un homme d'autant plus grand qu'il avoit une manière à lui; qu'il est le créateur d'une partie qui lui appartient en propre, ...

A vested interest in attacking Voltaire boosted these critics' enthusiasm for praising Crébillon, for he was not in reality sufficiently talented to be compared with Corneille and Racine, but undoubtedly their approval of his originality was genuine.

Just as Crébillon had found a precedent for his boldness in Seneca,

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(1) It also inspired a parody attributed to Lenoble or Faroard, which was performed at the Foire St. Laurent in July 1709, and an anonymous lyric tragedy entitled Atrée (B. N. ms. fr. 24352). It was translated into Italian, English, Dutch, and Portuguese.

(2) In Année littéraire (1762), vii.

so later dramatists who sought to introduce powerful spectacle invoked Atrée et Thyeste as the inspiration for their variations on the theme of horror. De Belloy, for example, in his Gabrielle de Vergy (1770) introduces a bleeding heart rather than a cup of blood, and he writes in his preface (p. 6-7):

Le titre seul de Gabrielle de Vergy annonce une Tragédie du genre le plus terrible: on se croit même menacé d'être conduit jusqu'à l'horreur. Heureusement, depuis quelques années, le Public s'est accoutumé à des situations fortes, que Racine & Corneille n'avaient pas déployées sur la Scène Française. ...

Crébillon est le premier qui ait transporté sur la Scène Française cette terreur sombre & majestueuse, l'ame de l'ancienne Tragédie. (1)

To de Belloy it seemed legitimate to find a path to pity through extreme terror, and his conviction was strengthened by examples from Greek tragedy such as Oedipus, the Bacchae, and Herakles Mainomenos. He saw this as a means of reviving the ancient theatre and of giving French tragedy a different direction from that which Corneille and Racine had pursued. The same policy had in substance already been advocated by Voltaire, whom de Belloy praises as (p. 7)

réunissant les trois genres de ses prédécesseurs, tour-à-tour & souvent à la fois héroïque, tendre, & terrible, a encore enrichi notre Scène de coups de Théâtre frappans & des spectacles magnifiques des Athéniens.

Voltaire and Crébillon were without doubt working in the same general direction as they strove to inject more life into tragedy by rendering its action more striking, but Voltaire would have been horrified to hear his work discussed in the same breath as that of his older contemporary. In his Discours sur la tragédie (Spectacles horribles chez les Grecs)<sup>(2)</sup> he makes the significant statement that the Greeks sometimes mistook horror for terror, and pursued 'le dégoûtant et l'incroyable' instead of 'le tragique et le merveilleux'. It is into

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(1) Paris (Duchesne) 1770.

(2) M. II, 318.

the first category that he would have placed Atrée et Thyeste, for he felt in general that artificial, melodramatic devices such as cups of blood or bleeding hearts were obvious and crude means of shocking the audience, but not of arousing the sort of pathos with which tragedy should be concerned. He was not averse to terror, or indeed horror on occasion, but he derived this from the passions of the characters and from their verbal exchanges rather than from stage props. Mahomet (1741) offers an especially skilful example of Voltaire's use of terror. Here Séide is prevailed upon by Mahomet and the arguments of fanaticism to murder Zopire, their most serious opponent, and the murder, followed by the revelation that Zopire is in fact Séide's own father, creates an intensely powerful emotional effect. Voltaire himself wrote of this play to Frederick (January 20th (Dec) 1740, D 2386):

L'action que j'ai peinte est atroce, et je ne say si  
l'horreur a été plus loin sur aucun théâtre.

To some, Voltaire's introduction of extreme terror seemed to be an attempt to outdo Crébillon in his own speciality, and abbé Le Blanc criticized the writer for deriving the horror of the fourth act of Mahomet from imitation of Crébillon (in the Correspondence, D 2635). In reality the play owes no more than superficial resemblances to the content and techniques of Atrée et Thyeste. However, as censor, Crébillon refused to approve Mahomet, and Condorcet (Vie de Voltaire (1789))<sup>(1)</sup> argued that his refusal sprang from jealousy that Voltaire had surpassed him in his own genre, and had been able to prove that

on pouvait porter la terreur tragique à son comble, sans  
sacrifier l'intérêt et sans révolter par des horreurs  
dégoûtantes, ...

Whatever the real reasons for the elderly dramatist's rejection of the play, it proved to be the beginning of an enduring quarrel. Voltaire

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(1) M. I, 216.



actively sought to prove his superiority to Crébillon by rewriting several of his plays,<sup>(1)</sup> and he continued this project right up to the time of his own death. He took every opportunity to criticize Crébillon's work, and derogatory comments on Atrée et Thyeste can be found in the Eloge de M. de Crébillon, which in fact offers the very opposite of praise, as well as in Voltaire's personal copy of his rival's tragedies. In this copy marginal notes alongside Atrée et Thyeste<sup>(2)</sup> harp continually on the theme of 'barbaric' and 'barbarian', and comments such as 'cela est cannibale et non tragique' and abominable express Voltaire's distaste at the final scene of the drama. This extreme disapproval culminated in a decision to rewrite Atrée et Thyeste in 1770-1.

Voltaire's composition of a play on this theme is, of course, of great significance to this study, although it must be remembered that the French writer was primarily concerned with his rival's play, and not with the Thyestes. Voltaire's letters of 1770-1 emphasize the barbarity of Atrée et Thyeste, and it is clear that he took his self-appointed task of defending the French language extremely seriously. It was as if he was worried that posterity would not recognize his own greater merits as a dramatist, although he had already established his reputation as the foremost tragedian of the eighteenth century.

The enmity within the family of Atreus and Thyestes was clearly an attractive subject to Voltaire, for it appealed to his desire for passionate emotion and vivid action. In the preface to Les Pélopidés he tells us that (Fragment d'une lettre (M. VII, 103))

J'ai toujours regardé la famille d'Atrée, depuis Pélops

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(1) This resulted in Sémiramis (1748), Oreste (1750), Rome sauvée (1750), and Octave et le jeune Pompée, ou le Triumvirat (1764).

(2) See V. S. Lyublinsky, Voltaire-Studien (translated from the original Russian into German by Wolfgang Techtmeier) (Berlin 1961), p. 98-110.

jusqu'à Iphigénie, comme l'atelier où l'on a dû forger les poignards de Melpomène. Il lui faut des passions furieuses, de grands crimes, des remords violents. Je ne la voudrais ni fade ment amoureuse, ni raisonneuse. Si elle n'est pas terrible, si elle ne transporte pas nos âmes, elle m'est insipide.

However, the task which he had set himself was a difficult one, for he had held Crébillon's version of the subject up to ridicule, and he disdained to refer to Seneca's Thyestes for inspiration. In a letter of 1771 (February 6th, D 17005) he wrote:

Je ne vous dirai point que Senèque fut un plat déclamateur, .. implying that this was exactly what he considered him to be, and he emphasized this view in the preface to his play (p. 103):

Je n'ai jamais conçu comment ces Romains, qui devaient être si bien instruits par la poétique d'Horace, ont pu parvenir à faire de la tragédie d'Atrée et de Thyeste une déclamation si plate et si fastidieuse.

In manifesting so scornful an attitude towards the opposition Voltaire had committed himself to producing a vastly better play than had either Seneca or Crébillon. He also designates precise faults within Atrée et Thyeste (Atrée's twenty-year delay in seeking vengeance; the lack of opposition offered to this revenge; the useless love interest; and the incorrect diction), which deprived him of a great deal of obvious material. Well aware of the extent of his problems, he confided to the comtesse d'Argental (December 26th 1770, D 16867):

Tout cela était assez difficile, car ce pauvre enfant<sup>(1)</sup> n'avait à mettre dans toute sa pièce que du sentiment. Point d'aventure romanesque, point de fils de Thieste amoureux d'une jeune inconnue .... point de galimatias, il n'était soutenu par rien.

Atrée et Thyeste did give Voltaire a certain foundation to work from, however, if only as a basis for alteration. That is to say he sets his action approximately one year after Thyeste has stolen Europe from the marriage altars, in order to correct Crébillon's unlikely

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(1) This refers to the young author Durand, by whom Voltaire pretended Les Pélopidés was composed.

twenty-year interval between crime and punishment,<sup>(1)</sup> and having thus excluded the role of Plisthène and his love for Théodamie, focuses on the relationship between Thyeste and Erope, who had so far appeared only in Monléon's Le Thyeste. The fact that Erope has borne a son to Thyeste and feels herself bound to him, while Atrée is also intent on recovering her for himself, makes this love the type of guilty, unfortunate passion which Voltaire considered to be worthy of the tragic genre, and it is upon the rivalry of Atrée and Thyeste for Erope that the action of the play is based.

In introducing Erope, whom he saw as a tragic and pathetic figure, guilty of no conscious wrong-doing, yet the source of bloodshed and of civil war, Voltaire is moving further and further away from Seneca's Thyestes. No longer do we concentrate on the theme of single-minded revenge, but our interest is shared between Erope, Thyeste, Atrée, and Hippodamie, their mother,<sup>(2)</sup> who strives for peace between her sons. The structure of Les Pélopidés is totally unlike that of the Thyestes, for the play opens with a civil war being fought in Argos, something which had occurred in neither the Latin nor the earlier French tragedy. The first act is very reminiscent of Racine's La Thébaïde, and Hippodamie and Erope fulfil the roles of Jocaste and Antigone. Thyeste and Atrée, too, are to some extent comparable with Polynice and Etéocle. The curse which afflicts the House of Pelops:

mais enfin la mère des Atrides  
Voit l'inceste autour d'elle avec les parricides. (Les Pélopidés,  
C'est le sort de mon sang. Tes soins et ta vertu I,1 )  
Contre la destinée ont en vain combattu.

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(1) It is not specified in the Thyestes how much time has passed since Aerope's seduction, although it was long enough ago for Atreus to have doubts about the fatherhood of Agamemnon and Menelaus, and for Tantalus, the eldest of Thyestes' sons (presumably by Aerope), to have become a iuvenis. Yet one has the impression that Thyestes' latest crimes have been committed fairly recently.

(2) Hippodamia is a figure of legend, but does not feature in the Thyestes.

is akin to that which taints the sons of Oedipus. In La Thébaïde

Jocaste says:

Tu ne t'étonnes pas si mes fils sont perfides,  
S'ils sont tous deux méchants, et s'ils sont parricides: (I,1)  
Tu sais qu'ils sont sortis d'un sang incestueux,  
Et tu t'étonnerais s'ils étaient vertueux.

But the fatality which Hippodamie recognizes:

Il est donc en naissant des races condamnées, (Les Pélopidés,  
Par un triste ascendant vers le crime entraînées, I,1 )

is expressly based on Thyestes 313-4:

ne mali fiant times ?  
nascuntur.

Voltaire is sensitive to the evocative atmosphere which surrounds this family, and he strives to suggest a mood of terror and foreboding which is both poetically and dramatically more effective than anything which Crébillon could offer. In his Eloge de M. de Crébillon (M. XXIV, 347) he dismisses his predecessor's attempt at a portentous dream as

un amas d'images incohérentes, une déclamation absolument inutile au noeud de la pièce.

His own dream description is an obvious attempt to improve on the earlier drama. In the first act Hippodamie recounts tormented visions of past and future evil:

Tout s'arme contre moi dans la nature entière:  
Et Tantale, et Pélops, et mes deux fils, et vous,  
Les enfers déchaînés, et les dieux en courroux;  
Tout présente à mes yeux les sanglantes images  
De mes malheurs passés et des plus noirs présages:  
.....  
Je vois les noirs détours de la rive infernale, (I,3)  
L'exécrable festin que prépara Tantale,  
Son supplice aux enfers, et ces champs désolés  
Qui n'offrent à sa faim que des troncs dépouillés.

The allusion to Tantalus recalls the circumstances of his appearance in the first act of the Thyestes, as well as the description by the chorus of the crimes of the House of Pelops (122-75), and the reference to the exécrable festin is an effective means of recalling to mind the barbaric act which Atreus imitated. There is no real evidence to suggest

that Seneca offered Voltaire any direct inspiration, but clear similarities with Crébillon's expression demonstrate Voltaire's aim to rework precise areas of his rival's faulty style.

Voltaire had considered that insufficient opposition was offered to the accomplishment of Atrée's revenge in Atrée et Thyeste, and this is a criticism which could also be applied to Seneca's Thyestes. Consequently the French writer attempts to make Thyeste a worthy opponent for his brother. His guilt is not minimized, but he is seen as meriting our interest. Polémon says of him:

Plus criminel qu'Atrée il est moins intraitable; (I,1)  
Il connaît son erreur.

As in Atrée et Thyeste his crime is that of adulterous love for Eroupe, rather than plotting to take over the kingdom, and his battle against Atrée's forces has been waged solely on her account. Voltaire imitates both Seneca (see Thyestes 512 ff.) and Crébillon in characterizing Thyeste as the more tractable of the two brothers, although he is unwilling to deliver Eroupe into the hands of Atrée, whose barbarity he knows only too well. It is this reluctance which prolongs his resistance. However, this opposition becomes, in the end, totally ineffective, for as soon as Atrée feigns to yield Eroupe to Thyeste it is abandoned, leaving Atrée free to exact his revenge.

This revenge is no longer the central theme of the drama, for Atrée does not even appear on stage until the beginning of the third act. This is to be contrasted with both Seneca and Crébillon, where the bloodthirsty king dominates the action. It is a fundamental weakness in Les Pélopidés that we are presented with conversations between Hippodamie, Eroupe, Thyeste, and Polémon rather than a confrontation between the two brothers, and there is a certain justice in Fréron's comment on the drama (Année littéraire (1772), ii, 9-10):

C'est qu'elle (i.e. the play) est employée presque toute à peindre la situation embarrassante de Thieste & d'Aeroupe,

& que la vengeance d'Atrée, qui doit être le véritable sujet, n'est traitée que sur la fin du quatrième acte & dans le cours du cinquième. ... Dans Les Pélopidés, Atrée est un homme très-commun, & si l'on ne connoissoit pas le sujet, on ne devineroit jamais, dans les quatre premiers actes, l'excès de vengeance où il doit se porter.

Voltaire's aim was to present Atrée as a human being with understandable emotions of jealousy and anger, for he had deplored the fact that in Atrée et Thyeste (and consequently in the Thyestes as well) he has no power to affect the emotions of the audience (Fragment d'une lettre, p. 103-4):

Et quand il mangerait le fils de son frère, et son frère même, tout crus sur le théâtre, il n'en serait que plus froid et plus dégoûtant, parce qu'il n'a eu aucune passion qui ait touché, parce qu'il n'a point été en péril, parce qu'on n'a rien craint pour lui, rien souhaité, rien senti.

Yet in becoming more human Atrée is no longer the Atreus of legend. For much of Les Pélopidés he is beset by uncertainty, and shows a singular lack of purpose:

Et tu me vois encor flotter dans cet orage,  
Incertain de mes vœux, incertain dans ma rage, (III, 3)  
Nourrissant en secret un affreux souvenir,  
Et redoutant surtout d'avoir à la punir.

In the fourth act he begins to consider the possibility of measuring up to the legendary Atreus:

Si ma juste vengeance  
De Thyeste et de vous eût égalé l'offense, (IV, 5)  
Les pervers auraient vu comme je sais punir;  
J'aurais épouventé les siècles à venir.

and his words recall the Thyestes, lines 192-3:

age, anime, fac quod nulla posteritas probet,  
sed nulla taceat.

But it is not until he realizes the full extent of Erope's perfidy that the metamorphosis is complete. At this stage he echoes the dissimulation of Crébillon's Atrée and Seneca's Atreus by pretending to be reconciled to the situation (IV, 5), yet in private he contemplates the most horrible forms of revenge (IV, 6). Like his predecessors he

will commit so fearful a crime that the Sun will not wish to witness it:

Soleil, qui vois ce crime et toute ma fureur,  
Tu ne verras bientôt ces lieux qu'avec horreur. (IV,6)

Hoc est deos quod puduit, hoc egit diem  
aversum in ortus. (1035-6)

Voltaire does not hesitate to evoke scenes of horror, and Atrée goes so far as to imagine a repeat of Tantalus' murder of Pelops:

Je tiens ce glaive affreux sous qui tomba Pélops.  
Il te frappe, il t'égorge, il t'étale en lambeaux;  
Il fait rentrer ton sang, au gré de ma furie,  
Dans le coupable sang qui t'a donné la vie. (IV,6)  
Le festin de Tantale est préparé pour eux;  
Les poisons de Médée en sont les mets affreux.

This imitates the sentiments of Seneca's Atreus:

Tantalum et Pelopem aspice;  
ad haec manus exempla poscuntur meae. (242-3)

In the edition of 1775 the scene ended with the lines:

Cessez, filles du Styx, cessez, troupe infemale,  
D'épouvanter les yeux de mon aïeul Tantale:  
Sur Thyeste et sur moi venez vous acharner.  
Paraissez, dieux vengeurs, je vais vous étonner.

These lines contain a clear allusion to the first act of the Thyestes, where the ghost of Tantalus is harried by the Fury.

In the event Atrée's revenge was less extreme than that of Atreus, and reflected instead the dénouement of Crébillon's play. In spite of his aversion to the closing scene of Atrée et Thyeste, Voltaire imitated his predecessor in focusing the catastrophe on the dreaded cup of blood.<sup>(1)</sup> Whether or not Thyeste should actually drink from this cup was clearly a thought uppermost in his mind, and varying versions of the final scene<sup>(2)</sup> show that he was unable to come to any firm decision on the matter. The version given by Naigeon in the stereotype edition of 1800 offers the most horrible ending, and one

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(1) The coupe de Tantale is first mentioned by Hippodamie in act IV scene 2. It is brought on stage in the final scene filled with the blood of Erope's baby.

(2) These variants are printed by Moland in the notes attached to Les Pélopidés.

which would probably not have been found acceptable for performance on stage. Here Atrée's revenge is successful, for Elope and Thyeste do drink the blood of their own child, and Atrée says:

J'ai rempli les destins d'Atrée et de Thyeste;  
J'ai moi-même égorgé ce fruit de votre inceste;  
Et ce vase contient le sang d'un malheureux. (V,5)  
Vous l'avez bu, ce sang, couple ingrat, couple affreux:  
Je suis vengé.

Crébillon, it should be remembered, had not dared to let Thyeste drink any of the blood. In the generally known version (1772 and 1775 editions) Atrée is only allowed to say:

J'ai voulu de ce sang vous abreuver tous deux. (V,5)

while the text printed by Moland (which had been found in Voltaire's papers and originally printed in the Kehl edition) has:

Je n'ai pu t'abreuver de ce sang criminel; (V,4)

In the latter version Elope is stabbed off stage, while she collapses poisoned in the former. All but the Moland edition feature the rolling of thunder, and the stage is covered in darkness, which contributes to the mood of terror. They also include the moment of recognition:

Tremble encor plus, perfide, et reconnais Atrée.

which had been used to such effect by Crébillon (V,6) and Seneca (1005-6). On the whole these versions provide a more effective dénouement than that which Moland prints. Voltaire did not want his tragedy to finish with an expression of joy on Atrée's part, for he had considered this to be in extremely poor taste in Atrée et Thyeste. He felt rather that it should conclude with universal suffering, which might well reduce the audience to tears, and he evokes a feeling of total desolation as Atrée feels himself being sucked down into Hades to share the fate of his grandfather Tantalus.

It would have been interesting to see whether audiences preferred Atrée et Thyeste or Les Pélopidés, but Voltaire's effort was never performed. Critical reaction was in general harsh, and most thought



that Voltaire had not offered a noticeably better alternative to Crébillon's faults. Grimm (Correspondance littéraire, IX, 412)<sup>(1)</sup>

writes:

On n'y remarque plus la griffe du lion: cela sent la caducité, la décadence totale.

and La Harpe echoes this comment (Lycée, X, 428-9):

Les Pélopidés sont le seul ouvrage de la vieillesse de Voltaire, où il ne se fasse reconnaître nulle part. ... La pièce de Voltaire est de la dernière faiblesse dans le plan comme dans les vers.

The basic problem is that in trying to better Atrée et Thyeste Voltaire was involving himself in a form of drama which was fundamentally alien to his talents. Crébillon had been ideally suited to adapting the Thyestes, for he was naturally inclined towards the sensational, and could portray Atreus in all his melodramatic, exaggerated colours. Voltaire, however, in trying to restore the drama to normal proportions, robbed it of its fundamental attraction. He seeks to interest us in the relationship of Eriopé and Thyeste, but they have insufficient impact to hold our attention. Atrée, too, becomes an ordinary criminal, who has none of the inhuman determination of the original character. Voltaire's talents were undoubtedly better highlighted in themes which offered him a broader moral and philosophical canvas and allowed him to address a message to mankind in general.

The impact of Crébillon's drama seems to have been quite widespread, and a renewed interest in the legends surrounding the House of Pelops resulted in the production of two tragedies offering a sequel to Atrée et Thyeste.<sup>(2)</sup> The first of these was Séguineau and Pralard's Aegyste,<sup>(3)</sup>

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(1) Edited by Maurice Toumeux (Paris 1877-82).

(2) Thyestes' suicide had been invented by Crébillon, and was ignored in these sequels.

(3) See Lancaster, French Tragedy in the Time of Louis XV and Voltaire, I, 105-6.

which was acted a total of five times from November 18th 1721. This play was never published, but a summary of its plot can be found in the Mercure de France (November 1721, p. 136-41) and Parfaict's Histoire du théâtre françois, XV, 456-63. From this we can deduce that the major source was Hyginus, Fables 87 and 88, where we hear of the birth of Aegisthus, the child of an incestuous union between Thyestes and his daughter Pelopia, who was to avenge his father on Atreus. We do not know whether the Thyestes exerted any influence on this play, although the characterization of Atrée, who plots a trap for Thyeste in the first act, may owe something to Seneca.

The second of these plays was Pellegrin's<sup>(1)</sup> Pélopée, which does survive. It was first read at Versailles in 1710,<sup>(2)</sup> but this version differs significantly from a later text, which was acted and printed in 1733. This is the text we possess today. The subject was in some respects as horrible as that of Atrée et Thyeste, although Pellegrin excluded the rape of Pélopée by Thyeste in favour of a secret marriage between the two. He still had to reveal, however, that Thyeste was her father, and the situation is complicated by Aegiste's sexual love for Pélopée, whom he does not know to be his own mother. The dramatist gives the sources of the play in his preface as 'Servius,<sup>(3)</sup> Lactance,<sup>(4)</sup> Vigenere,<sup>(5)</sup> & surtout Hyginus', but in addition to this there are

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(1) Simon-Joseph Pellegrin (1663-1745). He had a varied career as a priest, and also contributed numerous works to the Opera and Comédie-française. His tragedies were Polydore (1705), La Mort d'Ulysse (1706), Tibère (1726), Pélopée (1733), Bajazet I<sup>er</sup> (1739), and Catilina (1742). See Lancaster, Sunset, p. 124 ff..

(2) The duc du Maine gives us a detailed analysis of the play in a letter to his wife. See A. de Boislisle (Annuaire-Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de France (1908), 223-31).

(3) Commentary on Aeneid XI, 262.

(4) Lactantius Placidus' commentary on Statius, Thebaïd IV, 306.

(5) A free translation of Hyginus 88 appears in Blaise de Vigenère's Les Images, ou Tableaux de platte-peinture de Philostrate lemmien sophiste grec (Paris 1578).

traces of the Thyestes and of Atrée et Thyeste.

Pellegrin's characterization of Atrée seems to be based to a certain extent on the Roman drama, although it is often difficult to decide whether he is referring directly to Seneca, or merely reworking Crébillon's imitation of the Thyestes. Pellegrin was conscious of the need to preserve the force of the character, and he writes in his preface:

Le caractere d'Atrée a paru assez-bien rendu aux yeux des connoisseurs les plus difficiles; j'aurois voulu qu'il m'eût été permis d'en diminuer l'horreur; mais j'aurois manqué la ressemblance.

Consequently he portrays Atrée as determined to torment his brother.

In the first act he declares:

Thyeste va perir! Eh! crois-tu que sa mort  
Soit le bien où j'aspire avec plus de transport ? (I,2)  
Je cherche à prolonger, non à finir sa peine,  
Il m'enleve, en mourant, le plaisir de ma haine.

This is an imitation of Atrée et Thyeste (III,7):

Qu'il vive, ce n'est plus sa mort que je médite,  
La mort n'est que la fin des Tourmens qu'il mérite.

but derives ultimately from Thyestes 246.<sup>(1)</sup> His later challenge to the Sun to flee again in face of crime and horror:

Soleil, si tu le veux, pâlis, recule encore; (IV,1)

immediately recalls to mind his earlier crimes, depicted in the Thyestes and Atrée et Thyeste, which had caused the Sun to flee for the first

time. His only companion will be the Furies:

Va, fuï (Soleil), pour éclairer mes noires barbaries, (IV,1)  
J'ai besoin seulement du flambeau des Furies.

whom he had invoked in the Thyestes:

dira Furiarum cohors  
discorsque Erinys veniat et geminas faces (250-2)  
Megaera quatiens:

His regret that Thyeste will be unaware that he is dying at the hand of

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(1) See p. 78 of this chapter.

his own son (Aegiste):

J'avourai que ma joye eût été plus entiere,  
Si Thyeste, touchant à son heure demiere, (IV,1)  
Par moi-même eût appris que, pour trancher ses jours,  
De la main de son fils j'emprunte le secours:

echoes Atreus' regret that Thyestes was ignorant of the fact that he was consuming the flesh of his sons during his meal:

- omnia haec melius pater  
fecisse potuit, cecidit in cassum dolor: (1065-8)  
scidit ore natos impio, sed nesciens,  
sed nescientes.

The situation in which Thyeste is placed also contains similarities with the Thyestes and Atrée et Thyeste, in that throughout Pélopée he is the focus of Atrée's schemes of revenge. Aegiste, too, is not unlike Crébillon's Plisthène, although his statement that he was born for crime:

Je vous l'ai déjà dit, je suis né pour le crime; (I,5)

echoes Seneca, lines 313-4:

ne mali fiant times ?  
nascuntur.

The significant dream which Pélopée recounts in act II scene 1 is only one of the many instances of Pellegrin's imitation of Crébillon,<sup>(1)</sup> and there are verbal similarities between the two passages. Yet her vision of a Fury tormenting Tantalus:

Je vois une Furie, & mon Ayeul Tantale,  
Qu'elle force à sortir de la nuit inferiale, (II,1)  
La Barbare sur lui versant son noir poison,  
Lui fait un autre Enfer de sa propre maison;

can derive from no other source than the first act of the Thyestes (see lines 1-121).

It seems proven that Pellegrin was acquainted with the material of the Roman drama, but Crébillon's tragedy was undoubtedly the more important influence of the two. Indeed Crébillon seems to have gone a

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(1) See Thyeste's dream in Atrée et Thyeste II,1.

certain way towards recasting the ancient legend, for when Pellegrin's Thyeste looks back to the torments he has suffered at Atrée's hands, he recalls the murder of 'Plistene' (Pélopée III,3), rather than the deaths of his three sons in the Thyestes. In the same way it is the cup of blood which Atrée remembers ('..Et du sang de son fils abreuvé de ma main' (I,2)), rather than the meal of flesh he served up in the Latin play.

On the whole the eighteenth century was far more receptive to the theme of Atreus and Thyestes than the seventeenth century had been, and Seneca's drama served as the precedent for a new and more powerful genre of tragedy, which found its first exponent in the 'terrible' Crébillon. Crébillon's followers, such as de Belloy, inclined towards the melodramatic and the bloodthirsty, although their attitude towards the renewal of tragedy was just as serious as that of Voltaire, who sought less sensational paths towards the evocation of terror, and on occasion horror, in the theatre.

CHAPTER IV

Legends of the House of Pelops (ii):

'Agamemnon' - Clytemnestra, the Guilty Heroine

The obsessive revenge which finds expression in the Thyestes has a sequel in the Agamemnon. Here it is the turn of Thyestes' restless spirit to observe with joy the demise of Agamemnon, son of his deadly enemy Atreus. The agent of this act of revenge is to be Clytemnestra, Agamemnon's own wife, goaded on by her lover and confidant, Aegisthus, who is devoted to his role of avenging the suffering of his father, Thyestes.

The most famous of the ancient plays on this subject is undoubtedly the Agamemnon of Aeschylus. Besides this we know for certain of only one other fifth-century Agamemnon, that of Ion of Chios, although there is evidence to suggest that there may have been another play of that title by an unknown dramatist.<sup>(1)</sup> We possess the title of a Clytemestra by Sophocles, but this has been considered by some to be merely another title for his Iphigenia. Of Roman tragedies on this theme we have, besides that of Seneca, fragments of an Aegisthus by the Republican dramatist Livius Andronicus, and of an Aegisthus and a Clytemestra by Accius. Tacitus also alludes to what is possibly a drama on the Agamemnon theme by Curiatius Maternus (Dialogus de Oratoribus IX, 2).

The extreme dissimilarity between the Agamemnon of Aeschylus and

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(1) See R. J. Tarrant's edition of Seneca's Agamemnon (Cambridge 1976), p. 10.

that of Seneca<sup>(1)</sup> points to a fact which will later become even more evident, that is that Seneca's tragedies are often not closely modelled on their fifth-century Greek counterparts. The Latin dramatist's introduction of a supernatural protagonist to speak the prologue, his subordination of dramatic action to purely poetic and rhetorical description, and his concentration on the effectiveness of individual scenes to the exclusion of an outwardly unified whole, are characteristic features of his writing, although we cannot on that account assume that the Roman Agamemnon was not based on any earlier sources. Tarrant has explored in some detail possible sources of the play,<sup>(2)</sup> and offers well-informed theories, although the severe limitations on our knowledge of the progress of tragedy from 400 B. C. to Seneca's own time make

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(1) This can be demonstrated by a brief synopsis of the two plots:

Aeschylus' drama opens with the speech of the watchman, whose task it is to await the flashing of the beacon which will signal the fall of Troy. At length his vigilance is rewarded, and the news of victory sparks off celebrations throughout the city. Not long after a herald enters to confirm the victory, but also reports that a great storm has wrecked much of the Greek fleet on the return journey. The arrival of Agamemnon some halfway through the play (line 783) is greeted with hypocritical joy by Clytemnestra. The prophetess Cassandra, who accompanies Agamemnon, foresees his murder, and her unheeded words are soon confirmed by the king's cries for help from within the palace. He has been stabbed in his bath whilst trapped in the folds of a voluminous robe. His body, as well as that of Cassandra, who has also met her end, are revealed, and Clytemnestra and Aegisthus exult in their crime.

Seneca, on the other hand, opens his tragedy with the ghost of Thyestes, who looks forward to the accomplishment of his revenge. The second act shows Clytemnestra wavering between her adulterous love for Aegisthus and her duty to Agamemnon, and she is incited against her husband by her lover. The arrival of Eurybates, who heralds the return of Agamemnon, and his long description of the storm at sea fill the central portion of the drama. The Trojan women who have been brought with Cassandra as captives then lament their misfortunes. Cassandra is gripped with a prophetic vision of Agamemnon's death, but on his triumphant return (lines 778 ff.) he is shown as impervious to her warnings. The murder itself is described in a clairvoyant vision by the Trojan prophetess, who sees Clytemnestra wielding an axe against her husband at the royal banquet. The final act of the play shows Electra entrusting Orestes to the care of Strophius, thus saving him from the anger of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.

(2) See p. 8-18 of his edition of the Agamemnon.

emphatic assertions difficult to support.

Thematically the Agamemnon contains certain links with the Thyestes (1) not least of which is the presence of the ghost of Thyestes at the opening of the play (1-56). His appearance immediately recalls the horrific crimes already perpetrated, and the revenge which is to be accomplished during the Agamemnon will match these deeds in barbarity. However, unlike in the Thyestes, there is a considerable amount of restraint in the tone of the Agamemnon, and violence is restricted to a short description of the bloodthirsty murder of Agamemnon:

sic huc et illuc impiam librat (i.e. Clytemnestra) manum.  
habet, peractum est. pendet exigua male  
caput amputatum parte et hinc trunco cruor  
exundat, illic ora cum fremitu iacent. (900-5)  
nondum recedunt: ille (Aegisthus) iam exanimem petit  
laceratque corpus, illa fodientem adiuvat.

The Agamemnon also offers Seneca further opportunities to reflect on the nature of kingship, and the first chorus argues that great power is always attended by great cares (57-107).

In structure Seneca's drama is extremely episodic, and no one character dominates the action. Agamemnon himself makes only a brief appearance (778-807), which seems to be of comparatively minor importance, although of course the whole of the action ultimately revolves around him. The first part of the play focuses on the personality of Clytemnestra (108-309). Unlike the Aeschylean character, who is fully resolved on murdering her husband, Seneca's Clytemnestra is irresolute and torn between conflicting emotions of passionate love for Aegisthus and some semblance of a sense of duty towards Agamemnon. The precise shades of emotion in her mind are carefully defined by Seneca, who is interested in the motivation for her subsequent actions:

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(1) Although in the best manuscripts the Agamemnon precedes the Thyestes rather than observing its logical position as a sequel.



hinc animum iugo  
premit cupido turpis et vinci vetat:  
et inter istas mentis obsessae faces, (134-8)  
fessus quidem et devinctus et pessumdatus,  
pudor rebellat.

She is given contradictory advice by her nurse and by Aegisthus, whose role, although he is the son of Thyestes, is secondary to her own.

The storm narrative of Eurybates (421-578) provides a timeless interlude between the preparation and accomplishment of the murder. In technique this passage resembles the long description of the underworld in Hercules Furens 658-827, and Seneca strives to build up an atmosphere of power and violence as the force of the storm contrasts with the earlier calm. The second half of the play is dominated by Cassandra, the tragic prophetess of Troy, through whose eyes the process of murder is described. Her description of Agamemnon's death (867-909) seems to be a piece of originally conceived narrative, in that it represents a clairvoyant vision of the deed as it is being done within the palace. The final episode of the play (910-1012) is extremely unusual, since it introduces for the first time three new characters, Electra, Orestes, and Strophius. Its only link with the rest of the Agamemnon is in the appearance of Clytemnestra, Aegisthus, and Cassandra, who participate in the latter part of the action (947 ff.).

The Agamemnon of Aeschylus offers an interesting contrast to Seneca's drama both in form and interpretation of character. However, for a long time its merits were not fully appreciated in France, and the position of the most senior of the three Greek dramatists was a somewhat ambiguous one. He was held in awe as the 'père de la tragédie antique',<sup>(1)</sup> but, certainly in the first part of the eighteenth century, was very little read, and only imperfectly understood.<sup>(2)</sup> No complete

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(1) A term used by Lemerrier in his Cours analytique de littérature générale (1817), I, 152.

(2) See the discussion of T. E. D. Braun and G. R. Culley, 'Aeschylus, /  
contd. overleaf

French translation of his work was made until Le Franc de Pompignan produced his Tragédies d'Eschyle in 1770, followed by La Porte du Theil's version,<sup>(1)</sup> which appeared in an expanded edition of Brumoy's Le Théâtre des Grecs (1785-9), and few educated Frenchmen were sufficiently competent to approach the dramas in the original Greek. In 1730 Brumoy had offered only summaries of the ancient dramatist's work, and perpetuated the notion of unintelligibility (Théâtre des Grecs, II, 185):

Il est vrai que cette Tragédie (Agamemnon) n'est pas aisée à entendre: car outre qu'elle a été plusieurs fois confondue avec les Choéphores qui la suivent, & imprimée peu correctement, ... outre qu'elle n'est pas encore exempte de fautes dans l'état où Stanlei nous l'a donnée, il y a tant de métaphores, de figures, & de tours extraordinaires qu'on ne sauroit se vanter de les avoir tous démêlés.

When Pompignan offered his translation of the Agamemnon, he apologized for the obscurity of the text (Tragédies d'Eschyle, p. 206):

En général, le style de cette tragédie est obscur. Il est plus concis, plus métaphorique & plus hardi que celui des autres tragédies du même poète. On devine cette pièce plus qu'on ne l'entend. L'ancien scholiaste n'a pu la suivre; il l'abandonne presque par-tout.

although professing to offer some enlightenment.

Given the difficulties of the Greek text, one might expect the Agamemnon of Seneca, as the more easily accessible version, to be given preference and used to the exclusion of the earlier tragedy. However, in eighteenth-century comparisons of the two works Seneca invariably comes off worse. In the preface to his Agamemnon Pompignan shows a definite bias against the Latin drama (p. 207-8):

Senèque ou l'auteur des tragédies qui lui sont attribuées, a fait un Agamemnon. C'est une déclamation

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contd. from p. 108/ Voltaire, and Le Franc de Pompignan's Prométhée, in Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 160 (1976), 137-226 (especially p. 160 ff.).

(1) He subsequently reworked this to produce an edition of Aeschylus in 1795.

dramatique, ornée quelquefois d'assez beaux vers sententieux, mais languissante, froide, dépourvue d'action & d'intérêt.

In particular he held the storm narrative to be an extravagant waste of space (p. 208). Brumoy's view of Seneca's tragedy had been substantially the same, and he decried the Senecan practice of foreshadowing events in the prologue (II, 201):

Il (the ghost) ne fait autre chose qu'annoncer très-distinctement ce qui doit arriver, je veux dire, le meurtre d'Agamemnon; & par-là, il ôte tout le plaisir de la surprise; en quoi l'on voit combien l'art du Poète Latin est inférieur à celui d'Eschyle.

The writer in the Bibliothèque universelle des dames (p. 343) observes succinctly that

Eschyle a traité ce sujet en homme de génie. La Pièce de Sénèque ne peut souffrir de comparaison.

The Histoire universelle (VIII, 116-7) classes the Agamemnon as inferior to the best of Seneca's plays, but does offer some praise for the original episodes (p. 117):

L'incertitude de Clytemnestre, ses remords, son retour sur elle-même produisent un effet théâtral dans le Poète Latin, & le récit de Cassandre renferme de véritables beautés, ainsi que la narration de la tempête qui a séparé la flotte des Grecs, mais ces détails sont remplis d'ornemens superflus & qui nuisent à l'action.

The fact that much in these episodes detracts from the dramatic action could not escape the notice of French critics.

Coupé was in a small minority in offering unreserved praise of the Latin drama. He enthuses about the characterization of Clytemnestra (Théâtre de Sénèque, II, 297), and also admires the description of the storm (p 298):

La sublime et brûlante description de cette tempête qui égale ou surpasse toutes celles que nous lisons dans Homère et dans Virgile, n'est placée là que pour délivrer Agamemnon des pièges cruels qui l'attendent, ou pour rendre Clytemnestre la plus impitoyable des femmes.

French Adaptations of the 'Agamemnon'

The theme of revenge, coupled with marital infidelity and a wife's murder of her husband might have dismayed many dramatists, but seems to have appealed to those of the sixteenth century, and the Roman drama (rather than that of Aeschylus) inspired a wide selection of imitations during this period. The Agamemnon of Charles Toutain (1557) amounts to a free translation of Seneca, as does the Agamemnon of François Le Duchat (1561), and that of Roland Brisset (1590).<sup>(1)</sup> Pierre Matthieu's Clytemnestre (1589) is also based on the Latin play, but is much freer.

The subject was not able to maintain the same popularity in the seventeenth century, for the bienséances of the neo-classical theatre dictated that a wife should not plot to kill her husband and communicate freely with her paramour on stage. In general dramatists backed away from 'ce genre sombre & terrible',<sup>(2)</sup> and of the two tragedies we have from this century, one was written before the enforcement of the rules, and the other diluted totally the terror of the ancient theme. The first of these, the Agamemnon of Arnaud,<sup>(3)</sup> is not closely based on Seneca, although the writer was obviously acquainted with the Latin tragedy. He felt no compunction in stressing the ferocity of the subject, and the death throes of Agamemnon, as well as the grim cries of Clitemnestre, are heard as he is murdered off stage (V,5). In contrast, abbé Claude Boyer (who seems to have used 'Pader d'Assézan' as a pseudonym) was very concerned not to offend the sensibilities of polite society in his later Agamemnon (1680). Yielding to the customs of his

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(1) He also translated the Thyestes. See the preceding chapter, p. 70.

(2) Description of the Aeschylean theatre found in the Fragment d'un discours sur le théâtre grec (p.4), preceding Petitot's Hécube (1793).

(3) Avignon (Jacques Bramereau) 1642. The text is preserved in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 4<sup>o</sup> B. L. 3600.

day he introduces a complicated chain of love and jealousy involving Oreste, Agamemnon, Cassandre, Clytemnestre, and Egiste. The character of Clytemnestre is rehabilitated and her only crime is extreme jealousy of Cassandre, since responsibility for Agamemnon's death is laid at Egiste's door. Some of the scenes may have been suggested by Seneca, although there is little evidence of direct verbal imitation of the Latin version.

The most celebrated portrayal of the misfortunes of the Atrides in the seventeenth century was undoubtedly the Iphigénie of Racine (1674). The sacrifice of Iphigenia at Aulis was an important motive for Clytemnestra's later revenge on her husband, and as such is very relevant to the subject of Seneca's play. In the Agamemnon Clytemnestra emphasizes the criminal nature of the sacrifice by personifying the harbour at Aulis and imagining it as unable to endure the taint of the guilty fleet:

non est soluta prospero classis deo:  
eiecit Aulis impias portu rates. (172-3)

Racine must have been struck by the force of this image, for he has Clytemnestre exclaim the same thing as she believes her daughter is being murdered:

Quoi! lorsque les chassant du port qui les recèle,  
L'Aulide aura vomé leur flotte criminelle, (V,4)  
Les vents, les mêmes vents, si longtemps accusés,  
Ne te (i.e. the sea) couvriront pas de ses vaisseaux brisés ? (1)

The theme of Iphigenia was also exploited by Rotrou (1640) and Leclerc and Coras (1675), but in neither of these plays are any echoes of the Agamemnon apparent.

The eighteenth century was not in general as discouraged by the violence inherent in the events of the Oresteia as the seventeenth century had been, although Aeschylus was still regarded as a purveyor

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(1) Pléiade edition (ed. Raymond Picard (Tours 1951)).

of extreme terror. Orestes' revenge on Aegisthus and Clytemnestra was tackled by a number of dramatists, even if their boldness did not usually extend to having him wilfully murder his mother.<sup>(1)</sup> However, for a long time the Agamemnon theme was completely left to one side. This may indicate either a dissatisfaction with the subject, or with the available sources of inspiration. It was not until the last years of the century that the subject was attempted, and in 1797 Lemercier<sup>(2)</sup> produced his Agamemnon. We do possess a Clitemnestre by Lauraguais (1761), but this deals with events after the death of Agamemnon. Brenner<sup>(3)</sup> notes another Clytemnestre (175?) by Thomas de Vignerot (no. 11299), which does not survive.

Lemercier was a younger contemporary of La Harpe and Ducis, whose Oedipe à Colone he especially admired, and with other dramatists of the period, such as Marie-Joseph Chénier and Legouvé, he shared a genuine enthusiasm for the Greek theatre. In his Réflexions générales sur la tragédie et sur le public, which appeared for the first time in 1804, as a preface to the third edition of Agamemnon, Lemercier stated that the ancient theatre was one of the strongest foundations of modern tragedy,<sup>(4)</sup> and this view is given wider expression in the collection of lectures he delivered on tragedy at the Athénée in the early years of the nineteenth century, and which are printed in the first volume of his Cours analytique de littérature générale.

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(1) See the accidental death of Clytemnestre in the plays of Longepierre, Crébillon, and Voltaire. Lauraguais has Oreste murder his mother intentionally in his Clitemnestre, but this tragedy was never performed.

(2) Louis-Jean-Népomucène Lemercier (1771-1840). He was a prolific dramatist, spreading his talents over the whole range of dramatic genres. For a full biography see G. Vauthier's Essai sur la vie et les oeuvres de Népomucène Lemercier (Toulouse 1886), and Maurice Souriau's Népomucène Lemercier et ses correspondants (Paris 1908).

(3) A Bibliographical List of Plays in the French Language 1700-1789 (Berkeley 1947).

(4) Page (v) in the fourth edition of Agamemnon of 1818.

In this work the bulk of his examples are drawn from the Greek theatre, and it is obvious that his admiration for ancient drama does not extend to an approbation of Seneca's techniques. Indeed he discerns in the Roman dramas merely a feeble application of the rules of Greek tragedy (Première partie, quatrième seance, p. 169):

On ne trouve la loi de l'interruption des actes que dans l'épître d'Horace aux Pisons: elle date du théâtre latin, dont nous ne décomposerons pas les tragédies, puisqu'elles suivent les mêmes règles que les tragédies grecques, et que ces règles y sont faiblement appliquées.

as well as an unbecoming exaggeration and rhetorical adornment

(Douzième séance, p. 500):

Sera-ce donc chez les Latins que nous prendrons l'exemple achevé qu'il nous faut ? Mais les muses romaines ne nous présentent que Sénèque dont le cothurne est démesuré, tout scintillant de pointes, et brodé de faux clinquant.

Lemercier does examine in some detail the Agamemnon of Aeschylus, while Seneca's version is not mentioned, and this enables us to gain a certain insight into the conception of his own play, although the fact that this piece of writing postdates the composition of Agamemnon by several years, and does not necessarily offer an accurate reflection of the author's views in 1797, must be taken into account. Lemercier was particularly struck by the nudité or simplicity of the Aeschylean drama, for he had been conditioned by Sophocles and Euripides, and much more so by French tragedy, into believing that certain adornments were a necessary accompaniment of tragedy (Quatrième séance, p. 154-5). He is at pains not to call Aeschylus primitive, but he felt that his work marked a 'beginning' in art, which was subsequently perfected by later tragedians. Of Aeschylean characterization he writes (p. 160):

Leur dialogue, suspendu par des chœurs, ou s'entrecoupant avec leur coryphée, dirige une action que rien ne gradue en sa marche; ils s'y montrent sous de fières et immobiles attitudes, tels que des statues parlantes:

Yet this lack of sophistication is compensated by 'l'éminence des idées', 'la sublime concision des maximes', and 'le choix des caractères

prédominants' (p. 161).

Lemercier also discusses the Agamemnone of Vittorio Alfieri, a contemporary Italian dramatist, and thus reveals a source for his own play which might otherwise have been overlooked, for he judges that in spite of certain faults the drama is well worthy of imitation (p. 155).

Agamemnon was first performed on April 24th 1797, and although written early in Lemercier's career, proved to be the most successful of all his tragedies. The play met with great applause when performed at the Théâtre de la République, and was revived in 1798 with Talma at the Théâtre Feydeau and again in later years. The journals of the time greeted it with considerable enthusiasm. In the Décade philosophique (An V (1797), vol. III, p. 236), for example, it was stated that the new drama was superior to both Aeschylus and Seneca:

Son ouvrage annonce à-la-fois l'essor du talent et la maturité d'une étude réfléchie de son art. Voilà l'analyse de sa pièce, fort au dessus de celle d'Eschyle, bien supérieure à celle de Sénèque et plus colorée que celle de Thompson, quoiqu'il se soit habilement approprié ce qu'il a trouvé dans ces trois sources de convenable à son sujet.

A few months after its first appearance Lemercier was granted the signal honour of a National Triumph, and his play was solemnly crowned at the Champ-de-Mars.

Marie-Joseph Chénier wrote in his Tableau historique de l'état et des progrès de la littérature française, depuis 1789 (1816) that in Agamemnon (p. 303)

Eschyle et Sénèque sont imités, mais avec indépendance.

Had he added Alfieri to Aeschylus and Seneca, this would have proved an exactly apt description of the sources of Agamemnon and the way in which they are manipulated. That Seneca should have been used by Lemercier may seem surprising in view of the antipathy expressed in his Cours analytique. It is probable that at the time of composing his play he had not yet formulated dogmatic beliefs about the faults of



the Roman theatre, and was prepared to tailor the best elements of Seneca's drama to his own advantage. Aeschylus is used perhaps less than one might have expected in a staunch admirer of the Greek theatre, although, of course, the extensive choral passages of the Greek tragedy and its simple plot offered insufficient material to satisfy a French audience.

On the whole Lemercier abandons the plot structure of both Aeschylus and Seneca in favour of an original arrangement of events and co-ordination of characters. While Aeschylus' play opens with the watchman on the roof of the royal palace, and that of Seneca with the ghost of Thyestes, Lemercier plunges directly into the core of his tragedy. In the first scene we are confronted with Egiste and his confidant Pallène, and we are made aware of the former's guilty desire to bring about Agamemnon's death and to destroy his offspring. It may be more than a coincidence that Egisto also appears in Alfieri's opening scene. At this stage it is not known whether Agamemnon is alive or dead, and it is rumoured that he has perished in a shipwreck. It is not until the beginning of the second act that we hear of his safe return. Rather than introducing a sub-plot, or any secondary characters, Lemercier prefers to expand the roles of the characters directly interested in the fate of the king, such as Egiste, his enemy, and Strophus (based on Seneca's Strophius), his loyal friend. The fact that Egiste has concealed his real identity under the pseudonym of Plexippe provides an added complication, and this leads to a scene of recognition (III,4). The inevitable end of Agamemnon appears to be averted by the banishment of Egiste (III,4), although Cassandre sees clearly an imminent disaster (IV,3). This is brought about finally by Egiste's secret return (V,5) and his persuasive arguments to Clitemnestre, who murders her husband in his bed.

Lemercier is interested in examining the psychological motivation of Egiste and Clitemnestre, and these two powerfully drawn characters,

together with the arresting figure of Cassandre, dominate the play. His decision to bring Egiste into greater prominence may in part have been a reaction against the Egisto of Alfieri, whom he had described as a low coward (Cours analytique, p. 155), and he is seen several times in company with Clitemnestre (see especially II,3; IV,1; V,5; and V,7). These scenes form the pivot of the action. Egiste is an interesting and devious character, who has managed to convince Clitemnestre that he loves her, although he is merely using her as a stepping-stone to the throne. The fact that he is the 'fils de Thieste' (I,1) has moulded his destiny, and the events of the past contain enormous implications for him. He is haunted by his father, and in the very first scene he describes how Thieste appeared to him in the middle of the night:

Il vint, il m'apparut les cheveux hérissés,  
Pâle, offrant de son sein la cicatrice horrible;  
Dans l'une de ses mains brille un acier terrible: (I,1)  
L'autre tient une coupe....ô spectacle odieux!  
Souillée encor d'un sang tout fumant à mes yeux: (1)

This is, of course, a Senecan theme, but is, in all probability, imitated from Alfieri, who had already shown Egisto in a similar situation in the first scene of his Agamemnone. The allusions to the terrible cup of blood immediately evoke Atrée et Thyeste, and show that Lemer cier is to some extent providing a sequel to the horrific revenge of Atrée in his own dramatization of the murder of Agamemnon. By this time the cup of blood had clearly become the stock means of evoking this revenge, and had superseded Seneca's version of the story.

Lemer cier is keen to place the action of the story within a mythological perspective, and Agamemnon is coloured with allusions to the legendary feud of Atreus and Thyestes. Agamemnon himself is shown to be sensitive to the aura of evil surrounding the royal palace

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(1) Text from the second edition of the play (Paris (Fayolle) an ve (1797)), preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale (Yf 11344). The first edition had contained several errors which the author here corrects.

of Argos, and enumerates the series of crimes it has seen:

Là, sous les premiers coups de son glaive fumant  
Mourut Aerope, aux yeux de son coupable amant.  
Là, Thieste flatté par ses sermens perfides, (III,4)  
En crut un faux pardon scellé des Euménides.  
C'est là que de ses fils Atrée ouvrit le flanc,  
Et du festin, c'est là qu'on fit l'apprêt sanglant.

However, Lemer cier was not striving to steep his drama in horror, for he saw the gratuitous representation of physical suffering as a means of merely arousing disgust in the spectator. In his Cours analytique (Sixième séance, p. 264) he writes:

Le vice de plusieurs tragédies anglaises et allemandes est, au contraire, de trop souvent fonder la commisération sur l'aspect des seules tortures corporelles, dont le spectacle n'est que hideux et dégoûtant, et dont l'expression dégénère en grimaces odieuses.

He felt that horror could not naturally be allied with pity, and opted instead for a combination of terror and pity, the emotions he saw as most suited to the tragic genre.<sup>(1)</sup>

Tragic terror can be manifested in a number of different forms, and Lemer cier defines one type as

celle qui accompagne une action dénaturée, rendue possible et vraisemblable par la fatalité, ou par les passions;

(Cours analytique, p. 277). This seems to apply particularly well to Clitemnestre's case in the Agamemnon, for her passionate love for Egiste makes her receptive to his insidious arguments, and is a deciding factor in bringing about the murder of her husband. However, in order that the audience should be interested rather than repulsed by her character, Lemer cier paints her as weak and irresolute, not as the strong, self-assured figure of Aeschylus' drama. In this respect the early scenes of Seneca's play, where the emotional dilemma of Clytemnestra is examined, were of more use to the French dramatist than the Greek

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(1) See the Première partie, sixième séance for a full discussion of his views on this subject.

Agamemnon could be. Certainly act II scene 3 is modelled noticeably on the first appearance of Clytemnestra in the Latin play (108 ff.). The French Clitemnestre feels fear at her husband's imminent return, and a complete confusion in her heart:

Ah! de crainte glacée,  
Cent projets différens occupent ma pensée;  
Le trouble de ce coeur, qui ne se connoît plus,  
Pousse, arrête, confond mes voeux irrésolus. (II,3)

which seems to echo closely lines 133-4 of the Agamemnon:

mixtus dolori subdidit stimulos timor,  
invidia pulsat pectus;

Her feelings of remorse:

Ah! déjà les remords dont j'étouffois la voix,  
D'un époux outragé me rappellent les droits.... (II,3)

also owe something to the resurgence of pudor in the Latin Clytemnestra:

fessus quidem et devinctus et pessumdatus,  
pudor rebellat. (137-8)

although Clitemnestre's later monologue (III,1), where she is still unresolved, echoes these lines more closely:

Allons trouver le roi....L'oseras-tu, perfide ?  
N'est-il point de pudeur dont la voix t'intimide ?

Her love for Egiste is extremely passionate, and is conceived in terms of a burning flame (III,2). Although the most common of romantic metaphors, this may have been suggested by the 'flames' and 'torches' of desire in Seneca, lines 132 and 136.

Egiste finds skilful arguments to undermine Clitemnestre's faith in Agamemnon. He persuades her to believe that Agamemnon loves Cassandre, and will allow her to usurp Clitemnestre's own position:

Attends que ton époux de sa Cassandre épris,  
(Captive, que son choix destine au rang suprême,  
Et dont il est l'amant, et l'esclave lui-même)  
Attends, et souviens-toi que je l'aurai prédit,  
Qu'il lui donne à ta honte et son trône et ton lit; (IV,1)

This closely resembles Aegisthus' argument in Seneca:

sola sed turba eminent  
tenetque regem famula veridici dei: (254-7)  
feresne thalami victa consortem tui ?  
at illa nolet.

but seems to have been imitated directly from Alfieri (IV,1):

È ver, non merta  
D'esser tradito Atride: ei, che tant'ama  
La sua consorte: ei, che da Troja avvinta  
In sembianza di schiava, infra suoi lacci  
Cassandra trae, mentr'ei n'è amante, e schiavo  
Ei stesso, sì ... (1)

(Il est vrai; Atride ne mérite point d'être trahi; lui qui aime tant son épouse, lui qui, sous le nom d'esclave troyenne, amène ici Cassandre, dont il est l'amant et l'esclave lui-même, oui ...). (2) He attempts to arouse pity in Clitemnestre by mentioning the possibility of ending his own life (IV,1). The question of death is also broached in Seneca, lines 304-5, although once again Lemerrier was inspired in the first instance by Alfieri (IV,1). Egiste also forces Clitemnestre to think of her son Oreste. He assures her that Agamemnon, once married to Cassandre, will disinherit him (IV,1), in the same way that Seneca's Aegisthus warns Clytemnestra not to allow Cassandra to become a mad stepmother to her children (195 ff.).

In addition to this, Clitemnestre has reasons of her own for feeling bitter towards her husband, since he had sanctioned the death of their daughter Iphigénie. As in Aeschylus (1414-20) and Seneca (162-73) this has been the cause of a deep-rooted resentment against her husband:

Avant qu'il abjurât le nom sacré de père,  
Dieux! vous savez combien son amour m'étoit chère,  
Que fidelle à l'hymen, soumise à son pouvoir,  
Je n'eusse osé franchir les bornes du devoir; (I,3)  
Mais, à son sceptre affreux voir sa fille immolée,  
Moi, pâle à ses genoux, en pleurs, échevelée,  
Et frapper d'un seul coup toutes deux à la fois,  
Ce fut rompre nos noeuds, et perdre tous ses droits.

Yet Agamemnon himself is seen as no less distressed by the loss of his

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(1) Text from Saul. Agamemnone. Oreste. Bruto Secondo. Filippo. Tragedie con introduzione di Arturo Farinelli (Torino 1920).

(2) Translation of Petitot, Oeuvres dramatiques du comte Alfieri, traduites de l'italien (Paris 1802), tome II.

daughter (IV,2).

The dramatist strives to achieve in Clitemnestre an acceptable balance of good and evil. He does not exonerate her from responsibility for the murder of her husband, as Boyer had done in the earlier French version, but rather shows in a more convincing and realistic manner how passion and the persuasion of the man whom she loves can precipitate disastrous actions. Her conscious mind rejects the thought of murder:

Non, dùt-il me punir, ne crois pas qu'en son sein  
Clitemnestre jamais plonge un fer assassin. (V,5)

but as Egiste insists that her adultery has been discovered, and that she must strike the fatal blow, she is drawn insensibly towards the deed:

Où suis-je ? ....un dieu fatal veut m'entraîner au crime....  
Égiste....épargne-moi....mes sens, pleins de terreur,  
N'ont jamais éprouvé cette invincible horreur.... (V,5)

Lemercier echoes the terror aroused in the Greek tragedy by allowing the cries of Agamemnon to be heard as he is being murdered off stage:

(Agamemnon douloreusement, derrière la scène)

Arrête!

ÉGISTE (trionphant).

Il meurt, et je suis roi!...

Elle revient.

Aeschylus' Agamemnon cries out:

ὦ μοι πέπληγμαι καιρίαν πληγὴν ἔδω. (1343)

ὦ μοι μάλ' αὖθις δευτέραν πεπληγμένος (1345)

(Oh, I have been struck a mortal blow within! Oh, again! I have been struck a second blow). The murder of Agamemnon in his bed replaces the bath of Aeschylus and the feast of Seneca, where the king is killed with an axe rather than a sword or a dagger. This direct action proves more effective than Cassandra's description of the deed in Seneca (867 ff), and the cries of Lemercier's Agamemnon, coupled with the darkness which envelops the stage, must have created an intensely dramatic effect, although there were no protests that the

proprieties had been violated.

In the type of interpretation which Lemerrier offers, and to some degree in classicizing tragedy of the late eighteenth century in general, we are witnessing a form of drama which echoes more closely than ever before the external characteristics of ancient tragedy. A genuine feeling of tragic terror is aroused, and there is no longer an obsessive desire to complicate the plot with romantic intrigues. Yet the French theatre had already evolved to such a point that it would never be possible to return to the essential spirit of antiquity. Lemerrier endows his Clitemnestre with a sensitivity which could be better understood by his audience than the unfeminine barbarity and triumphant satisfaction of the Aeschylean and Senecan characters after the murder has been committed. The French Clitemnestre finds an immediate psychological punishment in her realization that Egiste has merely used her to further his own ends:

Je te connois enfin, et je m'abhorre. (V,7)

This is imitated from the striking 'oh cielo!... Or ti conosco, Egisto..' of Alfieri (V,6). The final scenes, although based on Seneca, show us a Clitemnestre of a very different mould from the Latin character. She seeks to be punished by Heaven, and when she asks for Oreste to be handed over to her:

Que crains-tu pour ses jours protégés par sa mère?... (V,11)  
Rends-moi, rends-moi mon fils.

she seeks to comfort him, not to harm him, as does the cold-hearted Roman Clytemnestra when she demands:

Redde nunc natum mihi. (967)

Agamemnon is not given a particularly prominent role, although his return from Troy marks a significant point in the action. Unlike in Aeschylus and Seneca, Clitemnestre has not resolved on her crime before his arrival, and his triumphant appearance serves to heighten her mental anguish. His words of greeting are based very closely on

Seneca and Aeschylus:

Salut, ô murs d'Argos! ô palais! ô patrie!  
O terre, où de Pélops la race fut nourrie! (II,6)

Tandem revertor sospes ad patrios lares;  
o cara salve terra. (782-3)

Πρώτον μὲν Ἄργος καὶ θεοὺς ἑγχωρίου  
δίκη προσεῖπεν, τοὺς ἐμοὶ μεταίτιους  
νόστου ... (810-12)

(First it is right to salute Argos and the native gods, who contributed to my safe return). His order for a sacrifice to be held also imitates Seneca, lines 802-7. Yet his character is, on the whole, conceived differently from <sup>that</sup> in both ancient dramas. He conforms to an ideal of sensibilité, and confides to Clitemnestre that he has no amorous designs on Cassandre:

Lorsqu'Ilion tomba sous les coups du destin,  
Cassandre me suivit; dès lors je lui jurai  
D'adoucir son malheur en ma cour honoré, (IV,2)  
De sauver sa pudeur d'un criminel outrage;  
Ainsi, la protégeant dans son triste esclavage,  
Mon joug qu'elle craignoit devint son seul appui.

This is a more sentimental analysis of the relationship between captor and captive than Aeschylus and Seneca offer, but it does have a dramatic function, in that it delays the tragic dénouement by creating a further dilemma for Clitemnestre.

The Trojan prophetess Cassandra held a special fascination for Lemer cier. In his Cours analytique (p. 155) he criticized Alfieri for excluding

la Pythonisse, qui, ne paraissant pas, ôte à la pièce le beau contraste de la douleur des vaincus avec la joie des vainqueurs;

and including instead Electra, whose appearance derives from Seneca's Agamemnon. In the event the French writer decided that his Cassandre would fill the roles of both the prophetess and Electra. He casts a sympathetic glance on the unfortunate princess, and Arcas is made to describe her distress in terms particularly attractive to a public



endowed with sensitivity of emotion;

La tristesse pensive est empreinte en ses traits;  
Ses sanglots étouffant ses timides regrets,  
Son silence au milieu des cris, du bruit des armes, (II,2)  
Son rang, son sort, les pleurs où sont noyés ses charmes,  
Ses yeux, pleins d'épouvante, ou chargés de langueurs,  
Des plus farouches Grecs ont attendri les coeurs;

Lemercier was convinced that Cassandra was one of Aeschylus' finest creations, and he was eager to preserve the violently emotional appeal which her prophecies of disaster contain. She is first brought on stage with Agamemnon, on his return from Troy (II,6), and she immediately senses an atmosphere of crime, as well as her own death:

Je touche enfin la terre où m'attendoit la mort. (II,6)

This echoes her premonition of death in Aeschylus, lines 1136-9. Her warnings contain an inherent irony, in that, while the audience is aware of their truth, she is doomed to be regarded as a false prophetess by those around her.

Prior to the final catastrophe Cassandre dominates the stage with her prophecies. While she had been heard by the chorus alone in the Greek play (1072 ff.), Lemercier decided to give her pronouncements a greater dramatic impact by having Clitemnestre and Strophus, as well as Agamemnon, witness her frenzy. This shows a greater similarity to Seneca's version, where Agamemnon speaks with Cassandra.<sup>(1)</sup> Cassandre first calls upon Apollo to spare her (see Aeschylus 1072 ff.), but she has no power to resist these visions of the future. Her mind is filled with images of Atreus' barbaric crime:

N'apercevez-vous pas ces fantômes livides,  
Dans ce palais assis, monstres de sang avides,  
L'oeil arrêté sur nous, ils portent dans leurs mains (IV,3)  
De palpitantes chairs et des lambeaux humains ....  
Effroyable repas dont se nourrit un père.

This horrific description is inspired by Aeschylus:

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(1) Clytemnestra and the chorus may also be imagined to be present, but this is not clear since they do not speak.

παῖδες θανόντες ὡς περὶ πρὸς τῶν φίλων,  
χεῖρας κρεῶν πλήθοντες, οἰκείας βορᾶς,  
σὺν ἐντέροις τε σπλάγχχν', ἐποικτίστον γέμος,  
πρέπουσ' ἔχοντες, ὧν πατὴρ ἐγεύσατο. (1219-22)

(Children, as if murdered by their parents, their hands full of flesh, kindred food, showing their inwards and their entrails, a pitiable mass, of which their father tasted).<sup>(1)</sup> Cassandre's description of the physical effects of Apollo's possession of her:

Oui, je sens sur mon front mes cheveux se dresser....  
Mon corps transit et brûle, et mon âme obsédée (IV,3)  
Ne contient plus le dieu dont elle est possédée....

are those observed by the members of the chorus in Seneca, lines 712-13:

stetere vittae, mollis horrescit coma,  
anhela corda murmure incluso fremunt, ...

Cassandre's actual warning to Agamemnon is couched in extremely clear terms. He asks 'Qui doit-on frapper?' and she replies 'Toi'. This is a long way from the veiled statement in Seneca's play that Agamemnon has much to fear (line 798):

AGAM. Nullum est periculum tibi met. CASS. At magnum tibi.

and it serves to give sense to the series of enigmatic questions and answers which are paraphrased from Seneca:

AGAMEMNON  
Moi! quand de mon retour le triomphe s'apprête ?  
CASSANDRE  
Ilion a péri dans la nuit d'une fête.  
AGAMEMNON  
Quand mes vœux, mon encens reçu des immortels ..... (IV,3)  
CASSANDRE  
On égorgea Priam embrassant leurs autels.  
CLITENNESTRE (courroucée).  
De Troie et de Priam chasse l'image vaine.  
CASSANDRE  
Je puis voir une Troie où je vois une Hélène.

AGAM. ...  
festus dies est. CASS. Festus et Troiae fuit.  
AGAM. Veneremur aras. CASS. Cecidit ante aras pater. (791-5)  
AGAM. Iovem precemur pariter. CASS. Herceum Iovem ?  
AGAM. Credis videre te Ilium ? CASS. Et Priamum simul.

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(1) It is noticeable that here the ancient version of Atreus' revenge on Thyestes has been preferred to the events of Atrée et Thyeste.

AGAM. Hic Troia non est. CASS. Ubi Helena est Troiam puto.  
Cassandre foresees the dagger in the hand of Clitemnestre, just as in Seneca's Agamemnon (734-6) she sees Clytemnestra wielding an axe.

The presence of Clitemnestre on stage allows her to refute these warnings, and Cassandre is not believed. In frustration that her prophecies have no power to convince, the Trojan girl tears off the sacred fillets - the marks of her calling - which are a mockery to her:

Que me sert de porter ces voiles, ces symboles  
Attributs d'un pouvoir qu'il ôte à mes paroles ? (IV,3)  
Dieu terrible! il est temps enfin de dépouiller  
Ces ornemens sacrés que ma mort va souiller.

Her actions are the same in Aeschylus:

τί δῆτ' ἑμαυτῆς καταγέλωτ' ἔχω τάδε,  
καὶ βκῆπτρα καὶ μαντεῖα περὶ δέριος στέφη; (1264-5)

(Why do I keep these, making a mockery of myself, these wands and this prophetic wreath about my neck), and in Seneca, where the chorus asks her:

Sed cur sacratas deripis capiti infulas ? (693)

In Aeschylus' work Clytemnestra's hatred extends to Cassandra as well as to Agamemnon, and her murder follows closely upon that of the king (1438-46). In the Latin drama she is still alive at the end of the action, but faces imminent death. Lemer cier, too, wanted her to appear in his final scenes, for here she fulfils the role of Seneca's Electra, and a slow-acting poison administered at the behest of Egiste ensures that she is capable of speaking until the last moments of the play, whereupon her death provides a pathetic conclusion. The elimination of the role of Electra meant that the French dramatist could avoid introducing a new character in the final act. It is therefore Cassandre rather than Electra who appeals to Strophus to save Oreste (although it is perhaps not very plausible that she should want to protect the offspring of her enemies):

Strophus, il en est temps, sauvez, sauvez Oreste. (V,10)

This derives from the Roman Electra's

recipe hunc Oresten ac pium furtum occule. (931)

Strophus, himself, the father of Pylade and king of Corinth, has been present throughout the drama as the 'gouverneur d'Oreste', seeking to free Argos from the baleful influence of Egiste. As such he is fully integrated into the action,<sup>(1)</sup> unlike Seneca's Strophius, who chances to arrive in Argos when on the way home from winning a prize in the Olympic games (917 ff.).

When Clitemnestre asks for her son, Cassandre, like Electra, asks her to restore his father:

CLITEMNESTRE  
Rends-moi, rends-moi mon fils. (V,11)  
CASSANDRE (hors d'elle-même).  
Et toi, rends-lui son père.

CLYT. Redde nunc natum mihi. (967-8)  
EL. Et tu parentem redde.

Since Cassandre refuses to surrender the child, Egiste threatens her with death:

Apprends-nous sa retraite, ou t'arrachant le jour, (V,11)  
Crains....

just as Clytemnestra says to Electra 'morieris hodie' (line 971). In this instance Lemerrier has followed his source a little too scrupulously, for he has forgotten that Cassandre is already on the brink of death through the effects of poison. The last words of Seneca's play allude to the revenge of Orestes on Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, and Lemerrier expands this idea. Cassandre foretells with her dying breath that

Cet Oreste vengeur, que j'ai sauvé moi-même, (V,11)  
Reviendra t'arracher ton sanglant diadème.  
.....  
Un jour....il punira l'assassin de son père.  
Un jour....lui-même, enfin....poignardera sa mère.

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(1) Lemerrier's practice is comparable with Corneille's method of involving Aegée in the action of his Médée. In the Medea of Euripides Aegeus, too, is only a chance passer-by.

These words are very similar to Elettra's final speech in Alfieri:

- Deh! vivi,  
Oreste, vivi: alla tua destra adulta  
Quest'empio ferro io serbo. In Argo un giorno, (Agamemnone,  
Spero, verrai vendicator del padre. V,7)

(Ah: vis Oreste, vis. Je réserve ce fer barbare à ton jeune courage.  
Un jour, je l'espère, un jour tu reviendras dans Argos venger le trépas  
de ton père).

Orestes has a non-speaking part in Seneca's Agamemnon, while in that of Aeschylus he does not appear at all (he has been sent by Clytemnestra to Strophius (see lines 877 ff.)). Lemercier increases his role, so that he is present not merely in the final act, and he is placed in an extremely pathetic situation as he plaintively describes Agamemnon's last words to his mother, totally unaware of the fact that she is his father's murderer:

Il inonde de sang et le marbre, et sa couche.  
Au travers des sanglots qui sortoient de sa bouche, (V,9)  
Il m'a crié: "Ta mère!..." ah! tout près de mourir  
Sans doute il t'appeloit pour l'aller secourir.

It has become increasingly clear that Lemercier's preferred practice is to combine several sources in the creation of his protagonists, and this 'contamination' extends also to his arrangement of peripheral events. Thus when the dramatist describes the diligent watchman perched on the roof of the palace:

Ce Grec, dont l'oeil au loin observe nuit et jour (I,3)  
L'horizon de nos mers que domine la tour,

this recalls the opening scene of Aeschylus' drama, where the watchman tells of his unceasing vigil:

καὶ νῦν φυλάσσω λαμπάδος τό σμυβρον,  
αὐγὴν πυρὸς φέρουσαν ἐκ Τροίας φάτιν (8-10)  
ἀλώσιμόν τε βαΐιν'

(And now I keep watch for the signal of the beacon, the ray of fire bearing the word from Troy, telling of its capture). Yet the storm which this man has seen arise:

Mais l'aquilon rugit, les vagues menaçantes,  
Cachant soudain Atride en leur sein soulevé,  
Font craindre qu'au naufrage il ne soit réservé. (I,3)

contains an echo of the raging winds which Seneca describes:

Strymonius altis Aquilo contorquet nives  
Libycusque harenas Auster ac Syrtes agit; (479-80)

The description of the death of Ajax in the first scene:

Déjà du grand Ajax et du fils de Laërte,  
L'un est errant, ou mort, dans des pays déserts, (I,1)  
L'autre, atteint de la foudre, a péri dans les mers.

was also taken from the storm scene of Seneca, where Ajax, son of Oileus (not the famous Ajax of legend as Lemer cier mistakenly believes), is struck by the thunderbolt of Pallas (528 ff.).<sup>(1)</sup> The set of beacons lit from Troy, on the other hand, is unmistakably evocative of the Greek play. In the second act (II,2) Clitemnestre tells Arcas how

Mille feux allumés, messagers de sa gloire,  
Nous ont de rive en rive annoncé sa victoire;

This is a much condensed version of the lyrical speech in Aeschylus, in which she marvels at the chain of fire set off by the flame on distant Ida (281-316). The appearance of Arcas, who announces Agamemnon's return in this scene, suggests the entrance of the herald in the Greek drama (line 503), although Eurybates has the same function in Seneca (lines 392<sup>a</sup>ff.).

In this chapter discussion of the influence of Aeschylus and Alfieri on Lemer cier has largely been restricted to areas in which there is some connection or contrast with the material of Seneca's Agamemnon, and this has inevitably necessitated the omission of certain details. No work to date has dealt with these sources in any depth, and they could profitably form the subject of a more far-reaching analysis.

Since we possess only one dramatization of the murder of Agamemnon

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(1) The same episode is recounted in Virgil, Aeneid I, 39 ff..

from the eighteenth century, it is not possible to think in terms of trends in connection with this theme. Nevertheless, we can note distinct differences between Lemer cier's treatment of the legend and that of Boyer more than a hundred years previously. The recent appearance of French translations of Aeschylus' Agamemnon placed the eighteenth-century dramatist in a better position to appreciate the Greek tragedian's methods of arousing terror than his predecessor had been, and this, combined with an extensive knowledge of Seneca, made for a more faithful imitation of the ancient theatre. By the end of the eighteenth century audiences had become inured to strong subjects, and Lemer cier was free to show a wife's murder of her husband, and to allow the cries of the victim to be heard, although his action is generally presented in a less melodramatic and sensationalized manner than that of Crébillon in his earlier Atrée et Thyeste.

CHAPTER V

The Theban Cycle (i):

Crime and Error in 'Oedipus'

Just as the race of Tantalus was doomed by the gods to wage unceasing war within its ranks, so the family of Oedipus seemed condemned to perpetuate a pattern of crime and misfortune. The grim fate of the Theban king was immortalized in the Oedipus Tyrannus of Sophocles, justifiably the most renowned of all ancient tragedies. Seneca's Oedipus cannot but help being overshadowed by its Greek predecessor, and must inevitably accept a secondary position alongside the myriad other variations on the Sophoclean theme.

Unique as it may seem to modern readers, Sophocles' tragedy was by no means the only attempt in the Greek world to dramatize the story. Both Aeschylus and Euripides also wrote Oedipus plays, and we know of others by Achaëus, Carcinus, Diogenes (?), Nicomachus, Philocles, Theodectes, Xenocles, and Lycophron. The subject seems to have been less popular in Rome, although Suetonius mentions an Oedipus drama composed by Julius Caesar in his youth (Divus Iulius 56, 7).

In Aristotle's Poetics the Oedipus story is used several times to illustrate different aspects of tragic theory, and the writer clearly felt it to be a theme especially suited to the serious genre. Not only does the very story arouse feelings of fear and pity (1453<sup>b</sup>, 3-7), but Oedipus himself is a perfect example of the tragic hero (1453<sup>a</sup>, 7-12) - a man of high birth, who is not pre-eminently virtuous, yet who falls into misfortune through no wickedness of his own, but rather through some kind of error (ἀλλὰ δι' ἁμαρτίαν τινά). It is evident from



the context that this error is not a moral flaw, but rather a mistake, or an error of judgement, on a particular occasion. Oedipus' error was that he did not recognize the man he killed in self-defence as his own father, nor Jocasta as his own mother. It is therefore inappropriate to equate his suffering with retribution for personal guilt. It is rather the result of an earlier action - Laius' contravention of the gods' warning not to beget children. Sophocles shows us that once Oedipus has been born no human action can avert his destined fate, which is to commit parricide and incest. Each act of free will, such as Laius and Jocasta's original gesture of sending their child to be exposed on Mount Cithaeron, is seen to be entirely futile, and contributes only to the inexorable accomplishment of the gods' will. Much of the pathos which is found in the final scenes of Sophocles' drama derives from the very fact that Oedipus' suffering is out of proportion with his deserts.

As in the Oedipus Tyrannus, the force of destiny is the central issue in Seneca's play. The concept of fate is defined by Seneca in his Naturales Quaestiones (II, 36, 1) as the 'inevitability of all things':

Quid enim intellegis fatum? existimo necessitatem  
rerum omnium actionumque, quam nulla vis rumpat. hanc si  
sacrificiis aut capite niveae agnae exorari iudicas,  
divina non nosti:

This definition is reiterated in the Oedipus, where the chorus sings of the supremacy and intractability of fate:

Fatis agimur: cedit fatis;  
non sollicitae possunt curae  
mutare rati stamina fusi.  
quidquid patimur mortale genus,  
quidquid facimus venit ex alto,  
servatque suae decreta colus  
Lachesis nulla revoluta manu.  
omnia secto tramite vadunt  
primusque dies dedit extremum:  
non illa deo vertisse licet  
quae nexa suis currunt causis.  
it cuique ratus prece non ulla

(980-94)

mobilis ordo: multis ipsum  
metuisse nocet, multi ad fatum  
venere suum dum fata timent.

Each man's life is seen to be ordained from, or even prior to, his birth, and no-one has the power to alter this fact. Seneca's Oedipus has attempted to avert his destiny by leaving Corinth and the people he considers to be his parents, but he seems convinced in his heart that he is tainted by crime:

infanda timeo: nemea genitor manu  
perimatur; hoc me Delphicae laurus monent, (15-17)  
aliudque nobis maius indicunt scelus.

.....  
thalamos parentis Phoebus et diros toros (20-21)  
nato minatur impia incestos face;

.....  
cuncta expavescō meque non credo mihi. (27)

Seneca has introduced the notion of moral guilt, and what was an error for Sophocles' Oedipus has become a scelus or crime for the Roman character.<sup>(1)</sup> He is obsessed with the question of his own criminality, and feels himself to be guilty of tainting the air around him and of bringing the plague upon Thebes (35-6). In the Phoenissae Antigone defends her father, and argues that no blame can be attached to him for his actions:

non es (dignum nece) nec ulla pectus hoc culpa attigit.  
et hoc magis te, genitor, insontem voca, (203-5)  
quod innocens es dis quoque invitis.

But it is a characteristic of Seneca's heroes to accept full moral responsibility for their deeds, even if done in ignorance, and Oedipus will only refer to his actions in terms of scelus.

Seneca's Oedipus seems to diverge in many instances from that of Sophocles,<sup>(2)</sup> but since we cannot know what other Oedipus plays the

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(1) This question is dealt with in detail in Roger Pack's 'On Guilt and Error in Senecan Tragedy' (in Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association 71 (1940), 360-71).

(2) For instance, the Oedipus Tyrannus opens with Oedipus listening to the plight of the citizens of Thebes and expressing his concern for /  
contd. overleaf

Latin dramatist may have known, it is difficult to assess the extent of his originality. His interest in religious ritual is clearly shown in the episodes of the sacrifice (297-383) and the evocation of Laius' ghost (530-658). Both of these amount to digressions from the development of the action, and have no source in the Greek tragedy. The sacrifice begins on a symbolic note with the flame separating into two parts to represent the alienation of Oedipus' two sons, Eteocles and Polynices (321-3). The two sacrificial victims, a bull and a heifer, are obviously intended to symbolize Oedipus and Jocasta, for their fates are foreshadowed as the heifer throws itself onto the knife (341-2) and the bull bleeds copiously through its mouth and eyes (349-50). This is followed by a technical and somewhat ghoulish enumeration of the state of all the internal organs, and culminates with the discovery of a foetus in the heifer which has never been mated. This is a clear indication of unnatural crime. Seneca aims to heighten this sinister, foreboding atmosphere with the episode of necromancy. The setting for

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contd. from p. 133 / their suffering (1-77), while Seneca has Oedipus describe the horrors of the pestilence and his own sense of guilt and responsibility in a long prologue (1-109). The next divergence occurs when Sophocles' Tiresias reluctantly names the Theban king as the murderer of Laius and the perpetrator of unspeakable crime (297-462), for Seneca's soothsayer is unable to ascertain these facts without the aid of a sacrifice. When this sacrifice proves inconclusive, Tiresias decides to summon the ghost of Laius from the underworld (288-402). Creon reports the results of this necromancy, and tells us that Laius has named Oedipus as his murderer, as well as accusing him of parricide and incest (509-658). Later in Sophocles' version, when Jocasta hears that the messenger from Corinth received Oedipus from a Theban shepherd on Mount Cithaeron, she rushes from the stage in despair (1072). In Seneca's Oedipus it is not clear whether she is supposed to hear the revelations of the messenger or not, for her exit from the stage is not marked, but she certainly does not leave the stage between the news from Corinth and the arrival of Phorbas (838). In the last scenes of the Oedipus Tyrannus a messenger reports that Jocasta has hanged herself and that Oedipus has blinded himself with a brooch belonging to his wife. The blood-stained king appears on stage at the end of the play, bidding farewell to his children (1297-1523). In Seneca the conclusion is somewhat different. A messenger reports that Oedipus has put out his eyes (915-79), and he and Jocasta appear before us, whereupon Jocasta stabs herself with Oedipus' sword. The drama ends with the stricken king preparing to depart from Thebes (995-1061).

the scene is eerie and dark (see lines 530-47), and we are reminded of a black-magic ceremony as Tiresias' offerings call forth the hounds of Hecate (569), the Furies, Madness, Horror, Grief, Disease, Old-Age, Fear, and Pestilence (590-4) before the spirits of the dead are released from Hell. When Laius emerges he is a terrible figure, still covered with the blood from the wounds he suffered (623-6), and he utters a fearful curse, threatening to destroy the royal house of Thebes for the unnatural crimes which have been committed within it (642-6).

Oedipus' later resolution to put out his eyes provided a further opportunity for Seneca to indulge in his liking for horror. The messenger's report of Oedipus' frenzied attack upon himself is filled with such explicit detail that he succeeds in sickening the reader:

scrutatur avidus manibus uncis lumina,  
radice ab ima funditus vulsos simul  
evolvit orbes; haeret in vacuo manus (965-9)  
et fixa penitus unguibus lacerat cavos  
alte recessus luminum et inanes sinus, ...

In this respect Sophocles is less extreme, but still admits a degree of terror as we hear of Oedipus plunging Jocasta's brooch into his eyes, and black blood thick as hail spreading over his beard (1268-79).

The Oedipus Tyrannus was, in general, very highly regarded in the eighteenth century, and Voltaire showed a certain daring in emphasizing in his Lettres sur Oedipe how far short it fell of contemporary criteria for tragedy. Seneca's drama met with less enthusiasm, and few writers gave it the benefit of serious discussion. Père Brumoy, who chose the Oedipus of Sophocles as the first play to translate in his Théâtre des Grecs, describes the Greek tragedy as the most masterly of works (I, 87):

L'Oedipe de Sophocle a été regardé dans tous les tems,  
jusqu'à nos jours, comme le chef-d'oeuvre du Tragique  
ancien, ...

De Limes, the author of a translation of Seneca's Oedipus (1783), echoes this view of Sophocles' work (p. 57):

L'Oedipe de Sophocle passa chez les Grecs pour le chef-d'oeuvre de leur Théâtre. C'est l'ouvrage dramatique qui approche le plus de la perfection. Quel pathétique! Quel tragique soutenu! quelle pitié! quelle terreur! quelle horreur même!

In contrast, Seneca's play was felt by many to be a poor successor to this work of genius. Abbé Batteux summed up his comparison of the two plays by writing (Cours de belles-lettres, II, 295):<sup>(1)</sup>

Quand on lit Sophocle, on est affligé; quand on lit Senèque, on a horreur de ses descriptions, on est dégoûté & rebuté de ses longueurs.

Discussions of the Roman Oedipus tend to focus on its lack of action and its excess of horror. To critics it seemed unacceptable for Seneca to be more interested in poetic digressions than in the advancement of the action, and the writer in the Histoire universelle (VII, 129) observes that

Si la richesse du style & l'abondance des images suffisaient pour faire le mérite d'une Pièce Dramatique, celle-ci devrait être mise au rang de nos meilleures Tragédies; mais nous voulons plus de mouvement, plus de rapidité dans l'action, & ces deux qualités ne peuvent se trouver avec la déclamation.

The Bibliothèque universelle des dames (p. 317) echoes this criticism:

La manière de Sénèque est par-tout la même; il ne cherche que les ornemens; il ne parle que d'oracles, de sacrifices symboliques, de manes évoqués, & c. Ses personnages ne font que haranguer; il n'y a presque point d'action.

Rather predictably the details of divination were not to everybody's taste. Père Brumoy, for example, found the symbolism of the first part of the sacrifice successful, but balked at what follows (I, 103):

Le reste où (sic) l'assaisonnement est une peinture hideuse d'entrailles qui palpitent d'une façon extraordinaire. Icy c'est le coeur qui s'affaisse & disparaît. Là c'est un sang noir qui trouve de nouvelles issues. En un mot c'est un détail d'anatomie païenne, dont le seul récit feroit fremir.

De Limes also found this scene somewhat repulsive (see p. 62), and

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(1) Also in the Encyclopédie (XVI, 515).

although generally attracted by Seneca's writing, felt that the Oedipus failed in offering horror instead of pity and fear (p. 63):

On trouve dans cette Pièce des traits sublimes, mais il y manque les deux grands ressorts de la Tragédie, la terreur & la pitié. On a souvent de l'horreur qui naît des descriptions dégoûtantes ou infernales, plutôt que des situations.

On the whole, Seneca's innovations were regarded with less favour than the well known scenes of Sophocles, and this attitude was bound to influence the amount of use which eighteenth-century dramatists made of his play.

#### French Adaptations of the 'Oedipus'

Corneille's Oedipe of 1659 was the first adaptation of the subject to become generally well-known and to achieve public success, but there are a number of earlier plays on the same theme. Jean Prévost's Edipe, which is a free translation of the Senecan tragedy, was published in Les Tragédies et autres oeuvres poétiques de Jean Prévost (Poitiers 1614), and in the same year Nicolas de Saint-Marthe also produced a play of the same title, which is now lost. Even less well known is the play of Tallemant des Réaux, whose name is more familiarly connected with the Historiettes. His Edipe survives in manuscript form only, and is preserved in the municipal library of La Rochelle.<sup>(1)</sup>

Corneille's drama is of great significance, in that it was very frequently a point of departure for eighteenth-century dramatists, whether they agreed with his methods of dramatization or not, and significant parallels as well as contrasts can often be drawn between

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(1) See Lancaster, A History of French Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century (Baltimore 1929-42), part II, i, 337-8. Pierre Brun has made a study of the play, which seems to be a fairly faithful adaptation of Sophocles, in the Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France 5 (1898), 538-53.

this work and its successors. It is clear from the tragedian's preface that he admired the plays of Sophocles and Seneca equally, and the two ancient writers are referred to as 'ces grands génies qui l'ont (i.e. the subject) traité en grec et en latin',<sup>(1)</sup> although the demands of his public necessitated a circumspect presentation of the subject of parricide and incest, and the introduction of 'l'heureux épisode des amours de Thésée et de Dirce'.<sup>(2)</sup> In many respects Corneille was forced to part company with his ancient models, but his introduction of the supernatural evocation of Laius is evidence of his admiration for that episode of Seneca's Oedipus. In the second act of Oedipe Nérine reports to Dirce that Tirésie has summoned the ghost of Laius in the temple. Although the situation is altered, and Seneca's grim surroundings are missing, the appearance of the late king:

L'impérieux orgueil de son regard sévère  
Sur son visage pâle avoit peint la colère;  
Tout menaçoit en elle, et des restes de sang  
Par un prodige affreux lui dégouttoient du flanc. (II,3)

is imitative of lines 623-4 of the Latin drama:

Laius - fari horreo:  
stetit per artus sanguine effuso horridus, ...

Oedipe was received extremely well in the seventeenth century,<sup>(3)</sup> but after the first years of the eighteenth century its popularity waned. This is not because audiences became tired of viewing the misfortunes of the Theban king, but because they were offered new versions of the story which coincided more closely with their present tastes. The eighteenth century provided an abundant variety of tragedies

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(1) M.-L. VI, 126.

(2) M.-L. VI, 127.

(3) According to Lancaster (op. cit., part III, ii, 438) its initial run was successful, and it enjoyed a number of revivals. Between 1680 and 1729 it was acted 94 times at the Comédie-française.

on this theme, but by far the most successful was the Oedipe of Voltaire. This extensive collection of plays can broadly be divided into two groups as regards chronology and subject matter. The first group encompasses the first thirty or so years of the century, and comprises seven tragedies (eight if one counts Houdart de La Motte's prose Oedipe separately from the verse version). These are the Oedipe plays of Voltaire (1718), père Folard (1720), La Motte (1726), and La Tournelle's Oedipe, ou les trois Fils de Jocaste (1730), Oedipe et Polibe (1731), Oedipe, ou l'Ombre de Laius (1731), and Oedipe et toute sa famille (1731). These dramas are of a widely differing standard. Voltaire's play, for example, seemed destined for success before it was even performed at the Comédie-française. It is announced in the following terms in the Nouveau Mercure of January 1717 (p. 246-7):

Cependant Monsieur Arouët assez connu par quantité de petits morceaux de Poésies enjouées, ne désespère pas de nous amuser plus sérieusement, en donnant de nouvelles couleurs à Oedipe. Il a orné ce sujet de manière, que dans les Assemblées où il en a fait lecture, les Partisans des anciens disent qu'elle ne le cède pas à l'original-même de Sophocle, & quelques modernes, qu'elle est beaucoup au dessus de celle de Corneille.

and its reception matched this enthusiasm. In the two years following its first performance on November 18th 1718 it was acted forty-two times, and gained a total of 336 performances.<sup>(1)</sup>

Antoine Houdart de La Motte, although also an important dramatist, was less successful with his Oedipe. Lancaster<sup>(2)</sup> tells us that it was acted on March 18th 1726, then performed another five times, when production was suddenly halted for unknown reasons. Père Folard's Oedipe was written to be performed by pupils of the Jesuit Collège de

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(1) See Lancaster, The Comédie Française 1701-1774: Plays, Actors, Spectators, Finances (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 41 (part 4), 1951), and French Tragedy in the Time of Louis XV and Voltaire, I, 56.

(2) French Tragedy etc., I, 93.



Lyon on May 26th 1720, together with the allegorical ballet Hercule entre les deux sentiers de la vertu et de la volupté,<sup>(1)</sup> and was published two years later.<sup>(2)</sup> In spite of its similarities with the usual tragedies written for school production by the Jesuit fathers, Folard probably hoped that his play would reach a larger audience than merely the parents of his pupils and local dignitaries. La Tournelle, like Folard, was not a professional dramatist, and he describes himself as an 'amateur des belles lettres' (preface to Oedipe, ou l'Ombre de Laius). By profession he was a 'commissaire des guerres', and in the preface to Oedipe, ou les trois Fils de Jocaste he tells us that these plays owed their composition to a long and tiresome law-suit, during which he needed something to distract his mind. We can only wonder at the type of obsession which drove him to write four different plays on the same subject, none of which is any more interesting than the last.<sup>(3)</sup> Although motivated by differing reasons, these writers were all trying to offer an original interpretation of the legend, and their tragedies are not slavish imitations of the ancients.

Between 1731 and 1781 there was a most curious dearth of dramas on this particular subject, although there was some adaptation of later parts of the legend (for example, Ducis' Oedipe chez Admète (1778)). Doubtless the success of Voltaire's Oedipe discouraged attempts to better it for a long while. Then suddenly in the last twenty years of the century there was a flurry of fresh activity. This second period produced a Jocaste by Lauraguais (1781), an Oedipe à Thèbes, ou le Fatalisme by Buffardin d'Aix (1784), and Oedipe roi, ou la

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(1) A programme for this performance is preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale (Res Yf 2763).

(2) Under the initials L. P. F. J. (Le Père Folard Jésuite), Paris 1722.

(3) Copies of his plays can be found in the B. N. (Yf 6600-6603). They were never performed.

Fatalité by Léonard (1798).<sup>(1)</sup> Marie-Joseph Chénier's Oedipe roi<sup>(2)</sup> and Doigny du Ponceau's drama of the same title,<sup>(3)</sup> although both printed in the nineteenth century, may have been composed at the turn of the century.

It is a noteworthy fact that not a single<sup>one</sup> of these tragedies gained performance, and that several were the work of amateur dramatists. Louis-Léon-Félicité de Lauraguais, duc de Brancas (1733-1824) was both a patron of the arts and a writer. He composed two tragedies, Clitemestre (1761) and Jocaste, but is best known for his generous act of clearing the stage of the Comédie-française of spectators. Unfortunately he was not able to profit from this new spaciousness, for although he obtained the order to perform Jocaste, his parents, who were opposed to the venture, had it stopped. This may have been a blessing in disguise, for criticism of his effort is generally harsh. Grimm (Corresp. litt., XII, 507) writes that Jocaste is even more bizarre than his earlier Clitemestre, and in a note appended to page 508 of this correspondence Meister tells us that people were saying:

ce qu'il y avait de plus clair dans la tragédie de M. de Lauraguais, c'était l'énigme du Sphinx.

Buffardin, or Buffardin d'Aix as he is known, was an extremely obscure writer, and a copy of his play can be found only in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal.<sup>(4)</sup> Nicolas-Germain Léonard is a better documented character.<sup>(5)</sup> He was a Creole, born in Guadeloupe, but spent much of his time in

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(1) Contained in the Oeuvres de Léonard, edited by Vincent Campenon (Paris 1798), tome I.

(2) See the Oeuvres posthumes de M. J. Chénier (Paris 1824), tome I.

(3) See the Oeuvres de M. d'Oigni (Paris 1826), volume II (B. N. Z 57013).

(4) Catalogued at Re 679.

(5) See William M. Kerby, The Life, Diplomatic Career and Literary Activities of Nicolas Germain Léonard (Paris 1925). Oedipe roi is discussed on p. 372-84.

Europe. He held a diplomatic post as secretary to the French embassy at Liège, but was also keenly interested in poetry. Marie-Joseph Chénier<sup>(1)</sup> is the best known of these later dramatists, and gained a considerable success with his Republican tragedies during the Revolutionary period. Oedipe roi is one of the least known of his dramas. Doigny du Ponceau,<sup>(2)</sup> who opposed the principles of the Revolution, also composed numerous tragedies, but only Antigone and Virginie were ever performed.

This renewal of interest in the story of Oedipus seems to be a product of the revival of antiquity, and in particular of ancient Greece, which took place in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Indeed these tragedies are all (except Jocaste) characterized by a desire to remain faithful to the ideals of the Greek theatre, and this involves excluding all secondary episodes which might detract from the effect of the Sophoclean play.

Unfortunately, the influence which Seneca exerted on any of the eighteenth-century Oedipus tragedies was only limited and often indirect. Dramatists no longer set Sophocles and Seneca on the same pedestal, and their prefaces show that they are primarily concerned with the Greek writer and his modern rivals, Corneille and Voltaire. Indeed such is their neglect of Seneca that the obscure librettist, Bernard d'Héry,<sup>(3)</sup> seems to be the only eighteenth-century interpreter of the theme to offer a comment on the Roman Oedipus. After praising at length the numerous qualities of the Oedipus Tyrannus in the Observations préliminaires to his lyric tragedy, he pauses briefly to consider Seneca's effort, and remarks of the ideas contained in the play (p. 106):

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(1) See A. Liéby, Etude sur le théâtre de Marie-Joseph Chénier (Paris 1901), and Lancaster, French Tragedy in the Reign of Louis XVI and the Early Years of the French Revolution, p. 102 ff..

(2) See Lancaster, op. cit., p. 95 ff..

(3) He composed a lyric Oedipe roi in 1786 (Arsenal Re 680).

L'Oedipe latin, parmi un grand nombre de pensées gigantesques & outrées, en offre d'admirables.

Other mentions of Seneca form mere passing references, but do indicate at least an acquaintance with the Oedipus. Voltaire, for example, notes that a line he has borrowed from Corneille is a translation of Oedipus 950 (Lettre sur Oedipe (5), Qui contient la critique du nouvel Oedipe).<sup>(1)</sup> Yet he reserves his detailed literary criticism for the two dramatists he considers to be his most important rivals, Sophocles and Corneille. The fact that Voltaire fails to consider Seneca's interpretation of the legend indicates that he judged the Roman drama to be of an inferior quality, and unworthy of discussion alongside major works of literature. La Tournelle also makes only a brief reference to Seneca, when discussing the reasons why Laius was only accompanied by a few followers at the time of his death. He recalls that in the Oedipus many of Laius' servants had lost their way, quoting inaccurately 'sed satellites error fefellit viae',<sup>(2)</sup> (preface to Oedipe et Polibe). However, Sophocles is the ancient source most often cited by La Tournelle, and the Oedipus Tyrannus was known to him through the translation of Jean Boivin (1729).

Père Folard notes Seneca merely as one among numerous writers of Oedipus plays. The Jesuit priest strives to be original by seeking inspiration from the Oedipus of Euripides, and makes erudite references to fragments of this play conserved in Stobaeus, Grotius, and Barnes (preface p. viii), but in reality he found most of his information in Hyginus, Fable 67. La Motte, in his Quatrième Discours à l'occasion de la tragédie d'Oedipe,<sup>(3)</sup> makes no mention of Seneca, and the alterations he makes to the legend in order to bring it in line with modern tragedy

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(1) M. II, 40.

(2) Line 778: 'Plures fefellit error ancipitis viae'.

(3) Oeuvres (1754), tome IV.

are based on a modification of the Sophoclean rather than the Latin text. In the long preamble to his Jocaste Lauraguais offers us a Dissertation sur les Oedipes de Sophocle, de Corneille, de Voltaire, de la Mote (sic), & sur Jocaste, but ignores Seneca. However, he does seem to have been acquainted with Seneca's philosophical works, since he mentions a passage from the Naturales Quaestiones on fatality (p. 139).<sup>(1)</sup> Buffardin and Léonard's plays also bypass mention of Seneca's Oedipus. Buffardin was particularly keen to emulate the spirit of the Athenian theatre in his tragedy,<sup>(2)</sup> and Léonard expressly described his Oedipe roi as 'imitée de Sophocle', thus spelling out his central interest. Chénier's Oedipe roi bears no introductory passage in the posthumous edition in which it is printed, but his Fragments littéraires reveal his views on the relative merits of the Greek and Latin theatre. In the section entitled Sur les Tragiques grecs he writes (Oeuvres posthumes, III, 425):

Personne n'a mieux connu le vrai langage des passions que ces anciens Grecs; et si, en traduisant leurs pensées, Sénèque, Longe-Pierre et d'autres, ont été déclamateurs, c'est qu'ils ont substitué à l'énergie, à la simplicité, à la gravité du style antique, leur propre style, c'est à dire, la bouffissure et la faiblesse.

Doigny tells us in his Avertissement that his Oedipe roi is a 'très faible copie de Sophocle',<sup>(3)</sup> and his aim is to restore the subject to its ancient dignity and simplicity.

That dramatists failed to be impressed or even interested by Seneca's tragedy must inevitably narrow the scope of the present chapter. Nevertheless, many of these Oedipus plays are not entirely lacking in Senecan elements, even if the legacy of the Latin drama was largely indirect, and transmitted to the eighteenth century by means of the

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(1) Jocaste, tragédie (Paris, Debure, 1781).

(2) See the preface to his Oedipe à Thèbes.

(3) Oeuvres, II, 342.

Oedipe of Corneille. We have already seen how the episode of the evocation of Laius' ghost was taken up by the French dramatist and made an integral part of his work. This supernatural element obviously appealed to eighteenth-century writers, for they adopted it almost unanimously,<sup>(1)</sup> and allusion to the appearance of the ghostly king came to be considered a standard feature of the legend, although a completely un-Sophoclean element.

Voltaire was the first to exploit Corneille's use of the supernatural figure, and for him it was a means of arousing terror as well as of suggesting spectacle. He was to see ghosts appearing on stage in the plays of Shakespeare when he later visited England, but for the moment he followed the lead of his French predecessor. In the first act of Voltaire's Oedipe the High-Priest reports to the Theban king that the shade of Laius has shown itself at his altars:

Cette nuit, à ma vue,  
Du ciel sur nos autels la flamme est descendue;  
L'ombre du grand Laius a paru parmi nous,  
Terrible et respirant la haine et le courroux.  
Une effrayante voix s'est fait alors entendre: (I, 3)  
"Les Thébains de Laius n'ont point vengé la cendre;  
Le meurtrier du roi respire en ces États,  
Et de son souffle impur infecte vos climats.  
Il faut qu'on le connaisse, il faut qu'on le punisse.  
Peuple, votre salut dépend de son supplice."

Here the ghost has appeared of its own volition rather than being summoned by Tiresias (as in Seneca and Corneille), and it emphasizes the urgency with which the royal murderer must be sought. Unlike in Seneca, lines 634 ff., the identity of the killer is not disclosed, and this allows for a gradual and vraisemblable unveiling of the truth. Laius also torments Jocaste, who describes to Egeine the unfavourable auspices which greeted her marriage to Oedipe:

Égine, je voyais dans une nuit obscure,

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(1) Chénier's Oedipe roi (which may well belong to the first years of the nineteenth century) is the only exception.

Près d'Oedipe et de moi, je voyais des enfers  
Les gouffres éternels à mes pieds entr'ouverts;  
De mon premier époux l'ombre pâle et sanglante (II,2)  
Dans cet abîme affreux paraissait menaçante:  
Il me montrait mon fils, ce fils qui dans mon flanc  
Avait été formé de son malheureux sang;

Voltaire's poetry is, on the whole, inventive and highly effective, but the idea of the pale, bleeding ghost goes back to Corneille, and ultimately to Seneca, lines 623-4. The yawning of the realms of Hell may have been suggested by Creon's words in the Latin play:

subito dehiscit terra et immenso sinu (582-3)  
laxata patuit -

Both Folard (II,2) and La Motte (III,6) make only passing references to the ombre de Laïus, but La Tournelle, on the other hand, must have been deeply impressed by the way in which the supernatural episode had been treated in his predecessors' works, for the ghost is granted the title role in his Oedipe, ou l'Ombre de Laïus. Here, in the very first act, Jocaste recounts a frightening vision of her former husband:

A peine le soleil avoit chassé la nuit,  
Que j'ai cru dans ma chambre entendre quelque bruit.  
.....  
J'ai vu, j'ai cru du moins voir l'Ombre de Laïus;  
Elle s'est présentée à mes sens éperdus, (I,2)  
Non comme Ombre de mort, non comme une Ombre vaine,  
Qu'une vision triste, une vapeur amene.  
Mais j'ai cru distinguer & le ton de sa voix,  
Et le visage & l'air, tel qu'il l'eut autrefois.

Her description of Laïus' fearful appearance:

Je l'ai vu tout sanglant, & le visage blême.

is reminiscent of Voltaire and Corneille rather than Seneca. However, for the ghost's warning to Jocaste that her second marriage is the cause of Thebes' troubles:

Retire-toi, dit-il, va chercher ton Oedipe, (I,2)  
Lui seul de tous tes maux est le fatal principe.

La Tournelle may have referred to the Latin play, where Laïus attributes Thebes' misfortunes to the presence of Oedipus:

non gravi flatu tibi  
luctificus Auster nec parum pluvio aethere  
satiata tellus halitu sicco nocet,  
sed rex cruentus, .....

(631-4)

In the fourth act of Oedipe, ou l'Ombre de Laïus Tirésie prepares to summon the ghost of Laïus to prove Oedipe's guilt (IV,4). Here he begins by addressing the spirits of the dead:

O vous, que j'apprehende, Hôtes du noir séjour,  
.....  
Faites paroître ici l'Ombre de Laïus même,  
Avec tous les atours dignes du diadème:  
C'est lui qu'il faut venger, & lorsqu'il parlera  
Plus aisément que nous, Oedipe le croira.

The inspiration for this may have come from Comeille I,5, where Oedipe suggests that Tirésie should call forth Laïus from the underworld, or it is possible that La Tournelle remembered something of Tiresias' decision to summon the dead king in the Latin play:

ipse evocandus noctis aeternae plagis,  
emissus Erebo ut caedis auctorem indicet.  
reseranda tellus, Ditis inplacabile  
numen precandum, populus infernae Stygis  
huc extrahendus:

(393-7)

The French writer's idea of bringing Laïus on stage in the fifth act (V,3 and V,4) is an innovatory way of using the ghost theme, and it would have been interesting to see what type of audience reaction it provoked had the play been performed. Voltaire, for one, was to find to his cost that his ghosts did not always succeed in achieving the effect of terror he had desired.

In many of the tragedies being discussed in this chapter, it is Jocaste who is most troubled and affected by the appearance of Laïus. This can only reflect the influence of Comeille or Voltaire, since the rites of necromancy are carried out without the participation of Jocasta in Seneca's play. Lauraguais' Jocaste, for example, is pursued by Layus as if by a kind of Fury (IV,4), and she tells her sister how his ghost prevented her from embracing Eudox (Oedipe):

J'y succombe, & je presse Eudox contre mon sein;  
Mais à l'instant un bruit terrible & souterrain



Nous fait trembler tous deux de l'horreur qu'il prépare:  
Un fantôme entre nous s'élève & nous sépare. (IV,4)  
C'était Layus.

Even the dramas which purport to be imitations of Sophocles find room for this non-Sophoclean element. In Léonard's Oedipe roi Jocaste has a nocturnal vision:

Cette nuit même encor, (le dirai-je, Phoedime ?)  
Des enfers sous mes pas j'ai vu s'ouvrir l'abîme: (II,2)  
Laius assassiné s'est montré devant moi.

which is reminiscent of Voltaire (II,2). In addition to this, the play opens to a striking situation as the voice of Laius is heard echoing from his tomb. In Doigny's play Jocaste sees the Furies attacking her and Laius rising from the grave:

J'ai cru voir sur ses pas (i.e. Tirésias') les noires Euménides  
M'entourer, me presser de leurs serpens livides;  
J'ai cru voir aux clartés d'un lugubre flambeau (III,1)  
Laius sortir sanglant du fond de son tombeau!

Buffardin, however, takes a largely original approach, and has Laius appear to his grand-daughter Antigone in a dream. She relates a series of strange events in the midst of which:

"A ces mots l'enfer s'ouvre, & sa fureur extrême  
"Vomit au milieu d'eux un corps ensanglanté,  
"Qui glace leur courage & leur noble fierté...  
.... (II,2)  
"Un bruit plus fort encore au loin se fait entendre;  
"Tout obstacle est brisé ... l'on ne sait quoi comprendre.  
"C'est le même phantôme, ardent & forcené,  
"Qui traîne.. Oedipe ... hélas ... mon père infortuné.

Part of Seneca's dénouement was also transmitted to the eighteenth century by means of Corneille. In his final act the French dramatist has Oedipe discover his fate from the Corinthian who received him as a baby on Mount Cithaeron and the Theban who handed him over. The message from Corinth, brought by Iphicrate (V,2), is followed directly by the arrival of Phorbas (V,3). This echoes the structure of the Latin play, where events are similarly continuous. (In Sophocles the unravelling of Oedipus' fate is halted by the abrupt departure of Jocasta from the stage after the news from Corinth has been delivered,

and by a song of the chorus). In the eighteenth century Voltaire imitated Comeille's scene structure, and has Icare and Phorbas appear in act V scenes 2 and 3. (Phorbas, incidentally, is Seneca's name for the anonymous Theban of Sophocles, and was generally adopted by dramatists after Comeille used it. Indeed it even appears in Dacier's translation of Sophocles). The fate of Oedipe is sealed, in Voltaire's play, by the stark statement of Phorbas that the child in question is the son of Jocaste:

Jocaste était sa mère. (V,3)

This is surprisingly close to Seneca's pithy

Coniuge est genitus (i.e. the child) tua. (867)

and may mean that Voltaire referred to the Latin play as well as to Comeille.

In the other tragedies of the eighteenth century dramatists either try to be original, in so far as the need to show that Oedipus is not the son of Polybus and Merope, but of Laius and Jocasta, allows, or else, later in the century, to provide a strictly Sophoclean dénouement. Folard, La Motte, La Tournelle, and Lauraguais fall into the first category. Folard, for example, reverses the order of the appearance of the necessary characters. That is, Phorbas appears first (V,1 and 2), then meets Itamale, the Corinthian (V,3). La Motte moves further away from the classical versions by complicating and altering details. Polémon is imagined to be the father of Oedipe, but he tells Jocaste (IV,5) that he saved him as a baby on Mount Cithaeron. When Phoedime, the intermediary of Jocaste, is recognized by Polémon as the woman from whom he obtained the baby, Jocaste realizes the terrible truth. Oedipe only learns of this through a letter written to him by the now dead Jocaste (V,4). La Tournelle, in an effort to add variety to his plays, engineers a series of invented dénouements. Oedipe's true identity is successively revealed by a letter from Erix, the wife of

Phorbas (Oedipe, ou les trois Fils de Jocaste), by Polibe (Oedipe et Polibe), by the ghost of Laius (Oedipe, ou l'Ombre de Laius), and by Tirésie (Oedipe et toute sa famille). Lauraguais' dénouement is also invented, but is so confused that it is difficult to see how it comes about. Jocaste is struck with terror when the ghost of Layus separates her from Eudox (IV,4), for Layus had warned her that their son, whom the old Eudox took away to Cithaeron, would love his mother. Layus had told her sisters that this son would kill his father. This is sufficient evidence for Jocaste to fear that her husband Eudox is actually Oedipe (V,1). In contrast to this type of approach, Buffardin, Léonard, Chénier, and Doigny choose to follow the steps laid down by Sophocles.

Corneille had not been able to conclude his play as his ancient predecessors had done with the blind and blood-stained Oedipus appearing before the audience. His public would also have been reluctant to hear a detailed description of Oedipus' blinding, and he was obliged to pass over this as artistically as possible. Yet one might expect dramatists of the eighteenth century to be somewhat more daring, and to exploit more fully the element of terror in the ancient dramas. Voltaire, for one, was particularly interested in this aspect, for he complained in his Commentaires sur Corneille (III, 818) that in Corneille's Oedipe

il y manque ces grands mouvements de terreur et de pitié qu'on attend d'une si affreuse situation.

However, while he may have admired the terror aroused by Oedipus' self-mutilation in Sophocles, it is doubtful whether he would ever have sanctioned the ghoulish and minutely detailed description of Oedipus' loss of vision in Seneca.

In his own Oedipe Voltaire did not pursue a particularly daring path. He focused his final act on Oedipe's recognition of his true identity, and this is the major source of tragic terror. After this

fearful discovery Oedipe is not seen again, and the news of his self-inflicted blindness is restricted to a few concise lines uttered by the High-Priest:

Il vit, et le sort qui l'accable  
Des morts et des vivants semble le séparer:  
Il s'est privé du jour avant que d'expirer. (V,6)  
Je l'ai vu dans ses yeux enfoncer cette épée  
Qui du sang de son père avait été trempée;

So that there is no easing of the tragic situation at the end of the play, Voltaire has Jocaste kill herself before the audience. This may have been suggested by Seneca's Oedipus, for here, unlike in Sophocles' version where Jocasta hangs herself in her chamber, the queen ends her life nominally on stage in the presence of Oedipus by stabbing herself in the womb:

hunc, dextra, hunc pete  
uterum capacem, qui virum et natos tulit. (1038-9)

In Corneille's play Jocaste stabs herself away from the eyes of the spectators (V,8).

Although Voltaire had decided at this stage not to shock the audience by showing them Oedipe covered in blood, he continued to reflect on the most apposite ending for a play of this kind. By the time he came to write on Corneille's Oedipe in the Commentaires sur Corneille he had imagined a scene which would allow Oedipe to appear on stage, but at the same time not violate the bienséances (III, 799):

Je ne sais même si aujourd'hui que la scène est libre, et dégagée de tout ce qui la défigurait, on ne pourrait pas faire paraître Oedipe tout sanglant, comme il parut sur le théâtre d'Athènes. La disposition des lumières, Oedipe ne paraissant que dans l'enfoncement pour ne pas trop offenser les yeux, beaucoup de pathétique dans l'acteur, et peu de déclamation dans l'auteur, les cris de Jocaste, et les douleurs de tous les Thébains, pourraient former un spectacle admirable.

Perhaps if Voltaire had written Oedipe at this point in his life he would have provided us with such a conclusion. Of the two dramatists whose plays were performed after that of Voltaire, neither made an

attempt to achieve this kind of realistic effect. Folard does include a description modelled on Sophocles of Jocaste's death and Oedipe's blinding (V,6), but the play ends without Oedipe reappearing. In La Motte's play there is no trace of the Sophoclean dénouement. Jocaste is made to stab herself off stage (as in Corneille), whereas Oedipe does the deed before the audience (V,4). Thus none of the endings of the tragedies which were actually performed was likely to outrage the feelings of the spectators. This toning down of the horror of the ancient story is also echoed in La Toumelle's plays, where his favourite ending is to have both Jocaste and Oedipe stab themselves, and in Lauraguais' Jocaste, where Jocaste seems to collapse from shock, while Oedipe strikes himself a mortal blow (V,3).

In general, the feeling in the latter part of the century was that the spirit of the Greek drama should be preserved, and that the pathetic appearance of the wounded Oedipus on stage was a necessary conclusion to the tragedy. Buffardin writes in 1784 that no-one has yet dared to show Oedipe sanglant in the fifth act, because it was thought too revolting. However, he argues that the sight of Oedipus in this condition will arouse both pity and fear, and cannot but interest the audience. Doigny confirms this point of view, and seeks to 'correct' Voltaire's play. He adopts the suggestion which Voltaire himself made for Oedipe to be only half-seen in a darkened corner, but fears, nevertheless, that this might prove too horrible (Avertissement, p. 342):

J'ai adopté en tout cette idée, mais cependant je crains que ce terrible tableau, que je me suis permis d'esquisser, ne répande trop d'horreur sur le théâtre.

As well as Buffardin and Doigny, Léonard and Chénier also present a bloody Oedipus in the final act. Léonard's stage direction describes Oedipe as 'aveugle et le visage ensanglanté, errant sur la scène' (III,6), and in Chénier's Oedipe roi the chorus exclaims at Oedipe's appearance :

O spectacle effrayant, mais digne de pitié! (V,1)

This move to allow blood to be shown on stage could be seen as an indication of a greater freedom in the theatre towards the end of the eighteenth century. However, it must be remembered that as none of these tragedies was ever acted they do not necessarily reflect public tastes. Voltaire had clearly shown that the demands of the French theatre were very often at variance with the work of Sophocles, and he had achieved a compromise between the two forces which ensured the long-lasting success of his play. It is clear, however, that experimentation became more possible as the century progressed.

The question of how far dramatists should go in creating scenes of tragic terror largely bypasses Seneca in this instance, and his only contribution was to provide an alternative and more immediate means of death for Jocasta. Yet certain other aspects of the Latin Oedipus do find some echoes in the eighteenth century. The sacrifice of Tiresias, for example, with its symbolism and sometimes obscure details of divination survives in some of the lesser known Oedipe tragedies. In La Tournelle's Oedipe, ou l'Ombre de Laius (the most Senecan of his four plays) Tirésie carries out a sacrifice to destiny, just as Tiresias seeks to shed light on the fates in Seneca, lines 297 ff.. He describes how at first the gods refused to answer his questions, but then the sacrificial victim produced an evil omen:

La Victime à l'Autel, les entrailles horribles,  
Le coeur flétri partout, le sang presque gelé,  
De ses vaisseaux encor il n'avoit point coulé. (III,2)

This may have been suggested by the ill-omened bull in Seneca's sacrifice, which sheds only a few drops of blood:

huius exiguo graves  
maculantur ictus imbre; (348-9)

The entrails are horribly disfigured and the heart is withered:

cor marcet aegrum penitus ac mersum latet  
liventque venae; (356-7)

Seneca goes on to give much more detail about the precise state of the internal organs, but La Toumelle obviously considered this inappropriate to his theme and includes none of it.

Doigny also imitates part of Seneca's sacrificial scene, but he picks on the element of obvious symbolism. The High-Priest describes how the heifer and bull reacted in a curious way to the blows they received:

A peine l'encens brûle, ô mortelle terreur!...  
Il s'éteint et répand une noire vapeur!...  
Au pied de nos autels la génisse frappée,  
Tombe du premier coup dans tout son sang trempée;  
Mais le taureau fougueux contre nous soulevé,  
Et terrassé trois fois, et trois fois relevé, (III,3)  
Terrible, mugissant dans une rage extrême,  
Traîne un reste de jours pire que la mort même!...  
Et tous les spectateurs, Tirésias et moi,  
Du temple nous sortons avec un long effroi!

This is a direct imitation of Seneca, lines 341-4, where Manto describes how

Iuvenca ferro semet imposito induit  
et vulnere uno cecidit, at taurus duos  
perpessus ictus huc et huc dubius ruit  
animamque fessus vix reluctantem exprimit.

A sacrifice of ominous portent also takes place in Lauraguais' Jocaste, at the marriage of Eudox (Oedipe) and Jocaste (III,1). However, here, where the victims turn to ashes before they have been burned, the images are not inspired by Seneca.

While the scope of Seneca's direct influence has been shown to be somewhat limited, that of Sophocles is both complex and far-reaching, and could only profitably be discussed in a chapter of its own. Even the tragedians whose works were not noticeably imitative of the Greek drama (the Oedipe of La Motte and the Jocaste of Lauraguais, for example), were intensely aware of the nature of Sophocles' achievement, and they offer conscious alternatives to the ancient version, rather than uninformed variations on a generally well known theme. At the other end of the scale, writers such as Buffardin, Léonard, Chénier,

and Doigny were committed to offering a faithful imitation of a model they esteemed extremely highly. Voltaire's Oedipe is neither wholly derived from nor totally independent of the Oedipus Tyrannus, but the detail with which the aspiring tragedian dissects the Greek play in his third Lettre sur Oedipe bears evidence to his preoccupation with its characteristics.

Cornelle had been the first French dramatist to observe that neither pure Sophocles nor pure Seneca would be found suitable for the French stage, and although his interpretation of the legend was not such as to satisfy eighteenth-century tastes, his successors also faced the same problem.<sup>(1)</sup> To consider the Greek play in its most obvious terms, it offers an extremely implausible and difficult subject for French tragedians. Indeed J.-B. Rousseau wrote to Claude Brossette that

Il n'y a peut-être point de sujet dans l'antiquité qui soit plus difficile à amener aux termes d'une juste vraisemblance.

(Letter of April 29th 1719 (D 75)). Several problems immediately spring to mind. Why did Oedipus not enquire earlier into the manner of Laius' death? Why is the survivor from the attack on Laius not questioned at an early stage by the king? Above all why does Oedipus take so long to enlighten himself about his crimes when there are indications of his guilt allaround him, especially when Tiresias names him as the murderer of Laius and alludes to incest? These were the weaknesses which occurred to Voltaire, and he exposes the irrationalities of the Greek Oedipus in his third Lettre sur Oedipe. Although he has a tendency to criticize Sophocles for not obeying the rules of French classical tragedy, his arguments have a real value in relation to tragic

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(1) This is less true of the later tragedians, Buffardin, Léonard, Chénier, and Doigny, who were more concerned to imitate Sophocles than to please contemporary audiences.



drama of the eighteenth century. He concludes somewhat condescendingly that Sophocles was writing at a time when the genre was in its infancy (M. II, 26-7):

Sophocle touchait au temps où la tragédie fut inventée. Eschyle, contemporain de Sophocle, était le premier qui se fût avisé de mettre plusieurs personnages sur la scène. Nous sommes aussi touchés de l'ébauche la plus grossière dans les premières découvertes d'un art, que des beautés les plus achevées lorsque la perfection nous est une fois connue. Ainsi Sophocle et Euripide, tout imparfaits qu'ils sont, ont autant réussi chez les Athéniens que Corneille et Racine parmi nous.

Had Voltaire stopped to consider the Oedipus of Seneca he would have found even less plausible a plot there. For Oedipus has no curiosity about the means by which Laius met his death until he suddenly remembers that he killed a man in the land of Phocis (768-72). Then, for the very first time, he questions Jocaste about the circumstances of her first husband's death (773-83). Towards the end of the play Phorbas arrives fortuitously on the scene (838 ff.) to recount how he handed the royal baby to the Corinthian messenger. We are not told that Phorbas has any connection with the murder of Laius, and he is not, like his opposite number in Sophocles, a survivor of Oedipus' attack. Thus Oedipus has had no reason to send for him and no desire to question him.

Voltaire's own attempts to increase vraisemblance in the story are not always entirely successful, and he himself is the first to admit this (see Lettre sur Oedipe (5)). Yet the difficulties of effectively rationalizing the theme were such that the problem must have seemed insoluble, and Voltaire had the sense not to make his play tortuous by elaborate attempts at altering the details before him. Oedipe's ignorance of the precise circumstances of Laius' death is explained naturally enough by the fact that he did not want to reawaken his wife's grief by discussing it (I,3), but less plausible is his reason for not telling his wife earlier than act IV scene 1

about the man he killed on the way to Thebes:

(Et je ne conçois pas par quel enchantement  
J'oubliais jusqu'ici ce grand événement;  
La main des dieux sur moi si longtemps suspendue  
Semble ôter le bandeau qu'ils mettaient sur ma vue), ...

As in Sophocles and Corneille there was a survivor from the combat, Phorbas, whom Oedipe sends for immediately (I,3). The fact that he does not arrive until act IV scene 2 is not totally acceptable, but had he arrived earlier he would have brought the play to a premature close. Like Tiresias in the Greek play, the High-Priest names Oedipe as the guilty party and foretells his grim future (III,4), but by being placed much further on in the action (in Sophocles Tiresias accuses Oedipus at lines 350 ff.) this scene does not destroy the feeling of suspense, but creates doubts in Oedipe's mind about his innocence, and is an initial step towards the dénouement.

The modifications which dramatists following Voltaire make to the details of the ancient story in order to bring it into line with vraisemblance are very diverse, and lead to a series of highly individual situations. Père Folard, for example, felt a logical reason was needed to explain why Oedipe had not interrogated Phorbas at an early stage, and he invents a situation whereby Créon seeks to obtain the throne for his own son, and has imprisoned Phorbas in a secret cell to prevent anyone discovering from him that Laïus has a son who is still alive. The truth is also made more elusive by oracles which ask for the blood of a descendant of Agenor, father of Cadmus, the founder of Thebes (II,2) and for a son to die for his father (III,6), since these seem to refer to Ménécée, Créon's son, rather than to Oedipe. Folard was also concerned by the chance appearance of the Corinthian shepherd, and replaces him with Itamale, who is present throughout the play.

La Motte felt that although the characters' ignorance of basic facts might be necessary to the plot, this destroyed all illusion and credibility (Quatrième Discours à l'occasion de la tragédie d'Oedipe,

p. 383):

mais une action qui ne marche qu'à ce prix, & où l'on sent toujours que le Poète a pris ses avantages, aux dépens de la vraisemblance, perd infiniment de sa force: l'illusion n'a plus de lieu; & l'on est trop averti de ne rien croire d'un fait qui ne subsiste qu'à la faveur de suppositions presque impossibles.

The author's answer to this problem is to make vengeance of Laius' death seem impossible throughout much of the play, for as a result of a lie told by Iphicrate to prevent him being branded a coward it is believed that Laius was killed by a lion. Iphicrate has since died, and the truth of the matter is not made known to Jocaste until act III scene 4. For a long time it seems entirely unlikely that Oedipe is guilty of any crime, and ambiguity is added to the plot by an oracle which asks for the blood of a son of Jocaste (I,7). The presence of both Etéocle and Polinice in the play inevitably focuses this oracle on them. The dramatist was confident that by arranging events thus he had found a 'new' subject to dramatize.

La Tournelle is generally unconcerned about the invraisemblances of the Oedipus story, and indeed often changes the plot to such an extent that it is no longer obvious what story we are concerned with. For example, in Oedipe et Polibe Oedipe knows himself to be the killer of Laius, because he has fought him on the battlefield whilst commanding the forces of his 'father' Polibe. In Oedipe, ou l'Ombre de Laius Oedipe refuses to believe that he is the murderer of Laius until he is confronted by the ghost of the king (V,3), whereupon his feeble rejoinder is that

Personne ne me dit que tu fusses Laius.

Oracles appear in abundance in La Tournelle's four tragedies, and seem to have been one of his favourite devices.<sup>(1)</sup> These are often highly

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(1) There are sixteen oracles in all, excluding significant dreams, visions, and ghosts.

inconsequential, and do nothing to enhance vraisemblance.

Lauraguais was far more interested in Voltaire's ideas about bringing the subject up to date. He discusses the Lettres sur Oedipe at length, and although taking issue with a number of Voltaire's points, concludes that it is fundamentally impossible to write a worthwhile tragedy using the facts as they stand in Sophocles' version (Dissertation, p. 127):

Mais toutes ces ressources créées par Sophocle dépendent de tant d'invraisemblances que leurs concours rend encore plus frappantes, qu'elles donnent un caractère si artificiel à son action, qu'elle ne paraît dramatique, que parcequ'elle est tragique.

His solution to the problem is to set the action at the precise period of Laius' murder, so that the marriage of Jocaste and Oedipe is no longer an established fact, but takes place within the play. It becomes far more logical that vengeance for this murder should be a priority for all concerned, and many of the invraisemblances of which Voltaire complains automatically disappear. This method of interpreting the story could have provided an extremely interesting play, but unfortunately Lauraguais' skill as a dramatist was minimal, and his drama is probably the least inspired of all the eighteenth-century Oedipus tragedies.

Among the devoted followers of Sophocles, even Chénier went some way to adding logicity to the plot. He has Phorbas explain to Oedipe why he had lied and stated that Laius had been killed by a band of brigands (IV, 4). No explanation is in fact given in the Greek play.

Another problem facing French dramatists was the brevity of the real action in the ancient versions of the story. Sophocles' tragedy is structurally simple, and Seneca's, once stripped of its adorning episodes, has little left to commend it. This was a real stumbling-block to playwrights of the eighteenth century, and Voltaire is stating a basic difficulty of neo-classical tragedy when he writes (M. II, 29):

On se trompe fort lorsqu'on pense que tous ces sujets traités autrefois avec succès par Sophocle et par Euripide,

l'Oedipe, le Philoctète, l'Electre, l'Iphigénie en Tauride, sont des sujets heureux et aisés à manier: ce sont les plus ingrats et les plus impraticables; ce sont des sujets d'une ou de deux scènes tout au plus, et non pas d'une tragédie.

(Lettre (4), Contenant la critique de l'Oedipe de Corneille). Corneille had supplemented his material by introducing the romantic interlude of Thésée and Dirce, but this seemed rather outdated by the time Voltaire was writing, and it is roundly condemned by him.<sup>(1)</sup> However, the actors of the Comédie-française were reluctant to act a play in which there was no romantic element, and Voltaire, too, needed an episode to fill most of his first three acts. Failing to find anything to capitalize on in Sophocles or Seneca, he imagined a situation in which Philoctète, supposed to be a former lover of Jocaste, returns to Thebes. Voltaire described this 'souvenir d'amour' between Jocaste and Philoctète as a 'défaut nécessaire',<sup>(2)</sup> and it is precisely this. Purists argued that the classical atmosphere of the rest of Oedipe was spoiled by its inclusion,<sup>(3)</sup> but Voltaire succeeds in integrating Philoctète into the main action, and he does not appear as obtrusive as do Corneille's Thésée and Dirce.

Père Folard adopted a different approach from Voltaire, for it was inappropriate for him to include romantic love within a school production. Instead he introduces the character of Ménécée (or Menoeceus in Hyginus, Fable 67), who shows outstanding filial devotion, and offers to shed his own blood to save Thebes. La Motte also found the addition of a love element forced, and writes in his Quatrième Discours, p. 381:

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(1) See, for instance, Commentaires sur Corneille, III, 801-2.

(2) Lettre sur Oedipe (5) (M. II, 38).

(3) Buffardin deplored 'des remplissages éternels qui ralentissent l'action principale & la font quelquefois oublier' (preface to Oedipe à Thebes (p. vi)), and Doigny recalls that Voltaire himself criticized 'le froid ressouvenir d'un amour insipide entre Philoctète et Jocaste' (Avertissement to Oedipe roi (p. 341)).

on y sent tellement le contre-tems de cette passion avec l'horreur qui doit saisir continüement les Personnages, qu'il est étonnant que les Auteurs se soient permis un si malheureux contraste.

Instead he decided upon the inclusion of Oedipe's two sons, Etéocle and Polinice, as the most natural means of extending the play without introducing a sub-plot. The love element is limited to the conjugal affection between Oedipe and Jocaste. La Tournelle introduces a mass of invented material into his plays. In Oedipe et Polibe the dramatist informs us that the subject is 'entierement nouveau' (preface), and we see a pitched battle between the armies of Corinth and Thebes, commanded respectively by Oedipe and Laïus. Both Oedipe, ou les trois Fils de Jocaste and Oedipe et toute sa famille contain new episodes involving the Theban royal family, and they focus on Etéocle's disappointment at losing his inheritance of the throne of Corinth after it is found that Oedipe is not the son of Polibe. Lauraguais invents two sisters for Jocaste, Iphise and Naxos, the former an optimist and the latter a pessimist, and much of the clumsiness of the play results from the fact that the inconsequential discussions of these two sisters occupy a good deal more of the action than do the misfortunes of Jocaste and Oedipe: so much so that while Oedipe appears in only three scenes and Jocaste in nine, Iphise and Naxos monopolize twenty-one out of the twenty-three scenes of the drama. Dramatists wishing to follow Sophocles more closely could, as does Léonard, reduce their tragedies to three acts, or, like Chénier, reintroduce the role of the Greek chorus to fill out the five acts. Both Buffardin and Doigny expand the role of Antigone, the dutiful daughter of Oedipus.

The concept of fatality inherent in the Oedipus story was interpreted in different ways in the plays of Sophocles, Seneca, and Corneille, and it is profitable to examine how far this theme was modified in the eighteenth century, either by currents of philosophical thought or by religious principles. Voltaire's Oedipe was likely to be coloured by

the former rather than the latter, and his hero has much in common with the Sophoclean character.

As in the Greek play we see a man who believes himself to be virtuous, and who attempts to act freely and positively towards solving the troubles of Thebes. He does not, as in Seneca's Oedipus, feel the weight of his criminal destiny bearing down upon him. The power of priests and oracles is thrown open to doubt:

Ne nous endormons point sur la foi de leurs prêtres;  
Au pied du sanctuaire il est souvent des traîtres,  
Qui, nous asservissant sous un pouvoir sacré,  
Font parler les destins, les font taire à leur gré. (II,5)

and Oedipe's confidant Araspe suggests that men can act independently to provide some kind of solution. Jocaste, too, rejects the power of oracles to foretell future events:

Hélas! pour mon malheur je suis bien détrompée,  
Et le ciel me punit d'avoir trop écouté  
D'un oracle imposteur la fausse obscurité. (IV,1)  
Il m'en coûta mon fils. Oracles que j'abhorre!  
Sans vos ordres, sans vous, mon fils vivrait encore.

exactly as her Sophoclean counterpart had done (lines 707 ff.). Her rationalistic rejection of the traditional methods of divination:

Pensez-vous qu'en effet, au gré de leur demande,  
Du vol de leurs oiseaux la vérité dépende ? (IV,1)  
Que sous un fer sacré des taureaux gémissants  
Dévoilent l'avenir à leurs regards perçants, ...

informs us eloquently that Voltaire would have had no time for the exact details of the sacrificial ceremony in Seneca's play.

In Oedipe Voltaire skilfully uses the Greek Jocasta's scepticism with regard to the efficacy of oracles as the basis for a series of anticlerical attacks. This gives the play a very contemporary significance, and Voltaire must have been delighted to find in the Oedipus Tyrannus the seeds for a skirmish with eighteenth-century authority. (1)

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(1) Absolute monarchy and courtiers also come under attack in this play. For a full discussion of the element of propaganda in Voltaire's theatre / contd. overleaf

When Oedipe discovers that he is guilty of the murder of Jocaste's first husband, he is horrified by his actions (IV,3), but Jocaste, the more positive of the two characters, makes a clear distinction between guilt and error. In the true Aristotelian sense she sees her husband's murder of Laïus as an error - a failure to recognize whom he was killing - and not a crime. She asserts that

Vous êtes malheureux, et non pas criminel: (IV,3)

Oedipe is able to echo this viewpoint, even after he has found himself guilty of parricide and incest:

Et je me vois enfin, par un mélange affreux,  
Inceste et parricide, et pourtant vertueux. (V,4)

By the end of the play the oracles and priests which had encountered such scepticism are shown to be vindicated. In Sophocles' play man is shown to be helpless in the grip of forces he cannot fully comprehend, and in Seneca's play the weight of predestined guilt crushes the pitiable Oedipus. Yet in Voltaire's Oedipe the conclusion is slightly more defiant. What has happened has not totally erased the censure of superstition which went before, and indeed we move towards an even more frightening conclusion. If Oedipe and Jocaste are essentially virtuous beings, does not their treatment at the hands of the gods serve to illustrate just how arbitrary and cruel divine justice is? Jocaste realizes that she has proved just this as she ends the play on a note of triumph against Heaven:

Honorez mon bûcher, et songez à jamais  
Qu'au milieu des horreurs du destin qui m'opprime,  
J'ai fait rougir les dieux qui m'ont forcée au crime. (V,6)

This anti-religious stance would be totally alien to the Jesuit

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contd. from p. 162 / see in particular Ronald S. Ridgeway, 'La Propagande philosophique dans les tragédies de Voltaire' (Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 15 (1961)), as well as Henri Lion, Les Tragédies et les théories dramatiques de Voltaire (Paris 1895), chapter I, and Jack Rochford Vrooman, 'Voltaire's Theatre: the Cycle from Oedipe to Méropé' (Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 75 (1970)).



priest, père Folard, and not unnaturally he casts a wholly different emphasis on the subject. He is interested in a just balance of crime and punishment rather than in callous injustice, and he rejects the Oedipus of Sophocles and Voltaire because he is merely malheureux, and

La situation involontaire où le Destin le réduit, ne tourne qu'à la honte des Dieux. Il fait plus d'horreur que de compassion.

(preface, p. (x)). Folard maintains that the majority of men do not wish to see God (and it is clear he means the Christian God) placed in a bad light, for respect for Heaven is man's dearest emotion. His solution is to endow Oedipe with a moral rather than an intellectual flaw, and his guilt lies in the fact that although he has been warned by the oracle at Delphi not to engage in an altercation with anyone and not to seek supreme power, he has both killed a stranger and become king by marrying Jocaste. At the beginning of the play a dream has recalled this oracle to Oedipe (I,3), and he is portrayed as being in a state of fear and agitation at the possibility of crime.

With this fear of future guilt the French Oedipe has much in common with Seneca's Oedipus. Indeed the notion of the punishment of a tainted soul in the Latin play has more relevance to Christian belief than has the implication of injustice in Sophocles. Oedipe prays that he may die with his citizens:

Et plaise au Ciel, sensible à mon malheureux sort,  
Que je puisse bien-tot vous suivre par ma mort.  
J'ai la vie en horreur depuis qu'un Dieu contraire  
Fait périr les Enfants, & conserve le Pere; (I,2)

just as Oedipus hopes not to survive the ruin of his country:

Adfusus aris supplices tendo manus  
matura poscens fata, praecurram ut prior  
patriam ruentem neve post omnes cadam  
fiamque regni funus extremum mei. (71-4)

Both characters feel themselves to be the guilty cause of the pestilence.

Oedipe is haunted by his destin coupable, and exclaims that

De mes crimes futurs l'influence présente  
Seule allume en ces murs la Peste dévorante; (I,3)

Et né pour effraier quelque jour l'univers,  
De Thebe en attendant j'empoisonne les airs.

This seems to reflect lines 35-6 of Seneca:

sperare poteris sceleribus tantis dari  
regnum salubre ? fecimus caelum nocens.

Itamale urges Oedipe to believe that if he is forced to crime by destiny, this in no way affects his innermost virtue. He counsels that

L'aveu libre du coeur seul consomme le crime; (II,1)  
Le bras le fait en vain si le coeur ne l'anime.

This is the view maintained by Antigone (Phoenissae 203-5) and Jocasta (Phoenissae 451-3), and the same advice is proffered to Hercules by Amphitryon in the Hercules Furens (1237), as well as to Deianira by Hyllus (Hercules Oetaeus 900-1), but just as these characters are not inclined to put aside responsibility for their crimes, so Oedipe will not accept this reasoning. In Oedipe's reply to Itamale we begin to see the kind of image of God which Folard is trying to project. His is not seen to be an arbitrary will, but rather He is able to see into the heart of man and discern the seeds of evil dormant within:

Toute notre malice, Itamale, n'est pas  
Dans l'astre imperieux qu'on croit regler nos pas.  
Quand le Dieu qui voit tout prédit notre ruine, (II,1)  
C'est parce qu'en nos coeurs il en voit l'origine;  
C'est dans nous qu'il prévoit les maux qu'il nous prédit;  
Et notre vrai destin dans nos coeurs est écrit.

This amounts to a rejection of the fatality one encounters in the Greek theatre, and we are shown that man does possess free will and brings about his own misfortune. This didactic note is underlined at the end of the play when Oedipe's terrible destiny has overtaken him. Folard completely turns the concept of man being inescapably trapped in the workings of destiny upside down as Oedipe declares himself guilty of causing his own downfall. Indeed he feels he is doubly guilty for not heeding the signs which Heaven gave him in an attempt to avert this catastrophe:

Seul & libre artisan de mon sort déplorable,  
Ma main seule a tramé le malheur qui m'accable.

Le Ciel, pour m'éloigner de l'abîme où je cours,  
A prodigué pour moy ses plus rares secours, (V,4)  
Ses Augures divins, ses Songes, ses Oracles,  
Mille secrets remors, mille éclatans miracles.

In this respect the Oedipe of La Motte bears a greater similarity to the Jesuit play than to that of Voltaire. For he, too, rejects the 'fatalité tirannique'<sup>(1)</sup> of Sophocles. His reason for this, however, is slightly different from that of Folard. He feels that there is no value in giving examples of such utter, undeserved desolation that they could only lead men to despair of their existence (p. 377):

Une pareille idée ne pourroit que jeter les hommes dans le désespoir; & loin qu'il fût raisonnable de leur insinuer cette erreur, il auroit fallu leur cacher à jamais une si triste vérité, si nous étions assez malheureux, pour que c'en fût une.

He prefers to derive a more positive effect from his tragedy, and to achieve the twin goals of plaire et instruire. In order to instruct, La Motte must give Oedipe a tragic flaw from which we can draw a moral lesson. This flaw is imagined to be an excess of ambition. Oedipe has been warned by the oracle of Apollo not to leave his country home unless he wants to lose all peace and innocence. However, by his own act he has chosen to ignore this advice. Jocaste is also endowed with a fault, in that she has given herself over to excessive love in spite of an express warning from the oracle that she would marry her own son if she did so. They are thus both guilty of creating their own misfortunes. In casting the burden of guilt onto the characters themselves La Motte feels that he has been able to show the gods, or God, in a better light (p. 379):

Il me semble que cet arrangement corrige la dureté du sujet; et qu'il éloigne l'impression désespérante que laisseroit l'idée d'une Divinité qui se plairoit à accabler de malheurs, & de l'horreur même du crime, les ames les plus innocentes.

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(1) Quatrième Discours, p. 377.

Although La Motte's characters are not totally innocent, they are not sufficiently vicious to alienate sympathy, and the dramatist can thereby achieve his aim to please the audience. Oedipe and Jocaste do possess some virtue, and we are encouraged to feel pity for their misfortunes. Emotional effect is an important element of La Motte's work, and he seeks to tap the sensibilities of his audience.

Jocaste attempts to minimize Oedipe's responsibility for the murder of Laius by attributing it to fate:

Je n'impute qu'au sort mes mortelles allarmes;  
Et je vous dois toujours mon amour & mes larmes. (III,6)

but Oedipe will not accept that he is innocent:

Et moi, quand votre coeur craint de me condamner,  
Le mien désespéré ne peut se pardonner.  
Je sçais qu'en ce combat je ne fus point coupable:  
Mais je suis de vos maux la source déplorable: (III,6)  
Et malgré ma raison, mon trouble plus puissant  
Me défend en secret de me croire innocent.

Even when she is later aware of the true identity of her husband, Jocaste is more inclined to think of them both as misérable rather than coupable (V,1). Oedipe, on the other hand, thinks in terms of criminal guilt rather than misfortune, and accepts that the punishment he has received from the gods is a just one. He says to his sons:

Princes, le Ciel est juste, & j'étois criminel.  
Puisque j'ai pu des Dieux mépriser les menaces, (V,5)  
J'en dois subir la peine; & je leur en rend graces.

Once again divine justice is seen to be scrupulously fair, and Oedipe provides a didactic conclusion to the tragedy as he offers himself as an example of the kind of behaviour which should be expressly avoided (V,5).

La Toumelle concentrates less on the justice or injustice of Oedipe's destiny, but we can see from the preface to Oedipe, ou l'Ombre de Laius that he took the straightforward view that the crimes of incest and parricide should be punished by Heaven. Yet he does not stop to consider why Oedipe should have been driven to commit these crimes in

the first place. In spite of his actions, however, Oedipe is still seen as a pitiable character, and in the preface to Oedipe et Polibe La Toumelle tells us that one of the reasons why we can pity and even admire him is because of his acceptance of fate.

Lauraguais' message seems to be that man cannot and should not avoid his destiny. Oedipe has been warned by Eudox not to leave the countryside around Cithaeron unless he wishes to meet with death, and once in Thebes he seems to realize that he is doomed. Jocaste, however, tries to deny responsibility for her incestuous love for Oedipe, and casts the guilt upon Layus, charging him with the initial crime of trying to thwart Heaven by saving his son from death:

Non, barbare Layus, non, ne le croyez pas,  
Jocaste n'eût jamais profané ton trépas. (V,1)  
C'est toi qui fus coupable, & je suis ta victime.  
Mon crime! c'est le tien, & ce n'est pas mon crime.

The High-Priest's speech at the end of Jocaste is slightly inconclusive. He seems to preach that it is a crime to oppose destiny, but that destiny itself is wicked:

Du crime vous voyez les funestes effets.  
Pour conserver son fils, Layus osa prétendre  
Le dérober au Sort; mais il sait le reprendre.  
De ses cruelles mains Layus crut l'arracher;  
Précédé par le crime, il l'est venu chercher. (V,3)  
Mais l'air n'est plus chargé d'horribles influences:  
On ne respire plus les mortelles semences  
Dont il fut infecté par un destin jaloux.  
Adorons sa justice, & craignons son courroux.

Not unexpectedly, several of the later Oedipe plays, that is those of Buffardin, Chénier, and Doigny, favour a Sophoclean view of fatality. However, sometimes their view of Sophocles was coloured by Voltaire's interpretation of the Greek play. In Buffardin's Oedipe à Thèbes, ou le Fatalisme, for instance, Oedipe dares openly to revile the decrees of destiny:

Au Temple d'Apollon votre voix redoutable  
M'effraya de l'inceste, & m'en voilà coupable:  
Que voulez-vous de plus ? ces mélanges hideux (IV,7)  
De frères & d'enfans nés d'un incestueux,  
Cette main, tout mon corps outrageant la nature,

Devraient au moins laisser votre injuste murmure;

In Sophocles Oedipus never actually questions the justice of the gods, although the viewer of these tragic events may well ponder the fact.

Léonard's play, like that of Buffardin, announces in its title that its key issue is the workings of fate (Oedipe roi, ou la Fatalité). Although the author calls his play an imitation of Sophocles, he is in fact more heavily influenced by Voltaire in his attitude towards destiny and the gods than any of his contemporaries. This shows that Voltaire's ideas were very much alive at the end of the century. Léonard's Oedipe accuses the gods of fostering openly evil motives in drawing him away from the peace of Corinth to commit crimes in Thebes:

J'ai donc assassiné celui qui m'a fait naître,  
Et de ma mère encor je me trouve l'époux!  
Dieux! voilà votre ouvrage! Oui, j'en appelle à vous;  
A vous qui me trompiez, et dont la voix terrible, (III,1)  
M'exilant du séjour où je vivais paisible,  
M'attira, malgré moi, dans ces tristes climats,  
Vers l'abîme secret dont j'éloignais mes pas!

There is no question of Oedipe being endowed with a tragic flaw which justifies his punishment. He affirms that he is virtuous, and has been driven to crime by a perverse destiny (III,2).

The Oedipus fable proved an irresistible attraction to dramatists, for it granted them an opportunity to work out their own answers to the most important and fundamental questions of human existence. The Theban king is a symbol of mankind in general, and his downfall is tragic not only on a personal level, but symbolizes the whole issue of human suffering and criminality. From antiquity the subject had been coloured by particular writers' personal philosophies, and in the eighteenth century was tailored to offer conclusions as diverse as an expression of faith in the beneficence of Heaven and a sceptical rejection of any form of divine reason or justice.

CHAPTER VI

The Theban Cycle (ii):

Hereditary Guilt in the 'Phoenissae'

The Oedipus fable offers a powerful illustration of the fact that in the ancient world defiance of the gods by a single individual was held to lead not only to disaster on a personal level, but to the instigation of a hereditary curse pervading future generations of a man's family. Thus Laius' contravention of the Delphic oracle's warning not to beget children brought about not merely his own death and the downfall of his ill-fated son and wife, but in the next generation prompted the fatal struggle between his grandsons, Eteocles and Polynices. The chain of disaster continued with the pathetic and unjust murder of Antigone, and in the final event the whole line of Laius, with the exception of the insignificant Ismene, was extinguished.

The three great dramatists of Greece all dealt with the complete cycle of the Oedipus myth, although Aeschylus' Laius and Oedipus and Euripides' Oedipus and Antigone are now lost. Aeschylus' surviving drama, the Seven against Thebes, focuses on the preparations of Eteocles for defending his city against the onslaught of the seven chiefs of the Argive forces, who threaten the seven gates of Thebes. Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus portrays the arrival of the old king at Colonus, an area near Athens, where he finds peace and an end to his life of suffering. In the same dramatist's Antigone we see the tragic death of Oedipus' loyal and dutiful daughter, as she disobeys the temporal power of Creon to satisfy a higher, divine justice in offering burial to her dead brother Polynices. Euripides' Phoenissae takes place at an earlier

period, as the struggles of Eteocles and Polynices to gain permanent possession of the throne of Thebes are played out against the background of the royal palace and the torn loyalties of Jocasta and Antigone. The tragedy gains its name from the chorus, a group of Phoenician women who have been devoted to the service of Apollo at Delphi, but who have halted at Thebes, and been obliged to remain there throughout the siege. We also possess fragments of a Phoenissae by Phrynichus and an Antigone by Astydamantes.

In Republican Rome Accius composed a Phoenissae or Thebaïs, as well as an Antigone, and Juvenal (VII, 12) mentions a Thebaïs by Faustus. The misfortunes of Thebes were also a subject for epic poetry, the best known example being Statius' Thebaïd. Another epic, by Ponticus, which does not survive, is mentioned by Propertius (I, 7). Some doubt has been attached to the title of Seneca's drama, for it is called the Phoenissae in one branch of the manuscript tradition, and the Thebaïs in the other, but since Leo adopts the Phoenissae as the title in his edition, it will be so called in this chapter. Although the play bears the same name as that of Euripides, there is actually very little similarity between the Greek and Latin tragedies. The opening scene of Seneca's drama depicts Oedipus wandering with Antigone in the rough countryside outside Thebes and obsessed by the urge to end his life (1-319). This has no exact counterpart in Euripides, although Oedipus does appear towards the end of the play (1530 ff.) to hear of the deaths of his sons and to lament the extent of his misfortunes. In its evocation of a natural setting it bears a greater similarity to the opening scene of Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus. Oedipus' refusal, in Seneca's play, to return to Thebes and to halt the fratricidal struggle of Eteocles and Polynices (320-62) likewise has no parallel in Euripides. The next episode, in which there seem to be two distinct scenes, shows firstly Jocasta and Antigone in Thebes, hearing of the imminent battle between



Eteocles and Polynices from a messenger, and Jocasta's resolve to separate her sons (363-442). Then the scene switches to the battlefield, where Jocasta addresses both brothers (443-664). This last scene seems to have some elements in common with Jocasta's meeting with Polynices in the royal palace (Euripides, lines 304 ff.), where they are later joined by Eteocles (443 ff.), and the earlier part with the queen's frantic dash to the battlefield with Antigone to prevent the brothers engaging in single combat (1264 ff.).

The brevity of Seneca's play (664 lines as opposed to the 1766 lines of Euripides), added to the fragmentary nature of the episodes (the scene shifts abruptly from the rough woods around Cithaeron to Thebes, and then to the battlefield), the sudden ending (it breaks off before the brothers engage in combat), and the fact that there is no chorus of any kind,<sup>(1)</sup> point to the conclusion that the tragedy is either unfinished or that parts were lost in the transmission of the text. However, it is possible that the Phoenissae was intended as a series of dramatic dialogues reflecting the emotional reactions of certain well known characters, without being conceived as a full-scale tragedy. This could be a more drastic example of the Senecan tendency to concentrate on the effect of individual scenes to the exclusion of overall structural unity. Tarrant<sup>(2)</sup> argues for this proposition, and writes that it is best to regard the play as 'an essay in a distinct subgenre of tragedy'.

Earlier attitudes towards the Phoenissae have shown a curious division of opinion. Justus Lipsius asserted that this play was a masterpiece, worthy of the Golden Age of Roman literature, and perhaps written during the Civil War,<sup>(3)</sup> while a diametrically opposed viewpoint

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(1) This renders the title of 'Phoenissae' totally irrelevant.

(2) 'Senecan Drama and its Antecedents' (Harvard Studies in Classical Philology 82 (1978), 230).

(3) Animadversiones, p. 390.

was adopted by Daniel Heinsius. He failed to discern any merits in the play, and classed it not as the work of Seneca, but of some idle declaimer ('fabula ociosi declamatoris').<sup>(1)</sup> In the eighteenth century the Phoenissae was assumed without question to be mutilated. The general consensus was that the chorus of Phoenician women, part of act two, and the fifth act in which Eteocles and Polynices would engage in combat and kill each other had fallen out.<sup>(2)</sup> The tragedy was divided into four acts by editors and commentators, with the first act ending as Oedipus agrees to endure life for Antigone's sake (319), the truncated second act after Oedipus refuses to return to Thebes (362), the third as Jocasta rushes off to stop Eteocles and Polynices fighting (442), and the fourth at the end of the play as it stands. A conviction of the fact that the Latin text was extremely mutilated, coupled with its insubstantial proportions alongside the Phoenissae of Euripides, could not but restrict the amount of inspiration which it would provide for dramatists in the eighteenth century.

As in the Oedipus, we see in Seneca's Phoenissae a hero tormented by the sense of his own guilt, and once again the inexorable power of fate is stressed. Oedipus recognizes that

infanti quoque  
decreta mors est. fata quis tam tristia  
sortitus umquam? videram nondum diem  
uterique nondum solveram clausi moras,  
et iam timebar. (243-7)

Yet the fact that he had no freedom in his actions, which had been decreed for him before his birth, does not lead him to attack the gods, or to question the justice of their ways.

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(1) Animadversiones et notae, p. 513.

(2) See contemporary editions of the tragedies, as well as Brumoy, Le Théâtre des Grecs, II, 431; D'Argenson, Notices sur les oeuvres de théâtre, I, 97; Histoire universelle, VI, 288; Bibliothèque universelle des dames, p. 347; Coupé, Théâtre de Sénèque, I, 69.

The companion of Oedipus' self-tormenting exile is his daughter Antigone, whose outstanding filial devotion is highlighted by her willingness to resign all aspects of normal life for the sake of guiding her blind father. This is a traditional feature of her character, also illustrated in Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus and in the closing stages of the Phoenissae of Euripides. Her natural pietas forms a strong contrast to the self-seeking ambition of her two brothers, and is all the more extraordinary for its appearance in a family tainted by crime. Indeed Oedipus professes amazement that he could have produced so virtuous a daughter:

Unde in nefanda specimen egregium domo ?  
unde ista generi virgo dissimilis suo ? (80-2)  
Fortuna, credis ? aliquis est ex me pius ?

Antigone herself manifests a touching and simple devotion towards her father, refusing ever to be parted from his side. Similarly in the Greek Phoenissae she sees it as her obvious duty to care for her father:

οὐκ οὖν μετασχεῖν καὶ μὲ δέῃ τῶν βῶν κακῶν ; (1690)

(Must I not then share your misfortunes ?). In Oedipus at Colonus Oedipus also praises her self-sacrifice (345-52). This young heroine, especially as she appears in Sophocles' Antigone, appealed in a very fundamental way to French dramatists, for they saw her not only as a morally uplifting character, capable of arousing emotions of both admiration and pity, but also as a romantic figure, doomed to be separated from her fiancé Haemon (who does not appear in Seneca's play).

Of the two brothers, Eteocles and Polynices, Polynices is portrayed by Seneca as the least unattractive. He has committed the crime of invading his native land with a foreign army, but the original act of treachery belongs to Eteocles, who has refused to give up the throne of Thebes after his agreed year of office. Polynices is thus worthy of some sympathy as he questions why Eteocles should be permitted to enjoy the fruits of his crime while he (Polynices) is forced to endure a mean

existence in exile:

fraudis alienae dabo  
poenas, at ille praemium scelerum feret ?  
iubes abire: matris imperio obsequor -  
da quo revertar. regia frater mea (589-95)  
habitaret superbus, parva me abscondat casa:  
hanc date repulso; liceat exiguo lare  
pensare regnum.

Eteocles, on the other hand, is portrayed as a tyrant, whose only desire is to retain the throne of Thebes, whatever the cost. He is prepared to countenance treachery (651-3), the hatred of his people (654-9), and even the destruction of his own city (663-4). The play, as it stands, ends with the defiant statement that

Imperia pretio quolibet constant bene. (664)

However, readers of Seneca's tragedies in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries would have gained a rather different view of the two brothers. For early editors of the text<sup>(1)</sup> attributed the harsh replies of Eteocles to Polynices (wrongly it would seem by the general sense of the passages), and thus completely altered the interpretation of his character. It was believed that Eteocles did not speak at all in the play, but that Polynices' hot-headed ambition drove him to reject his mother's pleas, and to express a desire to seek the throne at any cost - even if this meant devastating Thebes in the process.<sup>(2)</sup> This view of Polynices is clearly illustrated in the Antigone plays of Gamier and Rotrou, which follow closely the text of Seneca as it was edited by contemporary scholars, and to a lesser extent in La Thébaïde of Racine.

Readers of Seneca's Oedipus, where Jocasta stabs herself, may be

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(1) See, for example, the editions of Del Rio (Antwerp 1576), Lipsius (Leiden 1589), Heinsius (Leiden 1611), and Schröder (Delft 1728), as well as the translations of Brumoy (II, 441) and Coupé (I, 111-12).

(2) For a comparison of the text of Leo with the eighteenth-century text of Schröder see the final page of this chapter.

surprised to find the queen still alive in the Phoenissae. In this instance Seneca is following the tradition of Euripides' Phoenissae, rather than of Sophocles, in whose later plays Jocasta does not appear.

In view of what has already been seen of attitudes towards the Roman Phoenissae, it was to be expected that French critics would not react particularly favourably towards the play. In characteristic vein père Brumoy exclaims at the opening scene (Théâtre des Grecs, II, 432):

ô simplicité Grecque, qu'êtes-vous devenuë sous la plume  
de ce bel esprit latin!

while Coupé suggests optimistically that the best parts of the Phoenissae may well be those which are lost (Théâtre de Sénèque, I, 113):

Le temps, qui détruit tout, ne nous a conservé que ces débris  
pompeux de la Thébaïde, et ce sont précisément les endroits  
où les grands mouvemens commencent à se développer et  
l'intérêt à s'accroître, qui sont perdus.

The translator of Seneca maintained, however, that the dramatist had succeeded in arousing the tragic emotion of fear (I, 114):

Il atteint du moins le premier (i.e. fear); car il n'y  
a rien de plus terrible que cette longue scène d'Oedipe et  
d'Antigone, rien de plus étonnant que cette profondeur de  
désespoir, que ces élans inattendus de pensées poignantes  
qu'on n'avoit pas encore acquises, et auxquelles succèdent  
si rapidement une foule d'autres impressions qui se propagent  
en tristesse.

The Histoire universelle adds to this the evocation of pity (VI, 290):

On a vu que la Thébaïde est défigurée par quantité de  
lacunes, mais on ne peut nier qu'elle attache, & que de tems  
en tems on y trouve cette terreur sombre, cette pitié  
déchirante qui caractérisent l'ancienne Tragédie.

The fourth act of the play (443-664) was generally held to be the most successful, and indeed was used more by dramatists than the opening scene between Oedipus and Antigone. Brumoy wrote of the confrontation between Jocasta and her sons (II, 436):

...ce quatrième Acte, qui est assurément le plus supportable  
& le plus soutenu par la beauté des vers & de quelques  
pensées.

The writer in the Bibliothèque universelle des dames (p. 347-8) echoes

this viewpoint:

Ce qui nous reste du IV<sup>e</sup> Acte, est assez beau. Les prières de Jocaste à ses deux fils sont touchantes & dignes du naturel & de la simplicité d'Euripide.

French Adaptations of the 'Phoenissae'

Just as the story of Oedipus had held a wide appeal for dramatists, so the later misfortunes of the Labdacides attracted numerous interpreters. From the sixteenth century we have two tragedies, Antigone, ou la Piété by Garnier (1580), which follows Seneca closely in the first two acts, but then relies on Sophocles, Euripides, and Statius for the later action, and Robelin's Thébaïde (1584), which is far less indebted to ancient sources. The seventeenth century offers several further Antigone plays, with only Racine preferring an alternative title in La Thébaïde, ou les Frères ennemis (1664). Rotrou's Antigone was published in 1639, and he, as Garnier had done earlier, included the whole cycle of events from the war at Thebes up to Antigone's cruel death at the instigation of Creon. Oedipus has no role in Rotrou's drama, and use of Seneca is restricted almost exclusively to imitation of the scene between Jocasta and her sons (443-664). Act II scene 4 is modelled very closely on this passage of the Phoenissae, and here Polynice is shown to be the more intractable of the two brothers, his character being based on the interpretation of Seneca which has already been discussed.

Racine's play differs from those of Garnier and Rotrou by concerning itself primarily with the conflict of the two brothers and its effect on the Theban royal family, and this is reflected in his choice of title. It is interesting that the great playwright should have chosen the misfortunes of the Labdacides for his first excursion into the tragic genre, and he was no doubt attracted by the possibilities for

arousing pity and fear in this 'le sujet le plus tragique de l'antiquité'.<sup>(1)</sup>  
In exactly the same way in the eighteenth century Voltaire was to turn to this ill-fated family for his first tragedy. Racine gave his main source in La Thébaïde as the Phoenissae of Euripides, and he is highly critical of the Roman play in his preface (p. 133):

Car pour la Thébaïde qui est dans Sénèque, je suis un peu de l'opinion d'Heinsius, et je tiens, comme lui, que non seulement ce n'est point une tragédie de Sénèque, mais que c'est plutôt l'ouvrage d'un déclamateur, qui ne savait ce que c'était que tragédie. (2)

Nevertheless, the influence of Seneca (and of Rotrou) is greater than this preface would suggest. The most Senecan scene of the play is that in which Jocaste confronts both her sons and pleads with them to be reconciled (IV,3), although in some cases the dialogue has as much in common with Rotrou's Antigone as with the Latin Phoenissae. The character of Polynice was moulded to a certain extent by this earlier work, but Racine was the first of the French dramatists to strive to moderate in some way the violence of his nature. This was done, it would seem, with the intention of bringing the character more into line with the Polynices of Euripides, who arouses considerable sympathy. His unwillingness to engage in war:

De cette affreuse guerre il abhorre l'image: (II,1)

certainly reflects the sentiments of this character (see the Greek Phoenissae, lines 433-4).

The necessary romantic interest was provided by the relationship of Antigone and Hémon, and later and lesser known dramatists of the seventeenth century concentrated on expanding this love interest, usually to the detriment of the main conflict. This is true of the

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(1) Preface, p. 133 (Pléiade edition).

(2) It should be remembered that this preface first appeared only in the 1676 edition of Racine's work, and is not necessarily a totally authoritative guide to his views twelve years previously.

anonymous Antigone (1672) preserved in manuscript form in the Bibliothèque nationale.<sup>(1)</sup> The love element is also prominent in the Antigone of Pader d'Assézan (or abbé Claude Boyer), which was published in 1687,<sup>(2)</sup> although the dramatist tells us in his preface (Au Lecteur) that even this was not enough to satisfy the tastes of his audience:

On a approuvé dans cette Tragedie la conduite, les pensées & les vers; mais la plupart du monde, & sur tout du monde galant, en a condamné le sujet. On a dit qu'il est un peu trop lugubre, qu'il n'interesse pas assez, & qu'enfin Antigone a (sic) tort de mettre sa vie en danger pour un Frere qui ne vit plus. ... Peut estre mesme n'y ay-je pas jetté assez d'amour pour le tems; mais le tems n'en a-t'il point trop ?

Both these Antigone plays are loosely based on the events of Sophocles' play of that title, and d'Assézan (or Boyer) also makes some reference to Statius' Thebaïd, but there is little or no use of Seneca.

Although it is clear that Seneca's play was not capable of inspiring a complete drama, it does seem that certain episodes, such as the exchange between Jocasta and her sons on the battlefield, and certain isolated ideas appealed to French dramatists. It remains to be seen whether this tendency continued into the eighteenth century. Certainly for nearly a hundred years after d'Assézan's Antigone not a single tragedy was written on a comparable subject.<sup>(3)</sup> This lack of production can be compared with the dearth of Oedipus plays between 1731 and 1781, for in both cases there was a surge of activity, inspired by a new interest in Greek drama, in the last quarter of the century. One can only speculate that respect for Racine's name or the practical difficulties of adapting the sombre sequels of Oedipus to the needs of the modern

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(1) Manuscrits français 9290.

(2) Paris, Guillaume Cavelier (B. N. Yf 6221).

(3) We do possess an undated Antigone manuscript, which seems to belong to the eighteenth century, but it is not possible to say with any certainty whether it belongs to the earlier or later part.



theatre long dismayed writers, and set them searching for easier subjects. The work produced towards the end of the century manifests clearly a new interest in the writing of Sophocles and Euripides, and shows that dramatists were no longer so narrowly restricted by the need to introduce gallantry.

Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus inspired two tragedies. In the first of these, Ducis' Oedipe chez Admète (1778), the story of Euripides' Alcestis is interlinked with that of Oedipus. The tragedy was later reduced to three acts, in an attempt to exclude the Alcestis elements. Retitled Oedipe à Colone it was performed in 1797 and published in 1826.<sup>(1)</sup> The second is Marie-Joseph Chénier's Oedipe mourant. This was received at the Comédie-française on January 23rd 1785,<sup>(2)</sup> but was never performed. It is printed in the Oeuvres posthumes (Paris 1824). The Antigone seems to have inspired a number of imitations, but only two tragedies remain. Brenner (A Bibliographical List of Plays in the French Language) mentions an Antigone by a Mme. de Marron (1773) (no. 8871) and a play of the same title by Châteaubrun (no. 4783), which was neither performed nor published. No trace of either of these plays has been found. The two Antigone plays which do survive are a tragedy in manuscript form composed by an anonymous Viscount (B. N. ms. fr. nouvelles acquisitions 2863, fol. 161-193) and the Antigone ou la Piété fraternelle of Doigny du Ponceau.<sup>(3)</sup> The latter tragedy was performed on July 31st 1787 and then only once subsequently.<sup>(4)</sup> The only drama to imitate the Phoenissae of Euripides is the Étéocle of Legouvé. This

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(1) Paris, Nepveu (B. N. Yth 20283).

(2) See Liéby, Etude sur le théâtre de Marie-Joseph Chénier, p. 17n.

(3) Contained in the Oeuvres de M. d'Oigni, tome I (B. N. Z 57012).

(4) See Lancaster, French Tragedy in the Reign of Louis XVI, p. 95-7, for a discussion of this play.

tragedy was performed for the first time at the Théâtre de la République on 27 Vendémiaire an VIII, or October 18th 1799.

Although inspiration for these plays comes essentially from the Greek theatre, it is possible to trace in some of them a survival of certain elements of Seneca's Phoenissae. However, in contrast with the amount of use made of the Phoenissae in the seventeenth century, it is clear that Seneca has been largely superseded by Sophocles and Euripides. Aeschylus is still unused.

Jean-François Ducis,<sup>(1)</sup> Oedipe chez Admète was his first and only excursion into the Greek world, although in his speech of entry into the Académie française on March 4th 1779 he professed a respect for the ancients

qui, pour le goût, sont encore nos législateurs après deux mille ans; (2)

His tragedy gained a considerable success when performed for the first time on December 4th 1778, and in all the play was given twenty-four times from 1778 to the end of 1780.<sup>(3)</sup> It has the distinction of being the first French drama to make use of the Sophoclean Oedipus at Colonus, which with its scarcity of action was generally held to be incapable of providing sufficient material for the French stage. The Greek play tells of Oedipus' mystical death, which has been ordained by the gods, and finally brings peace to his tormented soul. Its religious overtones are linked quite skilfully by Ducis with the theme of death in the Alcestis of Euripides. Here Alcestis nobly resolves to offer her life to the god of death in place of that of her husband, but is saved by the inter-

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(1) (1733-1816). He is mainly known for his adaptations of Shakespeare for the French Stage. See Lancaster, French Tragedy in the Time of Louis XV, II, 571 ff..

(2) In Oeuvres de J. F. Ducis (Paris 1826), tome I, p. 12.

(3) See Lancaster, French Tragedy in the Reign of Louis XVI, p. 53.

vention of Hercules. The merging of the two plays' meant that Oedipus would give his life to save Alcestis, and thus enjoy a glorious end.

Oedipe chez Admète is usually described as an amalgamation of these two Greek plays, coloured by the prevailing taste for sensibilité in the theatre. Certainly these are the most important constituents. The first act introduces the Euripidean characters of Admète and Alceste, who are initially linked with the Oedipus theme by the presence of Polynice, who is seeking Admète's help against his brother Etéocle (I,1). The potential tragedy is set in motion at the beginning of the second act, when the gods demand the death of Admète. The third scene of the second act introduces us to the events of the Oedipus at Colonus with the reported arrival of a blind stranger led by a beautiful young girl. Oedipe and Antigone appear in person in act III scene 2, and their encounter with the inhabitants of Phère (III,2) was clearly suggested by their meeting with the stranger and chorus of inhabitants of Colonus in Sophocles (lines 29 ff.). Polynice's attempt to gain his father's forgiveness (V,2) is another instance of Sophoclean imitation, although the granting of his request is a sentimental addition by Ducis. The final scene of the play (V,7), which provides a spectacular conclusion in the temple of the Eumenides, brings the threads of the Alcestis and Oedipus at Colonus together, and the mystical death of Oedipus, reported by the messenger in Sophocles (1579 ff.), is transformed by Ducis into a scene of theatrical effect as Alceste is dramatically released from her vow.

This brief resumé of the Greek elements in Oedipe chez Admète shows that Ducis was well acquainted with the plots of the Greek works. However, there is some evidence to suggest that the French dramatist's view of the Oedipus at Colonus was modified to a degree by his reading of the opening scenes of Seneca's Phoenissae. The area in which Oedipe and Antigone arrive, for example, as they make their first entrance on

stage bears a superficial resemblance to the corresponding scene in the Sophoclean play, in that it contains a temple devoted to the Eumenides, while the Greek drama is set in an area of ground sacred to these goddesses. Yet the nature of the landscape is fundamentally different. In Sophocles Antigone describes an agreeable wooded grotto where Oedipus is pleased to take his rest:

χῶρος δ' ὄδ' ἱερός, ὡς ἀπεικάσαι, βρυῶν  
δάφνης, ἐλαίας, ἀμπέλου· πυκνόπτεροι  
δ' εἶσω κατ' αὐτὸν εὐστόμοις ἠηδόνες· (16-18)

(But this ground is sacred, as one may guess, teeming with sweet bay, olive, and vine; within it numerous nightingales sing sweetly). However, in Ducis' play the landscape is arid and desert-like. Phénix refers to

ces roches arides,  
Où le remords consacre un temple aux Euménides, ... (II,3)(1)

and Antigone describes to her father 'des cyprès arides' (III,2).

Polynice gives the fullest description of this foreboding place:

Quel temple et quel désert affreux!  
Des antres, des rochers, des cyprès ténébreux: (III,1)  
D'un nouveau Cythéron tout m'offre ici l'image.

This cannot but recall the barren, desolate countryside in which Oedipus and Antigone are imagined to be wandering in the opening scenes of Seneca's play. In the Latin tragedy the aged king is pictured in the wild woods around Cithaeron:

est alius istis noster in silvis locus, (27)  
.....  
quid moror sedes meas?  
mortem, Cithaeron, redde .... (30-1)  
.....  
semper cruenta saeve crudelis ferox,  
cum occidis et cum parcis, ... (34-5)

Antigone mentions a tall cliff looking out over the sea (67-8), bare rock ('nudus silex' (69)), a gaping chasm (70), and a raging torrent ('rapax torrens' (71)). This inhospitable scenery probably appealed

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(1) Text from the Oeuvres de J. F. Ducis, tome I.

to Ducis more than a tranquil scene, since he wanted to evoke an image of a place of terror, dominated by the temple of the avenging Furies.

The French writer's portrayal of Oedipe's state of mind also seems to bear closer similarities to Seneca than to Sophocles. In the Greek play Oedipus does desire to end his life (see lines 101-10), but he has come to accept his fate, and has learnt through suffering a kind of endurance:

τίς τὸν πλανήτην Οἰδίπουν καθ' ἡμέραν  
τὴν νῦν σπανιστοῖς δέξεται δωρήμασιν,  
ὄμικρον μὲν ἔξαιτούντα, τοῦ ὄμικροῦ δ' ἔτι  
μείον φέροντα, καὶ τόδ' ἔξαρκούν ἐμοί; (3-8)  
στέργειν γὰρ αἱ πάθει με χῶ χρόνος ξυγίων  
μακρὸς διδάσκει καὶ τὸ γένναίον τρίτον.

(Who will receive Oedipus the wanderer with scant hospitality today ? I ask but little, getting even less than little, and still this is enough for me; for my sufferings, endless time always with me, and thirdly my noble birth are teaching me to be content). In Oedipe chez Admète, however, Oedipe is obsessed with the thought of death, and can think of nothing but ways to end his suffering. This is the same picture of Oedipus which we see in the Latin play. Although there are few exact similarities of expression, it is possible to make close comparisons. Just as Oedipe has reached the end of his powers of endurance:

O ma chère Antigone!  
Je suis las de traîner l'horreur qui m'entourne. (III,2)  
Je vais cesser de vivre.

so the Latin Oedipus is resolved on death:

omite poenae languidas longae moras  
mortemque totam admitte; quid segnis traho (46-8)  
quod vivo ?

For Oedipe life is merely a form of torture:

Ma vie est un supplice; et pour me secourir (III,2)  
Il ne me reste plus que l'espoir de mourir.

as it is for Oedipus:

aliquando terra corpus invisum tege; (96-8)  
peccas honesta mente, pietatem vocas

patrem insepultum trahere.

In both plays his mind is filled with visions of the death he ought to have met long ago on Mount Cithaeron:

O Jocaste! ô mère malheureuse!  
Que tu prévoyais bien ma destinée affreuse! (III,2)  
Et toi, berceau sanglant où j'aurais dû périr,  
Rocher du Cythéron, je viens ici mourir.

(The original text of 1780 reads in the last line:

Rochers du Cythéron, j'y reviens pour mourir.)

ibo, ibo qua praerupta protendit iuga (12-13)  
meus Cithaeron, ...

mortem, Cithaeron, redde et hospitium mihi  
illud meum restitue, ut expirem senex (31-2)  
ut debui infans.

It is left to Antigone to preach courage and constancy to her father:

Hélas! faut-il qu'instruit par l'âge,  
Votre Antigone en vain vous exhorte au courage! (III,2)

sed flecte mentem, pectus antiquum advoca (77-8)  
victasque magno robore aerumnas doma;

As in Seneca's Phoenissae, she is seen as a model of filial devotion, although there is no particular reason to think that Seneca's view of the character influenced Ducis in any special way. Marie-Joseph Chénier was particularly impressed by this Oedipe/Antigone scene (III,2), but he analysed it as a mixture of the gravity of Sophocles and the powerful emotion of Shakespeare, rather than as an imitation of Seneca (Analyse de l'Oedipe à Colone, tragédie de M. Ducis. 1797 (Oeuvres de M. J. Chénier (Paris 1824-6), tome IV, p. 226):

Beaucoup plus longue que la première scène du tragique grec, elle est pourtant beaucoup plus rapide; elle est aussi plus variée, plus brûlante; elle réunit, en un mot, à la gravité du cothume antique les grands mouvemens de Shakespeare.

This part of the third act is the only area of the play in which the French dramatist referred to the Phoenissae, and it is noteworthy that he is the first of the neo-classical tragedians to use this particular section of the Latin drama. In the later three act Oedipe

à Colone (where elements from the Alcestis are still not completely eradicated) the scene which is evocative of the Phoenissae (III,2) becomes act II scene 2.

Chénier's Oedipe mourant, or Oedipe à Colone as it is often known, reacts against this 'contamination' in Ducis' tragedy, and remains far closer to the Sophoclean play. As in the same dramatist's Oedipe roi, the chorus is introduced in imitation of the Greek theatre, and no use is made of Seneca.

Whereas the subject of Antigone had often implied some use of the Roman Phoenissae in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in the eighteenth century there was a much stronger tendency to emulate the work of Sophocles and to discard Seneca completely. Of the two eighteenth-century Antigone texts we possess, that of Doigny du Ponceau is the more closely inspired by Sophocles, and indeed is nearer in spirit to the Greek play than is the work of any of his predecessors. In his Discours sur l'état actuel de la tragédie (Oeuvres, tome I) Doigny describes himself as a follower of Greece and Rome ('Nous autres partisans des Grecs et des Romains' (p. 24)), but he found no occasion to imitate the Roman theatre in his play. Whereas the romantic element had often been emphasized in the seventeenth century, gallantry is now discarded in favour of the nobler sentiment of pietas and Antigone's loyalty to her brother and family.

Although Doigny's tragedy does deal to a certain extent with the strife of the brothers Eteocles and Polynices, Legouvé's<sup>(1)</sup> Etéocle was the first play since Racine's La Thèbaïde to place the fraternal

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(1) Gabriel-Marie-Jean-Baptiste Legouvé (1764-1812) was a successful dramatist of the Revolutionary period, as well as the author of much poetry. See also the Troades and Octavia chapters for his Polixène and Epicharis et Néron, ou Conspiration pour la liberté. Dr Ernst Barts has made a study of his life and work ('Gabriel-Jean-Baptiste Legouvé, ein vergessener Dichter der Revolutionszeit' in Romanische Studien 49 (1939)).

conflict in the foreground. To treat the same subject as Racine was held to be a dangerous and even presumptuous pursuit in the eighteenth century, and Legouvé felt compelled to warn the reader in his Avertissement that he was not competing with the genius of the great dramatist, but with a work in which his talents were far from being fully developed (p. 251)<sup>(1)</sup>

On aurait tort d'imaginer qu'en traitant Étéocle, j'aie eu la ridicule prétention de lutter avec Racine. Sa Thébaïde, ouvrage de sa première jeunesse, est généralement regardée comme une tragédie où, malgré des beautés, il est encore loin d'être lui-même;

In order to protect himself further from accusations of plagiarism, Legouvé emphasized his debt to Euripides:

D'ailleurs j'ai été soutenu par Euripide qui m'a fourni le sujet, l'idée de la différence du caractère des deux princes, enfin plusieurs détails de ma pièce.

No mention is made of Seneca, although there are some echoes of the Roman Phoenissae in the play. However, by this stage many of the Senecan elements derive not from direct reference to the Latin drama but from the intermediary influence of Racine.

Given the tremendous influence of Racinian tragedy in the eighteenth century, it is not surprising that echoes of La Thébaïde should be easily discernible in Legouvé's drama. From a structural point of view the first act recalls the earlier play, and the expression of Jocaste's anxiety in the opening scene ('les douleurs d'une mère') is based on the 'mortelles douleurs' of the Racinian character (I,1).<sup>(2)</sup> The early introduction of Etéocle (I,2) also recalls his appearance in the first act of La Thébaïde (I,3). Other parallel scenes are also in evidence, although the dissimilarities between the two plays are generally of greater significance than the similarities. Legouvé, for example, pursues an absolute unity of action, so that nothing occurs

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(1) Text from the Oeuvres complètes de G. Legouvé (Paris 1826-7), tome I.

(2) Both of these modern scenes amount to a greatly condensed version of the opening episode of Euripides' Phoenissae.



which does not directly concern the conflict of the brothers. The love between Antigone and Hémon, which had been an important part of the seventeenth-century drama, is totally excluded,<sup>(1)</sup> and the interest derives exclusively from the interaction of Jocaste, Antigone, Étéocle, Polynice, and, more briefly, Oedipe. The plot remains essentially simple, and each act has one particular point of focus. The first act is structured around Étéocle's determination to retain the throne of Thebes, while the second act presents the case of Polynice. The third act brings about a confrontation between the two brothers, and ends on a climax as they prepare to wage war. This is contrasted with the lull in the fighting in the fourth act, caused by the deaths of Capanée<sup>(2)</sup> and Oenomaüs. We are then prepared for the especially dramatic fifth act in which the brothers engage in single combat.

Legouvé's characterization of Étéocle and Polynice is extremely interesting in the light of earlier discussions on the balance of good and evil in the two brothers. As in La Thébaine their mutual enmity is predestined, and therefore entirely unavoidable. Étéocle muses on this fact in act III scene 2:

On sait qu'avant de naître une précoce haine  
Fit du flanc maternel notre première arène.  
Pour moi, dès le berceau prompt à le défier,  
A nos futurs combats j'aimais à m'essayer.

We are immediately reminded of Étéocle's speech in the earlier tragedy (IV,1):

Nous étions ennemis dès la plus tendre enfance;  
Que dis-je ? nous l'étions avant notre naissance.

But the concept of pre-natal fatality originates in Oedipus' speech in the Latin Phoenissae, lines 243 ff..

While Racine had departed from his predecessors in arousing some

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(1) Euripides' Creon, Menoeceus, and Tiresias are also omitted.

(2) This episode is derived (with alterations) from Euripides' Phoenissae, lines 1172-86.

sympathy for Polynice, Legouvé takes this much further, and portrays Etéocle as an out and out tyrant and Polynice as wholly sympathetic. In this the French dramatist was influenced by his reading of the Euripidean text, where Eteocles openly seeks power (504-6), while Polynices pleads the cause of justice (469 ff.), although certain of the brothers' speeches hark back to Seneca. In Etéocle the tyrannical ruler proclaims that

Qu'important les moyens dont je me suis servi, (I,2)  
Si mon heureux effort du succès fut suivi ?  
Qu'importe qu'en ces murs l'on m'aime ou l'on me craigne ?

The source of this speech is Eteocles' argument in the Phoenissae that

Regnare non vult esse qui invisus timet:  
simul ista mundi conditor posuit deus, (654-6)  
odium atque regnum:

It had been used by Garnier, Rotrou, and Racine, but all of these, following contemporary editions of the Phoenissae, attributed it to Polynice instead of Etéocle. Etéocle's bold assertion that

..plutôt qu'en ces murs commande un autre roi, (III,5)  
Périsse, s'il le faut, Thèbe entière avec moi.

is also based on a speech attributed to Polynices in texts of the time.

Schröder prints:

POLYN. Pro regno velim (662-3)  
Patriam, penates, conjugem flammis dare.

Legouvé is the first to assign these speeches to the right brother, although rather than consciously correcting contemporary editions of the Phoenissae, he must only have been seeking to highlight the traits he had found in Euripides. Numerous references are made to the viciousness of Etéocle, but Polynice, on the other hand, is seen as possessing a basic goodness:

s'il montra cette altièrè chaleur  
Que donne la jeunesse et sur-tout la valeur, (I,1)  
Toujours plus généreux, plus humain que son frère,  
La bonté tempéra son fougueux caractère.

The idea of including a scene in which Jocaste strives to reconcile

her two sons (III,3) may have been suggested by the Greek play (443 ff.), or by La Thébaïde (IV,3). Certainly there are echoes of both Euripides and Racine. The echoes of La Thébaïde often refer back ultimately to the Latin Phoenissae, for Racine had made considerable use of Seneca in his scene. Thus Jocaste's effort to remind her sons that they are the product of the same womb:

Cruel, quel est celui que proscriit ta colère ?  
Est-ce un étranger ? non; c'est mon fils, c'est ton frère,  
Le frère qu'avec toi je portai dans mon flanc,

(Étéocle III,3) is a variation of Racine's

Je suis de tous les deux la commune ennemie,  
Puisque votre ennemi reçut de moi la vie: (IV,3)

and was suggested initially by Seneca's

ego utrumque peperit - ponitis ferrum ocius ? (449)

Her warning about the curse surrounding the throne of Thebes:

Et quel trône d'ailleurs brûles-tu d'occuper ?  
Celui que tant de fois la foudre vint frapper,  
Le trône si glissant des tristes Labdacides ? (Étéocle, III,3)

is reminiscent of Racine's

Ce trône fut toujours un dangereux abîme:  
La foudre l'environne aussi bien que le crime. (IV,3)

and ultimately of Seneca's

sceptra Thebano fuit  
impune nulli gerere, nec quisquam fide  
rupta tenebit illa: (648-50)

Jocaste is presented largely as she had been in Racine's play and in Euripides and Seneca, as the innocent victim entangled in a web of fatality and tragedy, and as a helpless mediator between her two sons. It is often difficult to define the precise sources for her words, but her initial plan to plead with Polynice in his camp:

C'est à ce fils plus doux que je veux m'adresser.  
Oui, je prétends voler au camp de Polynice. (I,1)

may owe something to her resolution in Seneca:

Ibo ibo et armis obvium opponam caput,  
stabo inter arma; (407-8)

Later on, her dash towards the battle-lines in a vain effort to stop the single combat:

(Antigone) Mon père, pour fléchir leur farouche vaillance,  
Entre vos fils armés quand Jocaste s'élançe, ... (V,1)

evokes vividly her frenzied flight in the Latin Phoenissae, lines 427 ff., as described by the satelles:

Vadit furenti similis aut etiam furit. etc. (427)

However, the actual situation finds a parallel in Euripides (1264 ff.), and Legouvé may have been inspired by Jocasta's urgent plea to her daughter:

ἔπειγ' ἔπειγε, θυγάτηρ' ὡς, ἤν μὲν φθάσω  
παίδας πρὸ λόγχης, οὐμὸς ἐν φάει βίος. (1280-1)

(Make haste, make haste, daughter, since if I get to my sons before they engage battle, my life is still in the light).

Antigone also retains the moral excellence with which she had been endowed by the ancient dramatists, and she is praised by Oedipe as the only worthwhile offspring he has produced:

Aimable rejeton d'une triste famille,  
Il m'est doux de pouvoir, sur ton sein vertueux,  
Me reposer des coups que m'ont portés les dieux. (V,1)  
Il m'est doux d'obtenir les soins d'une main chère:  
Toi seule, hélas! m'as fait un bonheur d'être père!

The sentiments of this passage are very close to the opening scene of Seneca's Phoenissae, where Oedipus exclaims:

Unde in nefanda specimen egregium domo ? (80-1)  
unde ista generi virgo dissimilis suo ?  
....  
nata, quam tanti est mihi (2-3)  
genuisse vel sic,

Oedipe's own role, however, does not reflect the Senecan drama, but that of Euripides, where, as in Etéocle, he is seen only towards the end of the action.<sup>(1)</sup>

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(1) Act IV scene 6 onwards in Etéocle; lines 1530 ff. in Euripides. In the Greek play (63-8) we learn that the unfortunate old man is being kept a prisoner by his sons, and has uttered a solemn curse on them. The situation is the same in Legouvé's play.

As has become apparent, Legouvé shows a considerable degree of flexibility in his use of sources, and is answerable to no one single model. However, his knowledge and use of the Greek Phoenissae should not be underestimated. Often passages which seem to indicate imitation of Seneca go back in fact to Euripides, for it is clear that Seneca himself imitated Euripides on some occasions. Thus Jocaste's expression of regret at the fact that she could not perform the usual maternal rites at Polynice's wedding:

Hélas! ce n'est pas moi qui, mère fortunée,  
Allumai pour mon fils les flambeaux d'hyménée, ... (II,2)

is based not on Seneca, lines 505-8, which it resembles closely, but is almost a direct translation of Euripides, lines 344-6. Similarly her first words of greeting to her son after his long exile (II,2) echo not the lines in Seneca (464 ff.), but the joyful verses of Euripides (304 ff.).

Euripides also provided the initial inspiration for the dénouement of Etéocle. In the Greek drama the messenger recounts the fatal combat between the two brothers (1335 ff.), and there appear to be two stages in the fight: Polynices strikes the first blow and is then wounded by Eteocles. Both continue fighting, and Eteocles is the first to aim a mortal stroke at Polynices, but as Polynices breathes his last he finds the strength to drive his sword through the other's heart (see lines 1390-1424). Legouvé felt that so dramatic a conclusion could not produce its best effect in narrative form, and he decided instead to represent the culmination of the fight on stage. Like many of his contemporaries, the French dramatist was convinced that so tragic a theme should be accompanied by the evocation of terror, and not merely fear, and he devoted his final act to the arousal of this emotion. The combat is foreshadowed by the appearance of the ghost of Laïus to Jocaste, and this sets the mood for the final confrontation. She relates how

A peine je rentrais sous les voutes antiques  
Dont le vaste détour conduit à ces portiques,  
Que Laius, échappé de la nuit des tombeaux,  
Pâle, hideux de sang, et couvert de lambeaux, (V,2)  
S'avance, et me dit: Morts! Ce cri lugubre et sombre  
Par l'écho de la voûte est répété dans l'ombre. (1)

The first stage of the fight takes place off stage, and soon after Etéocle is brought before the audience, wounded and supported on a bed of flags (V,4). It seems obvious that the tyrant has been defeated by Polynice, and that the moral account has been squared, but we are suddenly surprised by an abrupt reversal of roles. Etéocle has his sword concealed by his side, and when he feigns to draw his last breath, and Polynice piously comes to embrace him, he runs his brother through with this weapon. The play ends on a curious and morally dubious note as Etéocle dies full of happiness:

Je suis content.  
Le sort qui m'a trahi maintenant m'est propice;  
Dans la tombe avec moi j'entraîne Polynice. (V,4)  
O mort, terrible mort! je t'attends sans effroi:  
Je meurs vengé d'un frère, et je meurs encor roi. (2)

This type of ending, especially with its theme of fraternal revenge, is reminiscent of Crébillon's Atrée et Thyeste, and, of course, harks back to the Thyestes in spirit. Legouvé himself was convinced that the dénouement was no more fearful than the subject demanded (Avertissement, p. 252-3):

Le dénouement n'est pas trop cruel, puisque la tragédie entière, où la terreur domine, prépare le spectateur à un tableau effrayant pour conclusion.

and he named de Belloy's Gabrielle de Vergy (3) as his precedent for the inclusion of violence.

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(1) This is reminiscent of the appearance of Laius' ghost in the many Oedipe tragedies of the century. See previous chapter.

(2) This provides for a more dramatic ending than in the Phoenissae of Euripides, where there are some 350 lines of anti-climax after the deaths of the brothers have been reported.

(3) See Thyestes chapter, p. 90.

Clearly tragedy had come a long way since the seventeenth century, when the audience's preference was for gallantry and delicately expressed emotions. This purified atmosphere has been replaced by scenes of realistically violent passion, and the fact that the public was no longer repulsed by such episodes is demonstrated by the success which Etéocle gained. In this instance Seneca's contribution to the evocation of terror was minimal, or at most indirect, and the Latin Phoenissae has largely been eclipsed by the weightier authority of the corresponding Greek tragedies.

650

Leo

IOC.           sceptra Thebano fuit  
impune nulli gerere, nec quisquam fide  
rupta tenebit illa: iam numeres licet  
fratrem inter istos.  
ETE.           Numeret, est tanti mihi  
cum regibus iacere. te turbae exulum  
ascribo. IOC. Regna, dummodo invisus tuis.  
ETE. Regnare non vult esse qui invisus timet;  
simul ista mundi conditor posuit deus,  
odium atque regnum: regis hoc magni reor,  
odia ipsa premere. multa dominantem vetat  
amor suorum; plus in iratos licet.  
qui vult amari, languida regnat manu.  
IOC. Invisa numquam imperia retinentur diu.  
ETE. Praecepta melius imperi reges dabunt;  
exilia tu dispone. pro regno velim -  
IOC. Patriam penates coniugem flammis dare ?  
ETE. Imperia pretio quolibet constant bene.

660

Schröder

JOC.           sceptra Thebarum fuit  
Impune nulli gerere; nec quisquam fide  
Ruptâ tenebat illa. jam numeres, licet,  
Fratrem inter istos.  
POLYN.       Numero: & est tanti mihi  
Cum regibus jacere. JOC. Te turbae exulum  
Adscribo. regna, dummodo invisus tuis.  
POL. Regnare non vult, esse qui invisus timet.  
Simul ista mundi conditor posuit Deus,  
Oidium atque regnum. regis hoc magni reor,  
Odia ista premere. multa dominantem vetat  
Amor suorum. plus in iratos licet.  
Qui vult amari, languida regnet manu.  
Invisa numquam imperia retinentur diu.  
JOC. Praecepta melius imperi reges dabunt;  
Exilia tu dispone. POL. Pro regno velim  
Patriam, penates, conjugem flammis dare.  
Imperia pretio quolibet, constant bene.

(Similar to the text of 1611 (Heinsius and Scaliger), except that in this earlier edition lines 659-60 are attributed to Jocasta instead of Polynices).



CHAPTER VII

Hercules as Tragic Hero (i):

'Hercules Furens' - the Portrayal of Madness

Herakles, or Hercules as he was known in Rome, this most famous of the Greek heroes, appears in classical literature in a variety of guises. He is most popularly known for the twelve labours he accomplished at the behest of Eurystheus, king of the Argolid, and which all involved triumph over superhuman difficulties, but tales of his immense courage and endurance, as well as of his amorous exploits, intruded into every aspect of legend. Throughout his life Hercules fought and defeated monsters of all kinds, but in the Hercules Furens he falls prey to an internal rather than an external attack - a madness which takes full control of his senses - and his enemy is unconquerable precisely because it is he himself.

The theme of Hercules' insanity had been treated in the Greek world by Euripides, in his Herakles Mainomenos, and we also know of Herakles tragedies by Diogenes, Lycophron, and Timesitheus, in addition to a Herakles Perikaiomenos by Spintharus, although none but that of Euripides survives. In Rome Scaevus Memor is supposed to have composed a Hercules, but the nature of his play is unknown, and the Hercules Furens of Seneca is our only extant Roman tragedy on this subject.

In the Greek Herakles the madness which besets the unfortunate hero is clearly the work of Hera, and the form of madness, or λύσσα, is personified and appears on stage together with Iris, the messenger of the gods (815 ff). Soon after we hear of an immediate and physical change within Herakles, as insanity enters his mind:

ἦν ἰδοῦ· καὶ δὴ τινάσσει κρᾶτα βαλβίδων ἄπο (867-8)  
καὶ διαστρόφους ἕλίσσει σίγα γοργωποῦς κόρας.

(See him! Even now he is shaking his head at the starting-point, and rolls in silence his twisting, scowling eyes). Herakles himself is absolutely guiltless, and his innocence makes us question the justice of the gods who allow this to happen.

In Seneca's drama Juno herself appears in the prologue (1-124), and vents her wrath on her deadly enemy Hercules, who has defeated all the creatures she has sent against him. In desperation she resorts to a new method of attack, resolving to set the hero at war with himself:

quaeris Alcidae parem ?  
nemo est nisi ipse: bella iam secum gerat.  
adsint ab imo Tartari fundo excitae (84-8)  
Eumenides, ignem flammeae spargant comae,  
viperea saevae verbera incutiant manus.

The goddess, however, makes no appearance in the body of the play, and the actual onset of madness (939 ff.) is separated by a substantial amount of material from Juno's declaration of her intentions. Her involvement thus becomes far less tangible than that of Hera, and although we know her anger to be the external cause of Hercules' insanity, Seneca seems to be particularly interested in the psychological connection between Hercules' disturbed emotional condition after the bloody slaughter of Lycus and the onset of a state of total mental disorder. Unlike his Greek counterpart, Hercules falls prey to an especially learned type of madness, and the Latin dramatist focuses on intellectual rather than physical manifestations of insanity. His hero becomes guilty of the sin of hubris as he imagines himself attacking Heaven, as the Titans had done in times past:

bella Titanes parent,  
me duce furentes; saxa cum silvis feram (967-9)  
rapiamque dextra plena Centauris iuga.

In common with other Senecan heroes he assumes full responsibility for his actions upon recovering his sanity, and concludes ironically that his noble deeds had been prompted by another's orders (Eurystheus'),

but that his criminal action (that is the murder of his family) belongs to himself alone:

laudanda feci iussus: hoc unum meum est. (1268)

The events which both Euripides and Seneca are portraying are broadly the same,<sup>(1)</sup> but Seneca's treatment of these events highlights the fact that he is primarily interested not in the dramatic, but the descriptive mode. For while Euripides' drama proceeds at a logical pace with the action advancing through encounters between Amphitryon, Megara, Lycus, and Herakles, in the Latin play the action is suddenly brought to a halt precisely at the point of greatest interest, as Hercules is about to punish Lycus. Hereupon Theseus regales his audience with a long (nearly two hundred line) description of the nature of the underworld and Hercules' adventures there (658-827). This long digression is modelled to a certain extent on Aeneas' visit to the underworld in

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(1) In both plays Hercules has gone to Hades to capture Cerberus, and during his absence Lycus has killed Creon, king of Thebes and Megara's father, as well as his sons, and usurped the throne. Megara, Amphitryon (Hercules' father), and Hercules' sons are now at the mercy of the tyrant. In the Greek play Lycus is determined to destroy them all, and as the action commences they are sitting at the altar of Zeus seeking sanctuary. In Seneca's play Megara is offered an alternative solution of marriage with the tyrant (369-71), but it is a compromise she is not prepared to accept. When the situation seems desperate, Hercules returns to Thebes in both dramas (Eurip. 514 ff.; Sen. 520 ff.), and we at once become optimistic of a happy outcome. He determines to kill Lycus (Eurip. 565 ff.; Sen. 634 ff.), and accomplishes this soon after. In Euripides the cries of Lycus are heard off stage (754), and in Seneca he is deemed to die while Theseus is recounting Hercules' adventures in the underworld to his audience of Megara and Amphitryon (658-827). Both dramatists show madness coming upon Hercules shortly after (Eurip. 867 ff.; Sen. 939 ff.), and in his insanity he murders both Megara and his children. Seneca has Amphitryon describe these fearful events as they are happening (991-1053), while this task is assigned to a messenger in Euripides (910-1015). The tragic dénouement shows Hercules' recognition of his crime. In the Roman drama Amphitryon alone is left to console his son, although in Euripides' version Theseus arrives from Athens (1163), and as thanks for his rescue from the underworld invites Herakles to Athens to purify himself. (In the Hercules Furens Theseus had appeared at a much earlier stage, accompanying Hercules when he first returned from the underworld).

These are, of course, merely parallels in the plot, and the arrangement of the scenes is often quite different in the Greek and Roman tragedies.

Aeneid VI, 236 ff., and the tradition which Seneca is following is that of epic poetry rather than drama. Theseus conjures up an image of a totally barren area, which forms a stark contrast to the landscape of the Earth. All the traditional features of the underworld find a mention here: the infernal rivers of Lethe (679-85), Cocytus (686), Styx (712-13), and Acheron (714-16), the palace of Pluto and his queen, Proserpina (716-20), the judges of the dead, Minos, Rhadamanthus, and Aeacus (731-4), the punishments of sinners (750-9), the old boatman Charon (764-8), and of course the fearful guardian of the underworld, Cerberus (783 ff.). These were all no more than poetic images in Seneca's mind, far removed from his real views on the after-life, and in this digression the dramatist is merely conforming to a tradition in Latin poetry. The structural situation of this episode serves to emphasize the fact that there are really two actions within the play: the persecution of Hercules' family by Lycus, which is brought to a climax when Hercules goes 'off stage' to punish the usurper, and secondly the actual madness of the hero and the tragic events which this engenders.

A difference in the story-lines of the Herakles and Hercules Furens which was to assume significant proportions in the eyes of French neo-classical tragedians is that whereas in the Greek version Lycus, the brutal usurper, has no personal interest in Megara, in Seneca's play he seeks to strengthen his position by marriage with her. Although his proposal is not put in terms of endearment, or even politeness, and he threatens to get children from her by force if she refuses him (493-4), there was, nevertheless, potential material in this episode for expansion into the kind of romantic interest which constituted so important a part of French tragic drama of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The theme of a hero out of control, and wreaking terrible carnage

in his madness was such as to arouse a considerable amount of trepidation in French writers and their audiences, even in the eighteenth century, and reactions to Seneca's drama were invariably rather guarded.

D'Argenson was particularly struck by the larger than life quality which characterizes this form of ancient tragedy (Notices sur les oeuvres de théâtre, I, 95):

Ces sujets sont gigantesques et de grands spectacles; il n'y faut pas rechercher la régularité de la morale ny l'intérêt des intrigues bien composées ou des caractères soutenus; c'est la pure mythologie, telle que le génie élevé et gracieux des Grecs l'a formé pour leur religion et pour les poèmes.

while Coupé emphasizes the terror of such a subject (Théâtre de Sénèque, II, 199):

Il est impossible de mettre sur la scène un sujet plus terrible que la fureur d'Hercule. ... Mais la fureur, toujours impétueuse, toujours désordonnée, même dans les hommes vulgaires, ne pardonne rien et veut renverser tout. Il ne faut donc pas s'étonner si cet implacable mouvement de l'ame a de si épouvantables effets dans Hercule.

Seneca's particular interpretation of the theme was not to everyone's taste. As a churchman, père Brumoy held the goddess Juno's behaviour to be unseemly (Théâtre des Grecs, II, 724):

Il y a une noirceur trop marquée dans le procédé de Junon. A peine la passeroit-on au désespoir d'une femme en fureur.

He also felt that the Latin writer's declamatory style hindered the expression of sentiment. Of Megara's extravagant laments he writes (II, 726):

Tous ces grands souhaits se reduisent toutefois au désir de revoir Hercule. N'est-ce pas là abuser du sens commun, & ne valoit-il pas mieux se borner avec Euripide à une simple priere telle que la douleur sensée sçait la suggérer ?

Inevitably the description of Hadès was seen as ill-placed and irrelevant.

The Histoire universelle comments (VII, 269):

Tous ces traits seraient beaucoup plus frapans, s'ils n'étaient affaiblis par une déclamation continuelle, & sur-tout par une description des enfers, pleine de beautés à la vérité, mais aussi déplacées que l'énumération géographique des fleuves dans lesquels Alcide veut laver son crime.

Yet Seneca's basic conception of an invincible hero at war with his own self was held to be a successful innovation on his part. The Histoire universelle (VII, 268-9) commends this aspect of the drama, and Coupé expands this view (II, 200-1):

Mais le premier mérite de cette tragédie n'est pas encore la supériorité du style qui fait cependant les grands poètes ainsi que les grands orateurs: non, ce n'est pas seulement cette beauté éclatante de vers que personne n'a jamais refusée à Sénèque; c'est avant tout cette idée sublime d'opposer Hercule à Hercule, comme le seul moyen de pouvoir le vaincre:

#### French Adaptations of the 'Hercules Furens'

From the sixteenth century we have only one imitation of the Senecan drama, Roland Brisset's Hercule furieux (1590), which is in reality no more than a free translation of the Hercules Furens. Similarly from the seventeenth century we have only Nicolas L'Héritier de Nouvelon's Hercule furieux (1639),<sup>(1)</sup> which was republished in 1647 as Amphitrion, ou l'Hercule furieux. However, Rotrou did base the prologue of his comedy Les Sosies (1637) very closely on Juno's opening speech in the Latin drama. Like many other tragedies of the period, Nouvelon's play is heavily indebted to Seneca,<sup>(2)</sup> although he does have some rudimentary concern for the demands of the modern theatre. The question of Mégare's potential marriage to Lycus assumes a great importance, and dominates much of the first part of the play. To add some interest to the situation Nouvelon portrays Lycus as passionately in love with Mégare, and as a 'vainqueur vaincu par vos attraits' (II,3), rather than merely an ambitious schemer seeking a favourable alliance. The dramatist seemingly felt no qualms at portraying Hercule's

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(1) Paris (Toussaint Quinet).

(2) Yet it is clear that he also knew the Herakles of Euripides.

madness, for, having disposed of Lycus, the hero appears at the beginning of the fourth act in the grip of a frenzy which resembles that of his Latin counterpart. Some semblance of propriety is, however, maintained by having the murder of Mégare and her children take place off stage, and this grim deed is later described by Amphitryon (IV,3).

Nouvelon's Hercule Furieux was the last attempt to dramatize the Senecan theme for more than a hundred years, for, as has already been seen, violence and horrific emotions such as madness were substantially eradicated from the theatre by the establishment of the bienséances, and the subject was deemed unsuitable for presentation before members of polite society. Jacques Truchet<sup>(1)</sup> has noted that Racine's portrayal of Oreste's madness in Andromaque in 1667 was already an archaism, and it is significant, too, that Oreste's frenzy is couched in extremely abstract terms, and that he remains eloquent even as he loses his reason. The different stages of his madness contain elements in common with Hercules' insanity, although there is no evidence to suggest that Racine was specifically inspired by Seneca in this context. Firstly Oreste imagines himself to be surrounded by darkness:

Mais quelle épaisse nuit tout à coup m'environne ? (V,5)

Similarly Hercules begins by feeling his vision become clouded:

Sed quid hoc ? medium diem  
cinxere tenebrae. (939-40)

Then both characters begin to suffer hallucinations: Oreste sees blood around him and the figures of the dead Pyrrhus and Hermione, and Hercules sees his first labour, the Nemean lion, glowing at him from the sky. Visions of the Furies are also a necessary accompaniment to classical ideas of madness. Oreste is tormented by these hellish beings:

Quels démons, quels serpents traîne-t-elle après soi ?

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(1) In his work La Tragédie classique en France (Paris 1975), p. 43, n. 2.

Hé bien! filles d'enfer, vos mains sont-elles prêtes ?  
Pour qui sont ces serpents qui sifflent sur vos têtes ? (V,5)

as is Hercules:

flammifera Erinys verberere excusso sonat  
rogisque adustas propius ac propius sudas (982-4)  
in ora tendit;

In both cases this frenzy ends with a loss of consciousness. It would be totally exceptional to find a concrete description of the physical effects of madness (as is given in the Herakles Mainomenos) in a neo-classical tragedy of this period, and only a purified type of expression, such as Racine offers, would be found acceptable.

Where scenes of madness occur in eighteenth-century tragedies, particularly those of the first half of the century, they tend to be restricted to the final moments of the dénouement, and to spring from an intense feeling of remorse after the perpetration of some crime (as in Andromaque). In the Electre plays of the eighteenth century, for example, Oreste's madness generally follows the Racinian tradition of eloquence. Longepierre's Oreste gives a poetic description of the ghost of Clytemnestre, who appears before him:

Son sang à gros bouillons, coule & rougit la terre,  
Ce sang gémit, s'élève, & m'annonce la guerre, (Electre,  
Le front pâle d'horreur, & l'oeil étincelant, V,7)  
Elle m'offre sa plaie, & son sein tout sanglant: (1)

He is also haunted by the requisite Furies. In Crébillon's play Oreste sees visions of Hell and of Egysthe holding the head of his dead mother:

Mais quoi ? quelle vapeur vient obscurcir les airs ?  
Grace au Ciel, on m'entr'ouvre un chemin aux Enfers. (Electre,  
Que vois-je ? dans ses mains, la tête de ma mère! (2) V,9)

Voltaire also ends his Oreste on a piece of finely wrought poetry, as the frenzied Oreste seeks to be plunged into Hell, but he felt an

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(1) Edition of 1730 (Paris, veuve Pissot). B. N. 8° Yth 19670.

(2) Edition of 1711 (A La Haye, chez T. Johnson).



instinctive aversion for artificiality of this kind, and in a note affixed to the end of the play in the Moland edition of his works he writes (V, 155):

je n'aime pas ces fureurs étudiées, ces déclamations; je ne les aime pas même dans Andromaque.

Other tragedies based on Greek mythology also reflect the theme of madness. In Lemierre's Térée (1761), which tells of Térée's barbaric treatment of Philomèle and the bloody retribution he receives at the hands of his wife Progné, Térée is tortured by visions of Progné arrayed as a Fury:

Le poignard à la main où court cette Euménide ?  
C'est Progné: quoi, son bras s'est teint d'un parricide! (V,7)  
La tête de mon fils! barbare! tu mourras. (1)

When Ducis presented Le Roi Léar in 1783, he was still concerned by the effect Shakespearean scenes of madness might have on French audiences. He tells us in his Avertissement:<sup>(2)</sup>

Cependant j'ai tremblé plus d'une fois, je l'avoue, quand j'ai eu l'idée de faire paraître sur la scène française un roi dont la raison est aliénée. Je n'ignorais pas que la sévérité de nos règles et la délicatesse de nos spectateurs nous chargent de chaînes que l'audace anglaise brise et dédaigne, et sous le poids desquelles il nous faut pourtant marcher dans des chemins difficiles avec l'air de l'aisance et de la liberté.

and he was aware that he was making a bold innovation in introducing scenes of mental disorder into the body of the action.

We know of only two tragedies based directly on the Hercules Furens in the eighteenth century, and of these the text of only one survives. The first of these two plays, Hercule furieux, was performed at the Collège des Oratoriens de Niort on the occasion of the 'distribution solennelle des prix' on August 17th 1746. Its author is unknown, and

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(1) Oeuvres de A-M Le Mierre (Paris 1810), tome I.

(2) In Oeuvres, I, 325.

the only evidence of its existence is a programme for the event reproduced by L. V. Gofflot between pages 312 and 313 of his work, Le Théâtre au collège du moyen âge à nos jours (Paris 1907). This programme offers a summary of the drama, <sup>(1)</sup> which was performed in French, and from it we can deduce that at least some of the events were based on the Hercules Furens. <sup>(2)</sup> As was the custom in the Jesuit theatre, female roles were excluded, and Megara does not appear.

More widely known and better documented is the Mégare of Pierre de Morand, <sup>(3)</sup> which was performed at the Comédie-française on October 19th 1748. This tragedy had originally formed part of a tragédie-ballet composed for the wedding of the Dauphin and the princesse de Saxe in 1747, but it had been offered too late to be performed, and Mégare was submitted to the comédiens instead.

In dramatizing this theme Morand had the option of either following his predecessors in excluding madness from the main action of his play

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(1) Sujet de la tragédie

Hercule toujours en bute à la haine de JUNON depuis sa naissance, devient furieux après avoir tué le Tyran Lycus qui régnoit à Thebes, & dans sa fureur, il tuë ses propres enfans qu'il prend pour ceux de Lycus. Ce Tyran, après avoir tué le Roi Créon, & avoir usurpé sa place, songeoit encore, pour rassurer ses soupçons, à faire mourir les enfans d'Hercule, dans l'absence de ce Heros qui étoit occupé à purger la terre des Monstres qui la désoloient; & qui en partant, avoit mis ses deux fils sous la garde d'Amphitryon, son pere. Le bruit qui se répand qu'Hercule étoit descendu aux Enfers enhardissoit le Tyran dans le projet qu'il avoit formé, bien persuadé qu'Hercule ne reviendrait point d'un séjour d'où il est assez rare de sortir. Cependant Hercule arriva des Enfers, avec son fidèle ami Thesee, qu'il en avoit retiré, & ayant appris le noir dessein de Lycus, il fit souffrir à ce Tyran un supplice qu'il méritoit, mais qui fut aussi la source de ses plus grandes malheurs.

(2) The arrival of Theseus with Hercules from the underworld suggests the use of Seneca rather than Euripides, although Lycus' desire to murder Hercules' sons is based on Herakles 155-6 and 168-9.

(3) A provincial lawyer. See Lancaster, French Tragedy in the Time of Louis XV, I, 224 ff., and Paul d'Estrée, 'Un Auteur incompris: Pierre de Morand, l'homme et l'oeuvre (1701-1757)' (in the Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France 16 (1909), 302-28).

and limiting its appearance to the closing scenes, or of forging a new path towards dramatic realism and the presentation of violent emotions on stage. In the event he chose the safer course, and followed the well-established Racinian tradition. In the long preface to Mégare the dramatist offers us a detailed insight into his own interpretation of the subject, and it is obvious that he deplored the violence of the ancient versions. In describing the Greek Herakles he writes (p. 190):<sup>(1)</sup>

Le Palais s'ouvre: des portes brisées, des cadavres étendus, des piliers renversés, Hercule lié, Amphitrion au désespoir; l'appartement de sang; voilà ce qu'a produit la fureur d'Hercule, ou plutôt celle de Junon. Quel affreux tableau! Les Anglois, comme l'on voit par là, ne sont donc pas les inventeurs de ces spectacles horribles dont nous leur reprochons de souiller leur scene.

His reaction to Seneca's presentation of the subject was precisely the same, and he was averse to the idea of Hercules' madness holding the centre stage. He felt that this type of horror was unsuitable for the French theatre, and his instinct was to convert it into the more acceptable forms of pity and fear (p. 198-9):

Enfin, si je n'ai pû ôter toute l'horreur qu'inspire la Pièce des Anciens, je me flatte du moins de l'avoir adoucie au point de la changer en véritable pitié, & en simple terreur;

In order to achieve this it was necessary for Morand to displace the central theme of madness and make it merely a subsidiary event of his play. Indeed he seems to have been reluctant to allow Hercules' insanity even this position within his drama, for he felt that if it occupied only one whole scene it would still seem too lengthy (p. 204-5):

Ces fureurs qui, chez les Anciens, occupent deux Actes, réduites en une seule Scene, deviennent encore trop longues sur notre Théâtre; parce que sitôt que le sort de nos Héros est décidé, tout ce qu'ils disent après nous paroît étranger au sujet:

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(1) In Théâtre et oeuvres diverses de M. de Morand (Paris 1751), tome II.

However, Morand realized that he could not completely abandon the central theme of the subject he had chosen to adapt, and he dedicates his final scene to the depiction of this state of mind. In the event he alters the whole significance of Hercules' madness, as, in keeping with prevailing trends, it becomes the result and not the cause of Mégare's murder. The murder itself is accidental, and in this respect the dramatist heeds the advice given by Corneille in his Discours de la tragédie (Barnwell, p. 48-9) for the murder of Clytemnestre by Oreste (as did Longepierre, Crébillon, and Voltaire in their plays on the Orestes theme). In this way Hercule's heroism is not brought into question by an intentional act of violence.

Towards the end of Mégare, while still in complete control of his senses, Hercule goes to prevent Lycus escaping from Thebes with Mégare (V,6), and by some terrible (and also invraisemblable) stroke of misfortune, in the darkness of the night, he strikes Mégare unintentionally at the same time as he fatally wounds Lycus. When Hercule enters in act V scene 8 he knows that Lycus is dying, and he bears a sword 'rougi de sang'. At this stage he is unaware that he has hurt Mégare, just as is the Roman Hercules when he recovers from his frenzy and looks at his bloody weapons:

unde hic cruor? quid illa puerili madens  
harundo leto? (1194-5)

The obscure foreboding which Hercule feels:

Quel trouble cependant, de mon ame s'empare!  
Un noir pressentiment .... (V,8)

is imitated from the Latin:

pudet fateri: paveo; nescio quod mihi,  
nescio quod animus grande praesagit malum. (1147-8)

In the following scene the dying tyrant has the pleasure of tormenting Hercule with the news that Mégare has also been mortally wounded by the hero's sword:

Va voir mourir ton amante!  
.....  
Va la voir par tes coups expirante! (V,9)

However, it is only in the last scene of the play that Hercule falls prey to madness, as a result of his anguish and remorse at what he has done - just as Oreste in Andromaque, and in Longepierre, Crébillon, and Voltaire's plays. It is at this final moment that Morand combines the frenzy of the Roman Hercules, which had first begun far earlier in the Hercules Furens (939 ff.), and his later remorse (1202 ff.).

Negligible use is made of the Herakles Mainomenos, here or in the rest of the play, and it seems probable that Morand's only knowledge of the Greek drama was the summary in père Brumoy's Théâtre des Grecs, to which he refers in his preface.

The French Hercule blames Juno for making him strike the fatal blow, but this seems somewhat incongruous as previously the goddess has had little importance in the play. He cries out:

Tu triomphes enfin, Déesse impitoyable!  
C'est toi, qui m'aveuglant dans ta rage implacable, (V,11)  
As percé par ma main le coeur que j'adorois!  
C'est-là le dernier trait que tu me préparois!

Reversing the order of the Latin play, Morand makes Hercule's desire to die precede his attack of madness. He makes an attempt to kill himself (as in Hercules Furens 1311-13), but is disarmed by Iphis. In his torment he wonders where he will be able to conceal his shame, for he is celebrated throughout the world:

Est il quelque climat, quelque terre étrangere  
Où je puisse cacher ma honte & ma misere ? (V,11)  
Dans l'Univers entier, mon nom trop illustré  
M'ôte jusqu'à l'espoir d'un exil ignoré!

This is clearly an imitation of Hercules Furens 1321 ff.:

Quem locum profugus petam ? (1321-2)  
ubi me recondam quave tellure obruar ?  
.....  
in quas impius  
terras recedes ? ortum an occasum petes ? (1329-31)  
ubique notus perdidit exilio locum.

Hercule's desperate request to Jupiter to send a thunderbolt from Heaven:

Mon pere, par pitié, viens me réduire en poudre!

Le bienfait que j'implore est un seul coup de foudre. (V,11)  
echoes lines 1202 ff. of the Latin play:

Nunc parte ab omni, genitor, iratus tona,  
oblite nostri vindica sera manu  
saltem nepotes.

The hero suddenly imagines himself surrounded by darkness:

Où suis-je ? Quelle nuit ! Ah, tu viens de m'entendre ! (V,11)

which derives from the onset of Hercules' madness in the Hercules Furens:

sed quid hoc ? medium diem  
cinxere tenebrae. (939-40)

Then he imagines all the monsters he has destroyed rising up before  
him:

Quels monstres infernaux viennent pour me combattre ?  
Eh quoi, tous ceux encor que mon bras sçût abattre,  
Tous ces lâches Brigands écrasés par mes coups,  
Pour mieux me déchirer, ils reparoissent tous ! (V,11)  
Vous, dont le sang rougit la forêt de Némée,  
Les noires eaux de Lerne, & la Crette allarmée,  
Tremblez ! De vous encor je m'en vais triompher !

This hallucination seems to be inspired by Hercules' vision of the  
Nemean lion in the ancient play:

primus en noster labor  
caeli refulget parte non minima leo  
iraque totus fervet et morsus parat. (944-6)

although Hercule's vision of the dead Mégare:

Dieux, j'apperçois Mégare !  
Elle offre à mes regards le fer teint de son sang ! (V,11)  
Je vois le coup mortel qu'il porta dans son flanc.

derives in all probability from Oreste's vision of the dead Hermione  
in Andromaque V,5. The play ends with Hercule falling into a faint,  
as do Hercules ( or rather a sleep in lines 1042 ff.) and Oreste  
in Andromaque.

Morand's treatment of the theme of madness in the Hercules Furens  
is typical of his approach to the play in general, for at every point  
he is ready to modify and alter the focus of the Senecan material in  
order to bring it into line with his own conception of the needs of  
the modern French theatre. In many respects he found the ancient drama

unsatisfactory, and the points at issue (the simplicity of the plot, its lack of regularity, the implausibility of the role of Juno, and the duplicity of action inherent in the conflict with Lycus and the later madness of Hercules<sup>(1)</sup>) were fundamental problems for which it was difficult to find an adequate solution. He was even critical of the role of Hercules, whom he describes as more 'extravagant' and uttering 'des discours & plus outrés, & plus ridicules' than in Euripides (p. 191), and felt strongly that a complete reshaping of the subject was necessary. Given all these objections, it seems surprising that he chose the theme at all, especially since it was one which other dramatists had tended to avoid. Yet in this very consideration may lie one of the reasons for Morand's choice, for two of his previous tragedies, Childéric (which was the first tragedy accepted at the Comédie-française to portray characters from French history in French surroundings) and Menzikof (the first play to depict the recent history of Russia), demonstrate his predilection for unusual themes.

Clearly Morand would have to introduce a considerable amount of original material to sustain his action, and the title he gave the play suggests the direction in which his imagination took him. The French tragedian was an advocate of the theory that an expressly moral message is needed within serious drama,<sup>(2)</sup> and he was attracted to the possibility of portraying a striking example of virtue in the character of Mégare. She, rather than Hercule, is granted the centre stage, and is confronted

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(1) His answer to the last problem was to combine the deaths of Lycus and Mégare into one event, closely followed by the madness of Hercule.

(2) In an ode entitled Le Progrès de la tragédie he praises Comeille for extolling virtue and condemning vice in his work (Théâtre, II, 336). In the preface to Mégare (p. 196) he writes, 'il faut encore avoir en vuè quelque moralité frappante digne de plaire & d'instruire'.

with a moral dilemma of monumental proportions. She appears not as the wife of Hercule, but as his fiancée, and is forced into a situation whereby she must decide between her love for Hercule and her filial devotion towards Créon, and either agree to marry the tyrant Lycus or see her father die. This was a tragic situation which Morand found especially pleasing (p. 196):

Je me suis d'autant plus volontiers livré à ce nouveau plan, qu'il m'a paru plus propre à rendre une idée où je me plaisais depuis longtems; qui étoit de mettre, dans une même Pièce, l'amour en opposition tantôt avec les devoirs qu'exigent les liens du sang & la tendresse filiale, & tantôt avec ceux du lien conjugal;

No such moral dilemma had faced the ancient character. In the Hercules Furens Megara is offered a choice, but a choice between marriage (369-71), and rape (493-4), or even death (506-8), and she feels no compunction in rejecting Lycus' advances. Her father is already dead when the play opens, and Lycus applies no form of emotional leverage.

Seneca portrays Megara as a largely one-dimensional character,<sup>(1)</sup> and we see her only in relation to her worries for her husband. We know that she is desperate for Hercules' return (see lines 279 ff.), and she is praised by Amphitryon as a loyal wife and mother:

casta fide  
servans torum natosque magnanimi Herculis, (309-10)

Morand's interest in her character represents a desire to expand her personality and to make her an emotionally more complicated character. He endows his heroine with no less devoted a love for Hercules. She says to Lycus:

Ce seroit le (Créon) trahir que vous donner ma foi:  
Et pour vous l'engager, elle n'est plus à moi.  
Hercule en est le maître, elle lui fut promise:  
Ne croyez pas qu'ici mon ame se déguise; (I,5)  
Je lui donnai mon coeur en la lui promettant:  
Et, plus que les sermens, ce don en est garant.

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(1) See Jo-Ann Shelton's Seneca's 'Hercules Furens': Theme, Structure and Style (Göttingen 1978), chapter II, for her discussion of Seneca's techniques of characterization.



Yet in so virtuous a nature love must inevitably give way to the demands of duty, and she submits to marriage with Lycus (II,5). Her intention, like that of Andromaque, had been to commit suicide directly afterwards, but in this she is foiled by her father (III,2). The full extent of her misfortune is only revealed when Hercule returns to Thebes and defeats the forces of Lycus (III,2; III,3). Instead of rejoicing in the defeat of the tyrant, her virtue forces her to remain loyal to her husband:

J'immolerai l'Amant, sans bruler pour l'Epoux. (III,2)

She sets herself an impossibly noble task, and her character begins to lose its ability to convince as she stubbornly supports her husband's interests against those of Hercule.<sup>(1)</sup> The thought that marriage vows spoken under duress have no value never strikes her, and stifling all natural emotions she refuses to marry Hercule if he should become guilty of the murder of Lycus:

Mais ne te flate pas qu'après son sacrifice,  
Mégare lâchement, à ton destin s'unisse  
Elle aime trop l'honneur, pour recevoir la main,  
Qui, d'un premier Epoux, auroit percé le sein. (IV,3)

In a monologue in act IV scene 4 Mégare gives a sermon on virtue to the audience, and Morand's didactic aim becomes clearly evident.

Mégare preaches that

Il en coûte toujours pour être vertueux.  
Les grandeurs & l'amour sont des biens peu durables  
La gloire & la vertu sont les seuls véritables.

This sense of duty leads Mégare to go so far as to bribe Lycus' guards to free him from prison, and to flee with him from Thebes. Indeed she meets death while she is still clinging too close to him. In allowing Mégare to be killed at the end of the play, Morand was well aware that he was confusing the moral issue, for virtue appears to be punished

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(1) She becomes a martyr to her gloire inflexible (IV,3), and this gloire is almost a parody of the Comelian code of honour manifested in such characters as Pauline in Polyeucte.

and vice rewarded, as Lycus dies happily on seeing the despair of his rival Hercule, and the dramatist was obviously torn between the inescapable fact of Megara's death in his source material and his own desire for a clear-cut moral message. In the final analysis he felt he had to remain faithful to at least this aspect of the fable, and to the spirit of ancient drama, where justice is very often not seen to be done.

Morand was fully aware that he had given an exaggerated picture of virtue in *Mégare*, but his theory was that the theatre is particularly conducive to the portrayal of larger than life emotion (p. 200):

Les vertus poussées à l'excès ne déparent pas le théâtre; il est fait au contraire pour les montrer un peu plus grandes qu'elles ne sont au naturel; c'est une peinture qu'on voit de loin:

Unfortunately his audience did not agree with him, for on the play's only performance Collé (*Journal et mémoires*, I, 12) reports that *Mégare* was 'sifflée et bafouée'.<sup>(1)</sup> One of the most important reasons for its failure must have been the unconvincing psychology of the title character, and Morand admits in his preface that *Mégare*'s behaviour had been criticized as 'ni naturel, ni vraisemblable' (p. 199).

Given the prominence of *Mégare*, Hercule can be no more than a secondary character. This change of focus differentiates Morand's play very strongly from the *Hercules Furens*, where all the action is related to Hercules. The dramatist freely admitted that the character of Hercules interested him less than that of *Mégare*, but he sought in no way to minimize the heroic stature of the Greek demi-god. In the Latin drama

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(1) The critic was also uncomplimentary about his earlier works, *Childéric* and *Tégliis* (I, 13), as was Grimm (*Corresp. litt.*, II, 46). D'Argenson wrote of *Mégare* (*Notices sur les oeuvres de théâtre*, I, 368-9) 'Le rôle de *Mégare* est admirable', but 'Le 5<sup>e</sup> acte est très mauvais, la catastrophe cruelle et pitoyable, les fureurs d'Hercule déplacées'. Only Fréron offered unmixéd praise when he wrote of Morand (*Année littéraire* (1757), vi, 51) 'On peut le compter parmi les premiers écrivains de la seconde classe'.

Amphitryon and Megara hope desperately for his return, and Amphitryon's speech assumes the quality of a ritual prayer:

aderit et poenas petet  
subitusque ad astra emerget; inveniet viam  
aut faciet. adsis sospes et remees precor (275-8)  
tandemque venias victor ad victam domum.

At the beginning of the French play a rather more tentative plea is made for Hercule's return:

Mais cet Alcide enfin, l'espoir des malheureux;  
Nécessaire aux humains, nécessaire aux Dieux même, (I,3)  
Nous affranchira-t-il d'une infortune extrême ?  
Viendra-t-il nous venger ?

When he does arrive and gains his victory, Créon eulogizes his achievements:

Vous suffisez, vous seul, pour le bonheur du monde!  
Poursuivre le forfait sur la terre & sur l'onde;  
Remettre dans leur rang les Princes détrônés; (III,4)  
Protéger, rendre heureux tous les infortunés:  
Ce sont-là les hauts faits dont l'Univers se loue,  
Dont les Dieux sont jaloux, dont Hercule se joue.

Hercule's defeat of Lycus' warriors (see III,3) echoes his victory in the Latin play (896-7), but his gesture of sparing the usurper's own life at the request of Mégare (IV,3) is an invention on Morand's part, contrary to the spirit of the Hercules Furens. The French dramatist had intended this to be an outstanding act of clemency, paralleling Mégare's own nobility, and he describes his Hercule as (p. 208):

un Héros qui par le plus sublime effort de vertu, étouffe  
à la fois la haine, la vengeance, & l'amour, ...

But we can tell from Morand's preface that the audience did not appreciate Hercule in this light. Critics complained that he was overshadowed by Lycus (p. 207), precisely the opposite of the effect which Morand had sought to achieve.

While the characters of Mégare and Hercule become even more morally outstanding than they are in the Latin drama, Lycus' fundamental wickedness remains unchanged, although his actual role is considerably expanded (in the Hercules Furens he does not reappear after line 515). In the

first scene of the play Créon describes Lycus as

L'assassin de mes Fils, l'infâme usurpateur,  
l'opresseur de Mégare, (I,1)

who

Fait gémir tous les coeurs sous son pouvoir barbare!

and this summarizes his qualities as expressed in the Latin play. Here Megara paints a grim picture of the tyrant as he is seen approaching:

Sed ecce saevus ac minas vultu gerens  
et qualis animo est talis incessu venit (329-31)  
aliena dextra sceptrā concutiens Lycus.

In both works Lycus imagines that his successful destruction of the opposition has given him the right to exercise legitimate power:

quaeritur belli exitus,  
non causa. sed nunc pereat omnis memoria:  
cum victor arma posuit, et victum decet (407-10)  
deponere odia.

Accuser les Vainqueurs d'injustice & de crime,  
C'est toujours, des Vaincus, la première maxime. (I,4)  
En eussai-je commis, ils sont purifiés;  
L'instant où je fus Roi les a justifiés.

and for him exercise of power means coercion by any means at hand. To obtain Megara he threatens rape in the Hercules Furens:

sin copulari pertinax taedis negat,  
vel ex coacta nobilem partum feram. (493-4)

and the death of Créon in Mégare:

Que dès l'instant surtout, une fiere Princesse,  
Ou de force, ou de gré se rende à ma tendresse; (I,7)

Morand believed that he had discerned in the Roman character an 'amour désespéré & méprisé' for Megara (see preface, p. 192), although in reality it is doubtful whether his desire to marry her is based on anything more than ambition, and it is on this supposed passion that the French dramatist based the love of his villain for Mégare. In accordance with his tyrannical nature, this love takes a particularly threatening form:

Mais autant un amant trouve un plaisir suprême  
A flatter, à combler les voeux de ce qu'il aime, (I,4)  
Autant s'indigne-t-il si d'outrageans mépris,

De ses dons prodigués sont le funeste prix.

Conventional morality is observed by having the usurper meet his just deserts at the end of the play, but his satisfaction at seeing Mégare die with him is extremely problematic, in that it seems to negate this moral effect.

The character of Créon corresponds to that of Amphitryon in the Hercules Furens, and it is fitting that just as the father of the hero appeared in the Latin tragedy, so the father of the heroine should appear in Mégare. His role gains an added importance from his position as pawn in Lycus' schemes, but in other respects he resembles Amphitryon, although his situation is even more poignant, since he was formerly king of Thebes and must now observe impotently Lycus' abuse of power. Like Amphitryon he laments the pitiful state to which his city has been reduced:

Sous les loix de Lycus, Thébe est toujours rangée!  
Murs sacrés d'Amphion, triste sang de Cadmus,  
A quel comble d'horreurs êtes-vous parvenus! (I,2)  
Vous tremblez sous le joug d'un Etranger perfide,  
Dont le droit n'est fondé que sur le parricide!

This echoes lines 258-70 of the Latin text:

- quis satis Thebas fleat ? (258-9)  
ferax deorum terra, quem dominum tremis ?

.....  
cuiusque muros natus Amphion Iove (262-3)  
struxit canoro saxa modulatu trahens.

.....  
(haec) ..sordido premitur iugo.  
Cadmea proles atque Ophionium genus, (267-70)  
quo reccidistis ? tremitis ignavum exulem,  
suis carentem finibus, nostris gravem.

He has had to endure the murder of his sons, and makes no attempt to conceal his bitterness from his oppressor. He says to Lycus:

Quand rentrant, en un mot, dans un devoir austère,  
Tu voudrais réparer ta fureur sanguinaire; (I,4)  
Songe qu'alors mon coeur encor trop outragé,  
Du meurtre de mes fils, voudroit être vangé.

Similarly in the Latin play Amphitryon has seen the shameful murder of both Creon and his sons, and seeks the destruction of the tyrant:

Pro numinum vis summa, pro caelestium  
rector parensque, cuius excussis tremunt  
humana telis, impiam regis feri  
compesce dextram -

(516-19)

Also, like *Amphitryon*, Créon is left alone at the end of the play to console the grieving Hercule.

Although Morand had rejected much of the Greek and Latin material, and was often critical of the way in which it was presented, he did find positive qualities to admire in the ancients. He writes in his preface (p. 194):

en condamnant leurs défauts, admirons les beautés dont leurs ouvrages fourmillent; rendons justice à l'art admirable avec lequel un grand nombre de Scènes y sont traitées; & laissons-nous toucher au pathétique qui y régne si souvent;

In common with certain other dramatists of the eighteenth century, Morand was attracted by specific details of Seneca's drama rather than by its overall effect, and he tells us (p. 204):

c'est à Sénèque que je dois les principaux détails de ma Pièce, & beaucoup de pensées que j'ai traduites, ou imitées.

By the détails and pensées Morand means poetic details, such as Hercules' expression of remorse and certain elements from the portrayal of his madness, as well as original ideas which differentiate the Roman tragedy from its Greek predecessor. The term pensées also includes moral and philosophical statements which add a particular strength to the message of the play. It must have been with a certain disappointment that Morand noted that the most criticized parts of his play were precisely those derived from the ancients (see preface, p. 212). Whether these criticisms arose out of his own ineptitude at adapting Seneca, or from a general feeling that such elements were not suitable for contemporary tragedy we do not know.

The French dramatist does endeavour to conserve something of the mythological atmosphere of the Hercules Furens. Although he makes no attempt to imitate the lengthiness of Seneca's description of the underworld, he, nevertheless, still refers to Hercules' trip to Hades,

and does not feel it necessary to bring this journey within the bounds of vraisemblance (as Racine had done in Phèdre). In doing this Morand felt he was being somewhat daring, and his action constitutes an interesting attempt at increasing local colour. In the first act Mégare is made to refer to the possibility that Hercule is 'aux Enfers captif' (I,3), and on his return from the underworld the hero recounts his experiences, including the granting of Cerberus to him by Pluto:

Lui-même, il m'a livré ce monstre épouvantable,  
Des portes de la mort, défenseur indomptable. (III,4)

However, Morand does not go so far as to allow the dog to appear on stage.

The dramatist does not hesitate to recall Hercules' legendary feats. In a long tirade against Lycus' presumptuousness at comparing himself with Hercule, Mégare gives a full account of the hero's glorious deeds, from his very first feat of killing the serpents sent by Juno in his cradle:

Sa vie est, de hauts faits, une suite éclatante;  
Les jeux de son berceau sont de fameux exploits  
Dès l'enfance, il punit, il subjuguait les Rois;  
Le Lion de Némée, & l'Hydre renaissante,  
L'horrible Sanglier qui ravage Erimanthe, (I,5)  
Le Taureau de la Crète, & ces Dragons ailés,  
Dont l'air est obscurci, les champs sont désolés; etc.

In all, this hymn of praise runs to thirty lines, and it is nearly as long as the equivalent passage in the Hercules Furens, where Amphitryon, from a different angle, laments rather than praises the toils to which his son has been subjected (213-48).

Lycus, of course, is eager to point to the weaker side of his rival, in particular to his effeminate behaviour when in slavery to Omphale:

Que ne le peignez-vous pleurant aux pieds d'Omphale,  
Ou vous sacrifiant à quelqu'autre Rivale! (I,5)

This derives from Lycus' scornful remark in the Latin play:

fortem vocemus cuius horrentes comae  
maduere nardo, laude qui notas manus

*tympani*  
 ad non virilem, movit sonum, (468-71)  
 mitra ferocem barbara frontem premens ?

Morand also imitates Seneca in evoking the criminal past of the royal family of Thebes, and Créon cites a number of examples to warn Lycus of the doom which awaits him:

"Là, jette tes regards sur ces Soeurs odieuses,  
 "Monstres dénaturés & Mères furieuses;

....  
 "Ici, vois, de Tantale, une superbe fille,  
 "Niobe, dont l'orgueil a perdu sa Famille;

....  
 "De ce double forfait, dont la Nature a honte,  
 "Vois Oedipe accablé cherchant une mort prompte, (II,3)

....  
 "Regarde dans quels maux l'Ambition entraîne  
 "Ses Fils que tyrannise une implacable haine;

....  
 "Cadmus même forcé de fuir de sa patrie,  
 "Se trouve encore heureux pour soulager sa vie,  
 "De partager le sort d'un insecte rampant:

This is taken directly from the Latin text, where it is spoken by Megara to Lycus:

Thebana novi regna: quid matres loquar  
 passas et ausas scelera ? quid geminum nefas  
 mixtumque nomen coniugis nati patris ?  
 quid bina fratrum castra ? quid totidem rogos ?  
 riget superba Tantalus luctu parens  
 maestusque Phrygio manat in Sipylo lapis. (386-95)  
 quin ipse torvum subrigens crista caput  
 Illyrica Cadmus regna permensus fuga  
 longas reliquit corporis tracti notas.  
 haec te manent exempla:

Morand was visibly carried away by this theme, and he expands the original passage into twenty-four lines. Not surprisingly this tirade was found too lengthy for acting, and was cut out when the play was performed.

The specifically philosophical thought of the Hercules Furens is contained largely in the sententiae and the choral odes of the play. In general the choruses of Senecan drama were disregarded by French dramatists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and Morand makes little use of these. However, there does seem to be a distant echo of the theme of the first chorus (125-201), that is of the contrast



between the peace of the innocent country life and the destructive ambition and avarice of the city, in the fourth act, when Créon reflects on the dangers of ambition:

Fatale ambition, quels abîmes cruels,  
Tu creuses sous les pas des avides Mortels! (IV,2)  
Faudra-t-il que toujours, sur la solide gloire,  
A tes trompeurs attraits, ils cèdent la victoire ?

In Mégare we are presented with a somewhat unsuccessful hybrid, in which Morand's own interpretation of the concept of gloire and wifely duty is grafted onto a Senecan base of a rather different species. While the French dramatist wanted to emphasize the virtue of his heroine, Seneca was principally concerned with the suffering of his hero, and it is extremely difficult to combine the two successfully. We have no real justification for asserting that Mégare failed on its first performance because the audience had no wish to see an adaptation of the Roman tragedy. Its downfall was probably brought about by Morand's inability to breathe life into his characters and to endow Mégare with any convincing form of motivation. Nevertheless, in spite of its not outstanding literary merits, Mégare is of invaluable interest to the student of literary sources, for it provides us with an example of one particular eighteenth-century dramatist's attitude towards the role of the Hercules Furens in the modern theatre.

CHAPTER VIII

Hercules as Tragic Hero (ii):

'Hercules Oetaeus' - the Flawed Hero

In the Hercules Oetaeus we arrive at the last stage in the life of the fabled hero, where he meets, and finally overcomes, his ultimate obstacle, which is death itself. In the Hercules Furens he had been assailed by a form of mental torment, but here his suffering is purely physical, and occurs as a result of donning a poisoned robe prepared by the unwitting hand of his wife Deianira. These same events had already been chronicled in the Trachiniae of Sophocles, although the conclusions which the two plays reach are somewhat different.

In spite of its thematic links with the Hercules Furens,<sup>(1)</sup> considerable doubt has been cast on the authenticity of the Hercules Oetaeus. W. H. Friedrich, in his article 'Sprache und Stil des Hercules Oetaeus',<sup>(2)</sup> examines the linguistic evidence and points to features which do not occur in the genuine plays, as well as many borrowings from the Medea and Hercules Furens treated with inferior skill. However, the tragedy is not as obviously spurious as the Octavia, and the exaggerated qualities of individual scenes coupled with the excessive length of the finished work (1966 lines) suggest that a Senecan base has perhaps been inflated by another hand.

Clear parallels can be drawn between the Stoic sentiments of the

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(1) Hercules' madness and the murder of Megara and their children are alluded to several times (428-32, 806-7, 903-5, 1452-3).

(2) In Hermes 82 (1954), 51-84.

Hercules Oetaeus and the views of Seneca as expressed in his philosophical works. (1) However, this compatibility of ideas should not be used as an argument for the authenticity of the drama, since Seneca's imitator would no doubt have been well acquainted with his model's prose writings. Hercules was a particularly important figure to the Stoics, who regarded him as one of their heroes and as an outstanding example of virtue and wisdom. In Seneca's De Constantia Sapientis (II, 1) he is linked with Ulysses as a sapiens who was unconquered by toils and who despised pleasure, and in the De Beneficiis (I, 13, 3) he is praised as an altruistic conqueror and a champion of good:

Hercules nihil sibi vicit; orbem terrarum transivit non  
concupiscendo, sed iudicando, quid vinceret, malorum hostis,  
bonorum vindex, terrarum marisque pacator;

It was a facet of Stoic belief that all things were periodically resolved into the divine fire of which the universe is composed, but reconciled with this was the idea that the souls of the virtuous lived on after death, at which time they were admitted to the ranks of the blessed to live until the end of the world. In his Ad Marciam (XXV, 1) Seneca explains this concept of immortality to the mother grieving for her dead son:

Integer ille nihilque in terris relinquens sui fugit et  
totus excessit; paulumque supra nos commoratus, dum ex-  
purgatur et inhaerentia vitia situmque omnem mortalis  
aevi excutit, deinde ad excelsa sublatus inter felices  
currit animas.

The seat in Heaven which is granted to Hercules at the end of the Latin drama is in conformity with this Stoic view, and in order to achieve this he must be stripped of all mortal trappings:

quidquid in nobis tui  
mortale fuerat, ignis evictus tulit: (1966-8)  
paterna caelo, pars data est flammis tua (i.e. Alcmene's)

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(1) This is done by Christine M. King in her article 'Seneca's Hercules Oetaeus: A Stoic Interpretation of the Greek Myth' (Greece and Rome 18 (1971), 215-22). Miss King takes it for granted that the play is authentic.

The proximity of certain Stoic beliefs to those of Christianity is well known, and it is impossible not to notice a number of similarities between the life of Hercules and that of Jesus Christ. Scholars have investigated seriously the possibility of some kind of common source for the two figures. Arnold J. Toynbee, for example, in his A Study of History<sup>(1)</sup> notes twenty-four parallels of varying degrees of importance between Hercules, Jesus, and some historical Hellenic heroes, and he concludes, without forcing the issue, that there may be a valid link between them (p. 475):

This finding suggests that the legend of Hêraklês may be an important common source from which the story of Jesus on the one side and the stories of the pagan historical heroes on the other side may have derived some of their common features, independently of one another, through separate channels of the stream of 'folk-memory'.

After the victory of Christianity over Paganism, when the old gods no longer threatened the Christian church, the mythological figures lived on as moral images. In the Middle Ages there was a passion for seeking allegorical meanings within pagan tales, and Hercules was often likened to Christian heroes such as St. Christopher or St. George, or, alternatively, Samson of the Old Testament. The best known expression of the desire to reconcile pagan and Christian thought with regard to Hercules in the Renaissance is the Hercule chrestien of Ronsard. Here numerous parallels are drawn between Hercules and Jesus Christ, one of which is the similarity of the pyre on Mount Oeta to Calvary:

Hé! qu'est-ce apres d'Hercule qui alla  
Sur le mont d'Oete, et par feu s'immola  
A Jupiter, sinon Christ à son Pere,  
Qui s'immola sur le mont de Calvere ? (2)

A form of syncretism is also found in some French adaptations of the

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(1) Volume VI, annex II to V. C. (ii) (a) The Legend of Hêraklês, p. 465-76.

(2) Oeuvres complètes (Pléiade edition (ed. Gustave Cohen (Bruges/Paris 1938))), II, 211-12.

Hercules Oetaeus from the sixteenth century onwards, in that the hero's death and passage to Heaven is interpreted in noticeably Catholic terms, although Hercules is nowhere compared with Christ.

The interest of the Latin tragedy is clearly focused on Hercules' conquest of death and his glorious apotheosis, which is seen as a just reward for his courage and endurance. The message that virtue ultimately finds its own reward is a rousing one, and is marred only by certain aspects of the portrait of Hercules himself. A certain rhetorical exaggeration and inflation of style makes Hercules appear as something of a braggart (see the prologue especially), and he demands rather than merely awaits the immortality owed to him. He assumes an almost whining tone as he complains to Jupiter:

quid astra, genitor, quid negas ? mors me tibi  
certe remisit, omne concessit malum (13-15)  
quod terra genuit, pontus aer inferi:

This arrogance is somewhat at variance with the praiseworthy sentiments he expresses when about to meet his death on the pyre (1472 ff.).

The arrangement of events in the Hercules Oetaeus shows considerable divergences from the Greek Trachiniae,<sup>(1)</sup> and the themes of the two

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(1) The Latin drama opens to a prologue spoken by Hercules, in which he prays to Jupiter for his rightful place in Heaven. He has just destroyed Oechalia, the town of Eurytus, and he prepares to sacrifice to Cenean Jupiter (1-103). This is followed by the laments of the Oechalian women and of Iole, the object of Hercules' amorous attentions and ultimate cause of the destruction of the city (104-232). The Trachiniae opens at a somewhat different point. Here we learn from Deianira that Herakles has been absent from Trachis for fifteen months, and Hyllus is sent to search for his father (1-93). However, soon after a messenger enters to announce that Herakles is alive and well (178 ff.). He has sacked Oechalia, delaying his return in order to sacrifice to Zeus, and his entry is preceded by that of the captives (225 ff.). Amongst these is Iole, whom Deianira eventually learns is her rival. In both plays her jealousy causes her to send her husband a robe smeared with the blood of Nessus, which she believes to be a powerful love potion. This is, in fact, a deadly poison, and Deianira becomes suspicious of its properties when she discovers that it causes wool to melt and the earth to foam when exposed to the sun (H. O. 706 ff.; Trach. 663 ff.). Her suspicions are confirmed when Hyllus arrives to report that Hercules has been cast into unbearable agony (H. O. 742 ff.; Trach. 731 ff.). /  
contd. overleaf

dramas are very different. In the Trachiniae the question of immortality is not broached, and it is certainly not granted at the end of the play. The tragedy functions on a purely human level, and much attention is devoted to the character of Deianira. She is a pathetic figure, and a victim of the all powerful and destructive force of love. Herakles, too, seems to suffer at the hands of an unjust fate, as his heroic life is brought to a traumatic end by the robe of Nessus. When he realizes that the oracle regarding his death has been accomplished, he laments his unhappy destiny:

ἴου ἴου δύστηνος, οἴχομαι, τάλαις·  
ὄλωλ' ὄλωλα, φέγγος οὐκέτ' ἔστί μοι. (1143-5)  
οἴμοι, φρονῶ δὴ συμφορᾶς ἴν' ἔβταμεν.

(Alas, alas, unhappy man, I'm ruined. I'm done for, done for, I can no longer enjoy the light of life. Woe is me, now I understand the extent of my misfortune). This forms a strong contrast to the satisfaction and constancy of the Roman Hercules as he prepares to meet his appointed end:

nil querimur ultra: decuit hunc finem dari,  
ne quis superstes Herculis victor foret. (1479-82)  
nunc mors legatur clara memoranda incluta,  
me digna prorsus.

Sophocles' drama ends on a note of desolation, for, as in the Oedipus Tyrannus, we have seen a fundamentally innocent hero suffer undeserved pain. Hyllus has been deprived of both his parents by the end of the action, and he finds it difficult to understand the workings of divine

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contd. from p. 224 / Full of guilt, Deianira resolves to end her own life in both dramas. Herakles himself is not seen until lines 964 ff. of the Greek version, and the arrival of the Latin character is announced in lines 1128-30. He is forced to admit that he has finally been mastered by an enemy, but when he realizes that the poison was Nessus' blood, he sees that his ordained fate to be killed by a monster already dead has been accomplished (H. O. 1472 ff; Trach. 1143 ff.). The Trachiniae ends with Herakles being carried off to his pyre on Mount Oeta, but the Latin play gives us a long description of the hero's noble death (1607 ff.). Alcmene then laments his demise (1758 ff.), but the voice of Hercules is heard, and he comforts his mother with the assurance that he has been granted immortality (1940-76).

providence, which seems to ignore the individual in favour of a wider sphere of reference. This mood stands in complete opposition to the glorious note on which the Hercules Oetaeus concludes.

Comparisons of the Greek and Latin plays were inevitable among commentators, and the Trachiniae was generally held to be of far superior merit in the eighteenth century. Not surprisingly the rhetorical exaggeration of the Roman tragedy was a frequent source of dissatisfaction. Père Brumoy's contention, which he would have found applicable to the whole of Senecan tragedy, was that the noble simplicity of the Greeks had been corrupted by the over-sophisticated Latin pen (Théâtre des Grecs, II, 317). In similar spirit the writer in the Bibliothèque universelle des dames (p. 348) remarks that

Sénèque s'éloigne dans cette Pièce, ainsi que dans toutes celles qu'il a imitées des Grecs, de la noble & inimitable simplicité de Sophocle. Ce sont des vers échassés, du pompeux galimatias, des traits de raffinement.

and concludes concisely (p. 353):

Une vingtaine de vers des Trachiniennes de Sophocle valent mieux que toute la Pièce de Sénèque.

The bombastic style of the drama also evoked criticism from the Histoire universelle (VII, 361-2):

Le Père Brumoy qui n'est rien moins que l'admirateur de Sénèque, convient qu'il y a de véritables beautés dans cette Tragédie, ... Mais il condamne avec raison les rodomontades d'Hercule, & les transports effrénés de Déjanire qui cesse d'être intéressante toutes les fois que sa jalousie cherche des idées & des termes ampoulés.

Coupé, however, attempted to justify the style in which the play is couched by arguing that the greatness of the character of Hercules necessitates language of an extremely elevated nature (Théâtre de Sénèque, II, 425):

Tout le monde conviendra sans peine que cette Tragédie renferme les traits les plus sublimes; mais on trouvera peut-être que l'élévation des pensées et la pompe du style y sont prodiguées à l'excès. Nous observerons d'abord que c'est Hercule, que Sénèque avoit à peindre, c'est à dire, ce que l'antiquité nous a transmis de plus héroïque et de plus grand; et en traitant un sujet aussi sumaturel,

ce Poète a cru pouvoir excéder les bornes de la nature humaine.

He observes that while Sophocles is more interested in human nature, and adopts a sober, natural style, Seneca (for he thought Seneca to be the author of the Hercules Oetaeus) seeks to portray the extraordinary, and contrives extraordinary effects.<sup>(1)</sup> This is a valid method of differentiating the two tragedies.

The portrayal of a demi-god and hero of the stature of Hercules, particularly in a theme with supernatural connotations, was likely to pose certain problems for dramatists, especially for those writing for the rationalistic audiences of the eighteenth century, and Grimm, in particular, held the subject to be an unsuitable one for the French theatre (Corresp. litt., XV, 73):

Cette fable, traitée chez les anciens par Sophocle et par Sénèque, l'a été souvent en France, et n'y a jamais réussi. Ce sujet, qui tenait si particulièrement à la religion des Grecs, est devenu pour nous trop idéal; la tradition sur laquelle il est fondé avait pour ce peuple une sorte d'intérêt religieux; il voyait dans Hercule le plus illustre des héros, un demi-dieu chef d'une suite de rois qui, sous le nom d'Héraclides, régnèrent longtemps sur plusieurs contrées de la Grèce.

Nevertheless, in general tragedians were no more deterred by Hercules than by any other classical figure, and although, in Grimm's view, Seneca had made of the story 'une pièce monstrueuse' (XV, 73), the Hercules Oetaeus inspired a considerable number of tragedies from the sixteenth century onwards.

#### French Adaptations of the 'Hercules Oetaeus'

Apart from the Hercule Oeteus (1584) of Nicolas Le Digne, which according to Beauchamps (Recherches sur les théâtres de France, I, 476) was a translation and not an adaptation of the Latin drama, the first

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(1) II, 428-9.



French adaptation of the Hercules Oetaeus was the Hercule of Jean Prévost, published in Les Secondes Oeuvres poëtiques et tragiques de Jehan Prévost (Poitiers 1613).<sup>(1)</sup> This, too, is little more than a free translation of the drama, unlike Pierre Mainfray's Tragédie des forces incomparables, et amours du grand Hercules (1616), which contains largely original material.

Undoubtedly the best known of the Hercules tragedies of the seventeenth century is the Hercule mourant of Rotrou, first performed in 1634 (or slightly earlier) and published in 1636. This play adheres closely to the Latin text in many instances,<sup>(2)</sup> yet also foreshadows the general inclinations of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Rotrou, like many of his successors, was attracted by the romantic possibilities of the relationship between Hercules and Iole. Little stress had been laid on this relationship in the Hercules Oetaeus, although in the Trachiniae love is seen as a mighty force, capable of conquering even Herakles:

ὡς τᾶλλ' ἐκεῖνος πάντ' ἀριστεύων χερσῶν  
τοῦ τῆδ' ἔρωτος εἰς ἅπανθ' ἦσσαν ἔφθ.

(488-9)

(For he (Herakles), although everywhere pre-eminent in his deeds, is completely giving way to his love for this girl). However, it is likely that the seventeenth century found the source for their romantic theme not in Sophocles but in Ovid, Heroides IX, where Deianira complains bitterly at her husband's infidelities, and describes him as a warrior conquered by the force of love:

Quem non mille ferae, quem non Stheneleius hostis,  
Non potuit Iuno vincere, vincit Amor.

(25-6)

The notion of the conquered conqueror, or in French the vainqueur

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(1) For his Edipe see Oedipus chapter, p. 137.

(2) Derek Watts, who has edited Hercule mourant (University of Exeter 1971), points out in his textual notes (p. 77-94) all the significant borrowings from the Hercules Oetaeus, as well as highlighting the influence of the Hercules Furens on act III scene 1.

vaincu, was to become an extremely important element of tragedies on the theme of the Hercules Oetaeus. Yet it posed certain problems in a story whose main interest is the illustration of Hercules' heroic conquest of death, for to French writers Hercules' love for Iole, which is both adulterous and expressed with much brutality, was in obvious conflict with the principles of heroism. Indeed in Rotrou's drama he is seen as a crass hypocrite, pretending to Déjanire that he feels nothing for Iole, while in another breath swearing his devotion to the girl. Remaining faithful to his Latin source, Rotrou devotes a considerable portion of his action to Hercule's torment and subsequent death (act III onwards), but even the hero's death is tarnished, as he decrees that Arcas, his rival for the affections of Iole, must be sacrificed on his tomb (IV,4). It is not until Hercule has been taken into Heaven, and the base part of his nature washed away, that he can overcome his jealousy and forgive Arcas (V,4).

In later tragedies of the seventeenth century there is a strong tendency to increase the love element at the expense of the heroic apotheosis, and both La Thuillerie's Hercule (1681)<sup>(1)</sup> and Dancourt's La Mort d'Hercule (1683)<sup>(2)</sup> are far less indebted to the Hercules Oetaeus than is Rotrou's play. In La Thuillerie's drama Hercule appears as a tyrant, threatening the love of Iole and Philoctète, and his suffering occupies a lowly position, being reduced to the last three scenes of the play (V,3 onwards). The same pattern is found in Dancourt's La Mort d'Hercule, although here the love element is even more complicated, since Philoctète loves Déjanire, who loves Hercule, who loves Iole, who endeavours to resist him, but eventually returns his affection.

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(1) Preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale (Yf 6448).

(2) Printed in Victor Advielle's Le Théâtre à Arras et à Lille en 1683 (Paris/Lille 1893).

In the eighteenth century Hercule performed a heroic role in the many adaptations of the Alcestis theme,<sup>(1)</sup> but on the subject of the Hercules Oetaeus only two tragedies - Renout's Hercule (1757) and Lefèvre's Hercule au mont Oeta (1787) - were produced, and both of these survive only in manuscript form. Jean-Julien-Constantin Renout's<sup>(2)</sup> play was never published, and is preserved in the Bibliothèque de la Comédie-française (ms. 210). It was first brought to light by Spire Pitou, in his article 'Renout's La Mort d'Hercule: Text, Sources, and Structure' (Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 163 (1976), 129-53). This dramatist's literary output consisted mainly of short one-act comedies, and Hercule was his sole excursion into the tragic genre. Unfortunately the reception which the play gained when performed for the one and only time at the Comédie-française on February 28th 1757 was not such as to encourage him to continue in this field. Collé reports that it provoked an extremely noisy reaction (Journal et mémoires, II, 70-1):

Le 28 fevrier, je fus à la première représentation d'Hercule, tragédie. Depuis que les gardes françaises sont établies au Comédiens, je n'ai point vu de pièce tomber avec plus de bruit et de tumulte; il est vrai que je n'ai guère vu d'ouvrage mériter mieux d'être hué.

and Grimm confirms that (Corresp. litt., III, 358)

on pouvait le siffler dès le premier acte, on n'a cependant commencé qu'au troisième.

The subject of Renout's play is broadly the same as that of the Hercules Oetaeus, in so far as it deals with Hercules' triumphant return from his conquest of Oechalia and events leading up to his

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(1) La Grange-Chancel wrote an Alceste (1703), as did de Boissy (1727), and Dorat (fragments only of this play are printed with Amilka (1767)). There are also two eighteenth-century Alceste manuscripts in the Bibliothèque nationale (ms. fr. 24363 (by Charles Coypel) and ms. fr. nouvelles acquisitions 2855).

(2) (1723-83). He was secretary to the duc de Gêvres. See Lancaster, French Tragedy in the Time of Louis XV, II, 393.

death as a result of donning the poisoned robe of Nessus.<sup>(1)</sup> Yet Renout follows the tradition of La Thuillerie and Dancourt in basing much of the action on imaginary events and allowing the romantic situation to take precedence over Hercules' suffering and death. However, his decision to include the character of Euristhée, or Eurystheus,<sup>(2)</sup> the king who imposed the twelve labours on Hercules, and to set the action in Mycenae rather than Oechalia or Trachis, differentiates his play from earlier versions. The inclusion of this figure enabled Renout to work out a complicated chain of unrequited love, which is interwoven with the political struggle for the throne of Mycenae. There are successive changes of situation and emotion as Hercule tries first to win Iole, thus enabling Euristhée to put his suit to Déjanire, who is able to reject the king when Hercule is rejected by Iole and returns apologetically to his fiancée. The whole situation is reversed by Iole, when she decides that she does in fact

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(1) Euristhée, king of Mycène, seeks to marry Déjanire, the fiancée of Hercule, whose precise whereabouts are not known. However, the imminent return of the hero is announced in the second scene, and it seems that he has fallen in love with Iole, whose father he has killed and whose kingdom he has destroyed. The captives, including Iole, appear before Déjanire prior to the arrival of Hercule at the beginning of the second act. In this act Iole rejects the hero's attentions, and he sets in motion his plans to dethrone Euristhée. Repenting of his subjection to Iole, Hercule attempts to return to Déjanire, who is willing to forgive him, and she rejects Euristhée's offer of a share in his kingdom. However, Iole reveals that she does in fact love Hercule, and when she tells him of this he refuses to allow her to return to Oechalie. Déjanire is now in despair, and shows no interest in the magic robe of Nessus, use of which is suggested by her confidante, Delphise. In the final act the hero defeats Euristhée, and resolves to burn him on a pyre, but he soon begins to feel the torment inspired by the robe, which has been sent to him by Delphise, and he dies in agony. Iole leaps onto the pyre (which had originally been intended for Euristhée) in order to share his death, and Déjanire, blaming herself for the tragedy, resolves to end her life as well.

(2) Renout has little regard for mythological accuracy, for he calls Euristhée the 'frère d'Hercule', whereas he was no more than a distant cousin. In the Hercules Oetaeus he is referred to only three times (as someone of insufficient power to compensate Deianira for the loss of Hercules (403-5), as the king of Argos (1800), and as an enemy over whom, as Hercules promises, Alcmena will eventually triumph (1973-4).

love Hercule. In this arrangement there seem to be reminiscences of Dancourt's La Mort d'Hercule, especially as Déjanire is Hercule's fiancée rather than his wife, and has another suitor whose attentions she does not seek. Yet since Dancourt's play was never performed at the Comédie-française in Renout's lifetime, and was printed only in Arras, it is difficult to know how he might have come into contact with the earlier drama. A more accessible source was Racine's Andromaque, and Hercule's feelings for Iole, as well as the frequent changes of situation, are based ultimately on the Pyrrhus/Andromaque relationship in the earlier play. In this respect Renout's tragedy was somewhat backward-looking, for by the middle of the eighteenth century many of his contemporaries were branching out into more daring and controversial subjects.

The nature of Hercule allowed for little use of the ancient models, and Renout's debt to the Hercules Oetaeus is often insubstantial, particularly in the main body of the action. The role of Euristhée may be based on that of Lycus in the Hercules Furens,<sup>(1)</sup> for the king is seen as a tyrant with no legitimate claim to the throne. When he argues to Déjanire that

Le dernier Citoyen doit son sang à son Roy. (III, 5)

she immediately retorts:

Oüi, Seigneur; mais ce n'est qu'à son Roy legitime;  
Et trahir un tyran, ne fut jamais un crime.

The assumption that Renout made use of the Hercules Furens is strengthened by the fact that Hercules' defeat of Lycus and his forces:

Victrice dextra fusus adverso Lycus  
terram cecidit ore; tum quisquis comes  
fuerat tyranni iacuit et poenae comes. (Hercules Furens,  
895-7)

is echoed by the French Hercule, who announces in act V scene 5 that

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(1) See the preceding chapter for a discussion of his character.

Cet auguste palais  
Va cesser d'être enfin l'asile des forfaits.

.....  
Ces amis d'un Barbare et ses lâches Soldats  
Sont donc ensevelis dans la nuit du trépas....

Euristhée is, however, not killed in combat, but saved for a later punishment.

Echoes of the Hercules Oetaeus are often brief and imprecise. Iole's lamentations at the death of her father, Eurytus, seem to be based to a certain extent on the Latin drama, for the scenes of horror which she witnessed are fixed indelibly on her mind:

Teint du sang de mon pere et baigné de mes pleurs,  
Le cruel m'arracha du sein de ma Patrie.

(III,7)

.....  
Ah! le sang de mon Pere a rejailli sur moy.

as they are on that of the Latin Iole:

vidi, vidi miseranda mei  
fata parentis, cum letifero  
stipite pulsus tota iacuit  
sparsus in aula:

(207-10)

Her observation that the gods avoid bringing death to the wretched:

La vie est mon suplice: il semble que les Dieux  
Ne tranchent qu'à regret les jours des malheureux.

(II,2)

derives from the reflections of the chorus of Oechalian women:

felices sequeris, mors, miseros fugis.

(122)

On his return from Oechalia, Hercule feels sure that he has reached the end of his toils. He declares to Euristhée that

De mes travaux, Seigneur, la paix est l'heureux fruit,  
Et m'offre le repos dont la terre jouit.  
Le front ceint de lauriers digne du Diadème,  
Doit me faire prétendre à la grandeur suprême.

(II,4)

.....  
Les Dieux sont satisfaits, n'ont plus rien à prétendre.  
J'ai remply mon destin.

The situation is the same at the beginning of the Hercules Oetaeus:

Sator deorum, cuius excussum manu  
utraeque Phoebi sentiunt fulmen domus,  
secure regna - protuli pacem tibi,  
quacumque Nereus porrigi terras vetat.  
non est tonandum:

(1-5)

However, the future aims of the two characters are quite different, for

Hercule seeks the earthly throne of Euristhée as the reward for his labours, whereas the Roman Hercules aspires to a place in Heaven. Nevertheless, in both cases the hero goes on to list the labours he has accomplished, with Renout's Hercule furnishing less detail than the Latin character.

Déjanire's reaction to Hercule's infidelity is much less violent than that of her ancient counterpart. Philoctète offers her comfort by assuring her that Hercule will repent:

Vous avez triomphé d'Augé, d'Artidamie;  
Il quitta Philone pour vous dans l'Arcadie. (II,6)

Deianira's nurse had proffered the same advice in the Hercules Oetaeus:

Arcadia nempe virgo, Palladios choros  
dum nectit, Auge, vim stupri passa excidit, (366-8)  
nullamque amoris Hercules retinet notam.

but her mistress had been less disposed to listen to reason.

The robe of Nessus is included within the plot as being an essential part of the fable, but there is no long description of the source of the charm (as in Hercules Oetaeus 500-34; Trachiniae 553-77; and Ovid, Metamorphoses IX, 101-33). Delphise, Déjanire's confidante, is the first to suggest the use of this robe, and in a strangely inappropriate fashion she describes the barbaric centaur as a gallant lover:

Ne vous souvient-il plus du présent du Centaure ?  
Vous sçavez qu'en mourant cet amant malheureux  
N'écoula que la voix d'un amour généreux: (II,7)  
De sa robe sanglante il vous apprit l'usage,  
Qu'elle avoit le pouvoir de fixer un volage.

For a long while Déjanire remains reluctant to resort to this charm (unlike Deianira), desiring to be loved for her own attractions. By the end of act four she is too distraught to think clearly, and she tells Delphise to do as she will with the robe (IV,8).

The effects of the fatal robe are seen only in the last scenes of the play, and it is not until this point that significant use begins to be made of the Latin text. Hercules' suffering had first been mentioned in lines 749 ff. of the Hercules Oetaeus, less than halfway through

the action, and Renout, like La Thuillerie and Dancourt before him, has completely changed the emphasis of the story. In Hercule the robe is delivered in act V scene 3 by Lychas, and Hercule dons it under his lionskin as he prepares to fight Euristhée (in the Hercules Oetaeus he wears it for the sacrifice to Cenean Jupiter). The first effect of the robe is a craving for the blood of Euristhée:

Non, il me faut sa tête.  
Je brûle de combattre et d'arracher son coeur.  
Je ne sçai dans mes sens quelle excessive ardeur  
Précipite leurs cours et les anime encore: (V,5)

This is suggestive of the mad fury which afflicts Hercules in the Hercules Furens, but may also owe something to the Hercules Oetaeus, where the onlookers imagine that Hercules' old madness has returned when his torment begins (806-7). Renout allows us to see the onset of the hero's agony, unlike in the Hercules Oetaeus, where this is narrated by Hyllus. Hercule feels his blood boil, and seeks to attack himself:

Viens, ma rage est extrême,  
Et tu me la verrois tourner contre moi-même. (V,5)

This imitates Hercules Oetaeus 824-5:

'furore gravius istud atque ira malum est:  
in me iuvat saevire.'

The hero's death takes place off stage, and is recounted at length by Philoctète in act V scene 7. This corresponds to the speech of the nuntius, whom we assume to be Philoctetes, in the Latin play (1609 ff.). Although Renout radically condenses this part of the ancient plot, Philoctète's description does contain a considerable amount of detail. He begins by blaming Déjanire for Hercule's demise, saying, 'Il perit par vos coups'. This was suggested by Sophocles' Trachiniae, lines 739-40, where Hyllus accuses his mother:

τὸν ἄνδρα τὸν σὸν ἴσθι, τὸν δ' ἔμὸν λέγω  
πατέρα, κατακτείνασα τῆδ' ἐν ἡμέραι.

(Know then that you have killed your husband, and my father, on this day). Hercule's terrible cries ('il pâlit, jette des cris perçans')



echo Hercules Oetaeus 796-8:

gemitus in medias preces  
stupente et ipso cecidit; hinc caelum horrido  
clamore complet:

(and Sophocles, lines 787 and 790). His fearful sweat:

Tout son corps est couvert d'une sueur horrible. (V,7)

is derived from Sophocles, line 767, 'ἵδρὸς ἀνήγει χρωτὶ, ...' (sweat mounts to his skin), or may have been suggested by Ovid, Met. IX, 173:

Caeruleusque fluit toto de corpore sudor,

for this poet, too, describes in detail the death of Hercules.

Renout, like all dramatists depicting Hercules' death before him,<sup>(1)</sup> includes the motif of the robe pulling away flesh as attempts are made to remove it:

Il tâche d'arracher cette robe brulante  
Dont il sent les ardeurs: c'est en vain qu'il le tente.  
Elle est par le poison attachée à sa peau,  
Qu'il déchire; lui-même il devient son bourreau. (V,7)

This goes back to the Hercules Oetaeus, lines 828-31:

exuere amictus quaerit: hoc solum Herculem  
non posse vidi; trahere conatus tamen  
et membra traxit: corporis palla horridi  
pars est et ipsam† vestis immiscet cutem.

although the author of the play originally imitated it from Ovid, Met.

IX, 166-9:

Nec mora, letiferam conatur scindere vestem;  
Qua trahitur, trahit illa cutem, foedumque relatu,  
Aut haeret membris frustra temptata revelli,  
Aut laceros artus et grandia detegit ossa.

The unfortunate death of Lichas, the innocent deliverer of the robe, is described in graphic detail in the Latin tragedy (808-22), and is also related in Sophocles and Ovid. Renout retains this, but is far more restrained, merely saying that

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(1) See Rotrou, III,1; La Thuillerie, V,3; and Dancourt, V,4; as well as Corneille, Médée V,3, where Créon suffers from the effects of Médée's poisons.

Son bras désespéré l'immole à sa vengeance. (V,7)

Before he dies Hercule presents Philoctète with his arrows:

Reçois, dit-il, reçois ces flèches redoutables  
Toujours seures de vaincre et l'effroi des coupables. (V,7)

There was a tradition in legend that Philoctetes succeeded Hercules in the role of protector of the world, and this gift is also related in the Hercules Oetaeus, lines 1648-59. The opening sentence of the Latin passage seems to have suggested the phrasing of Renout's lines:

arcus poposcit. 'accipe haec' inquit, 'sate  
Poeante, dona et munus Alcidae cape. (1648-9)

Philoctète is moved to tears by this gesture, and his laments echo those of the bystanders in Hercules Oetaeus 1667-8. Hercule's determination to rise above this general grief and to display constancy at his death:

Tu m'attendris, dit-il, cache moi ta tristesse;  
Il faut sauver ma gloire, étouffons ma foiblesse. (V,7)

derives from Hercules' request to his mother to cease from her lamentation in the Latin drama, lines 1673-5.

The hero's death is essentially the same Stoic end which Hercules meets, and he shows especial courage in his last moments by leaping into the midst of the flames:

Nous tremblons....il s'élançe au milieu de la flame  
Qui dévore son corps sans ebranler son âme.  
Son Courage intrepide ose braver le sort;  
Il expire en Héros et vainqueur de la mort. (V,7)

Like his ancient counterpart, he has conquered fear and pain, but beyond this the significance of the two deaths is very different. Renout strives to stress the tragic aspects of the hero's demise, and there is no question of his apotheosis, since the play ends immediately after his death. Hercule himself sees his end in terms of a punishment from the gods, occasioned by his own infidelity to Déjanire, and he says to Philoctète:

Ami tu vois l'abime où le crime me jette.  
Je péris: oui, les Dieux veulent être vengés, (V,7)

Et mes sermens trahis les ont trop outragés.

Iole's act of throwing herself onto the pyre with Hercule is intended to add to the tragedy of the situation, and Renout seeks to offer a tableau of ill-omened love, but in fact the infectious desire to die by this means seems rather ridiculous, and serves only to detract from the dignity of Hercule's end. The last words of the play are uttered by Philoctète, and they contain a note of disillusionment as he questions the justice of the gods:

Quels objets! Ah! grands Dieux! reglez vous l'univers? (v,8)  
Quels malheurs inouïs! Vous les avez soufferts!

This questioning rather than praise of divine providence is perhaps more appropriate to the mood of philosophical speculation in the eighteenth century, but stress should not be laid on the modernity of this message, since it approximates very closely to the end of the Trachiniae and Hyllus' comments on the impenetrability of the ways of the gods. He can see nothing but misery all around him, and he laments that

τὰ μὲν οὖν μέλλοντ' οὐδεὶς ἐφορᾷ,  
τὰ δὲ νῦν ἐστῶτ' οἰκτρα μὲν ἡμῖν,  
αἰσχρὰ δ' ἐκείνοις,  
χαλεπώτατα δ' οὖν ἀνδρῶν πάντων  
τῷ τήνδ' ἄτην ὑπεχόντι. (1270-4)

(No-one may see the future, but the present offers lamentations to us, and reproach to them (the gods), and to him (Herakles) who is suffering such doom, it offers the worst miseries of all mankind).

There is clear evidence that Renout was acquainted with the plot and themes of the Greek play, something which sets his work apart from the Hercules dramas of the seventeenth century. The opening scenes of his play, in particular, reflect quite closely the situation in the Trachiniae, for Hercule has been long absent,<sup>(1)</sup> and his whereabouts

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(1) He has been away for two years in Hercule, and fifteen months in the Trachiniae.

are unknown. Then soon after (I,2) his imminent return is announced (see Trachiniae 180 ff.). The scene in which Iole and the rest of the captives are brought before Déjanire (I,5) is obviously inspired by the similar episode in the Greek play, and Déjanire's feeling of pity is reminiscent of that of Sophocles' heroine (298-302).

The reasons why Hercule failed were varied. Grimm (Corresp. litt., III, 358) complains, amongst other things, at the excessive number of sententiae in the play (he held that they formed three-quarters of the whole work), and at their inadequacy:

avec cela j'aurais de la peine à vous en citer une seule  
qui ne fût triviale, maussadement dite, ou fausse.

An abundance of moral maxims is normally held to be one of the distinctive features of the Senecan style, and one might be inclined to believe that Renout was carried away by the examples he found in the Hercules Oetaeus. Both plays do contain a number of maxims relating to kingship (see especially the Latin chorus, lines 604 ff.), and Euristhée's complaint about the hardships which kings must suffer:

Quel Roy peut se flatter d'être aimé pour lui-même ?  
Arsire, on n'aime en lui que la grandeur suprême. (I,1)  
Une crainte servile, ou l'espoir des faveurs  
Retient seul à mes pieds tous ces lâches flateurs.

seems to bear some resemblance to the chorus' remarks:

Tu quicumque es qui sceptra tenes,  
licet omne tua vulgus in aula  
centum pariter limina pulset: (604-8)  
cum tot populis stipatus eas,  
in tot populis vix una fides.

However, the vast majority of Renout's sentences owe nothing to the Hercules Oetaeus. He no doubt wanted his maxims on the duties of kings, and on crime and virtue, to stand out from the play and offer a comment on contemporary life, but unfortunately critics saw them as the mark of an inept dramatist, incapable of constructing dramatic dialogue.

The fundamental problem of the play is that Renout was either insufficiently gifted or insufficiently experienced as a tragedian

to extract any novelty, or indeed interest, from the stereotyped situations into which he placed his characters. We have already seen how difficult it was for dramatists to provide a convincing image of Hercules' heroism whilst adhering to the contemporary taste for romantic complications, and Renout found no adequate solution to this problem. Grimm notes that (loc. cit.)

le public passe bien des sottises dans la bouche d'un héros imaginaire, et il est impossible qu'il en souffre lorsque c'est Hercule qui parle:

and the tones in which Renout's Hercule spoke were found essentially unworthy. In the first act of the play we are told of the hero's glorious deeds (I,1), and this contrasts with the barbaric portrait Iole paints of her conqueror (I,5). This conflicting view is not, however, incompatible with the image of Hercules offered in the Roman play, where Hercules' listing of his achievements (1-98) is followed by the examples of his brute force given by the Oechalian women (143-72). Yet, from the second act of Hercule onwards, we see a character who conforms to neither of these images. Like his French predecessors, he has been conquered by the force of love:

J'ay vû ces Dieux s'armer d'une implacable haine, (III,1)  
J'en ay sçu triompher ... Une esclave m'enchaîne.

and this has brought him to a lamentable state of weakness. He castigates himself before Déjanire:

Je ne puis vous tromper. Oûi, je suis un Parjure,  
Et mon ingratitude a passé la mesure; (III,3)  
J'ay trahy mes sermens. Vous devez me haïr,  
Et je ne devois pas vous couter un soupir.

and such self-abasement must have struck the audience as a shameful spectacle. In the political sphere Hercule is also less than effective, in that it takes him until almost the end of the fifth act to dispose of Euristhée. His only redeeming feature is the courage with which he confronts death.

Iole is also a problematic character. Her appearance in both

Greek and Latin dramas is only brief, <sup>(1)</sup> and Renout had recourse to his own imagination for much of her personality. She is first and foremost endowed with the pride and self-respect which noble heroines of the seventeenth and eighteenth century tend to manifest when victims of a reverse of circumstances. When Hercule pleads his suit, she rejects him scornfully, showing that violence is an inappropriate way to gain affection:

Le sang d'Eurite fut l'horrible sacrifice  
Qui dût donc à vos yeux rendre le ciel propice ? (II,2)  
Dans son sein déchiré votre barbare ardeur  
Croyoit donc découvrir la route de mon coeur ?

Thus far her character is consistent. Yet when she suddenly admits to her confidante that she does indeed love Hercule (III,7), one begins to question her credibility. Having realized that Hercule is to marry Déjanire, and that she is to be sent back to Oechalia, she manifests an unpleasantly vindictive streak, and resolves to create havoc by confessing to the hero that she loves him (III,7). It is at this stage that she totally alienates any sympathy which the audience might have felt for her.

Déjanire, on the other hand, is shown as mild and submissive, and entirely unlike her enraged counterpart in the Hercules Oetaeus. Renout evidently saw her as a pathetic figure, for her love for Hercule is the most important thing in her life:

Ma tendresse est le noeud le plus sacré pour moy. (I,4)

On hearing of Hercule's infidelity, her reaction is not to fulminate against him, but rather to turn to melancholy introspection which can lead only to suicide. This conception of the character is not a successful one, for much of the dramatic force emanating from a figure such as Deianira, or indeed Hermione in Andromaque, is lost, and no

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(1) In the Hercules Oetaeus she does not reappear after line 224; in the Trachiniae she is seen with the other captives (225-334), but does not utter a word.

opposition is offered to Hercule's betrayal. Renout mellows her character to such an extent that she no longer becomes the instrument of the final tragedy, and in this way the whole element of tragic pathos arising from the remorse of the jealous wife who unwittingly precipitates her husband's death is destroyed. In her despair at Hercule's infidelity, Déjanire is too concerned with her own misery to think of using the robe of Nessus, and yet, in spite of the fact that the guilt properly belongs to Delphise, she assumes an unwarranted responsibility, and resolves on this account to commit suicide. Her parting words are:

Mais la coupable main qui s'arma pour le crime,  
Doit seule l'expier, et frapper la victime. (V,8)

Such a mixture of characters and events prompted Collé (Journal et mémoires, II, 71) to describe Hercule as a rapsodie (that is a set of disconnected elements, with no fixed form or plan)

qui est si détestable, que ce seroit lui faire trop  
d'honneur que d'en faire la moindre critique.

Lefèvre's<sup>(1)</sup> Hercule au mont Oeta fared a little better, and gained a total of seven performances, its first showing being on May 24th 1787. However, like Hercule, it was never published, and the text is considered lost by standard bibliographies.<sup>(2)</sup> Yet a manuscript of the play does in fact survive, and can be found amongst

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(1) Pierre-François-Alexandre Lefèvre (1741-1813). He first studied painting, but gave this up in favour of poetry. He wrote a number of tragedies - Cosroès (1767), Florinde (1770), Zuma (1776), Elisabeth de France or Don Carlos (1781) - of which Hercule au mont Oeta was the last. See Lancaster, French Tragedy in the Time of Louis XV, II, 583-7, and French Tragedy in the Reign of Louis XVI, p. 95.

(2) Brunet (Table des pièces de théâtre décrites dans le catalogue de la bibliothèque de M. de Soleinne) and Mme. Horn-Monval (Repertoire bibliographique des traductions et adaptations françaises du théâtre étranger) do not list the play at all; Brenner (A Bibliographical List of Plays in the French Language) mentions the play (no. 8223), but not the fact that a manuscript survives, and Lancaster (French Tragedy in the Reign of Louis XVI, p. 95) points only to a summary of the play in the Annales dramatiques, IV, 422-3.

the Manuscrits de P. F. A. Le Fèvre preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale (ms. fr., nouvelles acquisitions 5268, fol. 111-151). That the play has survived is extremely fortunate, for the plot shows distinct differences from Renout's Hercule,<sup>(1)</sup> and enables us to demonstrate that it was not a universal trend in the eighteenth century to emphasize Hercules' amorous inclinations to the detriment of his heroism.

Lefèvre was particularly attracted by the possibilities for visual spectacle which his subject offered him, and this was an element of the story which had not been exploited in tragedy since Rotrou's Hercule mourant, where Hercule was seen descending from Heaven on a cloud in the final scene. Although there had been a tendency throughout the eighteenth century to increase the visual impact of tragic action, spectacular, supernatural effects were largely the province of opera, and it is clear that Lefèvre was deeply influenced by this genre. At the beginning of his acts he strives to create tableaux which will appeal to the eye, and his sensitivity to the visual aspect must have been heightened by his earlier training as an artist. He

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(1) The scene is set in Trazyne, where Déjanire anxiously awaits the return of her husband Hercule, who has been away for two years. She sends her son Hyllus to search for him, and he soon returns, bearing news from Philoctète that Hercule has defeated Eurytus, and is bringing back captives including the king's daughter, Yole. Hyllus had earlier fallen in love with her, and Déjanire is aware of a rumour that her husband shares this love. Nevertheless, she deals kindly with the girl, as Hercule prepares a sacrifice on Mount Oeta. Later her fears about Hercule's feelings for Yole are confirmed. The hero first appears at the beginning of the third act. He strives to overcome his passion by giving Yole to his son as a wife, but once he learns that Hyllus is his rival he retracts this offer. Déjanire sends the veil of Nessus to Hercule at the beginning of the fourth act, through Yole, to whom she has confided her plans. A short while after, Hyllus rushes in, and accuses his mother of murdering Hercule, for the veil has thrown the hero into a torment which dominates the end of the fourth and the whole of the fifth act. Déjanire commits suicide, but both Hyllus and Hercule eventually realize that she is innocent and that Nessus is the cause of his death. Satisfied at his fate, Hercule grants Yole to his son, and the play ends with Hercule ascending to Heaven on a throne of clouds.



gives elaborate directions for the arrangement of scenery, and at the beginning of act five the stage set represents Mount Oeta in the midst of a forest. The pyre raised by Hercule can be seen, and he himself lies asleep at the foot of the statue dedicated to peace. His companions are busily making a trophy out of his weapons, which they place at the foot of the pyre. The third act opens to a full stage of Déjanire, Hyllus, Oenope, Philoctète, the High-Priest and other priests, companions of Hercule, and groups of soldiers and people. These all contribute to a visually effective scene, as the people, who bear laurel leaves, throw themselves at Hercule's feet when he makes his dramatic entry onto the stage.

Supernatural effects also play an important part in this drama. At the beginning of the fourth act Déjanire relates a series of magical occurrences which coincided with the removal of Nessus' robe, or veil, from its secret resting-place in a cave (IV,1). Her description of the trembling of the earth and fire shooting from the cave, followed by the magic transformation of the blood-stained article into a rich garment of purple and jewels, goes far beyond anything in the ancient versions of the story, although the appearance of the Furies:

Mais à-peine, emportant cette echarpe fatale,  
Yole à mes regards eut dérobé ses pas,  
Qu'un cri sourd est sorti des gouffres du trépas. (IV,1)  
Megere, à mes côtés, de ses Soeurs escortée,  
A répété ce Cri, par ses Soeurs imitée, ....

seems to be based on the Roman Deianira's vision of Hades after Hyllus has charged her with causing the suffering of Hercules:

quaenam ista torquens angue†vipereo comam  
temporibus†hastas squalidis pinnas quatit ? (1003-6)  
quid me flagranti dira persequeris face,  
Megaera ?

Déjanire's readiness to undergo punishment if she should have harmed Hercule, also echoes Deianira's plea to the infernal gods to prepare a dreadful penalty for her (H. O. 938 ff.).

However, it is above all in the final scene that Lefèvre indulges his taste for spectacle. Here he portrays Hercule's apotheosis, something which had not been seen since Rotrou's time, for La Thuillerie, Dancourt, and Renout had all concluded their action with the death of the hero. In act V scene 6 Hercule climbs onto the pyre, and sees Jupiter welcoming him to Heaven:

Et vous, qui me pleurez, quand ma mort est si belle,  
Amis, Junon s'appaise, et Jupiter m'appelle.  
Je l'entends, je le vois. Ses bras me sont ouverts.

As the pyre burns, it begins to fall in upon itself, and Lefèvre's stage direction instructs that

Le tonnerre tombe sur le bucher qui se change en un trône de nuages sur lequel Hercule est enlevé.

This may have been based on Marmontel's lyric tragedy, Hercule mourant,<sup>(1)</sup> where Hercule ascends to Heaven on a chariot, or on Rotrou's play, where a cloud conveys Hercule down to earth after his apotheosis. In both cases the original inspiration was offered by the Hercules Oetaeus, where Hercules is imagined to appear to Alcmene from Heaven.

Marmontel's opera was the most important modern influence on Lefèvre's tragedy, and may explain in part the prevalence of operatic elements in Hercule au mont Oeta. Yet it was principally the themes of his play which Lefèvre derived from this work, rather than visual spectacle. For instance, the conception of Hercule's passion for Yole as a monster which must be combated:

... un Monstre audacieux;

....  
"Plus à craindre que l'hydre, et moins prompt à s'abattre,  
"Est le dernier Rival que mon fils doit combattre. (2)

is based on Hercule mourant, where Philoctète says to Hercule:

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(1) Performed on April 3rd 1761 at the Académie royale de musique, with music by Dauvergne. The original text can be found in the Bibliothèque nationale (Rés. Yf 775).

(2) This is the pronouncement of an oracle from Jupiter, given to Hercule by the High-Priest.

Tous les monstres encor ne sont pas terrassés. (III,2)

to which Hercule replies:

L'amour est dans mon coeur une hidre renaissante.

Lefèvre's instinct to highlight the operatic rather than the romantic aspects of the story seems to have been a sound one, for both Grimm (Corresp. litt., XV, 73) and the writer in the Mémoires secrets (XXXV, 159) agreed that the theme was better suited to this genre than to tragedy, and the spectacular dénouement was described as the most successful part of Hercule au mont Oeta (Mém. secrets, loc. cit.):

le dénouement, où Hercule monte avec tranquillité sur le bucher, transformé soudain en une Gloire, d'où résulte son apo théose, est l'endroit qui a causé le plus d'effet & le plus d'admiration. Cette machine a été exécutée avec une rapidité & une précision étonnantes à ce spectacle: l'on étoit resté froid jusques-là;

Although this dénouement is based more on modern sources than on the Hercules Oetaeus, it is clear that Lefèvre knew and used the Latin play. Like the majority of the other Hercules plays, this use is more in evidence in the latter half of the action, where Hercule suffers from the effects of the veil of Nessus, than in the early scenes. This deadly veil is first mentioned in act I scene 2, and in act II scene 6 Déjanire recounts at length the circumstances in which it was given to her by the centaur. This narrative appears to be based on the Hercules Oetaeus, and both texts recount how Nessus tried to steal Hercules' bride, and was punished by the hero:

À ce spectacle, Hercule, éloigné mais terrible,  
Voit du fleuve, entre nous, la barrière invincible.  
Toutefois, au Centaure annonçant le trépas: (II,6)  
"Ma flèche ira, dit il, où mes pieds n'iroient pas."  
Il dit; lance le dard, touche au Monstre, et l'atterre. -

non tenent undae Herculem:  
'infide vector' inquit 'immixti licet  
Ganges et Hister vallibus iunctis eant, (513-19)  
vincemus ambos, consequar telo fugam.'  
praecessit arcus verba; tum longum ferens  
harundo vulnus tenuit haerentem fugam  
mortemque fixit.

The centaur then presented Deianira with the magic charm in both versions,

and the sleep of death weighed down upon him. Too much emphasis should not be placed, however, on the use of the Hercules Oetaeus in this passage, as both Sophocles (Trach. 553-77) and Ovid (Met. IX, 101-33) also tell the same story.

The question of Hercule's torment and subsequent death assumes a greater importance in Lefèvre's play than in previous French versions of the story (excluding those of Prévost and Rotrou), and suggests that the dramatist was attracted by the ancient portrayals of the theme. The fateful pyre is first mentioned in the opening act, when Hyllus reports that Hercule is raising a pyre as an altar to be dedicated to peace (I,3), but it is not until act IV scene 4, when the first torments of the veil makes themselves felt, that we begin to realize the true use to which it will be put. This episode begins approximately two thirds of the way through the play, a later point than in the Hercules Oetaeus, but almost the same as in the Trachiniae (see lines 734 ff.). For this part of his play Lefèvre selects details from both the Hercules Oetaeus and the Trachiniae, and it is often extremely difficult, where the imitation is not exact, to decide which source he is in fact using.

As in the Greek and Latin plays, these tragic events open with an agonised description by Hyllus to Déjanire of the disastrous effect her gift has had on Hercule. He relates how his father was suddenly consumed by hidden flames:

Il tombe. Un feu secret de tout son corps s'empare. (IV,4)

Similarly in the Latin play, Hercules is tortured by a burning fire:

At ille voltus ignea torquens face ... (808)

Then in Lefèvre's version Hercule lets out a terrible cry:

Par d'effroiabiles cris sa douleur se déclare. (IV,4)

which imitates:

gemitus in medias preces (796-7)  
stupente et ipso cecidit;

(see also Sophocles, lines 787 and 790). Hyllus' despair at the turmoil taking place around him:

Mais, Quoi ? mon pere expire, et ma mère est mourante! (IV,4)

may be inspired by Hyllus' words in the Latin play:

Pro lux acerba, pro capax scelerum dies!  
nurus Tonantis occidit, natus iacet, (1419-20)

or possibly by the Trachiniae, where Hyllus laments his bereavement in similar terms (941-2). During this scene Hercule had been lying just off stage, but he is then brought before the audience, who witness his agony. He begs Hyllus to kill him (cf. Trachiniae 1031-9), something which Hyllus cannot countenance doing, then asks to be conveyed to Mount Oeta:

Traînez, ou portez-moi, sans pitié, sans délais,  
Au pied du Mont voisin des murs de ce Palais. (IV,6)  
C'est là que de Junon doit finir la colere.

where he hopes to find the end of his troubles. This has a parallel in the Hercules Oetaeus, lines 1483-4, but is actually closer in wording to Herakles' instructions in the Trachiniae:

ἐνταῦθα νῦν χρῆ τοῦ μὲν ἐξάραντά σε  
σῶμ' αὐτόχειρα, καὶ τῶν οἷς χρήσεις φίλων, (1193-4)

(Now you must carry my body thither with your own hands, and with whatever friends you wish). Hercule is totally unable to remove the deadly veil, something which had become by now a fundamental aspect of the story: (1)

Quels feux! Qu'ils sont brulans! que d'horribles tortures.  
Voulant arracher son écharpe  
Ce Voile affreux résiste aux efforts de mon bras. (IV,6)

This is based on Hercules Oetaeus 828 ff., although Lefèvre may have referred to one of the earlier French Hercules plays, rather than the original Latin.

At the beginning of act five Hercule is seen by the pyre on Mount

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(1) See page 236 of this chapter.

Oeta, and we are reminded of his traditional fate. His great shame at the seemingly inglorious nature of his death:

Quoi ? ce que n'avoient pu ni trente ans de revers,  
Ni le courroux du Ciel, ni celui des enfers,  
Ni tous les fils de Mars assemblés pour ma chute, (V,3)  
Une femme, en un jour le tente, et l'exécute.

may be derived from the Latin play, lines 1176-8:

dirus o nobis pudor,  
o turpe fatum - femina Herculeae necis  
auctor feretur! morior Alcides quibus ?

but probably reflects the Trachiniae, lines 1058-63:

κοῦ ταῦτα λόγχῃ πεδίας, οὔθ' ὁ γηγενῆς (1058-9)  
στρατὸς Γιγάντων, οὔτε θήρειος βία

....  
... ἔδρασέ πω·  
γυνὴ δὲ θῆλυς οὔσα κἄνανδρος φύσιν (1061-3)  
μόνη με δὴ καθεῖλε, φασγάνου δίχα.

(No spear on the plain, nor the earth-born army of giants, nor the might of a wild animal ... has yet accomplished this; but a woman, womanly, and with nothing of a man's nature, alone, without using a sword, has destroyed me). The great hero also deplores the fact that he should be seen to weep:

Misérable, je pleure! et mes larmes sont vaines. (V,3)

as in the Hercules Oetaeus, lines 1265 ff.:

unde iste fletus ? unde in has lacrimae genas ? (1265)  
etc.

(and Trachiniae 1071-2). He then calls upon the peoples of the world to witness his demise:

Venez donc tous en foule assister à ma mort  
Peuples de l'Univers; au bord du noir Royaume (V,3)  
Venez d'Hercule en pleurs contempler le fantôme.

which echoes lines 1233-4 of the Latin drama:

en cernite, urbes, cernite ex illo Hercule  
quid iam supersit.

Hercule's torment is heightened by the vivid contrast between his past and present state, and he bitterly enumerates all the labours which his strength had previously enabled him to perform (as in H. O. 1234 ff.,

and, more closely, Sophocles 1089-1106).

In all three plays (i.e. the Trachiniae, Hercules Oetaeus, and Hercule au mont Oeta) Hercules seeks, not surprisingly, to kill Deianira, whom he blames for his suffering, but Lefèvre's version:

Qu'on me l'amene, Allez. Je veux seul la punir.  
Montrons à l'Univers plein de mon souvenir  
Qu'Hercule, heureux vengeur de tant de perfidies, (V,3)  
Fut, jusqu'au dernier jour, le fleau des impies.

is based specifically on Sophocles, lines 1109-11:

ἴν' ἐκδίδαχθῆναι πᾶσιν ἀγγέλλειν ὅτι  
καὶ ζῶν κακοῦς γε καὶ θανῶν ἐπειδάμην.  
προβόμοι μόνον,

(Let her just come here, so that she may learn this lesson to tell to everybody, that living and dying I have punished the wicked).

Once Hyllus explains Déjanire's innocence to Hercule he understands that his ordained fate has been accomplished:

Ah! tout est éclairci. Ce dernier mot décide (V,3)  
Du sort, de la conduite, et du repos d'Alcide.

This derives from the Latin text:

Habet, peractum est, fata se nostra explicant; (1472)

In Lefèvre's play Hercule had received an oracle from the High-Priest, which announced in one of its clauses that he would not die at the hand of any living creature (III,1), and he now understands that

Nul Mortel, en effet n'aura tranché mes jours. (V,4)  
C'est une Ombre aux Enfers qui termine leur cours.

In the Hercules Oetaeus Hercules suddenly recalls this same oracle as Hyllus explains that Nessus is his real murderer:

'dextra perempti victor, Alcide, viri (1476-7)  
olim iacebis, ...'

although the actual wording in the French play is closer to Sophocles, lines 1159-61.

Following the example of Sophocles and the Hercules Oetaeus (lines 1219-27 and 1488-96 respectively), Hercule asks Hyllus to marry Yole (V,6), although, of course, the French Hyllus' interest in the

matter is greater than that of his ancient counterparts, since he is in love with the girl. Hercule also grants Philoctète his arrows (V,6), in imitation of the Latin Hercules (1648-59), although the exact wording of the Hercules Oetaeus is not imitated.

It is difficult to know whether Lefèvre's motive in including the apotheosis of Hercule was merely to provide an exciting spectacle, or whether he was interested in highlighting the religious element of the Latin play, and sought to point out that virtue receives its just reward in Heaven. The Christian sentiments of the promise of eternal life:

Tous les Dieux avec lui descendus dans les airs,  
.....  
Promettent a ma gloire une éternelle vie. (V,6)

and the separation of the spirit from the flesh:

Et pour m'offrir la Paix qu'il me fit esperer  
De ce corps périssable il me vient séparer. (V,6)

(which derives, in fact, from Stoic belief, as Hercules says:

quidquid in nobis tui  
mortale fuerat, ignis evictus tulit: (1966-8)  
paterna caelo, pars data est flammis tua. )

coupled with the expressly didactic message of the last line:

Imitez-moi. Ma vie est le Chemin des Cieux. (V,6)

suggest that Lefèvre did wish his play to contain a religious dimension, and indeed Hoefler, in his biography of the writer (XXX, 349), mentions that in his old age he turned towards religion, abjuring the 'errors' he had learnt from the philosophy of the eighteenth century.

In his criticism of Lefèvre's drama, Grimm (Corresp. litt., XV, 74) reproaches the tragedian for imitating the declamatory style of Seneca:

on ne peut que le blâmer d'avoir trop souvent copié le  
style emphatique et déclamatoire de Sénèque;

Yet, in general, the play is not couched in the bombastic, exaggerated tones of the Hercules Oetaeus. In passing this comment, Grimm was no doubt thinking of the exclamations of Hercule as he suffers from the effects of the poisoned robe, but the dramatist greatly reduces the



length of the excessively long Latin speeches, and moderates their rhetorical effects. In contrast, Grimm (loc. cit.) praises Lefèvre

d'avoir suivi le plan de Sophocle autant que pouvaient  
le permettre les convenances de notre théâtre et de nos  
moeurs,

and it is true that the writer does make great use of the Greek play, especially in the arrangement of his plot. This is hardly surprising, since the Trachiniae is a dynamic drama in which the characters interact logically and engage in dramatic dialogues. There is no such effect in the Hercules Oetaeus, which consists (above all at the beginning) of a series of long speeches spoken in a complete void, and while the Latin play might suggest interesting themes and attractive phrases, it could provide little inspiration for the construction of a satisfactory plot progression. It is not relevant to list the French writer's borrowings from Sophocles in detail, but it is interesting to note that his debt to the Greek drama is more extensive than to the Hercules Oetaeus, and that echoes of the Trachiniae are seen throughout the play.

In comparison with the ancient dramas, Lefèvre has considerably expanded the love element by making Yole and Hyllus share a mutual affection, but to the eighteenth century his attention to this detail seemed rather perfunctory.<sup>(1)</sup> Indeed the young couple are given no scenes alone in which to express their feelings, although both are present in act III scenes 3 and 4, and act V scene 6. It is clear that Lefèvre's only interest in this relationship was the basis it provided for the rivalry between Hyllus and his father, and for the dramatic changes of situation, as Hercule successively grants Yole to Hyllus then reclaims her for himself, and finally entrusts her again to Hyllus in the closing scene. Hyllus himself is merely an

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(1) See Grimm, XV, 73.

instrument of the plot, following his mother's instructions to search for Hercule in the first scene (in imitation of Sophocles' opening episode), and being forced to sacrifice his love for Yole to the demands of his father. Yole is endowed with the sadness characteristic of the Latin character (see act II scenes 1 and 3), and has the same beauty which Iole laments as causing the downfall of her country in lines 219-23 of the Hercules Oetaeus. She maintains dignity in her suffering, and rejects pity:

Souffrez-moi cet orgueil qu'excuse ma douleur,  
Qu'aucun rang n'autorise, et qui sied au Malheur. (II,3)

but has none of the arrogance of Renout's heroine, and remains a passive character.

Déjanire has a larger role, and the inspiration for her character derives primarily from the Trachiniae, for she is not endowed with the excessive fury of the Latin heroine. She adores Hercule:

Mon epoux, à mes yeux,  
Est toujours ce que j'aime, et que j'aime le mieux. (I,2)

but has had to endure continual separations from him. Grimm (loc. cit.) argued that we can feel no interest for the jealousy of a woman who has been betrayed so often, but this is a harsh judgement, for the fact that she has had to suffer so much makes the final betrayal all the worse. In sending the poisoned veil of Nessus to Hercule she is the innocent victim of fate, and prior to her death she has to bear the burden of her son's misdirected fury (see IV,4), which Lefèvre, calculating a powerful emotional effect, makes even harsher than in Sophocles' play.

Lefèvre's main interest, however, lies in the portrait of Hercule. He resembles neither the tyrannical figure of the seventeenth-century Hercules dramas, nor the weak, vacillating character in Renout's play, but appears as a glorious hero. In this respect he is closer to the Hercule we find in the many French Alcestis plays of the eighteenth

century. In the opening scene Déjanire describes him as the saviour of the world, and to this image Philoctète adds that of the beneficent conqueror:<sup>(1)</sup>

C'est peu que d'opresseurs il purge au loin la terre, (I,4)  
Son travail le plus beau c'est d'adoucir la guerre.

Hercule himself sees his mission as that of bringing peace to the world (see III,1). This pre-eminent virtue is brought into question only by his love for Yole, and he reaches his lowest ebb when he proclaims to the assembled crowd that 'Yole est à moi seul' (III,3). However, he is ennobled by his superhuman efforts to overcome this adulterous passion, and he finally crowns his achievement by granting the girl to his rival Hyllus.

The French dramatist casts a peculiarly contemporary light on Hercule's labours as he has the hero declare himself to be a bringer of enlightenment to the world:

Autant que je l'ai pu, de l'Univers crédule,  
Ma voix, à la Raison, denonça les erreurs; (III,1)  
Vers la Nature, enfin, je rappelai ses moeurs.

The pursuit of reason and nature was the major canon of the Stoic philosophy, and as a Stoic sapiens Hercules would naturally uphold these, yet the reference to Raison seems to evoke its seventeenth and eighteenth-century connotations of the pursuit of philosophical truth as opposed to unenlightened superstition, and Nature suggests the theories of Rousseau.

In this complex character Lefèvre seems also to be striving to correct the faults of the braggart hero of the Hercules Oetaeus, for the French Hercule expressly desires to be treated as the equal of his people (see III,1), and as he nears his end he addresses Jupiter in respectful tones, making no demand for immortality:

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(1) One can note similarities with the image which Seneca offered of Hercules in his philosophical works. See page 222 of this chapter.

Mais si j'en crus ta foi; si toi même, ô mon père,  
Aux travaux de ma vie assignas un salaire,  
Je ne t'adresse point l'espoir ambitieux  
De partager l'Olympe, assis au rang des Dieux. (V,4)

unlike his Latin counterpart:

si pace tellus plena, si nullae gemunt  
urbes nec aras impias quisquam inquinat,  
si scelera desunt, spiritum admitte hunc precor  
in astra. (1701-4)

Similarly, whereas Hercules in his delirium imagines himself already in Heaven (1432-9), his unassuming successor sees himself only as 'une ombre insensible' in a kind of void (V,3), and is thus more worthy of the ultimate reward at the end of the play.

Although Lefèvre's tragedy was not highly acclaimed, it offers a fascinating contrast to Renout's conception of the subject. The very dissimilarity of these two dramas makes it difficult to generalize about the interpretation of the Hercules theme in the eighteenth century, and we may conclude only that the Greek text of Sophocles had become more widely known by this period,<sup>(1)</sup> and could provide significant alternatives to the plot and themes of the Hercules Oetaeus. Of the two Hercule tragedies, that of Lefèvre is the more forward-looking, and with its spectacular closing scene illustrates the broader sense in which vraisemblance was interpreted towards the end of the century.

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(1) In the seventeenth century only Prévost's Hercule (1613) had made use of the Greek play.

## CHAPTER IX

### Seneca's Heroines (i):

#### 'Medea' and the Portrayal of Magic in the Theatre

In three of his dramas,<sup>(1)</sup> the Medea, Phaedra, and Troades, Seneca focuses his attentions on the famous women of legend, and his heroines form some of the best and most powerful of his creations. Of these heroines, the most dynamic is undoubtedly Medea, the sorceress whose colourful life provided so many themes for ancient tragedy and epic, and whose personality impinged on the awareness of writers of both seventeenth and eighteenth-century France.

We know of numerous Greek Medea plays (by Euripides, Neophron, Dicaeogenes, Carcinus, Diogenes (?), Biotus, Euripides minor, Melanthius (?), and Herillus),<sup>(2)</sup> and of a Jason composed by Antiphon, as well as many others in which the character of Medea appears.<sup>(3)</sup> In Rome, Ennius wrote two Medea tragedies: the first, Medea Exul, is an imitation of Euripides, and the second, Medea, appears to deal with her later life in Athens as wife of Aegeus. In addition to this, plays on the theme were also composed by Accius, Ovid, Lucan, Curvatus Maternus, and Pompeius Macer (in Greek), as well as by Seneca. Pacuvius

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(1) It could also be argued that the most important characters in the Agamemnon are the women, Clytemnestra and Cassandra.

(2) The last two writers are added to Nauck's list by Heine ('Cornelle's Médée in ihrem Verhältnisse zu den Medea-Tragödien des Euripides und des Seneca betrachtet' (Französische Studien I (1881), 436)).

(3) Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides all explored more than one aspect of the legend.

wrote a Medus (the name of Medea's son by Aegeus), Gracchus a Peliades, and Bassus, according to Martial (V, 53, 1), a play entitled Colchis. Yet of all this wealth of Greek and Latin material only the plays of Euripides and Seneca survive in complete form.

There are distinct differences between the conceptions of these two works, and we may not assume that Seneca's Medea was influenced primarily by its fifth-century predecessor. Indeed, it seems likely that works closer to the Latin writer's own time, such as Ovid's Medea, were a far more immediate source of inspiration.

Seneca offers us in the character of Medea a portrait of excessive fury, and the prologue, in which she calls upon the gods of Heaven and Hell to grant her vengeance on her faithless husband Jason and his new bride Creusa, sets the scene for the mood of the drama. Her rage has already reached a pitch of frenzy, and the crimes she plans are beyond the bounds of reason:

gravior exurgat dolor:  
maiora iam me scelera post partus decent. (49-52)  
accingere ira teque in exitium para  
furore toto.

On seeing her anger, jealousy, and wounded pride, the chorus comments that there is no more powerful force than the fury of an abandoned wife:

Nulla vis flammae tumidive venti  
tanta, nec teli metuenda torti, (579-82)  
quanta cum coniunx viduata taedis  
ardet et odit;

There is little nuance of emotion in Medea, and we see only one side of her nature, but we are, nevertheless, carried along by the force of her personality. She stands a solitary figure, surrounded by a sea of hostility, for immediately after her opening speech the chorus sings in joyful tones the epithalamium, or wedding-hymn, for Jason and Creusa, yet from this very isolation she derives determination and the strength to overwhelm her adversaries.

The magical aspect of her character was clearly pleasing to Seneca, for he devotes 173 lines (670-842) to the preparation of deadly poisons and charms, with which Medea impregnates the gifts of a robe, necklace, and crown which she is to send to Creusa. There is an atmosphere of mystery and sorcery as she chants the ritual invocations to the forces of Hell and to Hecate:

Comprecor vulgus silentum vosque ferales deos  
et Chaos caecum atque opacam Ditis umbrosi domum, (740-1)

.....  
nunc meis vocata sacris, noctium sidus, veni  
pessimos induta vultus, fronte non una minax. (750-1)

Medea's incantations in lines 752-70 echo Ovid's description of her preparations for rejuvenating Aeson, the father of Jason (Metamorphoses VII, 179-209), and it seems possible that Ovid also concentrated on the magical aspects of Medea's character in his tragedy named after her.

Euripides, however, had been interested in the emotional rather than the magical side of Medea's nature, and he concentrates his attentions on the destructive force of her passion, rather than on her prowess as a sorceress. Consequently he does not dwell on her method of poisoning the robe and crown she is to offer to Jason's new bride, and his heroine alludes only briefly to the effectiveness of her poisons:

Κάνπερ λαβοῦσα κόσμον ἀμφιθῆ χροί',  
κακῶς ὀλεῖται πᾶς θ' ὅς ἂν θίγῃ κόρης.  
Τοιοῖδέε χρίσω φαρμάκοις δωρήματα. (787-9)

(If she takes and puts on the ornament, she will die horribly, as will anyone who touches the girl: with these sort of poisons will I smear the gifts). The action is mainly focused on the range of emotions which accompany Medea's betrayal. The first part of the play builds up a mood of sympathy for her, as her nurse, the children's guardian, and the chorus of Corinthian women all emphasize the bitterness of her situation. Medea herself is more human than her Roman counterpart,

and Euripides introduces an important element of pathos when, in her misery, she seeks to harm herself as well as Jason. She weeps (25), wants to die (97, 144-5, 226-7), and feels keenly the wretchedness of the woman's position in relation to that of her husband (230-51). Further on in the play this pathos is heightened as Medea undergoes a terrible emotional struggle when deciding whether or not she can bear to kill her children (1005-80). Her legendary potential for violence<sup>(1)</sup> means that her decision must eventually go against her sons.

Euripides seems to have a greater regard for verisimilitude, or perhaps logicity, than Seneca, and this, combined with the pathos of the play, made his version pleasing to French dramatists. Seneca is unconcerned by the fact that gifts from Medea to her rival would in all likelihood be regarded with extreme suspicion, and either destroyed or carefully examined before use, but the Greek dramatist pays greater attention to these kind of details. His Medea shows considerable cunning, and averts suspicion by feigning to be reconciled to her plight and by displaying a submissive attitude towards Jason (866-975). She gives her reason for sending gifts to the princess as the need to win over her favour, so that her (Medea's) sons will be allowed to remain in Corinth (964-75). No such reason is offered in the Roman drama. Other variations between the two plays<sup>(2)</sup> are of

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(1) Euripides does not neglect this aspect of her character, and she is described as a frightening woman (δεινή (44)), whose vengeance is to be feared (171-2).

(2) The Greek drama opens with the nurse lamenting the journey of the Argo and the meeting of Medea with Jason, which has been the cause of all her mistress' misfortunes (1-48). The paedagogus, or slave entrusted with the care of Medea's children, then tells the nurse that Medea is to be banished from Corinth with her sons (49 ff.). By this stage Jason has already married Creon's daughter. At the beginning of Seneca's play we see Medea meditating on her revenge, as the marriage celebrations get under way. Unlike in Euripides' version, Jason is determined to keep his sons with him (544-9), and /

contd. overleaf



less importance, although it is interesting that it is Euripides rather than Seneca who gives a lengthy description of the horrible effects of the robe on the princess and on Creon. In the Latin Medea only a single line is given to the announcement of their deaths:

nata atque genitor cinere permixto iacent. (880)

whereas in Euripides their deaths are first announced (1125-6), then elaborated on in eighty-six lines (1136-1221).

Seneca's Medea was generally held to be one of the best of the Latin tragedies in the eighteenth century, and was almost always attributed to the philosopher.<sup>(1)</sup> The Histoire universelle held the Latin Medea to be superior to that of Euripides (VIII, 61-2):

l'on conviendra que dans une infinité d'endroits, Sénèque l'emporte de beaucoup & sur l'Auteur Grec qui lui a servi de modèle, & sur ceux auxquels il en a servi à son tour. Il y a dans cette Pièce-ci moins de déclamation que dans les autres, & conséquemment moins d'ornemens superflus. Le Dialogue en est plus serré, l'action plus rapide, & l'esprit y est quelquefois remplacé par le sentiment.

as did Morelly, who preferred Seneca's characterization of the heroine to that of the earlier dramatist (Traduction libre ... de Médée, p. 105):

Il (Seneca) avoit été révolté de cet assemblage bizarre de force & de foiblesse qu'on y (i.e. in Euripides) trouve, & c'est ce qu'il a voulu éviter; aussi l'Héroïne de Sénèque, comme l'Electre de Sophocle, se montre-t-elle constamment la même du commencement jusqu'à la fin, sans se démentir un seul instant;

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contd. from p. 259 / Medea realizes that the murder of their children would be an ideal way of wounding him. The appearance of Aegeus (663-758) is unique to the Greek play, and the king of Athens offers Medea sanctuary in his own city. After the successful delivery of the poisoned gifts, Creon and Creusa die in agony in both plays. Medea then undergoes an emotional struggle (Eurip. 1005 ff.; Sen. 895 ff.), and finally kills her sons. In the Greek drama the cries of the children are heard as this is accomplished off stage (1271 - 8); in Seneca's version they are nominally murdered on stage (970-1, 1019)(although we now know that there was no question of these actions being represented), and Medea is imagined as hurling her children at Jason from the roof of the house (1024).

(1) See Brumoy (Le Théâtre des Grecs, II, 502); Morelly (Traduction libre ... de Médée, p. 104); Coupé (Théâtre de Sénèque, II, 92-3); and the Bibliothèque universelle des dames, p. 298.

He also approved of the terror aroused by Medea's murder of her children (p. 110).

Nevertheless, the Greek Medea did have its own supporters.

Fréron (Année littéraire (1779), ii, 307) praises the pathos contained in Medea's emotional struggle prior to killing her children:

Une pareille situation est le comble du pathétique, & a dû faire la plus vive impression sur les Grecs.

and the Bibliothèque universelle des dames (p. 297) expresses its preference for Euripides' treatment of the theme:

Euripide le (the subject) traita avec plus de sagesse que Sénèque. Ses caractères sont plus soutenus, le coeur est plus uniforme & plus d'accord avec l'action.

Père Brumoy was another admirer of the Greek tragedy, and although he did offer some praise of Seneca's Medea, he found fault with the Roman dramatist's method of treating the supernatural element in the fourth act (Théâtre des Grecs, II, 494):

Celle-là (i.e. the nurse) vient annoncer que sa maîtresse est occupée à des enchantemens magiques. Mais comment l'annonce-t'elle ? par la description de quantité de serpens, d'insectes, & de monstres que Médée fait venir en un instant des deux bouts du monde. Ensuite elle décrit les herbes venimeuses qu'elle emploie, sans oublier, je pense, un seul de tous les pays où il en croît.

The style of Seneca's play came under attack in the Encyclopédie (article Enflure (Rhétoriqu.), V, 673), where the chevalier de Jaucourt translates several lines from Medea's opening monologue (28-34), and offers them as a glaring example of bombast.

#### French Adaptations of the 'Medea'

The suitability of <sup>this</sup> theme for French tragic drama was brought into question by Voltaire, who in his Commentaires sur Corneille (II, 10) deplored both the 'longues déclamations' of Seneca and the 'vaine déclamation' of Euripides, and argued that we cannot be interested in the machinations of a wicked woman (II, 11):

Un défaut plus grand encore dans la tragédie de Médée (i.e. Corneille's play on the theme), c'est qu'on ne s'intéresse à aucun personnage. Médée est une méchante femme qui se vange d'un malhonnête homme. La manière dont Corneille a traité ce sujet nous révolte aujourd'hui; celles d'Euripide et de Sénèque nous révolteraient encore davantage.

However, this problem does not seem to have worried dramatists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for during this period four adaptations of the subject were made. The first of these, Jean de La Péruse's Médée of 1553, is thought to be the first regular adaptation in French of a classical tragedy. Faguet<sup>(1)</sup> argues that 'La Médée de La Péruse est la Médée de Sénèque', but in fact the play is inspired by both Seneca and Euripides. Claude Binet is also thought to have composed a Médée in 1577 (according to de Lérès (Dictionnaire portatif, p. 218)), but, unlike the earlier tragedy, this does not survive.

From the seventeenth century we have the Médée plays of Corneille<sup>(2)</sup> and Longepierre. Corneille's drama is characteristic of the era in which it appeared (1635), in that it owes an important debt to the Senecan tragedy and often paraphrases sections from the Medea. In the Examen of 1660 the dramatist referred to the versions of both Euripides and Seneca, but from the Greek tragedian Corneille derives only general suggestions of a limited kind.<sup>(3)</sup> The French writer was clearly attracted by the forceful personality of the Latin Medea,

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(1) La Tragédie française au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle (Paris 1912), p. 99.

(2) The Medea legend also inspired Corneille's La Conquête de la toison d'or (1660), a tragédie à machines which is based on the ancient chronicles of Apollonius Rhodius and Valerius Flaccus.

(3) André de Leyssac, in his edition of Médée (Textes littéraires français, Geneva 1978), has attempted to prove that Corneille's debt to Euripides is more substantial than has generally been supposed, but the textual parallels he offers between the Greek and French plays are generally unsatisfactory, for Corneille is almost always closer to Seneca than to the Euripidean lines quoted.

for he writes in a letter to M. de Zuylichem (March 6th 1649) that he based his heroine almost entirely on this figure (M.-L. X, 451):

Haec Graio nihil, at nimis nimisque  
Debet Ausonio, venena, planctus,  
Duros conjugis impetus relictæ,  
Materna in pietate fluctuantes, ....

The imposing and self-sufficient heroine appealed to him more than the weaker Euripidean figure, whom he describes as trementem, and we can see in Seneca's Medea the prototype for later Cornelian characters, such as Cléopâtre in Rodogune. Indeed André Stegmann<sup>(1)</sup> goes so far as to state that

Avec le personnage de Médée, Corneille découvre le tragique. L'essentiel, il le doit à Sénèque. La lutte de l'individu contre un sort qui l'accable, ...

The magical element of Medea's character is very much in evidence. In the first scene Jason describes her false rejuvenation of Pelias, and in the fourth act we see her in her magic grotto, preparing her poisons. Corneille also endows her with a magic wand which allows her to free Aegée from prison (IV,5) and to hold Theudas, the messenger, rooted to the spot (V,1).

Longepierre, too, was interested in Medea as a sorceress, and his Médée (1694) is based to a certain extent on Corneille's interpretation of the theme. In the first scene we are told that Médée has power over all nature, and in the fourth act we see her invoking the infernal deities and the horrors of Hell (IV,1). Longepierre's main classical source was Seneca, although he was particularly known as a Hellenist, and was clearly acquainted with Euripides' work. He was also attracted by the Racinian style of tragedy, and was keen to emphasize the element of pathos inherent in Médée's position as a deserted wife. In his preface he writes that he feels the subject to be especially suitable

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(1) 'La Médée de Corneille' (p. 123), in Les Tragédies de Sénèque et le théâtre de la Renaissance.

for arousing the emotions of pity and fear (p. 27):

Il m'a toujours paru que les deux grands ressorts de la Tragédie, la terreur et la pitié, s'y font sentir vivement; et que Médée toute méchante et toute criminelle qu'elle est, étant aussi très malheureuse et trahie par celui pour qui elle a tout fait et tout abandonné, est l'un des personnages du monde le plus propre à faire un grand effet sur la Scène. (1)

and these are the emotions on which he concentrates in his portrait of Médée. The element of pathos is particularly strong in the latter part of the play (IV,5 onwards), as Médée reacts with strong and conflicting emotions to the thought of being separated from, and then of killing, her children.

Longepierre's version of the Medea held no outstanding attraction for the seventeenth century, and was performed only twenty-three times. However, when revived in the eighteenth century (1728), the play met with an astonishing success (it was performed a total of 134 times throughout the century), and completely replaced Corneille's Médée on the stage. The reasons for this later success are manifold. Corneille's version was in many respects pre-classical, and Longepierre's Médée offered the attraction of a greater regularity. Also its emphasis on pathos appealed to audiences at a time when sensibilité was prevalent. (2) It was not generally felt that the play had any especial merit, (3) but it seems that, when portrayed by a skilful actress, the role of Médée had the power to capture the attention of the spectator. (4) No tragedy

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(1) Edition of T. Tobarì (Editions A.-G. Nizet, Paris 1967).

(2) J. D. Hubert explores this aspect of the play in his article 'Une Tragédie de la sensibilité: la Médée de Longepierre' (Romanische Forschungen 69 (1957), 28-48).

(3) See the Mercure de France (Jan. 1729, p. 152), and Voltaire's Commentaires sur Corneille, II, 10.

(4) See Mouhy, Tablettes dramatiques, p. 153; de Lérís, Dictionnaire portatif, p. 218; Voltaire, op. cit., II, 10; and La Harpe, Lycée, IV, 220.

on the theme of Medea's revenge on Jason surpassed the success of Longepierre's play in the eighteenth century, although Clément did attempt to offer a different interpretation of the character in his Médée of 1779. In addition to this drama, Medea also features in the Thésée of La Fosse (1700) and the Médus of Deschamps (1739).

La Fosse's<sup>(1)</sup> Thésée was performed a total of thirty-five times in the first decade of the eighteenth century, and relates the events which followed Medea's flight from Corinth, when she settled in Athens with Aegeus. The main classical source appears to be Plutarch's Theseus, and there is no evidence of any imitation of either Seneca or Euripides. Nevertheless, La Fosse's interpretation of the character of Medea is particularly interesting in relation to this study, for he completely abandons the magical side of her nature, which had particularly attracted Seneca and Ovid, as being inappropriate to this later stage of her life. In his preface he writes:

J'avoüe que la colere de cette Princesse n'agit pas ici comme à Corinthe, qu'elle ne souleve pas les Enfers, & ne met pas tout en feu, comme dans l'Opera, qui porte le nom de Thésée: mais j'ay considéré qu'elle se devoit conduire autrement dans Athenes, où sa fortune l'obligeoit à ménager la bienveillance d'un Peuple, chez qui elle avoit trouvé un azile, ... (2)

and he is consciously reacting against the fantastic elements of Quinault's opera Thésée (1675), in which Médée summons the inhabitants of Hell onto the stage. La Fosse prefers to concentrate on the purely human characteristics of cunning and deceit, and he makes Médée herself state that she will use a different policy to destroy Thésée, Egée's son, from that employed against Jason:

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(1) Antoine de La Fosse, sieur d'Aubigny (c. 1653-1708). He wrote four tragedies, Polixène (1696), Manlius Capitolinus (1698), Thésée, and Corésus et Callirhoé (1703), as well as a considerable amount of poetry. See Lancaster, French Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century, IV, 1, 385, and 396-9.

(2) Text from the 1706 edition of Les Tragédies de Monsieur de La Fosse (Paris, Pierre Ribou) (B. N. Yf 9710-9713).

mais tu connois mon coeur,  
Tu sçais avec quel art déguisant ma fureur,  
Quand à punir quelqu'un elle a pû se resoudre,  
J'empesche que l'éclair ne parte avant la foudre. (I,1)  
C'est ce que je veux faire, & non comme autrefois  
En armant les Enfers, asservis à mes loix,  
Je dois craindre en ces lieux, où je dois estre Reine,  
D'effaroucher les coeurs par l'éclat de ma haine;

This tendency to stress the human rather than the supernatural side of Medea's character is expressed more forcefully in Deschamps' (1) Médus of 1739. Deschamps' play is set some years later than Thésée, after the death of Egée, when Médée has returned to Colchis after an absence of thirty years. Médée is disguised as a priestess of Diana, and is working to bring down Persès (who has usurped the throne of Colchis after killing Aetès, Médée's father), and to obtain the throne for Médus, her son by Egée. In his preface Deschamps states firmly that in his view magic and fantastic spectacle are not valid constituents of tragedy. He explains that (p. iv-v)

je craignois de manquer le caractère de Médée, en rejetant (sic) le secours des enchantemens & de la machine, qui ne m'ont jamais paru convenir à la Tragédie. ... Pour ce qui est de Médée, j'ai tâché de la peindre implacable, dissimulée, artificieuse, occupée de sa vengeance au point d'y sacrifier les droits les plus sacrés; enfin j'ai substitué aux ressources de l'art magique dont elle se servoit, celles de son courage & de son génie. (2)

His rejection of the magical element contrasts strongly with the practices of Comeille and Longepierre, and suggests that eighteenth-century tragedians were more concerned to situate tragedy on a human plane and to offer a recognizable or life-like representation of character.

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(1) François-Michel-Chrétien Deschamps (1683-1747). He offered his first tragedy, Caton d'Utique, in 1712, and by 1733 he had amassed a large enough fortune from his employment in finance to be able to devote himself solely to literature. Médus, which was performed eight times between January 12th and 31st of 1739, was his last tragedy. See Lancaster, Sunset, p. 140 and French Tragedy in the Time of Louis XV, I, 242-5.

(2) Médus, tragédie (Paris, Prault fils, 1739).

Nevertheless, in spite of Deschamps' aim to focus his play on the achievement of Médée's ends by purely human methods, awareness of her supernatural powers is not completely lacking, for she has ended the plague in Colchis by means of her skills, and she reminds the audience of her potential power:

Je scaurai, s'il le faut, soulever les enfers,  
Et faire de mon deuil celui de l'Univers. (II,3)

There are also traces of the forceful Medea of Seneca in Deschamps' characterization, although the Latin play is not named among his sources. When faced by danger, Médée recalls her innate superiority over others:

Que dis-je ? & qu'ai-je à craindre ? Il me reste Médée.  
J'ai sçu vaincre toujours sans être secondée. (III,7)

This echoes the powerful moi of Corneille:

NÉRINE  
Dans un si grand revers que vous reste-t-il ?  
MÉDÉE  
Moi: (Médée, I,5) (1)  
Moi, dis-je, et c'est assez.

but is in fact closer to Seneca's original lines:

Medea superest, hic mare et terras vides  
ferrumque et ignes et deos et fulmina. (166-7)

Médée's triumphant words to Persès in the final scene of the play:

Tremble. Tu vois mon fils, & reconnois Médée. (V,11)

derive from her taunt to Jason in Seneca, line 1021, 'coniugem agnoscis tuam?'. Thus while Medea's incantations held no interest for Deschamps, her powerful, dominating personality, as reflected in Seneca's play, did still contain a certain attraction.

Clément's<sup>(2)</sup> Médée, which gained only one performance on February

(1) Marty-Laveaux edition, volume II.

(2) Jean-Marie-Bernard Clément (1742-1812) was primarily a literary critic, and throughout his career he succeeded in antagonizing those in a position of power. He attacked Voltaire, who nicknamed him inclément, in a series of letters, of which the first was entitled /  
contd. overleaf



20th 1779, provides a perhaps more interesting comparison with the ancient versions of the theme than do the plays of La Fosse and Deschamps, for although these dramatists had already postulated the idea of a Medea relying on human rather than supernatural powers, their plays relate to a later period of her life than that in which we are primarily interested.

Clément composed his tragedy many years before it was performed, for he writes in a letter of 1768 (December 5th, D 15351) to Voltaire, whom he had not yet alienated, that the play has already been sent to Le Kain to be read to the comédiens. In this letter the writer states his fundamental aversion to the presentation of Medea as a sorceress:

J'ai eu beau dire, ... qu'une femme sorcière ne peut nous toucher ni nous intéresser, que la magie détruit tout l'effet, et rend tout autre personnage que Médée ridicule devant elle, ...

The key words are toucher and intéresser, and Clément clearly felt that in order to sympathize with the character we must be able to identify with her emotions. He expands this view in the preface to Médée (p. iii):

Il est difficile en effet de nous attacher à un Personnage fictif, doué d'un pouvoir surnaturel & imaginaire, toujours occupé à converser avec les Larves & les Fantômes, & dont on ne sauroit partager les douleurs, puisqu'il ne lui faut qu'un coup de baguette pour sortir d'embarras. Ce merveilleux si éloigné de nos idées & de la vraisemblance, ce ridicule attirail de Sorcière, qui ne se pardonne qu'à l'Opéra, ou dans nos Féeries, n'est-il pas absurde sur un Théâtre uniquement consacré à la peinture du coeur humain, & au développement des passions ? (1)

Voltaire himself had seen magic in tragedy as essentially out of date in a century of intellectual progress, and he argues that tragic

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contd. from p. 267 / Boileau à Voltaire (1773), and this was followed by De la Tragédie, pour servir de suite aux lettres à Voltaire (1784). Besides Médée he wrote a tragedy entitled Cromwell, which was never finished. See Lancaster, French Tragedy in the Reign of Louis XVI, p. 27-9.

(1) Médée, tragédie en trois actes (Paris, Moutard, 1779).

drama has evolved into a representation of truth (Commentaires sur Comeille, II, 10-11):

Ces tragédies uniquement tirées de la fable, et où tout est incroyable, ont aujourd'hui peu de réputation parmi nous depuis que Comeille nous a accoutumés au vrai (i.e. with plays such as Cinna); ... et si le théâtre est la représentation de la vérité, il faut bannir également les apparitions et la magie. (1)

Whereas Medea might have been a suitable subject for the ancients, who accepted sorcery, it was no longer, according to Voltaire, credible in the eighteenth century. Clément echoes these sentiments in his preface, describing tragedy as a genre in which 'la vérité seule & la nature doivent régner' (p. xi). The dramatist seems to believe truth and verisimilitude to be almost synonymous, for in his critical work, De la Tragédie, he bases his dramatic theories on the necessity for vraisemblance, which is defined as an exact representation of nature (I, 4):

On doit convenir que le premier principe d'une imitation qui ressemble le mieux à la Nature, est fondé sur la plus exacte vraisemblance.

Not surprisingly Clément was deeply interested in Euripides' portrait of Medea, and in his preface he approves the Greek tragedian's view that (p. v)

le titre de mere & d'épouse abandonnée, étoit bien suffisant pour attendrir & pour émouvoir.

Both the magical element and the rhetorical style of Seneca's drama, on the other hand, were bitterly attacked by the French writer (p. vi):

Au lieu d'intéresser pour Médée, il en a, le premier, fait une Magicienne, qui étale sur le Théâtre toutes les horreurs ridicules de son art, & qui employe de mortels monologues à nommer tous les démons des enfers & tous les poisons de son pays;

Clément himself sought to produce an emotional portrait of Medea which

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(1) However, he did believe the appearance of ghosts to be acceptable in exceptional circumstances.

would arouse terror, and above all pity, in the audience, and he conceived his character as a woman driven to desperate actions by her excessive love for Jason. He felt that the element of terror, and of her culpability, would be mitigated by the fact that she is deeply troubled and in a frenzied mood at the time of killing her children, then full of remorse once the crime has been committed (p. iv):

si, en un mot, dans tous les égaremens où sa passion la précipite, on la voit toujours punie par ses propres fureurs & par un amour indomptable, je ne vois pas comment un pareil caractere ne produiroit pas sur la Scene l'effet le plus tragique, & n'y exciteroit pas l'intérêt, la terreur & la pitié.

He stated categorically that he would imitate Seneca as little as possible and Euripides as much as possible, and he does borrow far less from the Latin Medea than do Corneille and Longepierre. In all he derives somewhat less than fifty lines from Seneca, and of these several are traceable to Clément's French predecessors rather than to the Latin play itself. He had declared his opposition to the declamatory tones of Seneca's work (see preface, p. vi), and he excludes Medea's long invocation to the gods of Heaven and Hell, which opens the ancient drama. However, he does imitate Medea's appeal to the Sun, her grandfather. In act II scene 4 Médée questions how he can possibly shed light on her dishonour:

Et toi, sacré Soleil, auteur de ma famille,  
Tu pourras éclairer la honte de ta fille!

This imitates Seneca, lines 28-30:

- spectat hoc nostri sator  
Sol generis, et spectatur, et curru insidens  
per solita puri spatia decurrit poli ?

So although Clément rejects Medea's magical powers, he is content to stress her divine ancestry.

Médée's refusal to flee from Corinth and let Jason betray her with impunity, which provides a dramatic and forceful opening to

Clément's play:

PHÉNICE  
Madame, au nom des Dieux: fuyons.  
MÉDÉE  
Moi, que je fuie! (I,1)  
Moi! laisser triompher l'époux qui m'a trahie!

echoes Medea's defiance in Seneca's work:

NUTR. Profuge. MED. Paenituit fugae. (170)

The French dramatist also makes some borrowings from Seneca's Medea/Creon confrontation (177-300), and from the Medea/Jason scene (431-559), but these borrowings appear fairly insubstantial in comparison with the use both Corneille and Longepierre made of these parts of the Roman drama. In Médée's encounter with Créon, the king argues that he is being harassed by Acastus, the son of Pelias and now king of Thessaly:

Déjà, depuis long-temps, le Roi de Thessalie,  
Acaste, pour venger le meurtre de Pélée,  
S'obstine à demander, mais toujours vainement,  
Que je vous abandonne à son ressentiment. (I,2)

This seems to derive from Medea 256-7:

quippe quem poenae expetit  
letoque Acastus regna Thessalica optinens.

although in this instance Creon is referring to Jason and not Medea.

Médée's request for Jason to accompany her into exile:

Rendez-moi mon époux, je partirai contente. (I,2)

echoes Medea 272-3:

redde fugienti ratem  
vel redde comitem -

She argues that her crimes belong to Jason, in that they were committed on his behalf:

CRÉON  
Je connois vos forfaits; mais j'ignore les siens.  
MÉDÉE  
Hé bien! connoissez-les. (I,2)  
CRÉON  
Quels sont-ils ?  
MÉDÉE  
Tous les miens.

This notion is derived from Medea 497-8, where Medea is engaged in

bitter dispute with Jason:

IAS. Obicere tandem quod potes crimen mihi ?

MED. Quodcumque feci.

Her plea to be allowed to remain in Créon's lands:

Souffrez qu'en vos États j'aïlle, loin de sa vue,  
Chercher une retraite où je vive inconnue; (I,2)

is inspired by Seneca, lines 250-1:

urbe si pelli placet,  
detur remotus aliquis in regnis locus.

In the fourth scene of the first act Médée confronts Jason, and charges him with being the cause of her exile:

Pour combler mon tourment, c'est vous qui me chassez! (I,4)

This is derived ultimately from Medea 449-50:

discedo exeo,  
penatibus profugere quam cogis tuis:

but the phraseology is very reminiscent of both Corneille:

C'est pour vous que j'ai fui, c'est vous qui me chassez. (III,3)

and Longepierre:

Je fuyois pour Jason, et c'est lui qui me chasse! (II,5)

In his preface Clément had censured both of these earlier plays, but seemingly he was not averse to exploiting some of their most effective verses.

Médée goes on to remind Jason of all she has done for him:

Songe, songe un peu plus au péril assuré,  
Dont jamais ta valeur ne t'auroit délivré. (I,4)  
Que de combats divers, dans un champ redoutable,  
T'offroient sous mille aspects la mort inévitable!

and this, too, echoes Longepierre:

Songe à tous les perils qui menaçoient ta tête. (II,5)

rather than Seneca (465 ff.) or Euripides (476 ff.). The list of the sacrifices she has made for Jason:

Patrie, honneur, parens, je t'ai tout immolé; (I,4)

may derive from Medea 118-9:

erepto patre

patria atque regno ...

or Longepierre (II,2):

pour lui j'ai tout quitté,  
Pays, thrône, parens, gloire, félicité.

Jason's refusal to allow Médée to take their sons into exile with her, only adds to her anger, and the same situation had arisen in the Latin play (544 ff.), although both Corneille and Longepierre had already imitated this aspect of Seneca's plot.

The whole of Seneca's fourth act, which is devoted to Medea's preparation of the poisoned gifts for Creusa, is abandoned by Clément, in keeping with his aim to exclude magic, and he limits mention of the robe to four lines in act II scene 3:

Pour servir mon courroux, Phénice, en ce moment,  
Présente à ma rivale un riche vêtement,  
Où j'avois sçu mêler à la pourpre éclatante,  
Des plus subtils poisons la flamme dévorante ...

This approximates to Euripides, lines 784-9. However, the French Médée's gift is entirely without motivation, and it is highly invraisemblable that Créuse is not suspicious of so lavish a present offered by her rival.

When Médée hears that Jason has gone to the temple to celebrate his marriage with Créuse (II,4), she resolves to rely on her own strength to provide her with revenge:

Mais au défaut des Dieux, il me reste un vengeur,  
Médée.

This is a distant echo of the famous Senecan phrase which had already inspired much imitation, 'Medea superest' (166). She rejects her children, declaring that

Les enfans de Jason ne sont plus à Médée. (II,4)

This is based on the Medea, where it forms part of Medea's inner debate as to whether or not she can bear to kill her children:

scelus est Iason genitor ... (933-4)  
- occidant, non sunt mei;

In the final act of his play, after Médée has gained revenge on Jason by killing their children (III,1), Clément portrays his heroine as tormented by visions of the Furies and of her brother. This torment in her mind is imitated from Medea's emotional struggle prior to killing her children in the Latin drama. Médée's act of summoning the Furies:

Accourez, armez-vous, exécrables Furies,  
Exercez sur mon coeur toutes vos barbaries. (III,1)  
O Filles de la nuit! est-ce vous que je voi ?  
Est-ce vous que je sens frémir autour de moi ?

imitates Medea 958-61:

Quonam ista tendit turba Furiarum impotens ?  
quem quaerit aut quo flammeos ictus parat,  
aut cui cruentas agmen infernum faces  
intentat ?

The appearance of Médée's brother Absyrtus, whom she had murdered whilst escaping from Colchis with Jason:

qui m'arrête ? ah mon frere!..  
Fuyons: il me poursuit; quels cris plaintifs!.. hélas: (III,1)  
Ses lambeaux déchirés se traînent sur mes pas.

echoes Medea 963-4:

- cuius umbra dispersis venit  
incerta membris ? frater est, poenas petit -

Clément owes a much larger debt to Euripides, although his textual borrowings from the Greek play are not as extensive as his preface would lead us to believe.<sup>(1)</sup> The emphatic opening words of the nurse in the Medea:

Εἶθ' ὦφελ' Ἀργοῦς μὴ διαπτάσθαι σκάφος (1-2)  
Κόλχων ἐς αἶαν Κυανέας Συμπληγάδας,

(Would that the hull of the Argo had never flown through the dark-blue Symplegades to the land of Colchis!) are reflected in Médée's fiercely uttered:

Plût aux Dieux que l'ingrat, fatal à mon repos, (I,1)

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(1) Numerically they are no more extensive than the borrowings from Seneca's Medea.

N'eût abordé jamais aux rives de Colchos!

Médée is also endowed with a certain amount of the cunning of Euripides' heroine. She dissimulates her desire for revenge before Créon:

Que tu me connois mal,  
Phénice! ma fureur n'est pas prête à s'éteindre.  
Sous les yeux du tyran si j'ai su la contraindre,  
Si j'en ai renfermé les éclats dans mon sein, (I,3)  
Trop de ressentiment nuisoit à mon dessein.  
Sans l'espoir de venger mon amour offensé,  
Crois-tu que, devant lui, je me fusse abaissée ?

as Medea had done:

δοκεῖς γὰρ ἂν με τόνδε θωπεύσαι ποτε,  
εἰ μὴ τι κερδαίνουσαν ἢ τεχνωμένην ; (368-70)  
οὐδ' ἂν προσεῖπον οὐδ' ἂν ἠψάμην χεροῖν.

(For do you think that I would ever have flattered him except to gain advantage or contrive some plan, or that I would have spoken to him or touched him with my hands). Similarly her contemptuous dismissal of Jason:

Cours hâter un hymen qui comble tes desirs. (I,4)

is based on the *νύμφευ'* (Marry her!) of Euripides, line 625.<sup>(1)</sup>

The structure of the French play is also based on the practices of the Greek rather than the Roman theatre. *Médée* is divided into three acts instead of the statutory five, and constitutes an interesting experiment in dramatic form. In his preface Clément notes that the Greeks did not observe act division, and that their dramas formed one continuous action of variable length. The French writer uses this precedent to question the neo-classical custom of always dividing tragedy into five acts, and reduces his own drama to three. Yet, even more importantly than this, Clément derives from the Greek *Medea* the whole slant of his play, with its emphasis on the portraiture of Medea's passions and emotions and the expression of terror and pathos. Having said this, Clément's methods of arousing pathos are

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(1) There are some further echoes of Euripides later on in *Médée*.



often somewhat different from those of Euripides.

Euripides had evoked sympathy for Medea by emphasizing her own grief at her betrayal and underlining the pity of servants and chorus, whilst presenting Creon and Jason as utterly unfeeling towards her. Clément has no chorus, and he decided to let Créon and Jason instead express sympathy for Médée's predicament. Both of these characters emphasize the injustice of her fate. Créon says:

La fortune, envers vous, trop injuste & cruelle,  
Vous prépare, Madame, une attaque nouvelle; (I,2)  
Et gémissant du coup qui va vous accabler,  
Ma bouche, avec regret, s'ouvre pour en parler.

(although he does maintain a certain hostility towards her). Jason is even more full of regret:

Croyez que je gémis du sort où je vous laisse.  
Les Dieux me sont témoins que mon coeur affligé (I,4)  
Rompt à regret le noeud où j'étois engagé.

The fact that Médée is the victim of a tyrannical love for Jason, which, in spite of her natural independence and self-sufficiency, ties her inseparably to her husband, is an additional source of interest. Neither Seneca nor Euripides had concentrated on the emotion of love, for once betrayed Medea's affection has been transformed into an all-consuming hatred. It was largely the seventeenth century, and writers such as Longepierre, who had explored this avenue, and Clément goes even further than his predecessors by making the whole wretchedness of Médée's situation derive from her abiding passion for Jason. In the first act she confides to Phénice that

Tout perfide qu'il est, Jason m'est cher encore;  
Malgré tous ses mépris, mon foible coeur l'adore. (I,3)

This desperate love appears even more pitiable in the second act, when Médée hears that Jason has failed to appear at the altar for his marriage to Créuse, and believes that he has returned to her (II,3), for her momentary joy is soon shattered when Jason does go through with the wedding (II,4).

Thus far Clément succeeds in arousing pity for Médée, but when he abruptly injects terror into the play by making her turn her attention to bloody revenge (II,4), the character begins to lose its ability to convince. Médée makes a hasty decision to kill her children, something which had been prepared with much more care by both Euripides and Seneca, who had stressed Medea's potential for violence from the beginning of their dramas. The murder of the children is accomplished off stage between acts II and III, and the lack of any emotional struggle in Médée prior to the act is surprising in the light of Clément's general desire to emphasize pathos. However, this lack of forethought is compensated to a certain degree by the extreme remorse she suffers in the final act. According to contemporary evidence, Médée's children were brought on stage at the end of the second act when the play was performed, but unfortunately their behaviour completely spoiled any effect of pathos which Clément might have sought to achieve. Fréron (Année littéraire (1779), ii, 306) writes:

ces enfans mals instruits, ou gagnés peut-être par quelque ennemi de l'auteur, se sont enfuis à l'aspect du poignard de Médée, & cette fuite, qui paroissoit être l'effet d'une crainte naïve, a excité les ris de toute l'assemblée.

Clément invented a new ending for his play, and in so doing controverted the legend in a very fundamental way. In the final act Médée realizes the full implication of her actions, and she terms her crime a 'meurtre involontaire' (III,2), committed while she was out of her mind. Unable to come to terms with her remorse, she resolves to commit suicide in the closing scene:

Ce fer m'affranchira de tes vœux exécrables;  
C'en est fait; en tranchant mes jours trop misérables, (III,3)  
Je finis des remords que rien n'eût pu calmer,  
Et me délivre enfin de l'horreur de t'aimer.

In concluding the action in this manner Clément is completely deforming the ancient concept of Medea, for in both Greek and Roman tragedies, as

in the original myth, the essence of her character was that she assumed full responsibility for her crimes, performing them in the knowledge that she was avenging a gross betrayal on Jason's part. Clément's Médée represents an attempt to humanize the character which has been carried to excess, for the dramatist has gone beyond Euripides' portrait of Medea's emotions to produce a problematic figure, who is a pathetic and unhappy lover, but who can never succeed in completely winning the audience's sympathy because of the murder of her children.<sup>(1)</sup>

Most critics reacted harshly to Clément's portrayal of Medea, and rejected his hypothesis of a totally human character. The Mercure de France (March 1779, p. 53) argues that Medea has lost all her originality of character:

Il n'a pas songé qu'en ôtant à Médée tous les traits sous lesquels la mythologie nous l'a représentée, il lui ôtoit tout ce qui lui donne un caractère particulier & poétique, ..

Grimm (Corresp. litt., XII, 219) complains that

Au lieu de faire de Médée une dangereuse enchantresse, il en a fait une amante sensible et passionnée, qui commet à la vérité toutes les horreurs de la magicienne, mais qui les couvre des larmes de l'amour; et c'est des remords de cette furie qu'il a prétendu faire naître le plus grand intérêt de son ouvrage. Jusqu'à présent l'on avait pensé qu'il n'était pas permis d'altérer à ce point un caractère donné par la fable;

Both writers go on to make the pertinent point that the very atrocity of the crimes which Medea commits has to be balanced by some corresponding extraordinariness of character, whether supernatural or intellectual in origin, and they agree that Clément's Médée is not psychologically convincing. Indeed Grimm quotes an uncomplimentary witticism with which the comte de La Touraille greeted the dramatist after the première of the play, and this sums up the public's attitude to the character of Médée (op. cit., p. 220):

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(1) Fréron (op. cit., p. 292) argues that the theme of Medea must always be focused primarily on terror, because of the nature of her character and actions.

"Monsieur, je vous fais mon compliment:

Tout Paris pour Médée a les yeux de Jason."

Just as Clément was too zealous in humanizing the character of Medea, so he went too far in simplifying the action of the play. His aim was to exclude all complications (see preface, p. xi) and to concentrate exclusively on the development of the passions. Thus Médée appears in all but two of the twelve scenes of the play. However, in excluding the episodes which had adorned other versions of the Medea - the arrival of Aegeus in Euripides, the magical incantations in Seneca, and the love scenes between Jason and Créuse in Corneille and Longepierre - Clément severely limits the length and variety of his drama. Indeed it amounts to only 688 lines, less than half the length of Euripides (1419 lines) and Corneille (1628), and a good deal shorter than the works of Seneca (1027) and Longepierre (1360). On reading his tragedy one has the impression of a skeleton clothed in a meagre amount of flesh, and in fact the dearth of explanatory material and the scant references to the mythological background detract considerably from the central theme. Fréron (op. cit., p. 291) makes the pertinent point that this lack of context deprives the dramatist of the possibility of nuancing Médée's character in any way:

Le caractère de Médée est théâtral, mais il ne peut produire son effet qu'à l'aide d'une intrigue qui le mette en jeu, qui varie la scène, & attache le spectateur;

Paradoxically, the successful presentation of a simple action is extremely difficult, and demands the poetic talents of a master craftsman such as Racine. Clément's failure to match up to these exacting standards is noted by the Mémoires secrets (XIII, 289-90):

Malheureusement ce sujet n'a point trouvé dans son auteur les ressources de génie qu'il lui auroit fallu, cette profonde connoissance du coeur humain nécessaire pour en tirer parti, surtout cette chaleur, cette énergie de pinceau propre à rendre le caractère de l'héroïsme.

It was generally accepted that the first act was successful, but that

acts two and three were utterly devoid of interest, and if one examines the relative lengths of the three acts, one discovers that they become progressively shorter. In comparison with the 374 lines of act I, act II has only 182, and act III, 132, and it seems clear that Clément was unable to sustain the momentum he had gained in the first scenes of his tragedy.

Yet although Clément's play was in several respects poorly constructed, his original premiss that the magical paraphernalia surrounding Medea in Seneca, Corneille, and Longepierre is contrary to the requirements of modern tragedy is essentially valid, and reflects, together with the views of La Fosse, Deschamps, and Voltaire, a limited trend towards a greater realism and relevancy in the depiction of tragic emotion in the eighteenth century. However, his play also proves that it was extremely difficult to make an interesting drama out of the theme whilst denuding it of any spectacular elements (even Euripides ends his drama with Medea disappearing in a chariot drawn by dragons), and one might be justified in concluding with Fréron (op. cit., p. 203) that

Médée est un sujet ingrat & presque'impraticable, qui doit être relégué à l'opéra;

The popular success of Longepierre's tragedy in the eighteenth century shows that audiences were not averse to the magical elements of the legend, and although the tragic theatre was restricted by the need to observe vraisemblance, the genres of opera and ballet, whose province was precisely the merveilleux, adopted the theme with enthusiasm,<sup>(1)</sup> highlighting the very aspects of the story which had

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(1) Brenner lists two ballets entitled Médée, six entitled Médée et Jason, and one, La Toison d'or. He also notes operas entitled Médée et Jason (Pellegrin, 1713), Médée à Corinthe (Villette, 1786), Médée à Colchos, ou la Toison d'or (Desrioux, 1786), and La Toison d'or (Chabanon, 1788). In addition to this Hoffman published a Médée in 1797.

appealed to Seneca and Ovid. There was a feeling in the eighteenth century that the respective territories of tragedy and the lyric genres should be clearly defined, and Chabanon, in the Avant-Propos to his tragédie lyrique, La Toison d'or, states that (p. 275):<sup>(1)</sup>

Tout sujet où le merveilleux domine, appartient de plein droit à la Musique: il la recherche, il en a besoin. Un langage mélodique, une conversation chantée, est par elle-même une sorte de prodige; celui-là appelle tous les autres. Toute espede de merveilleux convient à l'Opéra;

Medea's prowess as a sorceress is emphasized in almost all the lyric works of the period, and their composers generally derive inspiration from Seneca and Corneille, as well as adding fairy-tale elements of their own. Medea's ability to submit Heaven and Hell to her command is a constant feature of her character. Thus in La Grange-Chancel's Médus Médée informs us that

Tout l'Enfer obeît a mes loix souveraines,<sup>(2)</sup> (I,1)

while in Pellegrin's Médée et Jason Jason says to his wife:

Vôtre art soumet l'Enfer, le Ciel, la Terre & l'Onde.<sup>(3)</sup> (III,4)

Similarly in Desrioux' La Toison d'or<sup>(4)</sup> Jason affirms that

Tout l'enfer est soumis a ses commandemens. (I,5)

Once again in Hoffman's Médée we see that

Les élémens, l'enfer sont soumis à ses charmes:<sup>(5)</sup> (I,3)

She is also seen as being attended by the Furies, whom she had

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(1) In Oeuvres de théâtre, et autres poésies (Paris 1788).

(2) Paris (Ballard) 1702 (B. N. Rés. Yf 1104). The music was by Bouvard.

(3) Paris (Ballard) 1713 (B. N. Yf 764). The music was by Salomon.

(4) This was the title of the opera when it was first performed on August 29th 1786 (printed, Paris 1786). It was then revised, and re-appeared in the same year as Médée à Colchos, ou la Toison d'or. The music was by Vogel.

(5) Paris (Huet) 1797 (B. N. 8<sup>o</sup> Yth 11489). François-Benoît Hoffman (1760-1828) was a well known librettist of the last years of the eighteenth century.

invoked in Seneca, lines 13-17. In Hoffman's opera *Médée* is surrounded by the three Eumenides after the murder of her children, and the action is concluded in an impressive manner as she is seen disappearing into Hell (III,6):

A ces mots elle s'enfonce avec les trois Euménides qui la saisissent. Des flammes sortent du gouffre où elle est descendue; le feu se communique au temple et au palais; le tonnerre éclate, enfin le temple, la montagne même s'écroule et s'abîme; le peuple saisit Jason et l'entraîne.

In the synopsis of Noverre's ballet tragi-pantomime, *Médée*, it is described how the sorceress summons the forces of Hell (Seconde partie, p. 13):<sup>(1)</sup>

elle évoque les Elements, les Enfers & les Dieux, elle change le Sallon en une Grotte épouvantable; la Haine, la Jalousie & la Vengeance accourent à sa voix, elle leur commande servir (sic) sa fureur, & ces Filles de l'Enfer lui présentent le Feu, le Fer & le Poison;

Pellegrin makes the initial entrance of *Médée* more terrifying by surrounding her with magicians and demons (II,1):

On entend une Symphonie effrayante, pendant laquelle il paroît un Tourbillon de nuages qui descend, & en s'ouvrant tout à coup, fait paroître Médée entourée de Magiciens & de Demons, qui s'avancent avec elle sur le Théâtre.

*Médée*'s use of a magic wand (see Pellegrin II,2 and Chabanon II,2 and following) can be traced back to Corneille's *Médée*.

In several cases the influence of Seneca is more than superficial, and it would be worthwhile to make a detailed study of the incidence of Senecan themes in lyric genres of the eighteenth century.<sup>(2)</sup> To give the reader some idea of the nature of this influence, one can point to Noverre's use of Senecan images in the Troisième partie of his ballet. Here (see p. 18 of the synopsis) *Médée* is seen on a

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(1) Edition of 1780 (Paris, de Lormel), B. N. 8° Yth 11488.

(2) Unfortunately this is too wide a subject to undertake here.

chariot drawn by flame-breathing monsters, with one of her children, whom she has just slaughtered, at her feet. The second is killed before Jason's eyes. This dénouement is clearly based on the Medea, lines 982 ff.. In Pellegrin's opera, Créuse's dream of a burning chariot setting fire to Créon's palace (II,1) echoes Medea 32-6, and Médée's later appeal to the Sun (V,1) derives from the preceding lines (28 ff.). The librettist also draws on Seneca for Médée's confrontations with Jason (III,4 and V,4), the scene in which Créon condemns the sorceress to exile (IV,5), and the beginning of the fifth act, where she hesitates before killing her children. Desrioux' La Toison d'or records an earlier stage in Medea's career, but the Sybil's prophecy of the murder of Absyrtus and of Pelias (III,3) echoes Medea's remembrance of these deeds in the Roman drama (131-4). Hoffman's Médée owes a good deal to Seneca, and the writer imitates more than just the magical elements of the ancient play. His debt to the Roman dramatist, which is greater than that of Clément, is particularly evident in Médée's scenes with Jason (I,7) and Créon (II,3). Her furious speech in the opening scene of the second act, where she swears to gain revenge, also owes much to Seneca's prologue, and her hesitation before killing her children (III,1) seems to have been suggested by the Medea as well.

Throughout this thesis we have been attempting to show that the limits of tragedy were successively widened throughout the eighteenth century, but the fate of the Medea demonstrates that this broadening of the genre did not usually extend to the inclusion of magic and superstitious practices which were in conflict with the spirit of French rationalism.<sup>(1)</sup> In the baroque period of the seventeenth century Comeille had been able to imitate freely Seneca's portrait of the

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(1) This restriction did not extend to oracles, portentous dreams, and (less frequently) ghosts, for these were regarded as more moderate examples of the merveilleux.



sorceress, and Longepierre later followed his lead, but in general neo-classicism left this aspect of the legend to be treated by lyric writers. It is a paradoxical fact that Seneca, who had never intended his dramatic works to offer a visual spectacle, should have provided librettists of the eighteenth century with the basis for episodes which were especially designed to dazzle the eyes of their spectators.

CHAPTER X

Seneca's Heroines (ii):

'Phaedra' - Passion as a Source of Crime

The character of Phaedra, who is doomed to disaster by an adulterous and moreover incestuous<sup>(1)</sup> passion for her stepson Hippolytus, has gained a theatrical immortality in the modern era through the justly renowned Phèdre of Racine, yet this drama stands not as an isolated example of the interpretation of the mythical theme, but as the culmination, and in some ways the perfection, of a tradition dating back some two thousand years.

The figures of Phaedra and Hippolytus both form part of early Greek legend,<sup>(2)</sup> and their relationship was crystallized in the work of the ancient tragedians. The only surviving Greek drama on the subject is the Ἰππόλυτος στεφανηφόρος, or Hippolytus Crowned, of Euripides, and this title distinguishes the play from an earlier Ἰππόλυτος καλυπτόμενος, or Hippolytus Veiled, by the same dramatist, of which only fifty lines of fragments survive. Lycophron also composed a Hippolytus, and Sophocles a Phaedra, neither of which is extant. Seneca's Phaedra, or Hippolytus as it is alternatively called,<sup>(3)</sup> is

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(1) In the Athens of Euripides a widow could marry her stepson, but in Rome and France this was forbidden.

(2) See pages 317-9 of the section on 'L'Histoire littéraire d'un couple tragique' in Jean Pommier's Aspects de Racine (Paris 1954) for further details.

(3) Following the edition of Leo the play will be known as the Phaedra in this chapter.

the only surviving example of an attempt to dramatize this theme in Rome, although the story of Phaedra's illicit love was well known. (1)

Of paramount interest in this theme is the evolution of the personalities of the two protagonists, and dramatists were undoubtedly attracted by the possibilities of interpretation open to them, and the variety of emphasis which could be placed on the roles of 'sinner' and 'sinned against'. Euripides appears to have tackled the question in two different ways, for his first version (Hippolytus Veiled) was found scandalous by the Athenian public. It is thought that in this play Phaedra gave free rein to her passion and indulged in magic incantations to obtain her stepson's love. Faced with open disapproval, the dramatist undertook to rewrite the play in a very different vein. In the Hippolytus which now survives the role of the gods is stressed, and Phaedra is presented first and foremost as an instrument of Aphrodite. Indeed the goddess tells us expressly in the prologue that Phaedra has been inspired with love by her designs ( τοῖς ἐμοῖς βουλευμάσιν (28)). Yet when we see Phaedra we inevitably become involved in the human aspect of the plot, and our sympathies are aroused by her attempts to safeguard her honour. She describes how she strove to stifle the feelings imposed on her:

λέξω δὲ καὶ σοὶ τῆς ἐμῆς γνώμης ὁδόν·  
ἐπεὶ μ' ἔρωσ' ἔτρωσεν, ἐσκόπουν ὅπως  
καλλιστ' ἐνέγκαιμ' αὐτόν, ἠρξάμην μὲν οὖν  
ἐκ τοῦδε, σιγᾶν τῆνδε καὶ κρύπτειν νόσον. (391-4)

(But I will also tell you the path my reason took. When love had wounded me I considered how best I might endure it; so from that time I began to silence and to conceal my affliction).

Phaedra shies away from uttering the name of Hippolytus, and is

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(1) Phaedra declares her love for Hippolytus in letter form in Ovid, Heroides IV, and the unfortunate young man also finds a mention in the same poet's Metamorphoses (XV, 492 ff.), and Virgil, Aeneid VII, 761 ff..

completely opposed to the idea of declaring her love to him. When she realizes that the nurse has in fact contravened her wishes (see lines 565 ff.), she considers herself to be in the most desperate and shameful of positions. On this basis critics have perceived in Phaedra a moral innocence which renders her downfall all the more tragic. However, on her death she leaves a letter for Theseus, which protects her own reputation at the expense of that of her stepson. That she was doomed to write this calumny by Aphrodite is understood, yet there remains some hint of moral ambiguity in her behaviour.

As the title of the Greek play suggests, Phaedra is not the main focus of the action, and we are properly concerned with the fate of Hippolytus. The anger of Aphrodite has been aroused by Hippolytus' scorn of her, and she is determined to exact revenge (see lines 10-22). The young prince's allegiance is to Artemis, the virgin goddess of the hunt, and it is she who offers comfort at the end of the play.

Seneca, on the other hand, saw the character of Phaedra as offering the more interesting basis for exploration, and he concentrates the anger of Venus on her rather than Hippolytus. The Sun, Phaedra's grandfather, had surprised the goddess of love in the embrace of Mars, and Venus has taken her revenge on the offspring of Apollo ever since:

stirpem perosa Solis invisī Venus  
per nos catenas vindicat Martis sui  
suasque, probris omne Phoebeum genus  
onerat nefandis: (124-7)

Yet beyond this initial curse on Phaedra's family, Seneca largely abandons the element of divine involvement, and focuses rather on the mentality of the individual. The nurse, in fact, refuses to accept that 'love' can be a god, and defines Venus and Cupid as mere personifications of lust:

Deum esse amorem turpis et vitio furens  
finxit libido, quoque liberior foret  
titulum furori numinis falsi addidit. (195-7)

The Latin dramatist is interested in the effects of furor -

passionate love which is akin to madness - on the individual, for furor is the opposite of ratio, or reason, by which the Stoics believed the mind should be ruled. In Seneca's play Phaedra has reached a stage where reason has become submerged by passion:

quid ratio possit ? vicit ac regnat furor  
potensque tota mente dominatur deus. (184-5)

and she is aware that this is a critical point. She also perceives the criminal nature of her passion for Hippolytus, and is indeed obsessed by considerations of guilt. Her illicit love is seen as a nefas, and this, together with the adjective nefandus, is a constantly recurring formula (lines 127, 128, 130, 143, 153, 160, 166, 173, 254, 596, 678, 1177, 1186, 1192). The opposite of nefas in Phaedra's terms is pudor, and the only way for her to restore her good name is to end her life (see lines 250-4). The same conclusion had been reached by Euripides' character, but the Latin Phaedra fails to adopt this solution, and when she comes face to face with Hippolytus she realizes that it is now too late for considerations of modesty:

magna pars sceleris mei  
olim peracta est; serus est nobis pudor:  
amavimus nefanda. (594-6)

The question of guilt and responsibility is of greater interest to Seneca than Euripides, and the Roman Phaedra is obviously the more guilty of the two characters. She is no longer seen as the instrument of the gods, and in common with other Senecan personalities she accepts responsibility for her own actions:

vadit animus in praeceps sciens  
remeatque frustra sana consilia appetens. (179-80)

She is bolder than Euripides' heroine, and takes an irrevocable step in declaring her love to Hippolytus (see lines 646 ff.). Upon seeing her stepson's reaction, she again recognizes her fault, and begs him to put an end to her life. However, death is denied to her at this point, and when placed in a desperate position by the return of Theseus,

she follows the advice of her nurse, and accuses Hippolytus of rape ('vim tamen corpus tulit' (892)). It is not until the end of the play that she confesses her crime to Theseus (this replaces the intervention of Artemis in the version of Euripides), and is able to find refuge in death.

It has been suggested by critics<sup>(1)</sup> that Seneca made use of the Hippolytus Veiled as well as the Hippolytus Crowned in his portrait of Phaedra, and this is an interesting way of explaining the apparent dichotomy of nefas (from the Hippolytus Veiled) and pudor (from the Hippolytus Crowned) in her personality.

The figure of Hippolytus, in the surviving Greek drama, is shown to contain no human weaknesses, and this is no doubt a reason why he has generally been considered less interesting than Phaedra. He has chosen to adopt a life of purity (as he attempts to prove to Theseus when accused of dishonouring him (993 ff.)), and has no interest in the emotion of love. Indeed he has a violent hatred for all women, and this misogyny is reinforced by the revelation of Phaedra's feelings towards him (616 ff.). Seneca's Hippolytus has inherited these tendencies, and he uses a whole series of synonymous words to express his detestation of the female race:

Detestor omnes, horreo fugio execror.  
sit ratio, sit natura, sit dirus furor: (566-8)  
odisse placuit.

Hippolytus' love of the chaste woodland life also echoes that of the Greek character, although Seneca gives it a new emphasis in his play. It was a commonplace among Latin poets to contrast the innocence and peace of the countryside with the sophistication and corruption of the town, and Seneca uses the character of Hippolytus to criticize

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(1) See in particular the informative article of Pierre Grimal, 'L'Originalité de Sénèque dans la tragédie de Phèdre' in the Revue des études latines 41 (1963), 297-314.

the evil inherent in city life. It was also a commonplace to contrast man's present depravity with his virtue in the Golden Age, when mankind lived in primeval innocence and enjoyed the fruits of nature. Hippolytus' way of life is presented as a Golden Age idyll, and is seen as infinitely superior to an existence spent in civilized society:

excussa silvis poma compescunt famem  
et fraga parvis vulsa dumetis cibos  
faciles ministrant. regios luxus procul (515-19)  
est impetus fugisse: sollicito bibunt  
auro superbi;

The absence of Theseus for much of the action is explained in the Phaedra by the fact that the Athenian hero has gone to the underworld with Pirithoüs to seize Proserpina (see lines 91-8). While Theseus' journey to the underworld and his subsequent rescue from imprisonment by Hercules were well known in ancient mythology,<sup>(1)</sup> this is not the reason given for his absence in either the Hippolytus or Ovid, Heroides IV.<sup>(2)</sup> The inclusion of this episode may be due merely to Seneca's liking for the supernatural, or may reflect the use of an alternative source.

The final moments of the Latin play also have no parallel in the Greek drama, and they, too, reflect a peculiarly Senecan preoccupation. Here Theseus, who has been utterly devastated by the revelation of his son's death and then of his innocence, is left to piece together the remains of Hippolytus' body. So mutilated are they that it is difficult to fit them into any semblance of order:

hoc quid est forma carens  
et turpe, multo vulnere abruptum undique ? (1265-7)  
quae pars tui sit dubito; sed pars est tui.

Seneca seems to take a macabre pleasure in relating these events, and

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(1) See, for example, the Hercules Furens of Seneca and that of Euripides, where this episode features.

(2) His whereabouts are not explained in the Hippolytus, while in Heroides IV Phaedra says that he is in the realms of Pirithoüs (110-12).

it is obvious that this is meant to titillate the imagination rather than to be seen on stage in all its revolting realism.

The Phaedra was discussed more than most of the other Senecan tragedies in the eighteenth century, largely because of its importance as a source for Racine's Phèdre, and where comparisons of the relative merits of Seneca and Racine are made, Racine is almost invariably held to have far surpassed his ancient model. When Louis Racine wrote about his father's play, he opted to compare Phèdre with Euripides' Hippolytus (Comparaison de l'Hippolyte d'Euripide avec la tragédie de Racine sur le même sujet),<sup>(1)</sup> rather than with the Phaedra, and noted only his disapproval of the Latin version (p. 301):

Cet auteur (i.e. Seneca) s'écartant entièrement d'Euripide, n'observe ni conduite, ni caractère. Sa pièce, qu'on ne doit pas nommer tragédie, n'est qu'un tissu de Sentences brillantes, & de descriptions poétiques, placées hors d'oeuvre. Je ne puis juger plus favorablement du corps de sa pièce, quoyqu'elle ait d'ailleurs quelques beaux traits, ...

Voltaire disliked the Phaedra plays of both Euripides and Seneca, and argued that the fact that Racine imitated parts of these did not make either good tragedies (Lettre sur Oedipe (3)):<sup>(2)</sup>

Et comme on ne s'avisera jamais d'approuver l'Hippolyte de Sénèque, quoique Racine ait pris dans cet auteur toute la déclaration de Phèdre, aussi ne doit-on pas admirer l'Hippolyte d'Euripide pour trente ou quarante vers qui se sont trouvés dignes d'être imités par le plus grand de nos poètes.

D'Argenson, however, spoke in favour of the Senecan drama when he argued that terror should be an integral part of tragedy, and that Racine's play diminished its power to touch the audience by moderating this element (Notices sur les oeuvres de théâtre, I, 96):

Lisant cette pièce (i.e. the Phaedra), l'on trouve que Racine y a prises les principales beautés de sa

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(1) In Histoire de l'Académie des inscriptions 8 (1726-30), 300-14.

(2) M. II, 28.



tragédie. Cet auteur françois l'a acomodé un peu davantage à nos moeurs, à notre douceur, à notre raison, et l'a rendu en même tems moins touchante, en la rendant moins terrible.

While critics would not generally commend the Senecan tragedy as a whole, certain isolated elements did meet with more widespread approval. The best known scene of the drama was that in which Phaedra declares her love to Hippolytus (see lines 589 ff., and especially 646 ff.), and its merits had been especially highlighted by Racine's felicitous imitation of it in act II scene 5 of Phèdre. Brumoy wrote of the Senecan scene (Théâtre des Grecs, I, 392), 'Ce morceau est assurément très-bien imaginé', while the opinion of the Bibliothèque universelle des dames was that (p. 308)

Cette entrevue, qui est de l'invention de Sénèque, est un chef-d'oeuvre. Le Poète Latin y a jeté le plus grand intérêt.

La Harpe also praises this scene (Lycée, V, 90):<sup>(1)</sup>

Enfin (et ce n'est pas la moindre gloire de Sénèque), il a fourni à Racine cette fameuse déclaration, l'un des plus beaux morceaux de la Phèdre française.

and translates lines 646-62 of the Phaedra into French (p. 91-2).

On the whole, eighteenth-century critics felt the Phaedra theme to be somewhat formidable. Seneca's Phaedra was described as 'une emportée' (Brumoy, p. 391), 'une forcenée, une véritable énergumène' (Bibliothèque universelle, p. 311), and 'odieuse' (La Harpe, V, 89), and the general consensus was that it needed a special talent, such as that of Racine, to adapt it successfully for the French stage.

Louis Racine (op. cit., p. 300) writes:

Il estoit aussi difficile d'accoutumer nos yeux à la vûe de Phèdre, qu'à celle d'Oedipe & d'Oreste. Quel spectacle plus affreux, que celui d'une femme en proie à toutes les fureurs d'un amour criminel, tandis que son époux est encore vivant ? d'une femme qui ne respire que l'adultère, l'inceste & l'imposture ? Cette même Phèdre cependant est un des personnages tragiques qui nous charment

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(1) See also Lycée, I, 502 for almost the same statement.

le plus, parce que, comme dit Boileau:

D'un pinceau délicat l'artifice agréable  
Du plus affreux objet, fait un objet aimable.

Brumoy, in his Réflexions sur l'Hippolyte d'Euripide, et sur la Phèdre de Racine, makes substantially the same point (Théâtre des Grecs, I, 384).

#### French Adaptations of the 'Phaedra'

The use of the theme of Phaedra and Hippolytus in French literature, particularly in the period preceding and contemporary with Racine, has already been the subject of detailed critical discussion,<sup>(1)</sup> and will not, therefore, need to be explored in any depth, although a number of interesting points can be highlighted.

In general, dramatists of the pre-classical period were not disturbed by the unseemly aspects of the legend, and they were inclined to imitate Seneca's version in preference to that of Euripides. Gamier's Hippolyte (1573)<sup>(2)</sup> relies uniquely on the Latin play, although the writer's powers of invention are evident in several original passages. Jean Yeuwain's Hippolyte, which was composed in the latter part of the sixteenth century (although not published until 1933),<sup>(3)</sup> is essentially a free translation of the Phaedra.

The theme of Phaedra and Hippolytus was attempted a total of

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(1) Claude Francis deals with the Phaedra theme in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, while also highlighting modern critical interpretations of the character, in Les Métamorphoses de Phèdre dans la littérature française (Quebec 1967); Winifred Newton, in her doctoral thesis, Le Thème de Phèdre et d'Hippolyte dans la littérature française (Paris 1939), studies the use of the subject from antiquity to the twentieth century.

(2) See the modern edition of Christine Hill and Mary G. Morrison, Robert Gamier: Two Tragedies, 'Hippolyte' and 'Marc Antoine' (Athlone press, 1975).

(3) Edited by Gontran Van Severen (Mons 1933). B. N. 4° Yth 9272.

six times in the seventeenth century, yet all but the Phèdre of Racine, which far outranks its rivals, have long since fallen into obscurity. The first of these, La Pinelière's Hippolyte, which was performed at the Hôtel de Bourgogne in 1634, and published in 1635, is typical of its period, in that the dramatist acknowledges his debt to Seneca, but strives to tailor the material in certain ways to the tastes of his own age. It is clear that he was conversant not merely with the Phaëdra, but with the other Latin dramas as well, for Theseus' return from the underworld evidently recalled to him the parallel event in the Hercules Furens, and the French writer interpolates a description of Hades borrowed from that play (654 ff.) into the beginning of his fourth act (IV,1). He was in no way troubled by Seneca's presentation of his heroine, and he makes no attempt to diminish the guilt of the character. Like Garnier before him, he has Phèdre openly accuse Hippolyte of rape (IV,3).

Hippolyte was separated by only one decade from Gilbert's Hypolite (1647)<sup>(1)</sup> on the same theme,<sup>(2)</sup> but the differences between the two versions are enormous, for the establishment of the neo-classical rules in the intervening years had caused a major revolution in attitudes towards the portrayal of Phaëdra and the whole interpretation of the myth. The direct result of this change was a successive dilution, and almost total disintegration, of the theme. Gilbert<sup>(3)</sup> himself was involved in the world of the précieuses, and the polite conversations

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(1) Paris (Augustin Courbé). B. N. Rés. Yf 346.

(2) Jean Regnault de Segrais also composed a tragedy entitled La Mort d'Hippolyte in the 1640's, but this was never published, and is now lost.

(3) See E. J. Pellet's A Forgotten French Dramatist, Gabriel Gilbert (1620?-1680?) (Baltimore 1931). Gilbert had a reputation as a scholar, and was the first of the French dramatists to make any significant use of Euripides. Miss Pellet discusses Hypolite in pages 81-106 of her work.

of the salons leave an indelible mark on his work. His main contribution to the evolution of the theme was to purify it of any elements which could possibly offend the sensibilities of his audience. Thus Phaedre is no longer the wife of Thésée, but merely his fiancée, and her love loses its incestuous quality. Her character is also rehabilitated, in that she is guilty of no calumny against Hypolite. This comes instead from her confidante Achrise, who is determined to obtain revenge for having been scorned by the young prince. Hypolite himself, although described by Gilbert in his alternative title as a garçon insensible, is in fact sensitive to the emotion of love, and is possessed of an unexpectedly eloquent passion for Phaedre.

The Hippolyte<sup>(1)</sup> of Bidar (1675), which was performed in Lille, succeeds in rendering the story of Phaedra and Hippolytus even more unrecognizable. As in the earlier play, Phèdre is no longer Thésée's wife, and her love for Hippolyte is not incestuous. Hippolyte is no longer a woman-hater and advocate of the rustic life, but appears as a colourless, weak individual, who has fallen in love with Cyane, a princess of Naxos. Thésée is no longer absent on a mysterious quest, so the tragedy is not precipitated by his return. The tragic outcome of the play is brought about by Phèdre's vindictive fury at the fact that Hippolyte will not love her, and she plots to destroy Cyane's faith in her lover, and Thésée's trust in his son.<sup>(2)</sup>

The Phèdre et Hippolyte of Pradon (1677),<sup>(3)</sup> which was presented as a serious attempt to compete with Racine's Phèdre, cannot sustain serious comparison with this play, and falls more clearly into the

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(1) Lille (Balthasar Le Francq). Arsenal 8<sup>o</sup> B. L. 13951.

(2) In this respect she appears as even more guilty than the Senecan character.

(3) Paris (Jean Ribou). It was performed on January 3rd 1677, two days after the début of Phèdre.

category of dramas offered by Gilbert and Bidar. Pradon followed both of these dramatists in modifying the legend before him, and in making Phèdre the fiancée of Thésée, but he remained closer to the interpretation of Bidar in portraying Phèdre as a vindictive and unsympathetic character. Her love for Hippolyte is in evidence from the beginning of the play, and we are not invited to pity her, since there is no struggle in her heart to stifle these feelings, and no question of her being seen as a victim of the gods. Her role in the tragedy has been compared with that of Roxane in Bajazet, and it seems clear that Pradon had this drama in mind, as well as his rival's newly produced Phèdre, when composing his play. He imitated his predecessors in making Hippolyte sensible, and the young prince's love for Aricie seems to have been copied from Racine. Unfortunately Pradon showed none of Racine's genius, and his play is lacking in both interest and dramatic tension.

The works of Gilbert, Bidar, and Pradon form an extraordinary contrast with the interpretation Racine himself offered, and perhaps the most important reason why Phèdre has retained a perennial appeal is that the French poet, while clearly a man of the seventeenth century, succeeded in stepping outside the dramatic stereotype of his times and injecting a new vigour into a well-worn theme. Racine saw clearly that there was a need to re-establish continuity with the dramas of Euripides and Seneca, and he restores Phèdre to her rightful position as Thésée's wife. The horror of her incestuous love once again becomes the predominant theme of the play, and although this was a daring situation for contemporary audiences to accept, the art with which the character of Phèdre is portrayed largely obviates any criticisms of impropriety.

Euripides is cited in the preface as the source for the subject matter of the play, and Seneca is reduced to a position of lesser

importance, merely being quoted by Racine to demonstrate that he had modified the unacceptable accusation of rape in the Phaedra. Literary critics have been debating for some three hundred years the precise influence of the ancient dramas on Racine's play,<sup>(1)</sup> generally emphasizing the French dramatist's debt to Euripides, although attempts have been made to prove that Seneca was Racine's major source.<sup>(2)</sup> It is indeed true to say that the French writer's use of the Latin play was greater than his preface would suggest, and in his reluctance to acknowledge his debt to Seneca, Racine seems to have anticipated eighteenth-century attitudes towards the Roman tragedian. Since he was determined to focus his play on the role of Phaedra, he was obliged to look beyond the Hippolytus of Euripides, where Phaedra commits suicide after line 731. In Seneca's play he found the hatred of Venus for the race of Apollo (124-7), as well as a psychological study of human passion and Phaedra's shameful declaration of love to Hippolytus. To this he added the pity we cannot but feel for the Euripidean character's struggle against her destiny.

Upon its first appearance in 1677, Phèdre met with prejudice from Racine's enemies, but once these biased views had been put aside the real merits of the play were recognized, and it was admired in the eighteenth century as one of the poet's greatest achievements. It gained the most performances of any of Racine's dramas in this period,<sup>(3)</sup>

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(1) R. C. Knight's Racine et la Grèce offers a very full and balanced analysis of Racine's sources in Phèdre (p. 334-67). See also the same writer's 'Hippolyte and Hippolytos' in The Modern Language Review 39 (1944), 225-35.

(2) Julian E. White puts forward this view in 'Racine's Phèdre: A 'Sophoclean' and Senecan Tragedy' (Revue de littérature comparée 39 (1965), 605-13).

(3) A total of 318. Emile P. Kostoroski's 'The Eagle and the Dove' (Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 95 (1972)), from which this figure is taken (p. 147), deals in detail with the fortunes of Corneille and Racine in the eighteenth century.

and although much dissected by eighteenth-century critics, the essential brilliance of the play was rarely brought into question.

It would be unrealistic to assert that the influence of Seneca could in any way match that of Racine in the eighteenth century, for echoes of the French dramatist's style, plot structure, and characterization are apparent in almost every example of eighteenth-century tragedy. To the averagely well informed man of the period the mention of Phaedra would immediately evoke the Phèdre of Racine, while knowledge of Seneca's play, if any, would probably be limited to vague recollections of the areas which the great French dramatist had improved upon. Fervent admirers of Racine assumed an almost mystical veneration for the doyen of French tragedy.<sup>(1)</sup> This type of attitude is evident in La Harpe's Eloge de Racine (1772), which, true to the style of panegyric writing, assumes an emphatically laudatory tone. The French critic apostrophizes the great dramatist (p. 10):

O Racine! un homme tel que toi ne pouvait être formé que par la Nature; ton excellente organisation fut entièrement son ouvrage, & portait un caractère original, indépendant de toute imitation.

and describes Phèdre as (p. 35)

le plus éloquent morceau de passion que les Modernes puissent opposer à la Didon de l'inimitable Virgile.

Not surprisingly, dramatists were reluctant to enter into open competition with a man who had gained so great a reputation,<sup>(2)</sup> and not a single tragedy on the theme of Phaedra was produced in the whole of the eighteenth century. At the beginning of the nineteenth century Michel de Cubières-Palmézeaux did attempt to improve on what he con-

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(1) A title also claimed for Corneille by his devotees.

(2) Richerolle's attempt to compete with Andromaque in Astyanax (1789) failed abysmally. Legouvé's Étéocle (1799) was more successful, due in part to the author's own merit, as well as the fact that La Thébaïde was held to be far inferior to Racine's later masterpieces.

sidered to be the faults of Phèdre, but his play, which he called an imitation of Euripides, was hissed by spectators when performed at the Théâtre du Marais on February 27th 1803.

However, while it was imagined in the eighteenth century that no tragedian could improve on Phèdre, it was felt that the subject could be successfully adapted for the lyric stage. We have already seen how Seneca's interpretation of the theme of Medea was particularly suited to this genre, and abbé Batteux noted that parts of the Phaedra legend, especially as treated by Euripides, necessitate the same treatment. He shows that while ancient tragedy could encompass both the natural and the supernatural, the modern theatre has divided this into two separate art forms (Observations sur l'Hippolyte d'Euripide & la Phèdre de Racine, p. 455):<sup>(1)</sup>

C'est la séparation des théâtres, l'un pour l'Opéra, l'autre pour la Tragédie simplement héroïque, qui a produit parmi nous cette division de l'art en deux genres, & qui en a séparé les règles. Mais cette séparation n'existant pas chez les Anciens, ils pouvoient employer la machine quand le sujet l'exigeoit, ou pouvoit le supporter; or le sujet d'Hippolyte non-seulement le supportoit, mais il l'exigeoit. Hippolyte se trouve placé entre Vénus & Diane, dont l'une forme le noeud, l'autre le dénoue:

Thus when Pellegrin composed his Hippolyte et Aricie (1733)<sup>(2)</sup> he attempted to focus part of his action on material which had either not appeared or not played a prominent part in Phèdre. Even so, he felt the need to apologize for attempting the same theme as Racine, and he justifies his choice of subject only by the change of genre (preface):

Quoiqu'une noble hardiesse, soit un des plus beaux appanages de la Poésie, je n'aurois jamais osé après un

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(1) In Histoire de l'Académie des inscriptions 42 (1776-9), 452-72.

(2) Performed at the Académie royale de musique in October 1733, with music by Rameau. After its initial success it was revived a number of times.



Auteur tel que RACINE, mettre une Phedre au Théâtre, si la difference du genre ne m'eût rassuré: (1)

He also emphasizes the suitability of the subject for opera (ibid):

Jamais Sujet n'a paru plus propre à enrichir la Scene Lyrique, & je suis surpris que le grand Maître de ce Théâtre, ne m'ait pas prévenu dans un projet qui m'a flatté d'une maniere à n'y pouvoir resister.

Although it is clear that Pellegrin was extremely familiar with Phèdre, he also mentions Seneca and Ovid in his preface. Ovid (Met. XV, 533-46) is the authority for the resurrection of Hippolytus under the name of Virbius in the forest of Aricia, and Pellegrin uses this as the basis for his final act, where Hippolyte is magically saved from death by Diana, and transported to a beautiful garden to live in eternal peace with Aricie. The appearance of the goddess Diana is borrowed from Euripides, although Pellegrin does not refer at all closely to the Greek text. In similar fashion, the second act is based on an idea from Seneca, although the exact expression of the Latin play is not imitated in any detail. Towards the end of the first act Arcas, Thésée's confidant, reports that his master has travelled to the realms of Hell with his friend Pirithous:

Ah! j'en frémiss encor; le Roy vient de descendre  
Dans l'affreux séjour de la Mort.

(I,8)

.....  
Pour suivre un tendre Amy dans l'infernal Empire,  
Il quitte pour jamais la lumiere des Cieux.

Phaedra complains of the same situation in Seneca:

fortis per altis invii retro lacus  
vadit tenebras miles audacis proci,  
solio ut revulsam regis inferni abstrahat;

(93-5)

However, Pellegrin expands on the Latin text, and situates the whole of the second act in the realms of the underworld. This supernatural episode is made all the more spectacular by the appearance of the Fury Tisiphone (II,1 and following) and the presence of Pluto, who sits in judgement surrounded by the three Fates and a 'Troupe de Divinitez

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(1) Paris (Ballard) 1733. B. N. Yf 728.

infemales' (II,2 and following). Thésée is only saved from eternal torment by the intervention of Neptune, on whom he calls for help:

Dieu des Mers, c'est à toy qu'il me faut recourir;  
Que ton Fils dans son Pere éprouve un coeur sensible;  
Trois fois dans mes malheurs tu dois me secourir; (II,4)  
Le Fleuve aux Dieux mêmes terrible,  
Et qu'ils n'osent jamais attester vainement,  
Le Styx a reçu ton Serment.

Seneca's Phaedra is the authority for the granting of three requests to Theseus by Neptune:

genitor aequoreus dedit  
ut vota prono tema concipiam deo, (942-4)  
et invocata munus hoc sanxit Styge.

but in this play Theseus had avoided using one of these wishes while in the underworld (see lines 951-3).

It is clear that Pellegrin's intention in this episode was to emphasize the merveilleux which characterizes lyric tragedy, and in this way to provide a contrast with the vraisemblance of Phèdre, where Thésée is said to have gone to Epirus with his companion Pirithoüs, rather than to the underworld (see Phèdre III,5). Pellegrin also strives to increase the immediacy of the action by having Thésée's revenge on Hippolyte take place on stage. Thus in the fourth act the stage direction reads that

La Mer s'agite; on en voit sortir un Monstre horrible. (IV,3)

and the chorus exclaims at the appearance of the monster:

Quel bruit! quels vents! quelle Montagne humide!  
Quel Monstre elle enfante à nos yeux! (IV,3)

Pellegrin is the only dramatist to have attempted to present this narrative as action, but even he avoids violence on stage by veiling Hippolyte's encounter with the monster in thick clouds.

When Hoffman came to write the libretto for his lyric opera Phèdre (1786)<sup>(1)</sup> he was less interested in the supernatural aspects

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(1) Phèdre, tragédie lyrique, en trois actes. Représentée devant Leurs /  
contd. overleaf

of the legend, although, as in Seneca and Pellegrin, Thésée is imagined to visit the underworld:

Secondant d'un ami les dangereux efforts,  
Thésée est descendu sur les rivages sombres; (I,5)

It is evident from his opera that Hoffman had Racine's Phèdre before him, and that he attached more importance to this than to the drama of Seneca. Thus many of the scenes which appear to be influenced by the Roman play are more directly attributable to the inspiration of Racine. Euripides, however, did furnish the librettist with some material.<sup>(1)</sup> His reduction of the play to three acts, and the exclusion of Hippolyte's love for Aricie, is an unfavourable comment on the romantic element of Phèdre, and reflects one body of opinion in the eighteenth century, which held that the wild hunter of the ancient dramas should not have been transformed into a gallant lover. Many writers were, however, opposed to any modification of Racine's work, and Grimm (Corresp. litt. XIV, 492) complains that Hoffman has deprived the play of a worthwhile episode:

On l'a blâmé avec raison de s'être privé de tous les avantages qu'il pouvait tirer de l'épisode d'Aricie. L'amour d'Hippolyte pour cette jeune princesse, cet amour si intéressant dans la tragédie de Racine, qui contraste si heureusement avec celui de Phèdre, ... était un moyen si propre à jeter de la variété et du mouvement dans l'action, par les contrastes et les transitions heureuses qu'il eût offertes au compositeur, que M. Hoffmann aurait dû l'inventer si Racine ne l'eût créé avant lui.

It is in no way surprising that tragic dramatists avoided the theme of Phaedra in the eighteenth century, for had an enterprising writer tackled the subject, he would either, by returning solely to Euripides and Seneca, have incurred charges of attempting to correct

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contd. from p. 301 / Majestés, à Fontainebleau, le 26 Octobre 1786; & à Paris, sur le Théâtre de l'Académie royale de musique, le Mardi 21 Novembre de la même année (Paris 1787). The music was composed by Lemoyne.

(1) The invocation to Diana in the opening scene echoes the opening episode of the Hippolytus.

Racine, and of producing a work not geared to contemporary manners, or, by opting to follow Racine's guidance, have been brought down by accusations of plagiarism. The problems relating to the Phaedra theme also highlight a fundamental difficulty which the eighteenth century faced. An extensive amount of material had already been exhausted by the major dramatists of the preceding century, and this necessitated a choice between repetitiveness and originality. The result of this was an unavoidable diversification of the genre.

CHAPTER XI

Seneca's Heroines (iii):

The 'Troades' - Suffering as a Source of Tragic Emotion

In both the Medea and Phaedra Seneca had been concerned with characters who initiate criminal actions, but in the Troades he turns his attention away from active violence, and tackles the theme of passive suffering in the innocent. Instead of examining the mentality of the individual, he here observes the misfortunes of a group, the women of the Trojan royal family who have survived the sack of their city.

The Trojan war had provided a potent subject for epic poetry from the earliest times, and forms the matter of Homer's Iliad. Its themes were also widely used in other genres, including tragedy. The grief of the Trojan captives is evoked in Euripides' Troades and Hecuba, and the fate of Hector's wife Andromache in a tragedy of that name by the same dramatist. Sophocles and Antiphon also composed dramas entitled Andromache, which do not survive. In Republican Rome dramatists took up these themes and adapted them for the Roman stage. We know of a Hecuba and Andromacha Aechmalotis by Ennius, while Accius composed a Hecuba, Troades, and Astyanax. From the later period we know of a Hecuba or Troades by Scaevus Memor, and Martial (V, 53, 2) writes of an Andromache by Bassus. None of these Latin tragedies survives in any substantial form, and the Troades of Seneca is our only remaining example of the dramatization of this theme in Rome.

In the eighteenth century the drama of Seneca was usually

described either as an imitation of Euripides' Troades,<sup>(1)</sup> or as a conflation of that play and Hecuba.<sup>(2)</sup> However, although there is some common ground between the Greek and Roman tragedies, this does not adequately explain the conception of many of the Senecan episodes. In his Hecuba Euripides portrays the effects of the deaths of her two remaining children, Polyxena and Polydorus, on the aged queen, as well as her revenge on Polymestor, the treacherous ruler of Thrace. Hecuba also appears throughout his Troades, where with Cassandra and Andromache she learns of the fate of the captives.

Seneca echoes the role of Hecuba, as portrayed by the Greek dramatist, and her lamentations and exhortations to the chorus to join her in bewailing the destruction of their homeland fill the opening act of the Latin play (1-164). Talthybius, the Greek herald, is also familiar from the Troades and Hecuba of Euripides, but his role is completely altered by Seneca. Whereas in the Greek plays he announces the distribution of the Trojan women among the victors (Tro. 235 ff.) and the death of Polyxena (Hec. 518 ff.), in the Roman drama he opens the second act with an emotional description of the appearance of the ghost of Achilles to the Greek army (164-202). This is followed by an impassioned discussion between Pyrrhus and Agamemnon regarding the fate of Polyxena (203-359), which has no parallel in either play of Euripides.<sup>(3)</sup> The third act is dominated by the character of Andromache, who, as in the Greek Troades, is forced to surrender her son Astyanax to the enemy, so that he may be hurled from the top of the only tower left standing in Troy. Any

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(1) By Brumoy in Le Théâtre des Grecs, II, 588, for example.

(2) The same view had been held in the seventeenth century. See the preface to Pradon's La Troade (1679).

(3) Euripides refers only in passing to Agamemnon's opposition to the slaughter of Polyxena owing to his love for Cassandra, her sister (Hecuba 120-2).

similarity of theme ends here, for Andromache's conversation with the senex and concealment of her son in the tomb of Hector, followed by her unsuccessful attempt to outwit the devious Ulysses (409-813), are independent of anything in the earlier dramas. The role of Helen is also completely changed, for while in the Greek Troades she is portrayed as a vicious enchantress, striving to insinuate herself back into the affections of Menelaus, in Seneca's version she is without malice to the Trojans, although hers is the unlikely task of announcing to the stricken Trojan women their future masters, and of preparing Polyxena for her sacrifice on the tomb of Achilles (861-980). The long descriptive passage devoted to the deaths of Astyanax and Polyxena (1068-1164) likewise derives little inspiration from Euripides, and in characteristic fashion the Latin dramatist emphasizes the horrible injuries to the young son of Hector:

ossa disiecta et gravi  
elisa casu; signa clari corporis,  
et ora et illas nobiles patris notas,  
confudit imam pondus ad terram datum; (1111-17)  
soluta cervix silicis impulsu, caput  
ruptum cerebro penitus expresso - iacet  
deforme corpus.

The characteristics of the ghost of Achilles (181-96) can be compared with those of the ghost of Laïus in Oedipus 619-58, in that both apparitions offer solemn instructions and are calculated to arouse a mood of terror. Unlike the ghost of Laïus, however, which has no antecedent in the Greek Oedipus, the shade of Achilles is mentioned in Euripides (Hecuba 37-41, 92-5, 109-15). Yet it was not here that Seneca found his source, but in Ovid, Metamorphoses XIII, 439 ff., where the poet describes how Achilles appeared to the Greeks as they delayed in Thrace, awaiting favourable winds for the journey home:

Hic subito, quantus, cum viveret, esse solebat,  
Exit humo late rupta similisque minanti  
Temporis illius vultum referebat Achilles, (441-8)  
Quo ferus iniusto petiit Agamemnona ferro,  
'Inmemores' que 'mei disceditis', inquit. 'Achivi,

Obrutaque est mecum virtutis gratia nostrae ?  
Ne facite! utque meum non sit sine honore sepulcrum,  
Placet Achilleos mactata Polyxena manes!"

Achilles' fearsome expression is echoed by Seneca (182-90), as is the content of his commands (191-6).

The Greek hero is not the only supernatural presence in the play, as Hector also bursts the bonds of death to appear before Andromache in her sleep. His dejected and tearful figure:

non ille vultus flammeum intendens iubar,  
sed fessus ac deiectus et fletu gravis (448-50)  
similisque nostro, squalida obiectus coma.

forms a contrast with the arrogance of Achilles. Once again Seneca referred to an earlier Roman poet for his inspiration here. His source was Virgil, Aeneid II, 270-97, where the weeping Hector warns Aeneas to flee from Troy:

in somnis, ecce, ante oculos maestissimus Hector  
visus adesse mihi largosque effundere fletus, (270-3)  
raptatus bigis ut quondam, aterque cruento  
pulvere perque pedes traiectus lora tumentis.

.....  
'heu fuge, nate dea, teque his' ait 'eripe flammis. (289-90)  
hostis habet muros; ruit alto a culmine Troia.

This was transformed by Seneca into a warning to Andromache to hide Astyanax from the Greeks (452-6).

Seneca's dramas are generally episodic in nature, but the reader cannot fail to notice how extreme this tendency appears in the Troades. There is a clear lack of connection between the different episodes of which the tragedy is composed, and this is evident both in the unmotivated entrances and exits of characters, and in their failure to express any reaction to preceding scenes. The result is a series of dialogues effective in themselves, but carried out in a dramatic vacuum. The second act offers a useful example of this phenomenon. Here Talthybius' description of the appearance of Achilles is followed directly by the argument between Pyrrhus and Agamemnon, yet neither Pyrrhus nor Agamemnon makes any reference to what has gone before.



This practice would have been dismissed by writers of the eighteenth century as an example of Seneca's ineptitude at composing a homogeneous dramatic action, but certain modern critics have seen that there is perhaps a greater sophistication in Senecan drama than would immediately appear to the superficial reader.

W. H. Owen, in his article 'Time and Event in Seneca's Troades', (1) explores the difficulties caused by the lack of scene connection in the Latin play, and concludes that dramatic time in the play does not represent a linear ordering of real time, but rather encompasses a complicated arrangement of scenes in which we jump from one point of action to another, and are then brought back to the original position. In such a way, Andromache's speech to the chorus (409 ff.) is an answer to their lamentations in the first act (up to line 164), and although in real time these episodes should follow each other, Seneca interposed the description of Talthybius and the discussion of Pyrrhus and Agamemnon. The latter we should imagine as taking place not amongst the captives, but in another area of the Greek camp. Owen's analysis does not necessarily provide the final solution to the problems of the play, but does emphasize that Seneca's techniques of composition can bear serious discussion, and are far removed from the practices of the earlier Greek tragedians.

The Troades is, on many counts, the most important of the group of Roman dramas, for, even more than the Medea and Phaedra with which it was ranked as one of the best examples of Seneca's work, it was capable of providing sources of inspiration distinct from the material of Euripides, and was found attractive by dramatists throughout the eighteenth century. Daniel Heinsius had described the tragedy as the 'Troades divina' (Animadversiones et notae, p. 485), and although

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(1) Wiener Studien 83 (1970), 118-37.

later critics would not have wholly endorsed this enthusiastic response,<sup>(1)</sup> certain elements in the play did receive widespread praise. The Histoire universelle remarks in general terms on the originality of ideas in the Troades (VII, 195):

c'est le même fonds, mais la marche est différente à plusieurs égards (i.e. from the Troades of Euripides), & si l'un fait verser des larmes sur le sort de ses captives, l'autre attache par l'abondance, & souvent par la singularité de ses idées.

But it was above all the dialogue between Pyrrhus and Agamemnon (203-359) and the unsuccessful attempt by Andromache to outwit Ulysses by concealing Astyanax in Hector's tomb (409-813, and especially 498 ff) which aroused universal admiration.<sup>(2)</sup> Both the originality of these two episodes and the tones in which the characters spoke appealed greatly to the eighteenth century.

Père Brumoy was extremely impressed by Agamemnon's opening speech to Pyrrhus (250-91), and he paid Seneca the highest compliment he knew, writing that in this instance the Latin dramatist was quite unlike his normal self (Théâtre des Grecs, II, 595):

Voilà une excellente veine. Si Senèque s'exprimoit toujours ainsi, il cesseroit d'être lui-même.

The Bibliothèque universelle des dames also commends this section of the play (p. 327):

La Troade présente quelques beaux morceaux: telle est la réponse d'Agamemnon à Pyrrhus, qui demande vivement que Polixène soit immolée aux manes d'Achille.

as does La Harpe, who although generally censorious of Senecan drama, writes (Lycée, I, 504):

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(1) See, for example, Boileau's criticism of Hecuba's opening speech in Art poétique, chant III, 135-40.

(2) The choral ode which denies the immortality of the soul (371-408) was also a frequent subject of debate, but the widespread influence of this passage will be discussed separately at the end of the present chapter.

Enfin, l'on trouve dans les Troyennes une scène entière fort belle entre Agamemnon et Pyrrhus: ... Le discours d'Agamemnon est du ton de la vraie tragédie;

The scene in which Andromache engages in a duel of wits with Ulysses was held to be successful both in terms of emotional effect and dramatic qualities. Brumoy (II, 598) says:

Du reste, Andromaque effraïée sur le sort de son fils fait ici une des plus belles & des plus neuves situations qui ait jamais paru sur le Théâtre.

Fréron's comments on this scene are substantially the same (Année littéraire (1754), ii, 130). The Bibliothèque universelle stated that on this occasion Seneca had shown himself to be a worthy rival of Euripides (p. 337-8):

Une scène qui devoit produire de l'effet sur le Théâtre Latin, est celle dans laquelle Andromaque fait entrer Astyanax vivant dans le tombeau de son père, pour le cacher aux yeux des Grecs. Sénèque dans ce moment se montre le rival d'Euripide.

Collé (Journal et mémoires, I, 403) goes even further than this, and argues that in this scene Seneca has surpassed anything in Euripides:

Sénèque en cela me paroît l'avoir emporté de beaucoup sur Euripide. J'aimerois mieux avoir inventé cette seule situation de la Troade, que d'avoir fait les Troyennes et l'Hécube (i.e. of Euripides), jointes ensemble.

Clément (De la Tragédie) uses this scene to demonstrate a truly pathetic situation in tragedy (I, 193-4), and translates large portions of it, concluding that (p. 205)

la situation qu'on vient de voir est d'un effet admirable. L'intérêt, la curiosité, le pathétique, le mouvement théâtral, le spectacle, tout s'y trouve.

The major fault of the Troades was seen to be the fact that it is lacking in unity.<sup>(1)</sup> This was a criticism which was inevitable in view of the lack of obvious connection between the episodes and the diversity of characters with which we are presented. The difficulty

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(1) See Le Théâtre des Grecs, II, 592-3. Brumoy felt that in this respect the play was inferior to the Troades of Euripides.

of unifying an action which portrays the misfortunes of a group of Trojan women was one obstacle to the use of this theme by French classical dramatists, but this does not seem to have prevented the subject from being enthusiastically adopted.

#### French Adaptations of the 'Troades'

From the sixteenth century we have only one tragedy which echoes Seneca's drama in title, La Troade<sup>(1)</sup> (1579) of Robert Garnier, although there were a number of works on the Trojan theme.<sup>(2)</sup> Garnier was largely unconcerned by the problem of the unities, and following a practice comparable with that which he employed in his Antigone he encompasses a wide span of events, using considerable material from both Greek and Roman sources. The seventeenth century seems to have been much interested in the Troades theme. Sallebray's La Troade, which appeared in 1640,<sup>(3)</sup> coincides with the period of intense imitation of Seneca, although it has been suggested with some justification that the drama owes more to Garnier than to either Seneca or Euripides.<sup>(4)</sup> Nevertheless, an examination of the many Senecan episodes which appear in La Troade suggests that Sallebray did have some acquaintance with the Roman Troades. The dramatist made no

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(1) In the sixteenth, seventeenth, and occasionally eighteenth century, the Troades was alternatively (and incorrectly) known as the Troas, signifying either the Trojan region, a poem concerning Troy, or a single Trojan woman. This is the reason why Garnier, Sallebray, and Pradon all entitled their plays La Troade.

(2) Two tragedies entitled Pyrrhe, by Luc Percheron (1592) and Jean Heudon (1599), survive, which focus on the character of Pyrrhus. J. Behourt composed a tragi-comedy entitled Polyxène (1597), and Claude Billard produced a tragedy of the same name in the early years of the seventeenth century (1610). These plays owe little to Seneca.

(3) Paris (Toussaint Quinet).

(4) See Lancaster, French Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century, part II, i, 159.

move to tone down the violence of either the events depicted or the characters perpetrating them, and the figure of Pyrrhus retains, and indeed surpasses, his ancient ferocity, by declaring to his fellow Greeks that

Si l'enfant (i.e. Astyanax) ne suffit, exterminons encor  
Et la mere, & les soeurs, & la femme d'Hector, .. (I,1)

This retention of the barbarity of Pyrrhus is the most significant difference between Sallebray's version and La Troade<sup>(1)</sup> of Pradon, which was first performed almost forty years later, for Pradon epitomizes the attitude of his period to the use of themes from antiquity when he advocates the necessity of 'civilizing' ancient manners. He writes in his preface that

les caracteres de leurs Heros sont si pleins de ferocité,  
qu'on n'eût pu voir sans horreur Ulysse precipiter  
Astyanax & Pyrrhus immoler Polixene. Il falloit trouver  
un milieu & un juste temperament pour adoucir cette action.  
Nostre theatre ne peut souffrir ce qui a fait autrefois  
la beauté de celui des anciens. Nos moeurs sont trop  
douces & trop éloignées de ces moeurs sauvages & barbares;

This echoes the view which his rival Racine had earlier expressed in the first preface of Andromaque (1667). Racine had already accustomed audiences to the idea of Pyrrhus as a romantic lover, and during the remainder of the seventeenth, as well as the eighteenth century, he is rarely seen without an attachment of this kind. In La Troade the love element is extremely important, and Pyrrhus is imagined to be in love with Andromaque and Ulysse with Polixène, yet this part of the plot is linked quite skilfully with the real story of the Troades, and imitation of Seneca is widespread.<sup>(2)</sup>

When Racine composed his Andromaque he decided to set the action

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(1) Paris (Jean Ribou) 1679.

(2) Many, though not all, of Pradon's borrowings from Seneca are noted by Bussom (A Rival of Racine: Pradon, his Life and Dramatic Works), p. 128-32.

a year after the fall of Troy, and his play is a more subtle blend of ancient sources than that of Pradon. He had no wish to make extensive borrowings from Seneca, and any suggestions from the Troades are so well assimilated into the plot that they are no longer easily recognizable as such. Oreste's petition to Pyrrhus for the surrender of Astyanax to the Greeks (I,2) is a complex reshaping of the Agamemnon/Pyrrhus scene in Troades 203 ff., with the role of Pyrrhus being assigned to Oreste, and that of Agamemnon to Pyrrhus. Andromaque's pathetic attempts to save the life of her son also bear some resemblance to her attitude in the Latin play.

While Racine was attracted to the plight of Andromache,<sup>(1)</sup> La Fosse was drawn to the character of Polyxena, who in Seneca is seen as a noble and courageous figure, although her appearance is somewhat restricted.<sup>(2)</sup> In choosing this subject for his Polixène (1696), La Fosse avoided the difficulties of a double action, but was faced with the problem of expanding the existing material into five acts. The obvious answer was to introduce a romantic episode, and he invents Pyrrhus' love for Polixène, which cannot but be in conflict with his duty to sacrifice her to his father. Like Pradon, La Fosse could not countenance Pyrrhus murdering Polixène in cold blood, and in order to make the dénouement satisfactory the dramatist contrived to have his characters execute a complicated and improbable manoeuvre which results in her being killed accidentally by Pyrrhus. Polixène met with considerable success when first performed, but aroused little

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(1) Racine may not have been the only seventeenth-century dramatist to deal with Andromache and her son, as the Mercure de France (Feb. 1789, p. 126) mentions two anonymous Astyanax plays performed in 1658 and 1696.

(2) Andromache describes her adornment for the sacrifice (945-8), and the messenger relates her courageous death (1118-64), but she never actually speaks. She has a more prominent role in the Hecuba of Euripides.

enthusiasm when revived in 1718.<sup>(1)</sup> In spite of this fact, La Fosse's interpretation of the character of Pyrrhus and his general approach to the subject were to exert a quite considerable influence on eighteenth-century versions of the Polyxena theme.

Dramatists of the eighteenth century were by no means discouraged from offering their own versions of the Trojan legend by the amount of material which had already been produced, and more plays than ever before appeared on this subject. Closest in title to the work of Seneca (and indeed to the Troades of Euripides) was Châteaubrun's Les Troyennes (1754), which in dealing with the whole group of Trojan women was something of a novelty. It was by far the more usual practice to choose between the captives, and to concentrate on either Andromache or Polyxena and/or Hecuba, and in this way to bypass the thorny problem of trying to unify the action while focusing on a whole set of heroines. The fate of Polyxena held a wide appeal for dramatists, and we possess numerous tragedies on this theme. Yet it is a curious fact that apart from the one-act Polixène of Dumas d'Aigueberre, which appeared in 1729, all our Polixène plays were published in the 1780's. La Harpe attempted the theme in 1783, and La Place's Polyxène, although probably composed much earlier, was published in the same year. Legouvé wrote a play on the same subject in 1784, and from 1785 we have a Polixène by Saint-Ildephont. In 1786 Ronsin published a Hécube et Polixène. From the next decade we have a three-act Hécube (1793) by Petitot (which is attributed to Rochefort by the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal). It is not clear why all these works should have been composed almost simultaneously, but it is doubtless linked with the general revival of interest in Greek drama at this period, and a

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(1) Lancaster (French Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century, IV, i, 388) tells us that the play was given only three times.

resurgence of interest in the Hecuba of Euripides.

The subject of Andromache and Astyanax was not neglected, and had been brought to the attention of writers by the success of Racine's Andromaque. Châteaubrun, the author of Les Troyennes, went on to offer an Astianax in 1756, and Richerolle d'Avalon produced a tragedy of the same title in the year of the Revolution. Brenner (A Bibliographical List of Plays in the French Language) notes in addition to these an Astyanax performed at the Jesuit college of Louis-le-Grand on August 2nd 1758<sup>(1)</sup> (no. 389), an Astianax by a writer with the initials V.C.D.V., contained in a Recueil de pièces dramatiques anciennes et nouvelles (Bouillon/Paris 1785) (no. 390), and a play by a certain abbé Polycarpe Poncelet (1778) (no. 10182), of which the text does not survive.

The majority of the above-mentioned dramas were not performed,<sup>(2)</sup> and are either the work of obscure writers, or the little-known efforts of otherwise famous dramatists. Les Troyennes is the most obvious exception to this statement, since it earned a considerable success for its author. Châteaubrun<sup>(3)</sup> himself was an intermittent producer of tragedies, his last play, Mahomet second, having appeared as long ago as 1714. Les Troyennes was given a total of thirty times after it first appeared on March 11th 1754, and was well received.<sup>(4)</sup> Both La Harpe<sup>(5)</sup> and Fréron considered that the play had its merits, and

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(1) A programme for this performance survives (Arsenal Rf 75.173), which tells us that certain of the scenes were sung to the accompaniment of music by Duché.

(2) It is an interesting fact that, of all the Polixène plays which survive, only that of Dumas d'Aigueberre was ever acted.

(3) Jean-Baptiste Vivien de Châteaubrun (1686-1775), the maître d'hôtel of the duc d'Orleans, son of the Regent. See Lancaster, Sunset, p. 138.

(4) See Collé (Journal et mémoires, I, 400) and Grimm (Corresp. litt., II, 329).

(5) He discusses Les Troyennes in detail in Lycée, XI, 235-41.



Fréron, in particular, offered lavish praise (Année littéraire (1754), ii, 139):

Que ces défauts sont légers, Monsieur, en comparaison des beautés de cette Pièce! C'est une véritable Tragédie; elle en mérite le nom;

Collé, on the other hand, was thankful that Châteaubrun had written for the theatre so rarely (Journal et mémoires, I, 400):

Le juste soin de sa fortune, qui est médiocre, et que M. de Chateaubrun auroit pu faire très-grande s'il eût été avide et importun, l'a, heureusement pour lui comme pour nous, détourné de travailler pour le théâtre, pour lequel il n'a ni génie ni talent.

The same dramatist's Astianax was far less successful, and was performed only once. It was never published, but the Journal encyclopédique ((Feb. 1756) I, iii, 75-80) analyses it at length. Lancaster publishes a summary of the plot,<sup>(1)</sup> and it can be seen that it consists of an imaginary sequel to Les Troyennes, or possibly to Andromaque.

Dumas d'Aigueberre's one-act Polixène,<sup>(2)</sup> which together with a one-act comedy (L'Avare amoureux) and a one-act pastorale héroïque (Pan et Doris) forms a medley entitled Les Trois Spectacles, earned a greater popularity, and was performed twenty times in the summer of 1729. The Polyxène of La Place, on the other hand, was published,<sup>(3)</sup> but never acted. La Place<sup>(4)</sup> is, of course, better known for his interest in the English theatre and his tragedy Venise sauvée (1746). This play was influenced in part by the Manlius Capitolinus of La Fosse, and his interest in the figure of Polyxena was aroused by

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(1) In French Tragedy in the Time of Louis XV, II, 391.

(2) Paris (Tabarie) 1729. See above work, I, 121-3.

(3) In Théâtre de M. de La Place, contenant Venise sauvée, Adèle de Ponthieu, Jeanne Gray, Polyxène (Paris 1783). Arsenal Rf 11.138.

(4) See Lancaster (op. cit., I, 276 ff.), and Lilian Cobb, Pierre-Antoine de La Place, sa vie et son oeuvre (1707-1793) (Paris 1928).

his reading of the same dramatist's Polixène. La Harpe's<sup>(1)</sup> Polixène was never completed, and we possess only the manuscript of the opening scene.<sup>(2)</sup> It was probably the success of Philoctète (1783) which led him to attempt another theme from ancient legend. Legouvé<sup>(3)</sup> is best known for his Revolutionary tragedies, and Polixène was one of his earliest compositions, produced when he was only twenty. This tragedy was never performed, but is printed in the Oeuvres complètes (Paris 1826-7), tome III. The Polixène<sup>(4)</sup> of Guillaume-René Lefébure, baron de Saint-Ildephont (1744-1809), a doctor of medicine, who composed comedies and tragedies in between treatises on medicine, incurred the same fate. Charles-Philippe Ronsin<sup>(5)</sup> was a Republican general, who also gained some success in the last decades of the century with his tragedies on political themes. However, his Hécube et Polixène, which was printed in 1786 with three other dramatic efforts,<sup>(6)</sup> was, once again, not performed. The Hécube of Claude-Bernard Petitot (1772-1825), who was responsible for translating the works of Alfieri into French, was actually rehearsed at the Comédie-française, but was then denounced to the Commune, and performance was forbidden.

Richerolle's<sup>(7)</sup> Astyanax did gain one performance at the Comédie-française, on February 7th 1789, but the audience voiced noisy dis-

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(1) See Lancaster, op. cit., II, 556 ff..

(2) Manuscrit inédit de La Harpe (Arsenal, Rondel ms. 306).

(3) See Phoenissae chapter, p. 186.

(4) Utrecht 1785. The text is preserved in the Arsenal (Re 843).

(5) See Lancaster, French Tragedy in the Reign of Louis XVI, p. 119-24.

(6) In Théâtre de M. Ronsin (Paris 1786).

(7) He was an ancien conseiller au bailliage of Avalon. See Lancaster, op. cit., p. 100-1. After Astyanax he composed another tragedy, Ajax furieux.

approval, interrupting the play, and then the actor declaiming the role of Pyrrhus suddenly declined to continue some thirty lines from the end, thus halting the performance. Richerolle was convinced that he had been unfairly dealt with, and blamed the uproar on the cabale (see the preface to Astyanax (Paris 1818)). However, the general consensus of opinion was that the writer had brought about his own downfall by trying to compete with Racine. The Mercure de France (Feb. 1789, p. 133) comments that

On a fait à l'Auteur plusieurs reproches graves, entre autres celui d'avoir paru lutter contre Racine dans un sujet qui a commencé sa haute renommée. En rendant Pyrrhus amoureux d'Andromaque sous les murs même de Troie, aux pieds du tombeau d'Hector, il a fait une faute que Racine a su éviter.

The author of the Astianax contained in the Recueil de pièces dramatiques anciennes et nouvelles<sup>(1)</sup> decided against submitting his tragedy to this kind of test, and he tells us in his preface (p. ii-iii) that

Ne le destinant point au Théâtre, je lui ai conservé les chœurs des anciens, qui, sans contredit, sont bien plus intéressants que les Confidens modernes;

The question of the precise amount of Senecan influence on any of these tragedies is a complex one, in that, although it is quite clear that the Troades was used to a larger extent than most of the other Senecan dramas we have so far examined, it is necessary to bear in mind that a certain amount of the influence may be indirect, and culled from earlier French tragedies rather than Seneca himself. There are also a number of other potential sources to consider. Châteaubrun's Les Troyennes, for example, contains elements from Euripides as well as Seneca, as Fréron observes in the Année littéraire (1754), ii, 121. In addition to this, there are various echoes of Racine's Andromaque. Richerolle's play is described accurately by

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(1) Astianax and a tragedy entitled Virginie are the only new works to appear in this collection.

the Mercure de France (Feb. 1789, p. 127-8) as a combination of Racine and Seneca, and V.C.D.V. was also clearly influenced by Racine, as well as by Châteaubrun, Greek tragedy, and Ronsard's Franciade, which is the source for the happy ending of Astianax.

The Polixène plays tend to be less biased towards Seneca, and often owe more to La Fosse's Polixène and the Hecuba of Euripides. Indeed Petitot's Hécube is expressly called an imitation of Euripides (Hécube, tragédie ... imitée du grec d'Euripide). La Place adds further possibilities to the list of sources by suggesting the use of Virgil (Aeneid III, 39-68) and Ovid (Metamorphoses XIII, fables 5 and 6 (i.e. lines 429 ff.)) for the story of Polyxena and Polydorus.

It is also interesting to consider the ambivalence of attitude which eighteenth-century critics demonstrated towards Seneca. We have already seen that certain scenes from the Troades were constantly praised, yet there appears to have been a prevalent belief that it was dangerous to imitate the Latin dramatist's work in any detail. This danger was thought to lie in the potentially corrupting influence of Seneca's exaggerated rhetorical style. The writer in the Mercure de France (loc. cit., p. 135) offers a stern warning, describing Seneca as

(un) homme que nos premiers Tragiques ont souvent pris pour modèle, & le plus dangereux que l'on puisse choisir.

Fréron, too, emphasizes that he is an unsuitable model to choose (op. cit., p. 121):

(Sénèque) ..., unanimement reconnu pour un mauvais modèle, & qui ne peut fournir que quelques situations heureuses, quelques belles tirades, quelques pensées sublimes.

Nevertheless, these derogatory remarks did not deter dramatists from making use of favourite Senecan episodes.

An interest in the supernatural is usually held to be one of the features of Seneca's writing, and, as was the case with the ghost of Laïus in the Oedipus, the ghost of Achilles in the Troades leaves its

mark on the majority of our modern plays. In some of these tragedies the apparition gains no more than a passing reference, and this is indicative either of a wish to follow Euripides in placing less emphasis on the role of Achilles, or of a vague memory of something heard in earlier productions such as La Fosse's Polixène.<sup>(1)</sup> Châteaubrun's description probably falls into the latter category (see Les Troyennes IV,9), as do those of La Place (Polyxène II,2) and La Harpe (Polixène I,1). Saint-Ildephont, however, refers back more closely to the Hecuba (see lines 37-41)<sup>(2)</sup> when he has Phénor describe the appearance of Achilles:

Même on dit, ...  
Qu'on a vu du tombeau l'ombre de vôtre père  
Sortir, l'oeil menacant et brillant de colère, (Polixène,  
Et qu'encor altéré du sang des Phrigiens, I,1)  
Il veut à ses autels voir tomber des Troiens.

Dumas d'Aigueberre focuses more attention on the spectacular nature of the ghost's appearance by devoting a whole scene (I,3) to the occurrence and its implications for Pyrrhus and Polixène. Thessandre enters expressly to describe to his master this strange happening. The ferocity of the ghost's expression:

Tel il parut jadis aux yeux de votre Armée,  
Quand d'un juste courroux sa grande ame enflammée, (Polixène,  
Et d'un affront sanglant voulant tirer raison, I,3)  
Il osa menacer l'injuste Agamemnon.

although close to Seneca's

Threicia qualis arma proludens tuis  
iam, Troia, fatis stravit aut Neptunium (182-4)  
cana nitentem perculit iuvenem coma,

seems to represent a paraphrase of Ovid's

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(1) Arsace's description of the appearance of the ghost of Achilles in act II scene 4 of this play is modelled closely on Seneca's Troades.

(2) In these lines the ghost of Polydorus says:  
For Achilles, son of Peleus, has appeared above his tomb, and halted the whole Greek host as they were directing homewards the sea-dipped oar, and he demands to receive my sister Polyxena as a dear sacrifice and honour to his tomb.

Hic subito, quantus, cum viveret, esse solebat,  
Exit humo late rupta similisque minanti  
Temporis illius vultum referebat Achilles,  
Quo ferus iniusto petiit Agamemnona ferro, ..

(Met. XIII,  
441-4)

Dumas must have referred directly to the Latin poet, as no other dramatist had yet made use of this passage. The actual words of the ghost:

"Peuple ingrat (leur dit-il d'une voix menaçante)  
"Oses-tu présumer que mes mânes sacrés  
"Par le sang le plus vil puissent être honorés ? (I,3)  
"Pour payer mes travaux d'une digne hécatombe,  
"Il faut que Polixène expire sur ma tombe.

are also closer to Ovid (Met. XIII, 445-8)<sup>(1)</sup> than Seneca.

Legouvé, too, was attracted by the idea of introducing a description in which he could display his poetic talents, and he, like Seneca, strives to suggest the enormity of the happening by emphasizing the disruption of nature. Ulysse tells how (Polixène I,3):

Tout-à-coup un grand cri sort des vagues profondes;  
La mer tremble, mugit, s'entr'ouvre, et, sur les ondes  
Monte et s'élève Achille au milieu des éclairs,  
De la foudre, et des vents qui grondent dans les airs:

This is clearly an imitation of Seneca's

cum subito caeco terra mugitu fremens  
concussa totos traxit ex imo sinus; (171-2)

.....  
nec terra solum tremuit: et pontus suum  
adesse Achillen sensit ac stravit vada.  
tum scissa vallis aperit immensos specus (176-80)  
et hiatus Erebi pervium ad superos iter  
tellure fracta praebet ac tumulum levat.

The visual image which Achilles projects:

Il paraît tel encore  
Qu'aux jours, où, renversant les Troyens sous ses pas,  
Il portait dans leurs rangs la terreur, le trépas,  
Du Xanthe soulevé combattait l'onde altière, (I,3)  
Ou traînait, à grands cris, Hector sur la poussière.

is also derived directly from Seneca:<sup>(2)</sup>

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(1) See page 306-7 of this chapter for Ovid's lines.

(2) We can affirm that Legouvé did not refer to Pradon or La Fosse, or any other earlier writers, because he is the first to imitate Seneca's use of the resonant and unusual Xanthus, referring to the Trojan river otherwise called Scamander.

(qualis) ...

aut cum inter acies Marte violento furens  
corporibus amnes clusit et quaerens iter  
tardus cruento Xanthus erravit vado,  
aut cum superbo victor in curru stetit  
egitque habenas Hectorem et Troiam trahens.

(185-9)

The actual words spoken by Achilles:

"Grecs, vous allez partir sans honorer ma cendre!

"Il faut, pour que les mers vous ouvrent leur chemin, (I,3)

"Que l'armée aujourd'hui répande

"Sur mon tombeau le sang humain:

although of a more general import than the instructions of Seneca's ghost, echo, nevertheless, the first lines of his speech:

'ite, ite inertes, manibus meis debitos  
auferte honores, solvite ingratas rates  
per nostra ituri maria -

(191-3)

Richerolle, like Legouvé, entrusts a lengthy description of the supernatural episode to Ulysse. Here, too, attention is paid to the portents preludeing the hero's arrival, and the details are also borrowed from Seneca, whom Richerolle imitates even more closely than Legouvé:

A peine le taureau tombe au pied de l'autel,  
Qu'on entend tout-à-coup au centre de la terre,  
Un bruit affreux semblable aux éclats du tonnerre;  
Le ciel même y répond par des mugissemens;  
L'Ida s'est ébranlé jusqu'en ses fondemens:  
Les rochers détachés du sommet des montagnes,  
Roulent avec fracas au milieu des campagnes:  
Le bois sacré gemit; l'Empire de Thétis  
Annonce en frémissant l'approche de son fils;  
La mer s'ouvre, mugit, vomit au loin ses sables,  
Et découvre du Styx les rives lamentables.

(Astyanax,  
III,5)

The mugissemens of Richerolle are a translation of Seneca's mugitu (171), and the reference to Mount Ida and the groaning of the sacred wood forms a paraphrase of lines 173-5 of the Troades:

et excelsum nemus  
fragore vasto tonuit et lucus sacer;  
Idaea ruptis saxa ceciderunt iugis.

The ghost's opening words also imitate closely Troades 191-3 (see above):

"Allez, partez, ingrats, et négligez de rendre  
Les tributs, les honneurs que l'on doit à ma cendre; (III,5)

Laissez, laissez ces tours que défendait Hector,

.....  
Mais de nos vastes mers repassez les abîmes;

although, of course, in a drama dealing uniquely with Astyanax the anger of Achilles has to be directed against Astyanax instead of Polyxena.

It is noticeable that none of these dramatists has made much attempt to alter the original format or setting of the piece. However, Petitot and Ronsin both decided to transform the potentially terrifying and dramatic description into stage action. This could be done with much of Seneca's descriptive material, and, as has been shown in earlier chapters, was undertaken on occasion by operatic writers and the more daring tragedians. Ronsin elected to startle his public with a visual display, as flames shoot from the tomb of Achilles. This occurs in the final act (V,6), and the stage direction reads:

(Il (Pyrrhus) s'approche du tombeau, & des flammes le repoussent.)

The ghost of Achilles appears on the altar destined for Polixène, and issues a solemn command to his son (Hécube et Polixène V,6):

"Fils ingrat & perfide,  
"Laisse trancher des jours que les Dieux ont proscrits;  
"Jamais, si tu fais grace à la soeur de Pâris,  
"Les vainqueurs d'Ilion ne verront l'Aulide."

In Petitot's tragedy we do not see Achilles, but his voice is heard, as the French writer endeavours to provide a dramatic last scene to Hécube. Here (III,8) the stage direction instructs that

(Le tonnerre se fait entendre, le tombeau s'ouvre, & une voix prononce ces mots,)

whereupon the ghost of Achilles commands that the blood of Polixène be shed on his tomb. It is a pity that neither of these tragedies was performed, for it would have been of great interest to see whether or not audiences were indeed impressed by this kind of spectacle.

While an often unimaginative use was made of the supernatural episode of the Troades, the debate between Pyrrhus and Agamemnon,



on the other hand, was altered considerably by dramatists to suit their individual needs. In the Latin play the basic contrast is between the primitive desire for revenge in the war-like Pyrrhus, and the more humanitarian attitude of Agamemnon. However, dramatists of the seventeenth century had altered the emphasis of this argument by making Pyrrhus an amoureux and involving his personal feelings for Polixène in the issue. To him were now assigned the honourable pleas of Agamemnon for clemency, while Ulysse, the traditionally wily schemer, would use arguments adapted from those of Seneca's Pyrrhus, and emphasize political expediency. The eighteenth century adopted almost unanimously the interpretation of the preceding century, and placed the debate in the mouths of Pyrrhus and Ulysse (see La Harpe (I,1), Legouvé (I,3), Saint-Ildephont (IV,4), Richerolle (I,3), Petitot (II,1)). Ronsin was alone in making Pyrrhus express feelings of hostility towards the captives, although even here he does not remain unyielding (IV,2). In these Pyrrhus/Ulysse scenes there is little direct imitation of the Troades, since, as has been said, this episode was suggested by Pradon (La Troade II,3) and La Fosse (Polixène I,2)<sup>(1)</sup> rather than by the Latin play.

Ronsin's scene (Hécube et Polixène IV,2) remains closer to the content of the Latin play. Here Hécube, who replaces Seneca's Agamemnon, pleads in an emotional manner for the life of her daughter. She upbraids Pyrrhus for listening to the voice of anger alone:

Le courroux seul d'Achille a passé dans ton ame ...  
En triomphant d'Hector, il a vaincu Pergame,  
Et toi, tu l'as détruite ...

This is adapted from Pyrrhus' own scornful words to Agamemnon in the Troades:

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(1) Racine's Andromaque (I,2) may also have provided some inspiration. This is especially relevant to Richerolle's Astyanax (I,3), where Pyrrhus and Ulysse are arguing about the fate of Astyanax not Polixène.

Ilium vicit pater,  
vos diruistis. (235-6)

Further on, Ronsin puts some of Agamemnon's own arguments into Hécube's mouth. She warns the young warrior of the transience of power:

Vous triomphez: nos murs sont tombés sous vos mains;  
Mais leur ruine affreuse auroit dû vous instruire (IV,2)  
A quoi tient le destin d'un Prince & d'un Empire.

which echoes Agamemnon's

magna momento obrui  
vincendo didici. Troia nos tumidos facit (263-6)  
nimium ac feroces? stamus hoc Danaï loco,  
unde illa cecidit.

Hécube continues:

Pyrrhus, vous êtes Roi. Plus on a de puissance,  
Moins on doit écouter la voix de la vengeance; (IV,2)

just as Agamemnon had argued that

quoque Fortuna altius  
evexit ac levavit humanas opes,  
hoc se magis supprimere felicem decet ... (259-61)

Pyrrhus puts his case at far less length than in the Latin play, merely citing his compulsion to obey his father, who had been treacherously murdered by Paris:

Par la main de Paris mon pere fut frappé. (IV,2)

In the Troades the murder of Achilles is also mentioned:

Illo ex Achille, qui manu Paridis iacet. (347)

but by Agamemnon, who is jibing at Pyrrhus' so-called immortal lineage. In spite of this stance, Pyrrhus is in reality no different from his counterparts in the other eighteenth-century plays, for he is visibly moved by Hécube's appeal, and as soon as he realizes that Polixène is in fact the unknown Trojan girl with whom he is in love (IV,3), he refuses to sacrifice her.

Not unexpectedly, the renowned 'tomb scene' found expression in all the tragedies dealing with the fates of Andromache and Astyanax. This is the most obviously Senecan element of the dramas of Châteaubrun,

Richerolle, and V.C.D.V., who all place much emphasis on this episode. (1)

In view of the fact that Seneca was writing for recitation only, it is surprising that this scene, which is interesting visually, as well as affording dramatic suspense and pathos, should work so well on the stage, and need so little modification by the modern dramatist.

Châteaubrun decided to focus his third and part of his fourth act on Andromaque and her child, and the Senecan episode forms the mainspring of the action. He could not, however, resist adding his own touches to the situation, and he invents a Greek child, who is to be handed over to Ulysse as a substitute for Astianax, while the young prince himself is concealed in the tomb of Hector.

The imminent danger to Astianax is announced in act III scene 4, where Thestor reports that Hector's son is to be thrown from a tower left standing amidst the debris of Troy. This imitates Calchas' words in Troades 368-9, or Talthybius' message in Euripides' Troades, line 725. Andromaque's immediate reaction is to find a hiding-place for her son:

Donne, cachons mon fils dans le tombeau d'Hector: (III,4)  
Céphise, viens, suis-moi; (2)

just as in the Latin play she says, 'succede tumulo, nate -' (503).

She appeals to her dead husband to conceal their child safely:

Et toi, mon cher Hector, sois sensible à mes cris,  
De tes mânes sacrés enveloppe ton fils; (III,4)  
Creuse jusques au Stix ta demeure profonde,  
Et cache mon dépôt sous l'épaisseur du monde:

which is a combination of Seneca's

---

(1) The writer in the Mercure de France (loc. cit., p. 134) remarks on the universality of its appeal, when discussing Richerolle's play:  
Au reste, il a été séduit, comme tous ceux qui avoient traité le même sujet avant lui, par le troisième Acte des Troyennes de Sénèque;

(2) Text from the first edition of the play (Paris (Brunet) 1756).  
B. N. Yf 6739.

qui semper, etiam nunc tuos,  
Hector, tuere: coniugis furtum piae (500-2)  
serva et fideli cinere victurum excipe.

and

Dehisce tellus tuque, coniunx, ultimo  
specu revulsam scinde tellurem et Stygis (519-21)  
sinu profundo conde depositum meum.

Châteaubrun also imitates Seneca's uncharacteristic attention to the precise position of his characters on stage. The old man warns Andromache not to betray her son's hiding-place by standing too close to the tomb:

quem ne tuus producat in medium timor,  
procul hinc recede teque diversam amove. (513-4)

This becomes, in the words of Thestor, who replaces the senex of the Troades:

Madame, éloignez-vous, de crainte que vos larmes (III,4)  
Ne fassent soupçonner d'où naissent vos allarmes.

In the following scene Andromaque is confronted by Ulysse (III,5), and she endeavours not to reveal her son's place of refuge. La Harpe (Lycée, XI, 240) called this episode a 'belle situation', but in fact the French dramatist has considerably weakened the emotional appeal and tension of the situation by lessening the danger to Astianax. While the Troades portrays a desperate woman fighting for the survival of her child, the French Andromaque is merely pretending to be unwilling to hand the Greek child by her side<sup>(1)</sup> over to the Greeks, and the first part of act III scene 5 is completely non-tragic. Ulysse puts the Greek case, and explains why it is necessary to kill Astianax:

Son nom seul nous fait craindre un funeste avenir;  
Vous tremblez pour un fils, nous en pleurons un nombre (III,5)  
Qu'Hector précipita dans le Royaume sombre.

This has a source in Troades 530-3:

(Danaos) ... semper a tergo timor

---

(1) This is the child which has been substituted for Astianax.

respicere coget arma nec poni sinet,  
dum Phrygibus animos natus eversis dabit,  
Andromacha, vester.

The child is summarily snatched from Andromaque, although Ulysse apologizes for carrying out this order.

Just when the Trojan woman seems to have turned the tables on the wily Greek, the scene suddenly becomes potentially tragic, as Ulysse reveals that the tomb of Hector is to be destroyed (see Seneca, line 663). As in the Troades, Andromaque reminds Ulysse that the body of Hector had been sold to Priam:

Avez-vous oublié qu'un immense trésor  
Fut le prix éclatant du corps de mon Hector ? (III,5)

ULIX. funditus busta eruam. (663-4)  
ANDR. Quae vendidistis ?

and she calls upon her dead husband to punish the Greeks:

Avez-vous oublié quel Guerrier fut Hector ?  
Ses mânes furieux vous menacent encor. (III,5)

rumpe fatorum moras,  
molire terras, Hector, ut Ulixen domes. (681-3)  
vel umbra satis es -

Andromaque's powerless complaints may affect the emotions of the audience, but the tragic situation is summarily shattered as Thestor gains a delay to the destruction of the tomb, and Astianax is smuggled away while the Greeks are otherwise engaged.

Châteaubrun's aim appears to be to wring the maximum amount of action possible out of this Senecan episode, and the duel of wits between Ulysse and Andromaque continues into the fourth act. The French dramatist's treatment of the situation is less successful than that of Seneca, in that there is no continuity of the tragic emotions of pity and fear, and the series of moves and countermoves almost assumes the qualities of a farce. By the second scene of the fourth act the Greeks realize that they have been duped, and Ulysse confronts Andromaque again in an attempt to discover the whereabouts of the real Astianax (IV,3). Here Châteaubrun takes up the Latin

episode from the point where Andromache pretends that her son is dead. Andromaque, keenly aware of the need to dissimulate, tells Ulysse to abandon the search:

Cessez contre mon fils une recherche vaine,  
Un tombeau le dérobe aux traits de votre haine. (IV,3)

Similarly in the Troades Andromache had said:

.. luce cassus inter extinctos iacet  
datusque tumulo debita exanimis tulit. (603-4)

The Latin passage contains a clever double-entendre, in that Andromache is actually telling the truth, since Astyanax is in Hector's tomb, yet Ulysses would naturally assume from her phraseology that the child is dead. This double meaning loses its point in the French play, as Andromaque goes on to explain that her son has been crushed in the destruction of Hector's tomb. Unlike her ancient predecessor, Andromaque indulges in a deliberate lie, since she knows that Astianax has been saved from death. As in the Latin play, Ulysse sees through her deceit:

La feinte désormais ne peut plus m'imposer;  
Je perce vos détours. (IV,3)

Simulata remove verba; non facile est tibi  
decipere Ulixen; (568-9)

but the craftiness with which he discovers that the child is still alive (619 ff.) is less in evidence in the French play. Andromaque refuses to reveal the location of her son:

Si je savois quel lieu cache un dépôt si cher,  
Crois, pour le reveler, que le ciel, que l'enfer,  
N'ont ni prix, ni tourmens capables de séduire  
Ou d'étonner ce coeur que sa tendresse inspire. (IV,3)

which imitates the fortitude of the Latin character:

Propone flammis, vulnera et diras mali  
doloris artes et famem et saevam sitim  
variasque pestes undique, ... (582-4)

Ulysse does not press her, and is ultimately unsuccessful in finding Astianax, who is taken to safety with Enée and the Trojans who escape

successfully from the captured city.

Critics who were acquainted with the Troades and could compare the ancient and modern versions, generally agreed that the force of the situation had been weakened by the saving of Astianax. Collé (Journal et mémoires, I, 403) writes:

et par là il a prodigieusement affoibli cette même situation, qui dans Sénèque tire de la façon dont Astianax est livré aux Grecs ses beautés les plus sublimes.

Fréron (op. cit., p. 138) also considered that the child should have died, for

La mort de cet enfant fait dans le Grec & dans le Latin la plus tragique impression sur l'ame des Lecteurs.

According to the Mercure de France (loc. cit., p. 127) Châteaubrun also made use of the Latin episode in Astianax, where the Trojan prince apparently cried out to his mother to pity him (cf. Troades, line 792, 'Miserere, mater') when being snatched from her by the Greeks. However, this seems to be a mistaken assumption, for a scene of this type does not fit the summary of the plot as given in the Journal encyclopédique (loc. cit.), and the writer in this periodical explains that on being reunited with his mother Astianax actually cried out 'ô moment trop doux!' which someone in the parterre mistook for 'ah Maman!' (p. 79-80).

Richerolle, too, was attracted by the 'tomb scene', and uses it as the basis for a whole act (the fourth). The influence of Les Troyennes is quite clearly seen in the reappearance of the character of Thestor and the fact that Astyanax is eventually saved from death and taken to safety by Aeneas, but in other respects the situation is the same as in the Troades.

Near the beginning of the fourth act Andromaque is thrown into confusion by the approach of the Greeks and the need to conceal her son from them. Her eyes light upon her husband's tomb:

Ouvrons ce marbre révééré: (IV,3)  
Ouvrons; cachons mon fils dans la nuit de la tombe.

These words are not far different from those of Andromaque in Les Troyennes (III,4),<sup>(1)</sup> although in general Richerolle referred directly to Seneca for his details. In the following scene the desperate woman prays to Hector to conceal Astyanax deep in the earth:

O terre! ouvre tes antres sombres;  
Hector, cache ton fils jusqu'au séjour des ombres:  
Du gouffre des enfers l'immense profondeur (IV,4)  
A peine suffira pour rassurer mon coeur.

This is based on Troades 519-21, a passage also imitated by Châteaubrun (see p. 326-7). In this case it is clear that Richerolle has consulted Seneca rather than the earlier French play.

The fifth scene of this fourth act is the most significant, and encompasses Andromaque's encounter with Ulysse and her eventual defeat as a result of his cunning and trickery. Here each stage of the Latin episode is imitated by Richerolle. Ulysse begins by expressing the unease felt by the Greeks at the continued existence of Astyanax:

Après dix ans entiers de guerres si funestes,  
N'est-il pas tems enfin d'en étouffer les restes. (IV,5)  
Un jeune Hector, madame, encor dans le berceau,  
De la guerre en ses mains tient déjà le flambeau:

... bella post hiemes decem  
totidemque messes iam senex miles timet  
aliasque clades rursus ac numquam bene (547-51)  
Troiam iacentem. magna res Danaos movet,  
futura Hector: libera Graios metu.

This is countered by Andromaque's statement that she is ignorant of her son's whereabouts:

Hélas! quel est ton sort ? dans quels climats lointains  
Portes-tu ta douleur et tes pas incertains ?  
Es-tu mort, étouffé dans les cendres de Troie ? (IV,5)  
Des vautours affamés ton corps est-il la proie ?  
Le glaive des vainqueurs a-t-il percé ton flanc ?  
Des tigres se sont-ils abreuvés de ton sang ?

nate, quis te nunc locus,  
fortuna quae possedit ? errore avio  
vagus arva lustras ? vastus an patriae vapor

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(1) See page 326 of this chapter.



corripuit artus ? saevus an victor tuo  
lusit cruore ? numquid immanis ferae  
morsu peremptus pascis Idaeas aves ? (562-7)

When Ulysse refuses to believe her rhetorical excuses, she swears truthfully, but in a wholly misleading manner, that Astyanax has been 'deprived of the light':

Que le courroux des Dieux me poursuive à jamais,  
Que les Grecs indignés du serment que je fais  
M'accablent des tourmens dont je suis menacée,  
Si ma bouche en impose et trahit ma pensée;  
Si, des morts habitant l'affreux et noir séjour,  
Mon fils n'est pas privé de la clarté du jour. (IV, 5)

Ita quod minari maximum victor potest  
contingat et me fata maturo exitu  
facilique solvant ac meo condant solo  
et patria tellus Hectorem leviter premat,  
ut luce cassus inter extinctos iacet  
datusque tumulo debita exanimis tulit. (599-604)

Ulysse cunningly tests the truth of this statement by regaling Andromaque with a description of the horrifying death which would have been her son's (he was to have been hurled off a steep cliff into the sea). He had done the same thing in the Troades (620-2), although the projected means of death was different. Andromaque's startled reaction informs him that the child is still alive, so he offers her a choice, which is really no choice at all:

Apprenez cependant ce qu'ordonne Calchas:  
Que si le fils d'Hector a subi le trépas;  
Si la victime, aux yeux de la Grèce assemblée,  
Au puissant Dieu des mers ne peut être immolée,  
Au défaut de son sang la cendre du héros  
Pourra seule apaiser et les vents et les flots.  
Maintenant que son sang ne peut plus se répandre,  
Je dois briser sa tombe et disperser sa cendre. (IV, 5)

Lustrale quoniam debitum muris puer  
sacrum antecessit nec potest vatem sequi  
meliore fato raptus, hoc Calchas ait  
modo piari posse redituras rates,  
si placet undas Hectoris sparsi cinis  
ac tumulus imo totus aequetur solo. (634-9)

Of course Andromaque cannot allow the tomb to be destroyed, as this would both affront the spirit of Hector and cause Astyanax' death. Thus she is forced to surrender her son to the Greeks. The most

pathetic moment of the scene occurs as she tearfully implores her son to beg for mercy:

Digne objet de pitié, tombe au pieds du vainqueur;  
Arrose de tes pleurs ses armes triomphantes; (IV,5)  
Embrasse ses genoux, tends-lui tes mains tremblantes.

submitte manus  
dominique pedes supplice dextra (708-10)  
stratus adora ...

This scene, and the fourth act, ends on a climactic note as the stricken woman, in paroxysms of despair, threatens to avenge her son.<sup>(1)</sup>

Although the parallels which have been quoted show that Richerolle paraphrased the Troades in some instances, they fail to give a real impression of the amount of use the French dramatist made of the Senecan episode. In fact, in this exceptionally long scene of 244 lines, some 170 are borrowed directly from the Latin play. This scale of imitation is totally unprecedented at this period, and we have to look back to the Seneca-based tragedies of the 1630's, typified by the Médée of Comeille, to find a comparable amount of paraphrase. It is clear that Richerolle felt extremely drawn to this episode, and it is as though he wrote the rest of the play, which in general owes far less to the Troades, merely to provide a framework in which to display this centrepiece. He felt no qualms at echoing the rhetorical style of the Roman dramatist, and indeed much of the play is couched in a declamatory vein.

Much of the action of V.C.D.V.'s Astianax is based around the concealment of Astianax in the tomb of Hector, but the fact that the writer makes no reference to Seneca in his preface suggests that his inspiration may have come primarily from Les Troyennes, or earlier French tragedies on the Trojan theme. Nevertheless, there does

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(1) In spite of Andromaque's fears, her son is in fact saved by Pyrrhus, who substitutes another child for Astyanax in the final act.

seem to be some direct imitation of the Roman play. Ulisse's statement of the fate which was to be Astianax', for example:

On devoit le jetter du plus haut d'Ilion. (III,2)

is based on Troades 368-9:

turre de summa cadat  
Priami nepos Hectoreus et letum oppetat.

although Andromaque's earlier prayer to Hector to protect Astianax (I,3),<sup>(1)</sup> and her recognition of her son's fear at entering the tomb of his father ('Tu frémis' (I,3))<sup>(2)</sup> were probably derived from Châteaubrun. Andromaque's pathetic command to Astianax to leave his hiding-place when her ploy has been discovered:

Sors, mon fils, sors d'ici; quitte ce triste asile: (IV,2)

also echoes Seneca's

Huc e latebris procede tuis,  
flebile matris furtum miserae. (705-6)

The 'tomb scene' is, of course, irrelevant to any tragedy dealing exclusively with Polyxena, and thus does not occur in any of the Polixène plays. Yet Legouvé did pick out isolated phrases spoken by Andromache, and altered their context by assigning them to Hécube instead. Thus Andromache's reply to Ulysses' demand that Astyanax be surrendered to him:

Ubi Hector ? ubi cuncti Phryges ?  
ubi Priamus ? unum quaeris: ego quaero omnia. (571-2)

becomes in Polixène Hécube's reply to Ulysse's demand for Polixène:

En quels lieux sont Hector, Priam, et ma famille ?  
Où sont tous les Troyens ? Tu demandes ma fille! (III,3)  
Et moi, mon peuple entier, mes fils, et mon époux.

Her move to plead with Ulysse:

J'embrasse vos genoux,  
Écoutez; c'est du moins la grace que j'implore. (III,3)

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(1) See page 326 of this chapter for Châteaubrun's version of this prayer.

(2) Exactly the same words are found in Les Troyennes (III,4).

may also echo Andromache's gesture of supplication (Troades 691-3). The remaining part of this scene, however, was influenced by Euripides' Hecuba rather than Seneca.

While the various episodes which have been discussed often retained a clearly Senecan identity, the same cannot be said for the personalities of all the Trojan women. Hecuba, Polyxena, and Andromache (as well as Cassandra, who appears in the Troades of Euripides, but not that of Seneca) seem to have undergone varying degrees of transformation.

Andromache had achieved a prominence of her own in Racine's Andromaque, where she appears as the epitome of wifely loyalty and maternal devotion. This is not dissimilar to the image she projects in the Roman drama. In the surviving 'Trojan' tragedies of the eighteenth century she appears three times<sup>(1)</sup> - in Les Troyennes and the two Astyanax plays of Richerolle and V.C.D.V. - and in all of these her motherly affection is demonstrated by her attempts to conceal Astyanax from the Greeks. The possibility of placing Andromache in a romantic situation had already been explored by Racine, and Richerolle, but not Châteaubrun or V.C.D.V., who both avoid romantic complications, sought to perpetuate this characteristically French idea.<sup>(2)</sup> Yet, however strong Pyrrhus' passion is shown to be, Andromaque never reciprocates his feelings. Although Richerolle was determined to have a happy ending to his play, he did not want to compromise his heroine, and insists only on a degree of mutual respect achieved between herself and Pyrrhus. She asks in the final scene of Astyanax:

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(1) She also featured in Châteaubrun's unpublished Astianax.

(2) In the Andromache of Euripides Andromache had borne a son to Neoptolemus (i.e. Pyrrhus), but there is no real question of romance.

Qu'il suffise à ce roi si grand, si généreux,  
Qui commande à l'amour, qui dompte la colère,  
De savoir qu'Andromaque au sein de sa misère (V,4)  
Se console, malgré tant de cruels exploits,  
Puisqu'elle doit servir, de servir sous ses lois. (1)

Hecuba, who is portrayed by both Euripides and Seneca as a symbol of lamentation, is a constant figure, appearing in all our eighteenth-century plays except Dumas d'Aigueberre's brief Polixène, the fragment of La Harpe's play of the same title, and the Astyanax plays of Richerolle and V.C.D.V.. Her character had already been well-determined by the ancient dramas, and is largely preserved in its original form by French dramatists. The catalogue of her woes in Saint-Ildephont's Polixène:

Jupiter! je croiois enfin que ta colère  
Avoit, après dix ans, lassé ta main sévère  
Et que tous les malheurs aux Troïens réservés (II,1)  
La Veuve de Priam les avoit éprouvés.  
J'ai perdu mes enfans, j'ai vu leurs funérailles,  
J'ai vu trainer Hector autour de nos murailles, ..

is a typical analysis of her situation. Her conviction that those Trojans who have already perished are the happiest, expressed in Ronsin's Hécube et Polixène:

C'est peu de vous survivre, ô mon époux, mes fils,  
Troyens, qui reposez sous ces sanglants débris,  
Vous êtes morts sans honte en mourant avec Troye. (III,6)  
Aux mépris du vainqueur vous n'êtes point en proie;  
Votre ombre, libre & pure, est entrée aux Enfers,  
Et nous avons vécu pour mourir dans les fers!

echoes her attitude towards the indignity of slavery in the Troades, lines 144 ff.:

- felix Priamus  
dicite cunctae: liber manes (144-7)  
vadit ad imos, nec feret umquam  
victa Graium cervice iugum;

The same idea also occurs in Saint-Ildephont's play, where Hécube says:

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(1) This happy ending cannot but seem rather trite in view of the absolute destruction of Troy and of normal life for the Trojans which have preceded it.

La mort n'est point cruelle à celui qu'on y livre.  
Les malheureux sont ceux qu'on condamne à survivre (II,3)  
Aux plus chéris des leurs, ...

and in Legouvé, although it is here expressed by Polixène:

Ah! puisque je survis à ma famille entière,  
J'ai vécu trop long-temps. Heureux et plus heureux (II,1)  
Ceux que frappa la guerre avant ces temps affreux!

Hécube's resentment against Achilles and her wretchedness at the  
loss of Polixène in Les Troyennes:

On déifie un monstre; à quel titre! à quel prix!  
Il a de son vivant exterminé mes fils;  
Il s'est rassasié du sang de ma famille, (V,1)  
A ma vive tendresse il restoit une fille,  
Et l'on va l'immoler à ce monstre odieux,

seems to reflect her feelings in the Latin play:

Adhuc Achilles vivit in poenas Phrygum ? (955)

....  
cinis ipse nostrum sanguinem ac tumulus sitit.  
modo turba felix latera cingebat mea,  
lassabar in tot oscula et tantum gregem (957-61)  
dividere matrem; sola nunc haec est super  
votum, comes, levamen afflictæ, quies;

Châteaubrun decided to give even more point to her grief by  
endowing her with a heavy sense of guilt. She feels herself to be  
responsible for the downfall of Troy, because she favoured Paris and  
persuaded Priam to allow his marriage with Helen. She confesses to  
Thestor that

C'est moi qui l'ai perdu ce Roi trop magnanime,  
C'est moi dont la fierté l'entraîna dans l'abîme, .. (I,2)

and ends the play on a moralizing note as she blames her suffering on  
the fact that

J'ai chéri la vertu; mais j'ai souffert le crime. (V,5)

This appears to be an expansion of her expression of responsibility  
in Seneca's play:

non cautus ignes Ithacus aut Ithaci comes  
nocturnus in vos sparsit aut fallax Sinon: (38-40)  
meus ignis iste est, facibus ardetis meis. (1)

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(1) Hecuba had foreseen the destruction of Troy when, before the birth  
of Paris, she had dreamt that she was delivering a firebrand.

Hécube's appearance as an avenging spirit in the Hécube of Petitot, where she blinds Polimestor (see III,1), imitates her revenge on the murderer of Polydorus in Euripides' Hecuba. In the Troades of Seneca she remains a passive figure of grief.

Cassandra appears in Les Troyennes alone (exclusively in the first two acts), and bears evidence to the fact that Châteaubrun made use of Euripides as well as Seneca in his play. Her extreme rationality as she reflects on the unhappy implications of being gifted with the art of prophecy (in the first scene of the second act) is an invention of the French dramatist, but her prophecy of the disasters which will befall her captors on their return home (II,4) is taken directly from Euripides' Troades 353 ff..

Polyxena is undoubtedly the most popular yet the most unrecognizable of the Trojan captives in the dramas of the eighteenth century. Seneca had provided little information to aid dramatists in the depiction of a three-dimensional character, for he concentrates more on the circumstances surrounding her death than on the girl herself.<sup>(1)</sup> Euripides' Hecuba was an alternative source, for the Greek dramatist depicts the girl's courageous willingness to face death (342-78), and then, as the moment of her sacrifice approaches, her proud resolution to die free and untouched by any Greek hand:

ὦ τὴν ἐμὴν πέρσαντες Ἀργεῖοι πόλιν,  
ἐκούσα θνήσκω μὴ τις ἀψηται χροὸς  
τοῦμοῦ· παρέξω γὰρ δέρην εὐκαρδίως. (547-9)

(O Argives, who have laid waste my city, I die willingly: let no-one touch my body, for I shall yield my neck with courage). This uncompromising heroism is praiseworthy, but not sufficiently interesting to absorb a French audience for five acts, and Dumas, Saint-Ildephont, and Petitot all looked back to the seventeenth century for a means of

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(1) See page 313, note 2.

adding variety to their plays. Like La Fosse they transformed the noble princess of Euripides into a romantic heroine, forced by her situation to revile her captors, yet drawn inescapably towards Pyrrhus. The exemplary nature of her character means that this emotion must be stifled, and a happy outcome will be impossible. Polixène is also endowed with a romantic attachment in the plays of La Place and Ronsin. In Hécube et Polixène her love is less problematic, since she is betrothed to a Trojan prince, named Anténor. In La Place's Polyxène the object of her affections is [also] named Agénor, and this relationship is fraught with difficulties of another kind, as this is found to be a pseudonym concealing her brother Polydore.

Châteaubrun and Legouvé stand apart from these invented situations, and endeavour to restore the character to her ancient colours. It seems clear from the nature of Les Troyennes that the elderly dramatist was keen to echo with some accuracy the pathetic emotions found in the plays of Euripides and Seneca, and he focuses his attention on the mother-daughter relationship as Polixène hears that she must die. Her immediate sympathies are for the plight of her mother, as she says:

Ils veulent m'égorger; je mourrois sans murmure:  
Mais de braver en vous les cris de la nature, (V,2)  
Mais de me faire voir vos larmes, vos terreurs,  
Et de fixer vos yeux sur le coup dont je meurs; ....

There is no romantic interest of any kind, and these words echo directly Hecuba 211-14:

καὶ σοῦ μὲν, μάτερ, δυστάνου  
κλαίω πανδύρτοισ Ἑρήνοισ,  
τὸν ἑμὸν δὲ βίον λώραν λύμαν τ'  
οὐ μετακλαίωμαί, ...

(For you in your wretchedness, mother, I weep with all-plaintive lament. But for my own life, my dishonour, my defilement, I weep not.) This naïve emotion seems to have touched the audience, for Fréron (op. cit., p. 137) writes that

Cette Scène est une des plus pathétiques que j'aie vues



au Théâtre: elle a fait fondre en larmes.

Legouvé does include Pyrrhus' love for Polixène within his plot, but Polixène responds to this in no way, and the French writer, clearly impressed by the Euripidean character, imitates her proud speech in Hecuba 342 ff:

Fille des rois, des Dieux je descendais encor,  
Et, pour te dire plus, j'étais la soeur d'Hector: (Polixène,  
Je ne suis plus qu'esclave; après un tel outrage, II,2)  
La mort, qui m'y soustrait, devient mon seul partage.

τί γάρ με δεῖ ζῆν; ἢ πατήρ μὲν ἦν ἀναξ  
Φρυγῶν ἀπάντων· τοῦτό μοι πρῶτον βίου. (349-50)

...  
νῦν δ' εἰμι δούλη. (357)

(For why should I live, whose father was king of all the Phrygians ?  
Such were the first days of my life. ... But now I am a slave.)

The character of Helen, who stands between the Trojans and Greeks as a bone of contention, has a curiously neutral role in Seneca's Troades. Her melancholic manner (see lines 903-26 and 938-41) is greatly at variance with the cunning charms she uses to recapture the heart of Menelaus in Euripides' Troades. Châteaubrun's reference to her hostility to the Trojans:

Elle enflamme leur haine,  
Et prenant en horreur ses amis malheureux, (Les Troyennes,  
Par des traits accablans se déchaîne contre eux. II,2)

reflects more closely the characterization of Euripides than that of Seneca.

Of the Greek leaders who are seen in the Troades, Pyrrhus appears most frequently in the eighteenth century, yet his original character is barely discernible. Racine, Pradon, and La Fosse had already undertaken the task of civilizing his manners, and by the time he was adopted by eighteenth-century dramatists there was very little of his ancient ferocity left. Châteaubrun was alone in returning to the original interpretation of the character, and although Pyrrhus does not appear on stage in Les Troyennes, in act V scene 4 Iphis describes

his barbaric urge to kill Polixène. Ronsin also displayed some originality in his depiction of the Greek hero, for Pyrrhus' attitude at the beginning of Hécube et Polixène echoes that of the Senecan character. He is hostile to Agamemnon and determined to avenge his father:

Mais jaloux des honneurs que m'accorde la Grèce,  
Agamemnon peut-être, implorant votre adresse,  
Voudroit de mes exploits m'ôter le digne prix .... (II,1)  
N'a-t-il pas à mon père enlevé Briséis ?...

His role in the argument with Hécube (IV,2) is also imitative of Seneca (see pages 324-5 of this chapter). However, this characterization is not pursued throughout the play, for as soon as Pyrrhus realizes that the Trojan girl with whom he has fallen in love is actually Polixène (IV,3) his resolve fails.

In all the other tragedies in which he is seen (the Polixène plays of Dumas, La Harpe, Legouvé and Saint-Ildephont, Petitot's Hécube, and Richerolle's Astyanax)<sup>(1)</sup> his feelings for his potential victim hamper considerably his ability to fulfil his duty. Any resolution to obey his father's wishes is transitory and based entirely on the delusion that he no longer loves Polixène. In comparison with his ancient counterpart Pyrrhus appears as weak and irresolute, but this was felt to be more acceptable than a barbaric warrior with no apparent trace of human pity.

Richerolle's Astyanax offers an extreme example of the way in which the character of Pyrrhus could be transformed by the demands of sensibilité. Here the warrior's whole attitude to life is shaped by his pity for the Trojans and his love for Andromaque. He has become ashamed of his role in conquering Troy, and his confidant Phynéas remarks on his extreme emotion:

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(1) It is interesting that he is absent from La Place's Polyxène.

Vous soupirez; des pleurs obscurcissent vos yeux. (I,1)

His passion for Andromaque is expressed in extravagant terms:

Ah! je sentis dès-lors le pouvoir de ses charmes;  
Mon cœur connut l'amour, et je versai des larmes. (I,1)  
Quel amour! quels transports sans cesse renaissans:

and his every effort is directed towards saving Astyanax, although Andromaque makes no response to his passion.

It is obvious that cold-blooded murder could not be associated with such a figure, and none of the eighteenth-century dramatists who feature Pyrrhus as a character make him guilty of this crime.<sup>(1)</sup> They were thus no more daring than Pradon and La Fosse had been in the seventeenth century, and their dénouements remain tragic but not terrible. Various means of achieving Polixène's death without inculping Pyrrhus were attempted. Petitot, for instance, allows the Greek warrior to strike the actual blow, but resorts to divine intervention as the hand of Achilles forces that of his son (III,7). Other writers were less original. Dumas d'Aigueberre and Legouvé both have Polixène commit suicide (scenes I,9 and V,6 respectively), as Pradon had done, while Saint-Ildephont imitates La Fosse in making the girl's death accidental (V,9). Both Ronsin and La Place avoided all difficulties by entrusting the sacrifice to the Greek soldiers (V,7) and Calchas (V,8) respectively.

The figure of Agamemnon, who is seen as hostile to Pyrrhus in the Troades of Seneca, was wholly discarded by dramatists in this context, and appears in only one of our tragedies.<sup>(2)</sup> He is normally replaced by Ulysse, who as in the Latin drama 'nectit pectore astus callidos' (523). On occasion he is shown to feel pity for the plight of Hécube

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(1) In Châteaubrun's Les Troyennes alone (where he is not seen on stage) does Pyrrhus sacrifice Polixène in cold blood.

(2) V.C.D.V.'s Astianax, where he is opposed rather than sympathetic to the Trojans.

(see the dramas of Ronsin and Petitot), and this echoes his role in the Hecuba.

Much of what has been discussed in connection with plays on the Troades theme in the eighteenth century points to the fact that in several respects dramatists tackled the subject no differently from the way in which their predecessors in the seventeenth century had done. However, in two important and sometimes conflicting areas the eighteenth century did seek to place its own stamp on the theme. By this time writers had realized that in order to interest, drama needed to widen its spectrum and admit a greater degree of action. La Place, as a translator and imitator of the English theatre, was especially sensitive to this fact, and in the Avertissement to his play he attributes the failure of La Fosse's Polixène on its revival in 1718 specifically to the simplicity of its plot:

Et c'est alors que je crus n'en pouvoir attribuer la cause qu'à cette même simplicité, pour ne pas dire nudité d'intrigue, par conséquent au peu de mouvemens théâtraux dont nos grands Maîtres avoient si long-temps su se passer, mais dont eux-mêmes, dans un siècle tel que le nôtre, devenu plus difficile à mesure que ses lumières & ses jouissances se sont accrues, eussent probablement senti la nécessité.

It was a logical reaction for La Place to complicate the story of his own Polyxène, but he takes this to an extreme, and his work is not representative of the eighteenth-century plays in general. The love plot was an obvious area for complication, and we are treated to a rather absurd situation as Polymestor (the king of Thrace, who had murdered Polydorus in the Hecuba) presents himself as an unexpected suitor for Polyxène's hand. His rival for the princess' love is his son Agénor, who, in true romanesque fashion, is not actually his son, but Polydore, brother to Polyxène. Spice is added to the situation by the potentially incestuous nature of Polyxène's love for Agénor. The scene of recognition between the brother and sister (IV,5) is another characteristically eighteenth-century touch. Saint-Ildephont's play

demonstrates the same tendency to move further and further away from the details given in ancient legend in an attempt to introduce novelty and thereby increase interest. In his Polixène he invents a scheming minister for Pirrhus, named Phénor, who strives constantly to separate Pirrhus from Polixène. This is because he, too, loves her, and seeks her for himself. His perfidious activities create a number of new situations, and when rejected by Polixène he is instrumental in bringing about her downfall. In Ronsin's Hécube et Polixène the complications also derive from a romantic attachment. Here Polixène's fiancé, the young prince Anténor, endangers her life with his impetuous behaviour when he believes that she has abandoned him.

Often contradictory to this tendency towards complication was the new interest awakened in the ancient theatre in the eighteenth century, for the Greek theatre, in particular, offered an example of simplicity of structure and realism in the representation of emotion. Châteaubrun's Les Troyennes, although including purely modern elements such as the substitution of another child for Astianax and the resultant peripetia which this causes, is essentially a tragedy after the ancient mould. The play itself is remarkable in that it focuses on a female situation, and the Trojan women dominate the action. Ulisse is the only member of the Greek army to play a significant role, and Thestor, who attempts to further the interests of the Trojan captives, appears more as a device of the plot than as a convincing and believable character. The fact that there is no love interest to complicate the plot makes the play almost unique, and it seems to have owed its popular success to the element of pathos and the acting talents of Mlles. Clairon and Gaussin.

Les Troyennes imitates both Euripides and Seneca in its episodic structure, and although Hécube provides a unifying influence, our attention is divided successively between Cassandre, Andromaque, and

Polixène. In the second act our attention centres on Cassandra, who is doomed to be taken to Mycenae by Agamemnon, while in the third and fourth acts we focus on the danger to Andromaque and her child. We do not hear of the imminent death of Polixène until Andromaque has left the stage (IV,7), and the tragic separation of Hécube from her last daughter fills the final act. This type of episodic structure is almost unparalleled in French classical tragedy, and, not surprisingly, attracted the attention of critics. The general tendency was to condemn this practice, and Grimm's remarks underline the difficulties of adapting the ancient Troades plays for the modern stage. He writes (Corresp. litt., II, 329):

Premièrement, cette tragédie n'en est pas une, c'est une tragédie à tiroir; c'est un recueil de tragédies; point d'action, point d'intérêt suivi, puisque l'auteur nous alarme successivement pour Hécube, pour Cassandra, pour Andromaque, pour Astyanax, pour Polixène;

La Harpe (Lycée, XI, 239) considered that Châteaubrun should have chosen between Polixène and Andromaque, and thus avoided a double action, but Fréron (op. cit., p. 120-1) believed that the dramatist could justify his choice of subject by the example of Euripides and Seneca. Collé, who was generally hostile towards the play, conceded that it did contain a fundamental unity of interest (op. cit., p. 401):

Ce qu'il a judicieusement imité du poète grec, c'est une espèce d'unité d'intérêt. ... il m'a paru ... qu'Hécube, que l'auteur ne fait jamais perdre de vue, est un point de réunion pour l'intérêt commun de cette famille infortunée.

The problem of unifying the action posed no real difficulties for other dramatists, since they had all chosen between Polyxena and Andromache.

The influence of Euripides is clearly discernible in Les Troyennes, as in many of the Polixène plays, and while one cannot deny that in some instances the influence of the Greek dramatist is more prevalent than that of Seneca (which is a fundamental difference from the Polixène

of La Fosse), the Latin Troades places us, nevertheless, in the happy and comparatively rare position of being able to report a positive and enduring influence on tragedy right up to the end of the eighteenth century. This influence was manifested mainly in the imitation of certain key episodes from the Roman drama, which provided material for the arousal of both terror and pity.

THE CHORUS OF THE 'TROADES'

(lines 371-408)

In any discussion of the influence of Senecan drama on post sixteenth-century French tragedy the choral element of the Latin plays is bound to be neglected, since the neo-classical form declined to include the chorus as used by Seneca and the sixteenth-century dramatists within its structure.

Seneca's choruses often have a philosophical content, and form general reflections arising out of the events of the play, yet not closely related to the action. So they may dwell on the nature of true kingship in reply to the tyrannical behaviour of Atreus (Thyestes 339-90), or the dangers to which those of exalted rank are exposed on seeing the murder of Agamemnon being planned (Agamemnon 57-102). The suffering of Oedipus causes them to comment on the subjection of all things to fate (Oedipus 980-94), while the effect of Hippolytus on Phaedra prompts an ode on the transience of beauty (Phaedra 761-76). The chorus' answer to the vagaries of fortune and the uncertain nature of power is often to advocate the moderate life or the golden mean, which consists in living in humble obscurity (Ag. 102-7; Thy. 391-403; Oed. 882-910). This is all unexceptionable material, and is nowhere in obvious conflict with Christian belief. In contrast to this, the second chorus of the Troades (371-408) is noticeable precisely because it does seem to propound a view antagonistic to modern Christianity. The chorus of Trojan women, amid the ruins of their city, debate the question of whether or not the soul is immortal and survives the dissolution of the body. Their conclusion, highlighted by its concise, epigrammatic form, is that the soul is entirely mortal:

post mortem nihil est ipsaque mors nihil,  
velocis spatii meta novissima;



spem ponant avidi, solliciti metum:  
tempus nos avidum devorat et chaos. (397-402)  
mors individua est, noxia corpori  
nec parcens animae:

.....  
quaeris quo iaceas post obitum loco ? (407-8)  
quo non nata iacent. -

This view, equated by the Christian church with atheism, is not Seneca's definitive statement on the subject, since the supernatural appearance of Achilles would seem to argue that the human spirit does survive death. Stoic views on the after-life were never conclusively defined, for Panaetius rejected this concept, while some Stoics allowed of a limited immortality. In his Ad Marciam Seneca speaks of death as the end of a course (XI, 2) (see the same racing metaphor in Troades 398 above), and as the final dissolution of all life's problems (XIX, 5), yet he also writes that while the bones and ashes are left in the tomb, the spirits of the good pass to Heaven to live until the end of the world (XXV, 1).

No Catholic writer, however much he admired the Troades, would echo the heresy inherent in the chorus' statement. Thus Garnier, in La Troade, expressly turns the conclusions of the chorus around, so that it becomes a profession of faith.<sup>(1)</sup> The free-thinking poets, or libertins, of the seventeenth century, in contrast, found the Epicurean flavour of these verses particularly attractive. One of these poets, Jean Dehénault (1611-82),<sup>(2)</sup> took an especial interest in the choruses of Seneca's dramas with their often Horatian tone, and composed a number of poems in imitation of the most attractive of

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(1) See the first choral ode of act III (Oeuvres complètes, ed. Lucien Pinvert (Paris 1923), II, 54-6).

(2) The poetic themes inspired by the chorus of the Troades are discussed by Professor Spink in his article 'Rochester, Dehénault, Voltaire and a Chorus from Seneca's Troades: Negation as a Source of Lyricism' (in Zagadnienia Rodzajow Literackich 8 (1966), 5-16).

these. (1) The same chorus also finds echoes in Cyrano de Bergerac's La Mort d'Agrippine (V,6), and in the work of other libertine writers. Racine, too, was well acquainted with its sentiments, and we can see 'Post mortem nihil est' written in his own hand above a passage of the Ad Marciam in his personal edition of Seneca's philosophical works (p. 176). (2)

In the eighteenth century 'post mortem nihil est' became a philosophical catchphrase, and achieved an importance transcending mere literary imitation. Voltaire, who was initiated to the ideas of the libertins through his association with the free-thinkers of the Temple, seized upon this chorus, and quoted it throughout his works as an ancient precedent for, and therefore a justification of, his own ideas on the validity of free-thought. He imagined erroneously that Seneca's tragedies had been performed before a huge concourse of spectators in the mighty arenas of Rome, and was extremely impressed by the fact that such views could be expressed with impunity. He writes in a letter to Mme. du Deffand (December 5th 1770, D 16805):

On chantait à Rome sur le théâtre public devant quarante mille auditeurs, où va t-on après la mort ? où l'on était avant de naître.

and contrasts this atmosphere with the contemporary mood of intolerance, as he goes on to say:

On voudrait cuire aujourd'hui devant quarante mille hommes celui qui répèterait ce passage de Senèque. Nous sommes encor des polissons et des barbares. (3)

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(1) His Oeuvres diverses (Paris 1670) contain imitations of the second chorus of the Thyestes, and the second (the one with which we are concerned here) and fourth choruses of the Troades. In the eighteenth century the famous chorus was translated by Louis de Court, in his L'Heureux Infortuné, histoire arabe, avec un recueil de diverses pièces fugitives en prose et en vers (Paris 1722).

(2) Gronovius edition (1649), tome I (B. N. Rés. R 2003).

(3) The fact that these lines would not have been found particularly controversial at Rome, and that there was no especial freedom of expression, above all under Nero, does not deter Voltaire from making this effective contrast.

La Harpe, a one time disciple of Voltaire, also comments on the freedom of thought reflected in this chorus (Lycée, I, 505):

C'est dans une piece de Sénèque que le chœur, qui est le personnage moral des tragédies, chantait ce vers:

Rien n'est après la mort, la mort même n'est rien.

.....  
On n'est pas étonné de ces exemples, quand on se rappelle quelle liberté de penser régnait à Rome sur ces matieres, et que tous ce que les lois exigeaient, c'est que le culte public fût respecté.

Voltaire made use of this ancient example to combat intolerance around him, and the chorus is quoted in his Traité sur la tolérance à l'occasion de la mort de Jean Calas (1763).<sup>(1)</sup> The chorus is also used as an argument for tolerance in Un Chrétien contre six Juifs (XXI Tolérance).<sup>(2)</sup>

Upon examining the actual content of the chorus, Voltaire perceived a rational view of death, freed from the restrictions of superstition. In the article Enfer in his Dictionnaire philosophique he writes (M. XVIII, 541):

On déclamait sur le théâtre de Rome ces vers de la Troade (choeur du II<sup>e</sup> acte), auxquels quarante mille mains applaudissaient:

. . . . . Taenara et aspero  
Regnum sub domino, limen et obsidens  
Custos non facili Cerberus ostio,  
Rumores vacui, verbaque inania,  
Et par sollicito fabula somnio.

Le palais de Pluton, son portier à trois têtes,  
Les couleuvres d'enfer à mordre toujours prêtes,  
Le Styx, le Phlégéon, sont des contes d'enfants,  
Des songes importuns, des mots vides de sens.

The Epicurean viewpoint expressed by the Trojan women was also synonymous with the affirmation of atheism. Thus when Frederick of Prussia wrote of his convictions on the subject in his correspondence with Voltaire, he quoted the Latin phrase (October 30th 1770, D 16731):

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(1) Chapter VIII: Si les Romains ont été tolérants (M. XXV, 43).

(2) M. XXIX, 521-2.

un Philosophe de ma connoissance (i.e. Frederick himself), homme assés déterminé dans ses sentimens, croit que nous avons assés de degrés de probabilités pour arriver à la certitude que post mortem nihil est.

D'Holbach's Système de la nature (1770) was intended to demonstrate a materialistic view of the world, and once again we find the passage from Seneca quoted here in a philosophical rather than a literary context. Chapter XIII of the first volume is concerned with the question of the immortality of the soul, and the writer's thesis that the spirit is corporeal, and thus doomed to perish, is supported by a series of quotations from ancient authorities, one of which is Sénèque le Tragique in the chorus of the Troades (I, 288).

It was to be expected that reaction to these sentiments from orthodox quarters would be extremely hostile. The Jesuit scholar, père Brumoy, speaks for the Catholic church when he condemns the chorus as impious. He also points out the dangerous precedent which this offers for the expression of controversial philosophical opinions on stage (Théâtre des Grecs, II, 596):

Le Choeur pour Intermede fait une espece d'Ode également impie & bien versifiée sur la mort, pour montrer que tout meurt, ame & corps. ...

L'Epicurisme étalé par Senèque avec tant de hardiesse & de hauteur n'a-t'il point donné lieu aux impiétés couvertes, quand elles osent se glisser sur le Théâtre moderne ?

In spite of his enthusiastic acceptance of the chorus as a weapon against intolerance of all kinds, Voltaire himself was not insensitive to the intensely negative force of the dogma of the mortality of the soul. He saw that this robbed man of his hope of happiness in a future life, and, in so doing, of his strength to endure the adversities of this life. The conclusion to his Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne (1755) stresses the importance of man's hope for a better future, and this is reinforced by a note attached to the word espérance:

Lucrece, pour détruire cette espérance, apporte, dans son troisième livre, des arguments dont la force afflige; mais il n'oppose que des vraisemblances à des vraisemblances plus fortes. Plusieurs Romains pensaient comme Lucrece;

et on chantait sur le théâtre de Rome: Post mortem nihil est, "il n'est rien après la mort". Mais l'instinct, la raison, le besoin d'être consolé, le bien de la société, prévalurent, et les hommes ont toujours eu l'espérance d'une vie à venir; (1)

In Gresset's Edouard III (1740) a strong case is made for the immortality of the soul by the duc de Worcestre, a virtuous man who has been brought down by the scheming of Volfax. He argues that without the promise of future salvation no sense can be made of the evil world in which we live:

La Mort est un bienfait, & non pas un malheur .....

.....  
Le desir du néant convient aux scélérats:  
Non, je ne puis penser que la nuit du trépas  
Eteigne avec nos jours ce flambeau de notre ame,  
Qu'alluma l'Immortel, d'une céleste flamme: (IV,6)  
La Vertu malheureuse en ces jours criminels,  
Annonce à ma raison les Siècles Eternels:  
Pour la seule douleur la Vertu n'est point née;  
Le Ciel a fait pour elle une autre destinée; (2)

Châteaubrun also rejects the views of the Latin chorus in Les Troyennes. Faced with Hécube's desire to escape her misery by committing suicide, Thestor sternly warns that death only destroys the body, it does not free the soul from awareness, or from the anger of the gods:

Non, non, n'espérez point vous soustraire à leur haine,  
L'enfer même frémit à leur voix souveraine:  
L'épouvantable mort ne détruit que le corps, (I,7)  
Et les dieux, malgré nous, sont nos dieux chez les morts.

This seems to be a reply to the Latin chorus' question of whether or

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(1) M. IX, 478. Voltaire appears less convinced of the certainty of the after-life in his reply to Frederick's declaration of atheism some fifteen years later (November 21st 1770, D 16775).

In addition to the examples which have been cited, Voltaire also mentioned the Latin chorus in his Dieu et les hommes (M. XXVIII, 155) and De l'Ame (M. XXIX, 336). He was also well acquainted with the chorus of the Medea (375-9) which seems to foretell the discovery of the New World. See the Dictionnaire philosophique, article Cyrus (M. XVIII, 310), and the Essai sur les moeurs, ch. CXLI (M. XII, 358-9).

(2) Paris (Prault père) 1740. B. N. Yf 6380.

not death releases the individual from a consciousness of his earthly suffering:

non prodest animam tradere funeri,  
sed restat miseris vivere longius ?

(376-7)

Seneca himself would no doubt have been astounded by the diversity of reaction which his chorus aroused, and the wide implications it had for eighteenth-century thought. It was by far the most widely known passage from the tragedies, and its importance lies in the fact that it was not merely a source of literary imitation but of moral and philosophical discussions.

CHAPTER XII

A Pseudo-Senecan Tragedy:

'Octavia'

The Octavia, whose subject is the tragic fate of Octavia,<sup>(1)</sup> first wife of the Emperor Nero, is a unique composition both in terms of Senecan drama and Latin literature in general, for it is our only complete surviving fabula praetexta, or Latin dramatization of Roman history. The titles of several other praetextae from the Republican and Imperial period are known to us: the Clastidium, Romulus, and Lupus of Naevius; the Sabinae and Ambracia of Ennius; the Paulus of Pacuvius; the Decius or Aeneadae and Brutus of Accius; the De suo itinere ad Lucium Lentulum proconsulem sollicitandum by Balbus;<sup>(2)</sup> the Aeneas of Pomponius Secundus; the Cato and Domitius Nero of Curatius Maternus; and the anonymous Claudia, Marcellus, and Nonae Caprotinae (?). However, none of these is extant.

Nero's repudiation, exile, and subsequent murder by proxy of Octavia in 62 A.D. are well documented in the Roman historians, Tacitus (Annals XIV, 59-64) and Suetonius (Nero), as well as in Xiphilinus' and Zonaras' abridgement of Dio Cassius LXII, 13. Not surprisingly, these events took place over a period of time,<sup>(3)</sup> and the historians

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(1) She was the daughter of Claudius and Messalina, and sister of Britannicus.

(2) Written to commemorate a mission performed by Balbus himself at the beginning of the Civil War.

(3) C. J. Herington, in his article 'Octavia Praetexta: A Survey' (Classical Quarterly 11 (1961), p. 21), hazards the opinion that they covered at least a month.

can give full weight to chronological accuracy. The author of the Octavia, however, faced with the necessity of establishing some kind of form in his work, is forced to compress the material into a manageable unit, which in this case is three days.<sup>(1)</sup> Even so, this representation of time contravenes the Aristotelian limit of twenty-four hours, and in this the Octavia differs from the other Senecan tragedies.<sup>(2)</sup> Rather than suggesting a fault of composition, it is possible that this extension of the time limit was a habitual practice of historical tragedy.

Although transmitted with the dramas of Seneca in the A-branch of the manuscript tradition, the Octavia is not the work of Seneca himself, but of an admirer and imitator of his dramatic techniques.<sup>(3)</sup> His ability is clearly inferior to that of his model, and the spurious nature of the play can be proved on stylistic grounds alone.<sup>(4)</sup> From a historical point of view, the detailed prediction of Nero's death (619-31), which took place in 68 A.D., bears evidence to a knowledge of events occurring in the three years after Seneca's own demise in 65 A. D.. The Octavia is also thematically uncharacteristic of the Latin dramatist. The suffering of the innocent Octavia can be linked with that of the Trojan women in the Troades, but the lack of variety

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(1) Lines 1-592 depict the day prior to Nero's wedding with Poppaea; 593-645 a hiatus in which the ghost of Agrippina appears; 646-89 the wedding day; and 690-983 the following day, in which Poppaea recounts an ill-omened dream of her wedding night, and Octavia is sent into exile.

(2) In none of the mythological plays is the passage of time clearly marked.

(3) We can discern something of his personality from his obvious hatred for Nero's tyrannical regime, and his sympathy for the sad plight of Octavia.

(4) R. Helm's article, 'Die Praetexta Octavia' in Berlin Akademie Sitzungsberichte, Phil-Hist Klasse (May 1934), 283-347, demonstrates the metrical and stylistic poverty of the piece.



in the choice of poetic motifs,<sup>(1)</sup> as well as the failure to develop the psychological motivation of the protagonists, separate this play from the authentic dramas.<sup>(2)</sup>

Whether the writer knew Seneca personally is not proved conclusively by the way in which the philosopher is portrayed in the Octavia. He is seen firstly in soliloquy, contrasting the contentment of his life in exile in Corsica, where he was free to engage in philosophical speculation, with the decay of the present age (377-435), and then in debate with Nero (438-592). His utterances appear somewhat stilted, and it is clear that the author has referred to the Ad Helviam V, 4 ff. for the first scene, and the De Clementia for the encounter with Nero. This wholesale plundering of the philosophical works does not suggest a close acquaintanceship with Seneca, but seems to have been held by later dramatists to contain a certain authority, for it set the tone for the way in which the philosopher was portrayed in French tragedy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Editors of the Senecan plays did not in general react favourably to the Octavia. Justus Lipsius attributes its authorship to a child ('Puer ego sum, nisi à puero ea scripta'),<sup>(3)</sup> and this attitude was echoed by later critics. In the eighteenth century it was assumed, correctly, to be the work of a different hand from any of the other tragedies. In the Histoire universelle the Octavia is emphatically separated from the name of Seneca (VIII, 172):

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(1) For example there are continual allusions to the unfortunate deaths of the members of Octavia's family (parentes, lines 65-6; Claudius 25-30, 41-4, 102, 164-5, 268, 338-41; Messalina 10-17, 102, 266-7, 947-51; Britannicus 45-6, 67-9, 103, 112-22, 166-73, 178, 242, 269, 342, 616-17).

(2) D'Argenson (Notices sur les oeuvres de théâtre, I, 97) highlights the totally undramatic nature of the action, writing that 'cela ressemble au spectacle d'un innocent agneau dévoré par un loup affamé'.

(3) Animadversiones, p. 390.

On n'y trouve ni cette abondance d'idées, ni cette richesse d'expressions qui caractérisent les autres pièces, & l'Auteur qui l'a composée, était loin d'avoir cette hardiesse, cette élévation qui, de tems en tems, font oublier les défauts des ouvrages précédens.

as in Coupé's Théâtre de Sénèque (II, 510-11). The tone of the Bibliothèque universelle des dames is even more conspicuously negative (p. 358-9):

L'Octavie est l'ouvrage de quelque Rhéteur qui ne connoissoit ni les règles du Théâtre, ni les ressources de sa langue. Elle est aussi mauvaise pour le style, que pour la conduite & les sentimens.

La Harpe places the Octavia at the bottom of the list in his evaluation of Senecan drama (Lycée, I, 501):

et la dernière, Octavie, qui n'a pu être composée qu'après le règne de Néron, puisque la mort de son épouse et son mariage avec Poppée en font le sujet, est évidemment de quelque mauvais poète qui a voulu faire la satire d'un tyran, et la publier sous le nom d'un des personnages célèbres qui avaient été ses victimes.

#### French Adaptations of the 'Octavia'

In spite of its dubious merits, the Octavia did exert some influence on French tragedy. In the sixteenth century the play gained a certain glory from its connection with the name of Seneca, and was the object of a free translation by Roland Brisset in 1590.<sup>(1)</sup> In 1599 it inspired a drama entitled La Tragédie d'Octavie, femme de l'Empereur Néron by Regnault. A summary of this play in the Bibliothèque du théâtre françois (I, 327) reveals that events were closely modelled on the Latin praetexta. In the seventeenth century Octavia herself disappeared from the limelight, but Nero and Seneca were portrayed in a number of guises. Tristan L'Hermite's<sup>(2)</sup> La Mort de Sénèque (1644)

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(1) See the Thyestes, Agamemnon, and Hercules Furens chapters for his other translations.

(2) See N.-M. Bernadin's Un Précurseur de Racine, Tristan L'Hermite, /  
contd. overleaf

is set in 65 A.D., three years after the death of Octavia, and describes the Pisonian conspiracy, which led up to Seneca's death. The major historical source is Tacitus, Annals XV, 48-74, although Seneca, while preparing for death in the final act, speaks in terms reminiscent of his philosophical works.<sup>(1)</sup> Seneca also appears as a character in Gilbert's<sup>(2)</sup> Arie et Pétus (1659), which shows Nero in love with Arie, wife of the senator Pétus. Once again Seneca is seen engaging in philosophical discussions, here upholding Stoic views against the Epicurean, atheistic stance of Pétrone.

The best known 'Neronian' play of the century was, of course, Racine's Britannicus (1669). Although the action takes place in 55 A.D., at which time Nero had yet to show his true colours, the play is in fact influenced to a certain extent by the Octavia. The role of Seneca is excluded by Racine in favour of Burrhus, and his comparison of the two figures in the second preface (1676) amounts to a questioning of the philosopher's moral stature:

Ils étaient tous deux gouverneurs de la jeunesse de Néron, .... et ils étaient fameux, Burrhus pour son expérience dans les armes et pour la sévérité de ses moeurs, militaribus curis et severitate morum; Sénèque pour son éloquence et le tour agréable de son esprit, Seneca praeceptis eloquentiae et comitate honesta.

Thus it is to Burrhus that are attributed Seneca's arguments against Nero's proposed marriage in Octavia 533-87 (see act III scene 1 of Britannicus). Léon Herrmann has made a detailed study of Racine's use of the Roman drama in his article 'Octavie source de Britannicus' (Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé 7 (April 1925), 15-28).

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contd. from p. 357 / sieur du Solier (1601-1655): sa famille, sa vie, ses oeuvres (Paris 1895).

(1) Tristan's idea of making Seneca die a newly converted Christian is, however, contrary to historical fact. Like many of his contemporaries, Tristan believed in the apocryphal friendship of Seneca with Saint Paul.

(2) See Phaedra chapter, page 294.

and he highlights most of the echoes of the Octavia, although his arguments are invalidated to a degree by his tendency to exaggerate the subtle influence of this play.

In the eighteenth century some interest continued to be shown in Roman history of the Neronian period, although this may be due more to enthusiasm for the work of Tacitus and Suetonius<sup>(1)</sup> than to a desire to emulate the Octavia. Only two printed texts on this subject survive: La Mort de Néron by Péchantré (1703) and Epicharis et Néron, ou Conspiration pour la liberté by Legouvé,<sup>(2)</sup> written almost a full century later (1794). An Epicharis, ou la Mort de Néron by the marquis de Ximenès,<sup>(3)</sup> which was performed only once (January 2nd 1753) and apparently a failure, was not published and has not survived. The same fate befell Petitot's<sup>(4)</sup> La Conjuration de Pison, which was acted at the Comédie-française in 1795. The only tragedy to echo the title of the Latin play is the Octavie usually attributed to the Jesuit, père de Sacy. This survives in manuscript form only, and is preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale (manuscrits français 9241, fol. 206-224), together with a comedy, Le Contraste (ms. fr. 9240).

This Octavie manuscript presents a fundamental problem, in that it is not possible to attribute an exact date to it. Confusion regarding this dating derives from the eighteenth century, for in the Bibliothèque du théâtre françois the play is mentioned twice, firstly under the heading vers 1690 (III, 117) and secondly under the heading vers 1720

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(1) All periods of Roman history were an extremely useful source of material for tragic dramatists of the eighteenth century, and Livy, Sallust, Tacitus, Suetonius, Plutarch, and Dio Cassius provided invaluable information.

(2) See Phoenissae chapter, page 186.

(3) See Lancaster, French Tragedy in the Time of Louis XV, II, 374-5.

(4) See Troades chapter, page 317.

(III, 163). Both references are presumably to the same play, since in both places the same comedy, Le Contraste, is mentioned. Mouhy (Abrégé de l'histoire du théâtre françois, I, lvi) also mentions 'two' Octavie plays: 'OCTAVIE, Tragédie par le Jésuite Sacy, manuscrite, vers l'année 1690', and 'OCTAVIE, Tragédie manuscrite, in folio, vers l'année 1720'. Modern bibliographies have seen that there is only a single play in question,<sup>(1)</sup> and Lancaster<sup>(2)</sup> argues that the handwriting of this manuscript would rather indicate the later date of composition.

The subject of the play is derived from the Roman Octavia, in that it focuses on Nero's rejection of Octavia and his plans to marry Poppaea.<sup>(3)</sup> The action is set in 62 A.D., but opens at a point slightly later than the Octavia, for in the first scene we hear that the head of Plautus has been brought to Néron. In the Latin drama Nero gives the order for Plautus and Sulla to be slaughtered and their heads delivered to

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(1) The play is number 10841 in Brenner's A Bibliographical List of Plays in the French Language.

(2) See French Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century, part IV, i, 350.

(3) As in the Octavia, the play opens with the heroine lamenting Néron's crimes and her own loss of place to Poppée, whom Néron intends to marry. Phénus, who is in love with Octavie, seeks to avenge the wrongs done to her, but she forbids any action, threatening to denounce him to the Emperor if he proceeds with his plot. Sénèque attempts to reason with Néron, and advocates a policy of clemency. He also begs to be allowed to retire. Their discussion is interrupted by Anicétus, who delivers an anonymous letter warning Néron that Poppée will attempt to destroy him. Néron resolves on this account to postpone his marriage. This letter had in fact told the truth, for Poppée is still devoted to Othon, and is plotting to obtain the throne for him. Phénus, meanwhile, is unwilling to give up his plot, but Octavie decides that she cannot permit an uprising against her husband. She reminds Néron of her claims on the Empire, but he orders her to leave Rome before dawn on the following day. In spite of this brutal behaviour, Octavie warns Sénèque of the plot against Néron, and he resolves to save his master. The fourth act begins at dawn on the next day. Néron has had a foreboding dream, in which it was predicted that he would lose his throne to Othon. Octavie's departure from Rome has meanwhile been prevented by the people. Their rebellion is halted by Octavie, but Néron is still determined to have her killed. Phénus begs her to escape, but in preference to this cowardly act she commits suicide.

him in lines 438-9. Sénèque's request for permission to retire (II,1) is historically accurate, but not mentioned in the Octavia. The inclusion of Phénius<sup>(1)</sup> rebellion, however, represents a compression of time, for although he was involved in the Pisonian conspiracy, this did not take place until 65 A.D..

Sacy appears to have been influenced by the representation of time in the Octavia, for his play breaks, or at least stretches to the limit, the unity of time. The first three acts of Octavie depict the day prior to Octavie's banishment. Acts four and five clearly refer to the following day. This second day encompasses Octavie's abortive journey into exile and her later suicide. While these events may conceivably have been accomplished within twenty-four hours, it is an extremely unusual practice in French classical tragedy to represent parts of two days. The fact that the unity of action is also poorly observed suggests that Octavie is the work of an amateur. The tragedy ends, not unexpectedly, with the death of Octavie, but at this stage the fates of all the other characters remain undecided. We are not told whether Néron marries Poppée, nor do we know what will now happen to Phénius, or indeed Sénèque, who is not mentioned at all at the end of the play.

In spite of the similarity of theme, Sacy makes curiously little direct use of the Latin text. However, there is no doubt that he knew the Octavia. The characterization of Octavie, for example, is to a certain extent imitative of this play.<sup>(2)</sup> Her wretched situation, expressed in such lines as,

La suite en est affreuse, et tu vas t'estonner  
Qu'a de tels maux les Dieux m'ayent pu destiner. (I,1)

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(1) Faenius Rufus, praetorian prefect with Tigellinus.

(2) We must also bear in mind the possible influence of Tacitus, as well as Racine.

echoes Octavia 57-8:

o mea nullis aequanda malis  
fortuna, ...

and the tone of lamentation throughout the Latin drama. Octavie's realization that the only way to end her suffering is by death:

il n'est point d'autre port  
Pour finir mes tourments que la plus prompte mort. (I,1)

imitates lines 100-1 of the Roman drama:

Toleranda quamvis patiar, haud unquam queant  
nisi morte tristi nostra finiri mala.

Phénus' suggestion that Octavie should attempt to win back her husband:

Il vous est encor cher, s'il le pouvoit scavoir,  
Peut estre on le verroit rentrer dans le devoir. (I,2)  
Voyant couler vos pleurs seroit'il inflexible ?

owes something perhaps to the nurse's advice in Octavia 84-5:

tu modo blando  
vince obsequio placata virum.

and Octavie's alienation from her husband:

Moy je pourrois prier un Tyran que j'abhorre,  
Que je n'aimai jamais loin de l'aimer encore! (I,2)

is as great as in the Latin play (see lines 86-8 and 222 ff.):

Iungentur ante saeva sideribus freta  
et ignis undae, Tartaro tristi polus, (222-3)

....  
quam cum scelesti coniugis mente impia  
mens nostra, ... (225-6)

Octavia's virtue is stressed both in the Octavia (sancta (49)) and in Tacitus, Annals XIII, 12, 2 ('nobili quidem et probitatis spectatae'). Sacy emphasizes this aspect of the character, and provides in his heroine an outstanding example of moral integrity. Not only does Octavie lead a stainless life, but her conception of virtue also includes loyalty to her husband. Knowledge of Phénus' planned rebellion against Néron arouses a conflict in her heart:

Il faut que de l'hymen je viole les droits,  
Ou qu'etouffant en moy toute reconnoissance,  
Je porte un coup mortel a qui prend ma deffense. (III,3)

Mais s'il recoit Poppée en ma place en son lict,  
Neron ne rompt'il pas le noeud qui nous unit ?

but she concludes that she cannot betray her husband:

Que dis-je, qu'un epoux soit fidele, ou perfide,  
C'est a la vertu seule a nous servir de guide, (III,3)  
Et malgré ses forfaits ....

This loyalty seems somewhat misplaced in view of Néron's intention to divorce and banish her, and is nowhere present in the Latin drama.<sup>(1)</sup>

The very same type of loyalty was shown by Mégare to the tyrant Lycus in Morand's Mégare,<sup>(2)</sup> and such self-sacrificing devotion seems to have been regarded as the epitome of feminine virtue in the eighteenth century.

Octavie's desire to have no guilt attached to her name:

Il ne me suffit pas de n'estre point coupable  
On oze m'accuser; c'est diffamer mon nom, (V,4)  
Et je dois estre mesme exempte de soupçon.

is, however, based on the Latin Octavia's sentiments:

trepidante semper corde non mortis metu,  
sed sceleris - absit crimen a fatis meis, (106-8)  
mori iuvabit;

The love of the people for the tragic princess, which is referred to in Octavia 183, where the nurse comforts her charge by saying:

Confirmet animum civium tantus favor. (3)

is also stressed in Octavie. Néron is very much aware of the people's love for his wife:

Je ne me flatte point, et je scais la tendresse (II,3)  
Que le peuple Romain conserve a la Princesse:

and they revolt in her favour as she is led away to banishment. However, this show of support for Octavie produces an unforeseen and tragic

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(1) In fact Octavia begs Jupiter to destroy him (227-31).

(2) See the Hercules Furens chapter. Péchantre's Octavie (see later in this chapter) displays the same characteristic.

(3) Tacitus (Annals XIV, 59, 3) also tells us that Octavia was burdensome to Nero 'nomine patris et studiis populi ...'



result, as Néron resolves to reward it with the death of his wife. He says:

Je ne veux pour calmer tous les seditieux,  
Qu'exposer Octavie expirante a leurs yeux, (V,2)  
Sa mort va me venger de ce peuple perfide ...

The source for this brutal reaction is found in the Octavia, lines 827-30:

at illa, cui me civium subicit furor,  
suspecta coniunx et soror semper mihi,  
tandem dolori spiritum reddat meo  
iramque nostram sanguine extinguat suo.

Sacy's description of the violence of the rioters:

Ils insultent par tout ces bustes reverez  
Qu'a son amour pour vous Cesar a consacrez.  
Soit marbre, soit airain, empreint de vostre image,  
Tout tombe sous leurs coups, tout se sent de leur rage.

....  
Au trosne des Cesars (ils) veulent la replacer. (IV,5)

....  
dans leurs perfides mains ils veulent qu'on vous livre,  
Madame (Poppée), et si fuyant loin de ces tristes murs  
Vous ne cherchez bientost des aziles plus surs,  
Contre eux dans ce palais rien ne peut vous deffendre,  
Ils menacoient deja de le reduire en cendre;

is also imitated directly from the Octavia:

quaecumque claro marmore effigies stetit  
aut aere fulgens, ora Poppaeae gerens, (794-7)  
afflicta vulgi manibus et saevo iacet  
eversa ferro;

....  
sepire flammis principis sedem parant,  
populi nisi irae coniugem reddat novam, (801-3)  
reddat penates Claudiae victus suos.

The fact that Seneca appears in this play is of great significance, for, if indeed Octavie does belong to the eighteenth century, it would seem to be the only instance in which the philosopher is portrayed on stage throughout the whole of this period.<sup>(1)</sup> Sacy patently admired Seneca, for he shows him in a highly favourable light. He is seen as a force for good, and strives to bring Néron back onto the path of

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(1) It is possible that he also featured as a character in Ximenès' lost Epicaris, ou la Mort de Néron.

virtue, pleading the case for clemency:

Jupiter eut toujours la clemence en partage  
Vous devez icy bas estre sa vive image; (II,1)

The dramatist was no doubt acquainted with Seneca's prose work on the subject (De Clementia), but the philosopher also advocates clemency in the Octavia:

Magnum timoris remedium clementia est. (442)

The basic inspiration for a Seneca/Nero dialogue (II,1) may have come from the Octavia (438-592), but Sacy referred to Tacitus for the majority of speeches he puts into the mouth of S n que. Here he found Seneca's request to be allowed to retire (Annals XIV, 53, 3):

abavus tuus Augustus Marco Agrippae Mytilenense secretum,  
C. Maecenati urbe in ipsa velut peregrinum otium permisit;  
quorum alter bellorum socius, alter Romae pluribus  
laboribus iactatus ampla quidem, sed pro ingentibus  
meritis, praemia acceperant.

which he paraphrased as:

Daignez a ma vieillesse accorder un asile;  
Auguste vostre ayeul ne le refusa pas  
A ses deux favoris Agrippa, Mecenas, (II,1)  
L'un d'eux dans les combats, l'autre au milieu de Rome,  
Avoient egalement bien servi ce grand homme:

as well as Seneca's willingness to surrender part of the wealth bestowed on him by the Emperor (XIV, 53, 5) and the substance of Nero's reply (XIV, 56).

In addition to Tacitus and the Octavia, Sacy's interpretation of the subject was deeply influenced by Britannicus. Racine's portrait of N ron, although relating to an earlier period of his life than does Octavie, was clearly in Sacy's mind as he composed his play, and the contrast of good and evil advice bestowed on the Emperor by S n que (II,1) and by Anic tus (II,2 and 3) obviously derives from the Burrhus/Narcisse dichotomy in Britannicus. There are also a number of verbal echoes of the most famous lines from the seventeenth-century tragedy.

Sacy introduces certain fictitious elements into his tragedy, chief of which is Ph nius' love for Octavie. This romantic episode

is a concession to contemporary taste, for none of the historians mention any connection between Faenius Rufus and Octavia. It is also an attempt to balance power more equally between Octavie and Néron, for in the Latin drama Octavia is crushed without any effective resistance being offered to the Emperor. Poppée's loyalty to Othon and her desire to destroy Néron and place her lover on the throne is another invention, which may have some connection with Poppée's feelings for Othon in Péchantré's La Mort de Néron. It is by no means proved that Sacy referred to Péchantré's play, but the assumption is given added weight by certain common characteristics in the portrayal of the character of Octavie. If this is so, Sacy's drama would seem to belong to the eighteenth century, since it is unlikely that Péchantré would have known and imitated Octavie.

Nicolas de Péchantré (1638-c.1709)<sup>(1)</sup> gained a reputation as a fine Latinist and scholar,<sup>(2)</sup> and was especially attracted by the possibility of dramatizing events from Roman history. He had gained his greatest success in the late seventeenth century with Géta (1687),<sup>(3)</sup> which dealt with the hostility between the two sons of the Emperor Severus, and also composed a Jugurtha (1692) based on Sallust's Bellum Iugurthinum. La Mort de Néron,<sup>(4)</sup> which was first performed on February 21st 1703, was only a moderate success, earning a total of nine performances.

Certain accusations were levelled against Péchantré for the way in which he interpreted his subject in La Mort de Néron, and in a long

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(1) See Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre françois, XIV, 298-9, for his biography.

(2) Titon du Tillet (Le Pamasse françois (1732), p. 511) writes, 'Il a composé des Vers latins qui sont fort estimez'.

(3) This was performed a total of 146 times.

(4) Paris (Pierre Ribou) 1703. See Lancaster, Sunset, p. 59-64.

and informative preface to the play he outlines the nature of these criticisms. One of the most significant of these was that he had compressed time in an unsatisfactory manner:

On condamne en second lieu le dessein de ma piece, & l'on prétend que je ne sçaurois concilier dans un même jour le mariage de Néron & de Poppée avec leur mort, ny avec celle d'Octavie, qu'en un mot il ne sçauroit m'être permis de réunir dans le cours d'un soleil des faits que tout le monde sçait être separez par un intervalle de plusieurs années.

Péchantré's desire to include four actions within his play - the marriage of Néron and Poppée, the death of Poppée, that of Octavie, and that of Néron - is the cause of the problem, for this necessitates an extreme distortion of real time. Into the space of twenty-four hours he contrives to fit a far wider spectrum of events than occurs in the Octavia (which itself represents three days in stage time), and he compresses actions which in reality took place over a period of ten years. If we are to suppose that the play focuses on Nero's last day, then the action must be set in 68 A.D.. This dating is supported by references to the revolts of Galba and Vindex (I,1; I,5; II,5), which took place in that year. However, by 68 A.D. Octavia and Poppaea were both dead.<sup>(1)</sup> On the same day on which he dies Néron is shown as declaring his love to Poppée and marrying her, and Poppée herself only hears for the first time of Néron's attachment to her in act II scene 1. Yet, according to Tacitus, Poppaea had become Nero's mistress as early as 58 A.D.. Péchantré's liberties are not restricted to time alone, but also encompass place. In reality the deaths of Nero, Poppaea, and Octavia occurred in entirely different locations, and their modes of death are also largely falsified by the dramatist.<sup>(2)</sup>

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(1) Octavia was executed in 62, while Poppaea died in 65.

(2) Nero committed suicide at the estate of a freedman, Phaon, outside Rome; Poppaea died at Rome, after being kicked by Nero when pregnant; Octavia was killed on the island of Pandateria. In La Mort de Néron Néron and Octavie both commit suicide, while Poppée is stabbed in error by Néron.

Péchantré justified his alteration of historical detail by arguing that he sought to portray the vraisemblable rather than the vrai, but unfortunately his extreme compression of events is utterly lacking in verisimilitude.

Although the play is entitled La Mort de Néron, it is mainly concerned with Néron's relationships with Octavie and Poppée, and as such has a connection with the Octavia. However, as in Sacy's drama, there is little close imitation of the Latin text, and it is often difficult to decide whether Péchantré based his work merely on the information provided by the historians (especially Tacitus), or whether he also referred to certain features of the Octavia. Racine's Britannicus is another source which has to be taken into account.

The only ancient authorities Péchantré himself mentions are Tacitus, whose portrait of Nero's emotions after the murder of Agrippina especially interested him (preface):

Neron cependant paroît presque dans tout le cours de la piéce obsédé par l'ombre d'Agrippine; voicy comme Tacite le peint après le meurtre de sa mere; Confecto scelere moestus, incolumitati suae infensus, morti parentis illacrimans, modo per silentium defixus, interdium pavore exurgens ac mentis inops; (1)

and Virgil, who, with Dido's declaration of her intention to haunt Aeneas after her death, offered an example of a spirit of vengeance (Aeneid IV, 386). In La Mort de Néron the ghost of Agrippine forms an important motif, and in the opening scene Nymphidius tells Othon how Néron is unable to sleep at night:

S'il ferme quelquefois sa paupiere pesante,  
De cent spectres divers un (sic) Image effrayante (I,1)  
L'inquiéte, l'agite & le rend transporté.

and is tormented during the day:

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(1) This quotation is inaccurate, and should read:  
Sed a Caesare perfecto demum scelere magnitudo eius  
intellecta est. reliquo noctis modo per silentium  
defixus, saepius pavore exurgens et mentis inops lucem  
opperiebatur tamquam exitium adlaturam. (Annals XIV, 10, 1)

Toujours la même horreur le trouble, le poursuit;  
Ou le Phantôme affreux d'une Mere sanglante, (I,1)  
Ou l'aspect importun d'une Epouse vivante ...

It is likely that Péchantré was also influenced in his portrait of Néron's state of mind by Suetonius (Nero 34, 4), who writes that Nero confessed he was often harassed by his mother's ghost and by the whips and burning brands of the Furies after her death, as well as by the Octavia, where the ghost of Agrippina features as a character. In the Roman drama Agrippina speaks in a vacuum and has no effect on the action, but she does create a sinister atmosphere, and gives a prophecy of the grim punishment which her son will suffer. The French dramatist was not sufficiently daring to bring the ghost on stage, but he does allow Agrippine a direct influence on events. The Latin character's spoken threat to disturb Nero's marriage with Poppaea:

Tellure rupta Tartaro gressum extuli,  
Stygiam cruenta praeferens dextra facem  
thalamis scelestis: nubat his flammis meo (593-7)  
Poppaea nato iuncta, quas vindex manus  
dolorque matris vertet ad tristes rogos.

becomes a physical reality in the final act of La Mort de Néron, as Néron sees the ghost of his mother at his wedding:

Soudain Neron se trouble, il prend un air farouche;  
Ses yeux sont égarez, tous ces (sic) discours confus, (V,1)  
Il tient, il voit Poppée, & ne la connoît plus;  
Il croit en la voyant, voir l'affreuse Agrippine,  
Il croit qu'à tous momens cette ombre l'assassine.

This frenzied vision precipitates the tragedy, for Néron pursues Poppée, believing her to be the ghost of Agrippine:

(Poppée) Pressé par les horreurs d'une affreuse Megere,  
Neron ne voit en moi que l'ombre de sa Mere; (V,6)  
Il me cherche, il me fuit; & son coeur agité  
D'amour & de fureur est pour moi transporté.

and finally kills her in error.

Certain other aspects of the play also point to a probable use of the Octavia as a source. For example, Néron's conception of himself as an absolute ruler possessed of total power:

Et quiconque peut tout ne se refuse rien. (I,6)

echoes his attitude in the Octavia:

Fortuna nostra cuncta permittit mihi. (451)

He justifies his crimes with the excuse that Augustus and Tiberius both shed much blood:

Il est vray, j'ay puni, j'ay vengé des grands crimes,  
A répandre du sang je me suis vû forcé;  
Mais Auguste & Tibere en ont-ils moins versé ? (I,5)

which once again suggests a use of the Octavia:

ille qui meruit pia  
virtute caelum, divus Augustus, viros (504-7)  
quot interemit nobiles, iuvenes senes  
sparsos per orbem, ...

In the De Clementia mention is also made of Augustus' crimes and subsequent clemency.

As in the Octavia, Néron is deeply smitten with love for Poppée.

His extravagant expressions of love for her:

Mais les charmes flatteurs que je vois dans Poppée,  
Sont les seules vertus dont mon ame est frappée. (I,2)  
....  
Poppée est à mes yeux charmante, incomparable,  
Je ne voi sous le Ciel qu'elle seule adorable;

are imitative of the Roman drama, where the Emperor exclaims:

dignamque thalamis coniugem inveni meis  
genere atque forma, victa cui cedat Venus (544-6)  
Iovisque coniunx et ferox armis dea.

although the initial idea of portraying Néron in love may well have come from Britannicus.

The notion of providing Néron with a virtuous adviser - here Traséas, (1) the tribune of the people and representative of the Senate - may also have been suggested by Racine, and act III scene 1 of Britannicus (where Burrhus advises against marriage with Junie) offered Péchantré a model for a scene of confrontation between Traséas and Néron. This takes place in act II scene 5. Néron's determination

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(1) Thrasea Paetus, a Stoic condemned by Nero in 66 A.D..

to wed Poppée:

J'ai fait un nouveau choix, je vais le couronner.  
Poppée aura ma foy. (II,5)

and Traséas' emphatic declaration of Octavie's virtue:

Mais Seigneur, Octavie a pour soi sa vertu.  
Rien ne ternit sa gloire, & la plus noire envie (II,5)  
Ne sauroit obscurcir une si belle vie.

can both be traced back to the Racinian episode, although they derive originally from the Octavia, where Nero states:

hic mihi iugales praeferat taedas deus  
iungatque nostris igne Poppaeam toris. (570-1)

and Seneca says:

merita te divi patris  
aetasque frangat coniugis, probitas pudor. (586-7)

Traséas' warning that the people will be displeased by Néron's action, however:

Si vous l'abandonnez, le peuple son soutien  
Répandra tout son sang pour relever le sien. (II,5)

is found in the Octavia alone:

Vix sustinere possit hos thalamos dolor  
videre populi, sancta nec pietas sinat. (572-3)

and this suggests a detailed knowledge of the Latin play as well as of Britannicus.

As we have already seen in connection with Sacy's Octavie, the support of the people for Octavia is an important feature of the Roman drama, and the nurse consoles her charge by stressing their power to oppose Nero:

Confirmet animum civium tantus favor. (183)

.....  
Vis magna populi est. (185)

Emilie comforts Octavie in the same way in La Mort de Néron, arguing that Néron will not banish her since

Il voit pour vous venger mille mains toutes prêtes. (IV,1)

The Senate is also loyal to Octavie, as Othon states in the opening scene:



Tant qu'à ses sacrez noeuds Neron sera fidelle,  
Le Senat contre tous sou'tiendra sa querelle;  
Mais, si pour Octavie oubliant son devoir,  
Neron peut la bannir pour ne plus la revoir; (I,1)  
Le Senat indigné de son ingratitude,  
S'affranchira d'un joug trop superbe & trop rude.

Péchantré had probably also read of Octavia's popularity in Tacitus (Annals XIV, 59, 3).<sup>(1)</sup> Certainly the reports at the beginning of act five (V,2) that the people have torn down the statues of Poppée seem to be based on Annals XIV, 61, 1, although the same act is described in graphic detail in the Octavia (see lines 792-803).

Like her ancient counterpart, Octavie is troubled by the situation in which she finds herself, and in the first scene of the fourth act she indulges in laments reminiscent of those of the heroine of the Octavia. She foresees that the present day will bring the end of her life:

Ce jour va de mes jours éteindre le flambeau;  
Ce jour dans un exil va m'ouvrir le tombeau; (IV,1)  
Pour jamais de Neron je me vois séparée,

as does Octavia:

dabit hic nostris  
finem curis vel morte dies: (652-5)  
non ego saevi cedere cogar  
coniugis ora,

However, it must be noted that whereas Octavia sees the day of death as a release and a means of escape from Nero, Octavie views it as a terrible misfortune. Octavie goes on to list Néron's crimes, which cause her to fear for her own safety:

Il perdit dans son Frere un rival innocent.  
Il tenoit sa grandeur d'une Mere perfide,  
Pour l'en recompenser il fut son parricide. (IV,1)  
Pyson, Silla, Plautus, Pollion massacrez,  
Pour venir à ma perte ont été ses degrez.

References to these crimes make up a good deal of the Latin material, and Octavia is similarly anxious about her own position:

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(1) See page 363, note 3, in this chapter.

... cuius (i.e. Neronis) obsequium meus  
haud ferre posset fata post fratris dolor (111-13)  
scelere interempti,

....  
adice his superbam paelicem, nostrae domus  
spoliis nitentem, cuius in munus suam  
Stygiae parentem natus imposuit rati, (125-30)  
quam dira post naufragia superato mari  
ferro interemit saevior pelagi fretis;  
quae spes salutis post nefas tantum mihi ?

This long lament ends with a plea to her father Claudius:

emergere umbris et fer auxilium tuae  
natae invocanti, genitor, aut Stygios sinus (134-6)  
tellure rupta pande, quo praeceps ferar.

as does the speech of Octavie:

O vous! Manes sacrez de mon illustre Pere  
De mes malheurs presens trop fideles témoins, (IV,1)  
Ne m'abandonnez pas en ces pressans besoins;

As in the ancient play and the accounts of the historians, Octavie is seen as an extremely virtuous character. However, in Péchantré's eyes, this virtue also implies devotion to her husband. This loyalty<sup>(1)</sup> persists throughout the play, in spite of Néron's aim to divorce and exile her, and she attempts to explain to Emilie that

c'est cet Epoux qu'un Pere m'a donné,  
Tout barbare qu'il est, quelque ingrat qu'il puisse être,  
Je ne puis, Emilie, encor le méconnoître;  
Et quoi que de sa main je doive apprehender, (IV,1)  
Je lui donnai ma foi; je veux la lui garder.

Not surprisingly, in view of the fact that she was to suffer a dreadful death at Nero's instigation,<sup>(2)</sup> the Octavia of the Roman drama has no sentimental illusions about her relationship with her husband.

The modifications which the character of Octavia undergoes in the modern tragedy serve both to bring her in line with the audience's

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(1) This is the most significant feature which La Mort de Néron has in common with Sacy's Octavie.

(2) Tacitus tells us that her limbs were bound with cords and her veins opened. When this proved too lengthy a means of death, she was suffocated in a boiling bath. Finally her head was cut off and taken back to Rome to be viewed by Poppaea (Annals XIV, 64, 2).

expectations of a noble heroine in the Cornelian mould, and to make her personality more varied and dramatic. The extreme passivity of the ancient heroine and her failure to struggle against the will of Nero robbed the Octavia of any element of emotional conflict, and thus of much of its power to interest or touch the emotions of an audience. Péchantré's character is less timid, and meets Néron on equal terms. Her self-respect, or amour-propre, causes her to disdain Poppée, and she scornfully suggests to her husband means of freeing himself so that he can marry the object of his affections:

Et pour anticiper l'heure de mon trépas,  
Le fer ni le poison ne te manqueront pas, (IV,4)  
Ou peut-être un Esquif dressé pour mon naufrage;  
Ce fut là pour ta mere autrefois ton ouvrage, ...

The Octavia of the Latin drama also has visions of a fatal ship:

sed iam spes est nulla salutis:  
fratris cemo miseranda ratem.  
hac en cuius vecta carina (906-10)  
quondam genetrix, nunc et thalamis  
expulsa soror miseranda vehar.

but this is a source of terror to her, and she is never seen to address Nero face to face.

Instead of focusing the action on Octavia, as do the Roman dramatist and père Sacy, Péchantré decided to make Nero the central figure of his play, and in so doing he clearly sought to offer a sequel to Britannicus. However, in assigning the principal role to a character who was historically little more than a monster, he incurred the displeasure of many. Among these critics was Parfaict, who writes (Histoire du théâtre françois, XIV, 297):

Il suffit de dire que le choix de son sujet n'est point digne du Théâtre, parce que le principal personnage de la Pièce est un Prince, dont le nom n'inspire que l'horreur & le mépris, & dont il faut rappeler tous les crimes & les extravagances.

The fundamental problem lies, as he says, in the fact that the Aristotelian concept of the tragic hero can in no way (in spite of Péchantré's arguments to the contrary in his preface) be applied to

the sadistic and criminal personality of Nero. (1)

Péchantré was interested in the contrast between Nero's first and last days, and in La Mort de Néron Néron has become the antithesis of the young Emperor at the opening of Britannicus. He has long since made the choice for evil, and whereas in Racine's play:

Enfin Néron naissant  
A toutes les vertus d'Auguste vieillissant. (I,1)

in La Mort de Néron:

Ce n'est plus ce Neron si genereux, si juste,  
Qui dans ces premiers ans faisoit revivre Auguste;  
C'est de la vertu même un mortel ennemi, (IV,1)  
Ce n'est plus qu'un Tyran dans le crime affermi.

Néron's various crimes are ever present in the background, and are recalled by Octavie in act IV scene 1.

Nevertheless, Péchantré argued that the death of this man could create a pathetic effect. He writes in his preface:

Mais si ce même homme tout cruel, tout scelerat qu'il  
est, ayant en soy un mélange de grandes vertus, vient  
par un soudain revers à tomber de sa grandeur dans le  
dernier accablement, ou dans les mains de ses ennemis,  
il excite dès lors la crainte & la pitié pour luy-même.

To enhance this pathetic effect, Péchantré endowed Néron with an ability to be touched by noble sentiments. Prior to the final catastrophe he is affected by Octavie's virtuous reproaches, and resolves to reform his behaviour:

Neron songe plutôt, songe à te reconnoître,  
Cesse d'être Neron; ou si tu pretends l'être, (IV,5)

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(1) Certainly in the Octavia Nero has no redeeming features. He is the tyrannus (lines 33, 88, 110, 250, 620, 899, 959), a crudelis vir (48), ingratus (93), a hostis (150), a iuvenis infandi ingeni, scelerum capax (152-3), immitis vir (177), scelestus coniunx (225), nefandus princeps (227), saevus dux (235), dux impius (237), non tam ferum Typhona ... Tellus edidit (238-9), hic gravior illo pestis, hic hostis deum hominumque (240-1), tam nocens (247), violentus maritus (254-5), impius (363), monstrum (372), natus crudelis (603), nefandus (643), saevus coniunx (654-5), dirus vir (661), dirus (671), saevus natus (957). In other plays, such as Tristan's La Mort de Sénèque, Gilbert's Arie et Pétus, and Britannicus, the focus is shifted, at least nominally, to more suitable heroes.

Sois tel que tu le fus dès tes plus jeunes ans,  
Suis les pas des Césars, & non ceux des Tyrans.

It is only the Senate's opposition to his new marriage which determines him to carry out his guilty plan. In spite of his betrayal of Octavie, one cannot but feel sympathy for him at the end of the play, for having married Poppée he accidentally kills her, and then, realizing what he has done, is overwhelmed with remorse. In the final scene he commits suicide, following the example of Octavie, and he dies a pathetic hero, exhorting himself to one final act of courage:

Meurs, Néron, meurs enfin mieux que tu n'a (sic) vécu. (V,14)

It was this ambiguous mixture of villainy and heroism which angered critics, and Péchantré has, by altering Nero's real personality, contravened the Horatian principle of verisimilitude in the depiction of well known mythological or historical characters. (1)

Yet, even more than the character of Néron, Péchantré's interpretation of Poppée was censured by critics. The dramatist tells us that (preface)

On ne peut souffrir que Poppée après tant de marques de tendresse données à Othon, après tant de sermens de ne la quitter jamais, semble se rendre à Néron dès le premier aveu que ce Prince luy fait de son amour.

Poppée's situation in the play is analogous to that of Racine's Junie, and audiences and critics alike expected to see a character who would not yield to Imperial blandishments. In this respect the Octavia offered Péchantré no inspiration at all, for in this play Poppaea merely recounts to her nurse a frightening and foreboding dream she has experienced (712 ff.). Tacitus, however, sums up her character succinctly when he writes that she paraded modesty and practised depravity (Annals XIII, 45, 3). Péchantré strove to work out a compromise between Junie's virtue and loyalty and Poppaea's historical

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(1) De Arte Poetica 123-4: 'sit Medea ferox invictaque,' etc..

immorality and ambition, but he achieved an unhappy balance which results in unacceptable inconsistency. Poppée swears her devotion to Othon:

Ma foy sera pour vous inviolable & pure,  
Et je mourray plutôt que vous être parjure. (II,2)

and the audience believes in her sincerity, but then her intense ambition, coupled with threats from Néron against Othon and a desire to humiliate Octavie, cause her to yield to Néron's advances.

Tacitus was undoubtedly the most important classical source of La Mort de Néron, although Péchantré did make some use of the Octavia. Like many of his contemporaries, he also owed a considerable debt to Racine. The difficulties in his play arise out of his inability to forge these three models into an acceptable whole. In spite of his courageous attempts to prove the contrary, it was fundamentally impossible to concentrate years of history into a single day, and to fit Nero and Poppaea into the mould of tragic hero and heroine alongside Octavia.

No other tragedies featuring the character of Octavia were composed in the eighteenth century, and subsequent plays concentrated on the role of Epicharis in the Pisonian conspiracy of 65 A.D.<sup>(1)</sup> Although never published, the plot of Ximenès' Epicharis, ou la Mort de Néron is described in the Almanach des spectacles of 1754 (p. 193-4). This tells of a secret marriage between Epicharis and Néron, resulting in the birth of a son, Drusus. Jealousy at Néron's proposal to marry Poppée after the death of Octavie, instead of re-instating herself, causes Epicharis to join a conspiracy to kill the Emperor. The situation is complicated by the fact that Drusus loves Poppée. All these events are purely imaginary, and it is doubtful whether the tragedy owed anything to the Octavia. A fragment of the play (act II

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(1) See Tacitus, Annals XV, 48-74 for the details of the conspiracy, and XV, 51-7 for Epicharis' involvement.

scene 1) is preserved in the author's Choix de poésies anciennes ou inédites (1806), p. 19-21, and this tells us that Seneca took part in the rebellion, but not whether he actually appeared on stage.

It is not surprising that the Epicharis story was popular in the Revolutionary period, for it tells of a common woman's struggle against tyranny. Legouvé's Epicharis et Néron, ou Conspiration pour la liberté<sup>(1)</sup> casts the freedwoman in the role of popular heroine, and the play is symbolic of the struggle against tyranny in France in the last years of the eighteenth century.

There is little to suggest any direct use of the Octavia in this play. Néron is portrayed as a monster,<sup>(2)</sup> in keeping with his historical image, and the death of Octavie is noted as one of his past crimes (see I,1). His degeneracy is stressed from the very first scene of the play, in which Epicharis complains that he is holding a debauched festival:

Cette fête insolente, où Néron et Poppée,  
Au milieu d'une cour, à leur plaisir occupée, (I,1)  
Dont la bassesse obscène imite leurs fureurs,  
De la plus vile orgie étalent les horreurs. (3)

Néron himself has no illusions about the nature of his rule:

J'assieds sur l'échafaud mon trône ensanglanté;  
Et je veux que toujours le monde épouvanté (III,2)  
Redoute, en me voyant, le signal du supplice,  
Et que l'avenir même à mon nom seul pâlisse.

In his indifference as to whether he is loved or hated:

Je ne m'abuse point, sans doute ils me haïssent; (III,2)  
Mais il m'importe peu, pourvu qu'ils m'obéissent;

he echoes the often quoted Latin adage, 'oderint dum metuant', which appears in the Octavia, lines 458-9 as

Metuant necesse est -

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(1) This was a successful play, and was generally praised by contemporaries. It was first performed on February 4th 1794.

(2) Contemporaries saw this as a portrait of Robespierre.

(3) Text from the Oeuvres complètes, tome I.

Iussisque nostris pareant. (1)

However, Legouvé may well have found this phrase in Suetonius (Gaius Caligula 30, 1), for he used the Roman historian's portrait of Nero for several of the details of his play. (2)

The writer's view of Poppée is not based on the character as depicted in the Octavia, and unlike in La Mort de Néron she is seen as a corrupting force, responsible for Néron's adoption of a life of crime. She does not appear on stage, but Epicharis says of her:

Quelle femme en effet! C'est elle qui, d'Othon  
Fuyant l'illustre hymen pour s'unir à Néron,  
Irritant d'un époux la cruauté docile, (I,1)  
Poussa vers les forfaits ce coeur jeune et facile,

Legouvé does not assign Seneca a role in his play, but even so, we can surmise that he admired the philosopher, for Epicharis is expressly made to speak in praise of him. She says:

Mais je veux un soutien plus imposant encore,  
Un mortel dont le nom, que l'univers honore,  
La vertu, les talents, éclairant les Romains, (II,3)  
Affermissent l'ouvrage élevé par nos mains,  
Sénèque enfin.

Another admirer of Seneca was Palissot, who, when he discusses Epicharis in his Mémoires sur la littérature, argues that the appearance of the Stoic writer would have greatly improved the quality of the drama (Oeuvres complètes (1809), v, 11-12):

Au lieu du poète Lucain qui n'y produit aucun effet, et qui n'a rien de tragique, le personnage de Sénèque était celui qui devait s'offrir le plus naturellement à la pensée de l'auteur. Ce personnage vraiment digne de la tragédie, en fournissant à M. Le Gouvé des beautés d'un ordre supérieur, pouvait couvrir, en quelque sorte, le vice de son sujet.

Just as Legouvé's play is independent of the Octavia, so it is

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(1) This is imitated by Racine in Britannicus III,8.

(2) However, many historical details are altered to emphasize the theme of the overthrow of tyranny. The most important of these is Néron's suicide at the end of the play, which did not take place as a result of the Pisonian conspiracy, but three years later in 68 A.D..



likely that Petitot's La Conjuraton de Pison of the following year made no reference to the Latin tragedy. The conclusions which one can draw regarding the influence of the Octavia in the eighteenth century, especially in the latter part, are inevitably rather negative, for the drama lacked sufficient personality to make a significant impact on French tragedy, and is devoid of the originality of conception and idea which characterizes the genuine plays. Nevertheless, its use by Racine in Britannicus had ensured that it would not be entirely forgotten.

CHAPTER XIII

Conclusion

Any survey of the influence of one body of literature on another necessitates a close and analytical examination of the material at hand, and this form of approach is especially valid in the case of Senecan drama, whose influence on French tragedy of the eighteenth century is most often manifested in the imitation of specific ideas, themes, and phrases. The writer engaged in a study of this nature cannot but find himself intimately acquainted with the sources with which he is dealing, yet in this very familiarity lie two contrasting dangers or extremes between which a conscious and wary path has to be steered. The first of these consists in the adoption of too restricted a viewpoint, where precise verbal imitation of the Latin dramas is discussed in isolation, and to the complete exclusion of wider issues relating to the general development of tragedy in the eighteenth century. The second, and almost unavoidable, temptation is to exaggerate the significance of one's own subject, and to make sweeping statements which are belied by the available evidence, assigning to the Roman dramatist a role he was unsuited to fulfil. Bearing in mind both of these extremes, it has been our aim not to argue that the influence of Senecan drama was either overwhelming or universal in the eighteenth century, but to show that it did have a definite part to play within a specific sphere, and to demonstrate that an investigation of the manner in which Seneca's work was both viewed and utilized by tragedians of the period can cast a useful light on contemporary conceptions of the validity of

ancient drama as a source for tragedy.

The influence which antiquity as a whole exerted on the eighteenth century was extremely complex. In the realm of tragic drama the precepts of Aristotle and Horace still carried immense weight, and great respect was paid to the ancient Greeks as the founders of the genre. Nevertheless, this did not imply an attitude of subservience, or a failure to question the precise merits of the ancients, for just as the seventeenth century had been much occupied by the Querelle des anciens et des modernes, so the eighteenth century was very interested in discussions of the value of ancient literature as opposed to that of the modern era. In the latter part of the seventeenth century the Moderns<sup>(1)</sup> had formulated a theory of progress in the spheres of literature and science, and this idea became an often repeated formula in the eighteenth century. La Motte,<sup>(2)</sup> for example, argues for this proposition in his Réflexions sur la critique (1715) (Seconde partie, p. 88):<sup>(3)</sup>

Ne pouvons-nous pas soutenir modestement, que les hommes, de siècle en siècle, ont acquis de nouvelles connoissances; que les richesses amassées par nos ayeux ont été accrues par nos peres, et qu'ayant hérité de leurs lumieres & de leurs travaux, nous serions en état, même avec un génie inférieur au leur, de faire mieux qu'ils n'ont fait.

La Harpe testifies to the fact that there were two extremes of opinion in his time - those who upheld strenuously the superiority of Greek drama (primarily because of their intimate acquaintance with this genre), and those who regarded it merely as the manifestation

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(1) See, for instance, Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin's Traité pour juger des poètes, grecs, latins, et françois (which follows Clovis in the third edition of 1673), Charles Perrault's Parallèle des anciens et des modernes (1688), and Fontenelle's Digression sur les anciens et les modernes (1688).

(2) However, it must be noted that La Motte was frequently more iconoclastic than his contemporaries with regard to literary conventions.

(3) In Oeuvres, tome III.

of an art in its infancy<sup>(1)</sup> (Lycée, I, 310-11). The latter position seems in some respects to be that adopted by Voltaire in his third Lettre sur Oedipe. He writes (M. II, 27):

Ne devons nous-mêmes, en blâmant les tragédies des Grecs, respecter le génie de leurs auteurs: leurs fautes sont sur le compte de leur siècle, leurs beautés n'appartiennent qu'à eux; et il est à croire que, s'ils étaient nés de nos jours, ils auraient perfectionné l'art qu'ils ont presque inventé de leur temps.

These views suggest implicitly that modern dramatists have been able to improve on the ancients, and the glory which Corneille and Racine had already conferred on French tragedy did much to endow the eighteenth century with an air of confidence regarding the achievements of their native drama.

That there was a clear cultural and chronological divide between the tragic drama of ancient Greece and Rome and that of France was well appreciated,<sup>(2)</sup> and the religious connotations of Greek tragedy, in particular, set it apart from its later imitators. It was recognized that modifications, often of a fundamental nature, needed to be made to ancient themes in order for them to gain success on the French stage, and features such as the simplicity of action, which characterizes both Seneca and his Greek predecessors, but which was alien to the taste for complication and all kinds of coups de théâtre prevalent in the eighteenth century,<sup>(3)</sup> often proved a severe stumbling-block to contemporary dramatists. The almost obligatory inclusion of a love interest,<sup>(4)</sup> something which was the product of French rather

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(1) La Harpe's own view was somewhere between the two.

(2) See, for example, Grimm's Réflexions sur la tragédie (Corresp. litt., VI, 170-1) and La Harpe's De la Tragédie ancienne (Lycée, I, 314 ff.).

(3) Although tragedy does seem to have become less complicated in the latter years of the century.

(4) Voltaire's opposition to this convention was the exception rather than the rule at the time at which he was writing.

than ancient preferences, also placed a certain constraint on eighteenth-century writers.

In so far as tragedy deals with the universal problems of mankind, the ancients had much to teach the moderns, but each society seeks to find some point of reference and some reflection of its own way of life in its native tragedy, and Greek tragedy itself was by no means totally lacking in contemporary awareness. Tragic drama was traditionally performed in Athens, and dramatists habitually offer praise of the city.<sup>(1)</sup> Allusions could also be made to well known figures, and the last lines of Euripides' Hippolytus refer to the death of Pericles, which had occurred shortly before the play was performed in 428 B.C.. From what we know of the conditions in which tragedy was recited in first-century Rome, it is apparent that Seneca's dramas would have reached an audience only a tiny fraction of the size of that which had filled the Greek amphitheatres, but his portraits of tyranny and the scenes of horror he describes may well have been found evocative of the contemporary political climate. In exactly the same way, French tragedy had to cater for the tastes of an aristocratic society and for its moral and social values, although certain dramatists of the eighteenth century began to bring some of these values into question. These differing circumstances could not fail to colour interpretations of mythological themes, and in judging Seneca's influence on the eighteenth century we have been concerned not only with similarities between his work and tragedies of the later period, but also with divergences between the two, by means of which we can gain an insight into the customs and exigencies of the time.

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(1) In Euripides' Medea Athens is seen as a place of refuge for his heroine; in his Herakles it is a place of purification, where Herakles can be cleansed of the blood of his family. It is a city which dispenses justice in the Eumenides of Aeschylus, for it is here that Orestes is acquitted for the murder of his mother, Clytemnestra.

Modern dramatists were clearly in a better position to please contemporary audiences than were the Greek and Roman tragedians whose works they adapted, and it is hardly surprising that the works of major writers, such as Racine's Phèdre, Voltaire's Oedipe, and to a lesser extent Crébillon's Atrée et Thyeste, were held in the eighteenth century to have surpassed their ancient models. The source of their success seems to have been the fact that they preserved the essence of the ancient legends while also appealing to the tastes of their age. Phèdre was almost universally preferred to the Latin Phaedra,<sup>(1)</sup> and of Atrée et Thyeste Mlle. Barbier wrote (Dissertation critique sur la tragédie d'Atrée & Thieste, p. 3):

...j'avoué que sa Fable (i.e. that of Crébillon), moins simple que celle de Seneque, a quelque chose de plus grand & de plus terrible,

The Bibliothèque universelle des dames held the same view with regard to Crébillon's tragedy (p. 345-6):

La Pièce de Crébillon est infiniment supérieure à celle du Poète Latin. .... mais combien l'imitateur est au-dessus de son original! Quel pinceau vigoureux, quelle force! quelle chaleur! quel pathétique!

An even greater accolade was accorded to Voltaire's Oedipe when it was set above Sophocles' masterpiece, the Oedipus Tyrannus. Jean-Baptiste Rousseau wrote in a letter to the philosophe of March 25th 1719 (D 73) that

Je ne doutais nullement que l'avantage ne fût de votre côté, mais je ne m'attendais pas que vous sortissiez si glorieusement du combat contre Sophocle, et, malgré la juste prévention où je suis pour l'antiquité, je suis obligé d'avouer que le Français de vingt-quatre ans a triomphé en beaucoup d'endroits du Grec de quatre-vingts.

When we discuss the manner in which antiquity was viewed in the eighteenth century, it is not strictly accurate to generalize and to

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(1) See the chapter on this play for further details.

assert that ancient drama as a whole was admired, thus linking Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Seneca under the same heading, for, unlike in the first part of the seventeenth century, when both Greek and Roman dramatists had been valued equally highly, attitudes towards the two sets of writing were by now frequently very different, and the respect which Sophocles and Euripides gained (Aeschylus was judged to be less easy to appreciate) can be contrasted with the scorn attached to the achievements of Seneca. Ample evidence of this divergence of opinion has been offered throughout the course of this study, and it will have become clear that the Latin writer was often regarded as no more than an inferior imitator of his Greek precursors. Thus, while Sophocles and Euripides were constantly cited in the critical and theoretical works of the period, Seneca generally received no more than cursory attention.<sup>(1)</sup> The prevalence of this type of attitude must, of course, affect the nature of our conclusions, and points to an overall decline in the importance of Senecan drama as a model for French tragedy, but there is also a positive side to the question by which this negative aspect may be counterbalanced.

This thesis has already presented substantial evidence of a revival of interest in antiquity towards the end of the eighteenth century in France, and although it may seem eccentric to discuss the Revolutionary period before the earlier part of the century, these years are of extreme importance to any general consideration of attitudes towards the ancients, and as such may be included here. In terms of dramatic literature this was a revival of Greek rather than Roman culture, and was manifested in renewed imitation of ancient Greek tragedy. From approximately 1780 onwards we find a host of imitations

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(1) In Voltaire's Lettres sur Oedipe, for example, Sophocles and Corneille are discussed in preference to Seneca; later in the century, in La Harpe's Lycée, Seneca is granted only an eight page Appendice (I, 499-506), whilst almost two hundred pages are devoted to the Greeks (I, 310-498).

of Sophocles' Oedipus cycle<sup>(1)</sup> and Euripides' Trojan plays,<sup>(2)</sup> more in fact than appeared throughout the whole of the rest of the century, and dramas such as the Oedipe à Thebes of Buffardin (1784), the Oedipe roi of Léonard (1798), and the Hécube of Petitot (1793) express their allegiance to the Greeks by declaring themselves to be 'imitée de Sophocle', or 'imitée du grec d'Euripide'. There was a movement to recapture the spirit of Greek tragedy, and Lemerrier's Cours analytique de littérature générale expresses this mood when he exhorts his readers by saying (I, 500):

Remontons, remontons aux Grecs: c'est entre Eschyle, Sophocle, et Euripide, qu'il convient de chercher un modèle.

The best authors of the Revolutionary period strove to return to a structurally simpler form of tragedy, excluding love interests and unnecessary complications,<sup>(3)</sup> and this may well have been an attempt to echo more closely the spirit of ancient Greece. Marie-Joseph Chénier's Tableau historique de l'état et des progrès de la littérature française, depuis 1789 (p. 311-12) notes this evolution, and praises the fact that authors are no longer obliged to observe the effete convention of gallantry:

...ces fadeurs érotiques si anciennes sur notre théâtre, introduites, par la tyrannie de l'usage, au milieu de quelques chefs-d'oeuvre, prodiguées par les prétendus élèves de Racine, fréquentes dans les sombres tragédies de Crébillon, signalées par Voltaire, et désormais bannies de la scène comme indignes de la gravité du cothurne.

Chénier's own Oedipus plays remained very close to their Greek models, but the majority of dramas based on ancient themes, and especially those

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(1) Nine in all. See the chapters on the Oedipus and Phoenissae.

(2) Eight in all. See the chapter on the Troades.

(3) This is true of Legouvé's Epicharis et Néron (1794) and Étéocle (1799), as well as Lemerrier's Agamemnon (1797).



which were most successful, such as Lemercier's Agamemnon and Legouvé's Epicharis et Néron, ou Conspiration pour la liberté and Etéocle, still represent an antiquity coloured by contemporary sentimentality or other prevailing trends. Thus while Chénier writes that the basic characteristics of tragedy should remain constant (Tableau, p. 313-4):

Que peint la tragédie ? des passions. Quelles passions ? celles des hommes qui furent à la tête des états. Que résulte-t-il de ces passions ? des crimes et des malheurs. De là découlent la terreur et la pitié: hors de là point de tragédie. Elle fut telle chez les Grecs, telle parmi nous, telle en Angleterre: sa nature ne saurait changer;

the methods of interpreting these could not but vary according to time and place.

During this latter part of the century little obvious praise of Seneca's tragedies was uttered, and his only notable champion was abbé Coupé, who did his utmost to combat prejudice against the Roman dramatist's work in his Théâtre de Sénèque (1795). However, his voice was not altogether solitary, for Richerolle's Astyanax (1789) bore evidence to its writer's admiration for the Troades of Seneca, and demonstrated that even by the Revolutionary period imitation of the Latin dramas was not entirely dead. Indeed, although we have been stressing the importance of Greece during this time, it is in several respects a significant era for our own study, for in many cases the primary sources, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, failed to offer sufficient inspiration to dramatists, and they turned in the second instance to Seneca's tragedies on the same subject. This is true of Legouvé's Polixène (1784) and to a lesser extent of his Etéocle,<sup>(1)</sup> of Ronsin's Hécube et Polixène (1786), Lefèvre's Hercule au mont Oeta (1787), and Lemercier's Agamemnon. The last case is interesting, and

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(1) Legouvé's work shows that his interest was primarily in the Greeks, although his use of the Troades in Polixène suggests that he was not altogether opposed to Senecan rhetoric.

in some ways typical of the general attitude towards Senecan drama in the eighteenth century, for although Lemer cier made substantial use of selected elements from the Latin Agamemnon, he testified later, in his Cours analytique de littérature générale, to a strong disapproval of the Roman dramas as a whole.

Apart from the Revolutionary years, there are two further periods of the eighteenth century around which imitations of Seneca appear to be grouped. One of these is the mid years of the century, from approximately 1745 to 1760, which saw the production of a Hercule furieux at the Oratorian college of Niort (1746), and the performance of Morand's Mégare (1748), Châteaubrun's Les Troyennes (1754), and Renout's Hercule (1757) at the Comédie-française. This seems to have been an early manifestation of the new interest in subjects from antiquity which was to characterize the Revolutionary era. The other period<sup>(1)</sup> encompasses the first years of the century, and, apart from Péchantré's La Mort de Néron (1703), which owes more to Tacitus and Racine than to Seneca, and the first draft of Pellegrin's Pélopée (1710), is especially marked by the appearance of Crébillon's Atrée et Thyeste (1707). Atrée et Thyeste was in many respects ahead of its time, creating a precedent for the introduction of extreme terror into tragedy, and its centrality to this thesis makes a consideration of its author's aims and attitudes extremely important.

Within certain limits Crébillon could justifiably be called the most Senecan of the tragedians of the eighteenth century, although he was regarded by his contemporaries as a modern incarnation of Aeschylus.<sup>(2)</sup>

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(1) This division inevitably excludes certain tragedies, such as the Oedipe plays of Voltaire (1718), Folard (1720), La Motte (1726), and La Tournelle (1730/1), Dumas d'Aigueberre's Polixène (1729), Voltaire's Les Pélopidés (1771), and Clément's Médée (which although not performed until 1779 was written by 1768). Yet in most of these the direct influence of Seneca is either minimal, or indeed non-existent.

(2) See La Porte, Anecdotes dramatiques, III, 129, and the Annales dramatiques, III, 40.

Like Seneca, he was drawn to themes with strong action and striking characters, and plays such as Rhadamiste et Zénobie (1711), where the hero Rhadamiste, in spite of his excessive love for his wife Zénobie, stabs her in a fit of anger and casts her into the river Araxes, demonstrate his liking for fierce passions and for larger than life characters. In the light of these general inclinations, it is hardly surprising that he found the Thyestes, with its excessively ferocious leading character, Atreus, highly attractive, and the Latin play provided the material for his most controversial tragedy. The dreaded cup of blood which Atrée offers to Thyeste in the final act made an intense impression on contemporary audiences, and although this was the only play in which Crébillon used Senecan scenes of horror as a model, the cup of blood surfaced again in a later play, Catilina (1748). Here the conspirators swear their allegiance to Catilina by drinking the blood of Nonius, a traitor murdered by their leader himself, and in act IV scene 3 Céthégus reports to Catilina that

Au fond de ton palais j'ai rassemblé leur troupe;  
Tous se sont abreuvés de cette horrible coupe,  
Et se liant à toi par des sermens divers,  
Sembloient dans leurs transports défier les enfers. (1)

This Thyestean touch actually has a source in Sallust, Catilina XXII, where the author reports the horrific act as a popular rumour of the time. Crébillon's liking for horror is further illustrated in Le Triumvirat (1754), where Tullie uncovers the head of her father Cicéron on the rostrum (V,3). She cries out to Octave:

Ah! monstre impitoyable,  
A quels yeux offres-tu ce spectacle effroyable ? (1)

but the effect is moderated by the fact that the head is concealed from the eyes of the audience.

That Crébillon was attracted to powerful rhetoric was demonstrated

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(1) In Oeuvres de M. de Crébillon (Paris 1750 (1755)).

in Atrée et Thyeste, where he imitated in some detail the Roman Atréus' declamatory utterances, and Seneca's descriptive passages - in particular the long digression on the storm at sea in Agamemnon 421-578 - may have also exerted an influence on certain of his other plays, for in both Idoménée (1705) and Electre (1708) we find comparable descriptions. In particular, the roaring of the air ('l'air mugit' II,1) which heralds the onset of the storm in Electre suggests the 'murmur grave' of Agamemnon 466, and the oppressive darkness:

une épaisse vapeur  
Couvre d'un voile affreux les vagues en fureur. (1) (Electre,  
II,1)

echoes Agamemnon 472-3:

densa tenebras obruit  
caligo et omni luce subducta fretum  
caelumque miscet.

This taste for ornamental rhetoric earned for Crébillon a certain amount of reproach in the eighteenth century, for critics lamented the fact that he, like Seneca, was inclined to bombast. In the section Sur Crébillon in his Réflexions historiques et critiques sur le goût et sur les ouvrages des principaux auteurs anciens et modernes (1743), the marquis d'Argens says of the tragedian's style (p. 237):

Il y-a quelques endroits de déclamation; quelques récits  
longs & même obscurs; quelques monologues un peu languissans.

and Clément observes in De la Tragédie, II, 114 that

Le talent de Crébillon est la force; son défaut est  
l'exagération. Ses traits sont fiers, mâles, vigoureux,  
mais quelquefois outrés.

We have already explored in some detail eighteenth-century attitudes towards Senecan rhetoric, and the predominant hostility towards the exaggerated qualities of his style meant that little success was to be found in closely imitating the Latin writer's mode of expression. Morand had transplanted substantial passages from the Hercules Furens

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(1) Edition of 1711 (A La Haye, chez T. Johnson).

into his Mégare, but his skill was insufficient to make them an integral part of his tragedy, and he complains in his preface (p. 212) that the most criticized parts of his play were those derived from Seneca. Lefèvre, too, seemed unable to translate Hercules' suffering into the poetic idiom of the eighteenth century, and while Grimm (Corresp. litt., XV, 74) castigates the dramatist for giving too much weight to the declamatory expression of Seneca in Hercule au mont Oeta, the Mémoires secrets (XXXV, 159) described his versification as 'dure, boursoufflée, incorrecte', and the Annales dramatiques (IV, 423) criticized his style as 'lâche, ampoulé et sans couleur'. Further evidence of the difficulties which the Senecan style posed for eighteenth-century dramatists is offered by the fate of Richerolle's Astyanax. This writer was keen to echo closely the style of the Troades, and much of his fourth act consists of a paraphrase of the well known tomb scene in this play. However, while his erudition gained him praise from the Mercure de France (February 1789, p. 135), his imitation of Seneca's rhetoric was not approved:

..on y a aussi remarqué de l'enflure, des récits trop multipliés, trop de descriptions épiques, & des défauts de goût assez nombreux, suite nécessaire, indispensable de l'étude de Sénèque, ...

Although Seneca had little to commend himself to the eighteenth century on a stylistic level, or on a structural level, since it seemed that he had neglected the normal rules of tragedy,<sup>(1)</sup> this period was potentially more favourable to the strong themes of his work and the striking images which he offers than the seventeenth century had been. For in contrast to the earlier neo-classicists who had been concerned to strip tragedy of its violent elements and to exclude all manifestations

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(1) Much of the eighteenth century's misunderstanding of Seneca stemmed from the fact that they believed he had intended his tragedy for performance. See our section on this topic in chapter II.

of horror, the eighteenth century sought to widen the limits of the genre and to experiment with new themes, and this allowed for the imitation of subjects such as Thyestes and Agamemnon which had hitherto been neglected. Crébillon was the first of the neo-classicists to refer to Seneca for scenes of horror in addition to his poetic expression, and this new use of the Latin tragedies is contrary to the idea of decline customarily associated with Senecan drama in the eighteenth century. Indeed the Thyestes provided the impetus for what was a positive and original advance for French tragedy at a time in which it had become fettered by stereotyped formulas. The influence of Atrée et Thyeste, and consequently the indirect influence of the Thyestes, was considerable in the eighteenth century, and aroused not only a new interest in the legends of the Pelopides, which inspired the production of Séguineau and Pralard's Aegyste (1721) and Pellegrin's Pélopée (1733), but also offered a precedent for horrific elements in plays such as Lemierre's Térée (1761), de Belloy's Gabrielle de Vergy (1770), and Legouvé's Étéocle.

Nevertheless, although Crébillon's work heralded what was to become a general trend towards more striking action and more powerful emotion in tragedy of the eighteenth century, his use of horror, which was seen as an extreme form of tragic emotion, was not universally accepted as the proper avenue for serious drama to pursue. For many, horror was synonymous with the introduction of gratuitous violence, and this was held to be unworthy of the dignity of the tragic genre. La Harpe's verdict on Lemierre's Térée reflects this body of opinion (Lycée, XI, 245):

Térée ... tomba entièrement, et je doute que même dans des mains plus habiles, ce sujet eût pu se soutenir. Il n'offre que des horreurs révoltantes, et par conséquent froides. L'auteur, plus de vingt ans après, essaya de le faire revivre: il tomba encore. Une femme à qui l'on a coupé la langue après l'avoir violée, n'est pas un spectacle à présenter à des hommes.

His views were also shared by Voltaire, who consistently attacked what

he saw as Crébillon's crude methods of arousing tragic emotion. Voltaire's own interest, as we saw in the chapter devoted to the Thyestes, also lay in deepening the emotional effect of tragedy, but he opted for a mitigated form of horror, or terror, basing his theories on a modification of the practices of the Greek and English theatre,<sup>(1)</sup> and rejecting the use of artificial or melodramatic devices to shock the audience. Unlike Crébillon, he felt no empathy for Seneca's dramas, and when he does refer to these it is generally in terms of contempt.<sup>(2)</sup> It was only when Seneca offered a precedent for daring free-thought in the famous chorus of the Troades that the philosophe was ready to use him as an authority. Voltaire's unsuccessful attempt to remodel Atrée et Thyeste in Les Pélopidés shows that he was fundamentally unhappy with the type of themes which Seneca provides, and his greatest success lay in the development of the pièce à thèse as a weapon with which to combat contemporary injustice and abuses of power.

In the final analysis the evocation of terror as practised by Voltaire and his disciples was a more important force in French tragedy than was Senecan horror, for while horror merely shocks or even disgusts the spectator, terror can be combined with pity to produce an intensely emotional effect. The desire to attendrir the audience and to extract tears of sympathy was an extremely important facet of eighteenth-century drama, and can be linked with the prevalence of sensibilité in the literature of the time. By the end of the century a combination of pity and terror - which must be defined as a strong emotion midway between the terreur or fear of the seventeenth century and the horror of Seneca - had become firmly established as the requisite tragic

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(1) See his Discours sur la tragédie (preface to Brutus).

(2) He criticizes the Phaedra in his third Lettre sur Oedipe (M. II, 28), the Medea in his Commentaires sur Corneille (II, 10 and 23), and the Thyestes in the preface to Les Pélopidés (M. VII, 103).

emotions, although Legouvé was not afraid to name Gabrielle de Vergy, a play in which horror had been exploited, as the precedent for the dénouement of his Étéocle. His contemporary, Lemercier, was opposed to horror on the principle that 'elle vous épouvante sans vous attendrir' (Cours analytique, I, 276),<sup>(1)</sup> and although the action he portrayed in his Agamemnon was daring, he allied the terror which a wife's murder of her husband arouses with a pathetic effect, which is derived from the audience's interest in the tumultuous emotions of Clitemnestre.

Lemercier's freedom to depict such a subject demonstrates how far the limits of tragedy had been extended by the end of the century, and audiences were no longer deeply shocked by scenes of this type, as they had been when Atrée et Thyeste first appeared. The gaining of this freedom was to a certain extent a gradual process, for whereas Voltaire, in 1718, decided against allowing a blind and blood-stained Oedipus to appear on stage in the final act, later dramatists such as Buffardin, Léonard, Chénier, and Doigny felt this to be a legitimate source of tragic emotion, and imitated the example of Sophocles. Buffardin, for example, writes in the preface to his Oedipe à Thèbes (p. vii):

Tout hideux qu'il (i.e. Oedipe) peut être, nous voulons le revoir encore. Plus il sera défiguré, plus il nous intéressera.

Yet the theory of a gradual evolution is contradicted by the example of Crébillon's play, since this threw down a stern challenge to the supremacy of the bienséances in the first years of the century.

Not all adaptors of Senecan themes made as bold a use of their material as Crébillon had done, and timidity may have been an important factor in the failure of Morand's Mégare and Renout's Hercule. Morand

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(1) This was his comment on Atrée et Thyeste, and it could also be applied to the Thyestes. He placed Voltaire above Crébillon as a dramatist because 'sa terreur ne marche jamais sans pathétique'.



felt that he could not imitate Seneca's Hercules Furens in concentrating his action on the hero's madness and subsequent murder of his family, and his introduction of invented material to sustain the action<sup>(1)</sup> owes much to seventeenth-century techniques of dealing with ancient themes of a potentially controversial nature. However, it was by no means certain that even the eighteenth century would have tolerated the portrait of a hero committing murder whilst in a state of insanity,<sup>(2)</sup> for it contradicted their conception of tragedy as a genre concerned with rationality. Renout, too, in focusing on the romantic possibilities of his theme, failed to differentiate Hercule from seventeenth-century methods of treating the Hercules Oetaeus, and audiences who had already seen too many plays based on love plots in the Racinian mould expressed their deep disapproval of so unimaginative a handling of the theme.

Whereas a more liberal interpretation of the bienséances had allowed for imitation of aspects of both Greek and Roman tragedy hitherto regarded as unacceptable for the French stage, a freer application of the demands of vraisemblance permitted a greater degree of spectacle, and enabled the dramatist to interest his audience by means of varied visual images. It is extremely ironical that a set of plays totally devoted to auditory effect should have anything to offer in this direction, but Seneca's often lavish descriptions did provide a point of departure for several writers. In his Dissertation sur la tragédie ancienne et moderne, which precedes Sémiramis (1748), Voltaire suggested that in certain circumstances ghosts might be admissible on the tragic stage (M. IV, 503-4):

Mais je suppose que l'auteur d'une tragédie se fût

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(1) He focuses on Mégare, whom he portrays as a loyal wife devoted to the interests of Lycus, a husband whom she detests.

(2) Even Ducis hesitated to portray the madness of Shakespeare's Lear as late as 1783.

proposé pour but d'avertir les hommes que Dieu punit quelquefois de grands crimes par des voies extraordinaires; je suppose que sa pièce fût conduite avec un tel art que le spectateur attendit à tout moment l'ombre d'un prince assassiné qui demande vengeance, sans que cette apparition fût une ressource absolument nécessaire à une intrigue embarrassée: je dis qu'alors ce prodige, bien ménagé, ferait un très-grand effet en toute langue, en tout temps, et en tout pays.

However, he based his introduction of the ghost of Ninus in that play on the example of the English theatre,<sup>(1)</sup> rather than on the supernatural episodes which are a particular characteristic of Senecan drama. Nevertheless, the ghost of Laïus, which played a significant part in the majority of eighteenth-century Oedipe plays, does have a source in Seneca, in the episode of necromancy which occupies over a hundred lines of the Latin Oedipus (530-658), although Corneille's Oedipe provided a crucial intermediary link. The appearance of Laïus' ghost had only been described in the seventeenth-century play, but in the later period certain dramatists showed a greater daring. In Léonard's Oedipe roi a dramatic effect is achieved in the opening scene when the voice of Laïus is heard echoing from his tomb, but La Tourelle gave the greatest prominence to the supernatural figure by assigning it the title role in his Oedipe, ou l'Ombre de Laïus. This play culminates with the appearance of Laïus in the final act. The ghost of Achilles, whose awe-inspiring presence is described in the Troades, also exerted an influence on the majority of eighteenth-century plays on that theme,<sup>(2)</sup> although only Petitot, in his Hécube, and Ronsin, in his Hécube et Polixène, went so far as to transform the description into stage action. Of the two, Ronsin's presentation is the more spectacular, since flames shooting from the tomb of Achilles herald

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(1) Yet even such scenes in English drama were based ultimately on Senecan tragedy.

(2) Euripides had earlier alluded to the apparition of Achilles in his Hecuba, and this also had some influence on French versions.

the Greek hero's appearance (V,6).

This acceptance of the possibility of introducing supernatural characters in certain circumstances can be contrasted with the lack of enthusiasm which was accorded to Seneca's portrait of the magical abilities of Medea by tragedians of the eighteenth century. The distinction between the acceptability of the one and the unacceptability of the other is a fine one, but dramatists felt instinctively that while certain mysterious prodigies could be a means of arousing terror and adding to the dignity of tragedy, a sorceress who departs from Corinth in a chariot drawn by dragons was an inappropriate heroine for a genre which should be devoted to the representation of truth in the realm of the emotions.<sup>(1)</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to stress that the rejection of Seneca's portrait of Medea as a magical character by tragedians did not mean that the Medea was entirely cast to one side in the eighteenth century, for its spectacular, unrealistic elements appealed greatly to lyric dramatists, and provided them with the basis for many of their most impressive episodes. Abbé Pellegrin, who was a distinguished librettist as well as tragedian of the first part of the century, seems to have been attracted to Senecan themes,<sup>(2)</sup> and in addition to his Pélopée, which showed some knowledge of the Thyestes, he also composed two operas, Médée et Jason (1713) and Hippolyte et Aricie (1733), which are based to a certain extent on the Medea and Phaedra. Pellegrin's debt to Seneca is more extensive in Médée et Jason than in Hippolyte et Aricie, for in the later opera he was clearly influenced deeply by Racine's Phèdre. Nevertheless, in

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(1) The views of Voltaire and Clément are especially interesting in this respect. See the Medea chapter.

(2) Although Pélopée, Médée et Jason, and Hippolyte et Aricie also had sources in earlier French plays (Crébillon's Atrée et Thyeste, Corneille's Médée and T. Corneille's opera of the same name, and Racine's Phèdre).

both of these it is possible to discern his technique of basing visually exciting, supernatural episodes on brief suggestions from Seneca.<sup>(1)</sup> Hoffman also composed a Phèdre (1786) and a Médée (1797), but while Médée owed a clear debt to the Roman Medea, Phèdre depends entirely on Racine and Euripides.

It is interesting to note that although theorists discerned a clear divide between the vraisemblance which characterizes tragedy and the merveilleux of opera, there was often little difference between the most daring of the eighteenth-century tragedies and operas on the same theme, in terms of the action they portrayed, and this fact illustrates the enthusiasm which many tragic writers felt for the possibilities of visual spectacle. Thus the appearance of the ghost of Laïus before Oedipe and Jocaste to the accompaniment of a thunder-clap in Bernard d'Héry's lyric tragedy Oedipe roi (1786) is little more adventurous than the equivalent scenes in La Toumelle's Oedipe, ou l'Ombre de Laïus and Léonard's Oedipe roi. Similarly La Serre's ghostly Achilles, who strikes fear into the audience in the opera Polixène et Pyrrhus (1706) is no more terrifying a figure than the phantom in Ronsin's play on the same theme. Lefèvre's Hercule au mont Oeta is an excellent example of a tragedy which has appropriated operatic elements, for Lefèvre was the first tragedian since the establishment of the classical rules to employ machines in depicting the death of Hercules, and to show the hero actually ascending to Heaven on a throne of clouds. The immediate influences on the writer were probably Marmontel's opera, Hercule mourant (1761), and Rotrou's much earlier tragedy of the same title, but his ultimate source was the Latin Hercules Oetaeus, and it is important to realize that a

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(1) Médée's invocation to the Furies in Médée et Jason V,1 and their appearance in V,2 seem to be based on Medea 13-17, or possibly 958 ff.. The second act of Hippolyte et Aricie, which takes place in the underworld, was suggested initially by Phaedra 93-8.

relaxation of the rule of vraisemblance allowed for a more faithful imitation of the spirit of that play.

In addition to the exploitation of Seneca's more terrifying themes, and the transformation of his descriptive passages into scenes of spectacular visual effect, certain dramatic episodes from his best known works attracted the eighteenth century by the very originality of their conception. This is true of the heated dialogue between Pyrrhus and Agamemnon in Troades 203-359, and even more so of the scene enacted by Andromache and Ulysses in the same play (498-813), where the Trojan woman strives to conceal her son from the victorious Greeks. Neither of these episodes had a counterpart in the Troades of Euripides, and while Agamemnon's arguments in the one scene appealed to eighteenth-century notions of humanitarianism, Andromache's pleas in the other were found a potent source of the most poignant pathos.<sup>(1)</sup> The Troades was undoubtedly the most respected of all Seneca's dramas during this period, and it carried sufficient weight to inspire direct imitation in a considerable number of French tragedies, the best known of which is Châteaubrun's Les Troyennes.

The most widely known line of the Troades in the eighteenth century was the phrase uttered by the chorus of Trojan women, 'post mortem nihil est ipsaque mors nihil' (397), and this was frequently used as a philosophical slogan to prove the freedom of thought prevalent in Rome and to combat modern intolerance, above all by Voltaire. Yet, in fact, this line is not really representative of Seneca's own views or of the moral content of the tragedies, and in more than one of his philosophical works he suggests that there is an after-life. Noteworthy in the dramas are Seneca's considerations of the nature of true kingship, as well as his comments on the fickleness of fortune

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(1) An emotion not frequently associated with Seneca's theatre.

and the precarious nature of power, which are generally expressed by the chorus. However, this aspect of the plays exerted little influence on the eighteenth century, although dramatists of the period were often keen to make philosophical statements. Clément writes of this tendency in tragedy (De la Tragédie, II, 197-8):

Cette affectation de sentences & de sentimens philosophiques, qui, dans ce siècle, s'est emparée de la Tragédie, mérite bien un article à part. ... A ces beaux raisonnemens on a voulu joindre des autorités; on ne s'est pas trop appuyé de Sénèque, décrié depuis si long-temps par cette même affectation; mais on a allégué l'exemple d'Euripide, qui en effet l'a poussée beaucoup trop loin, en qui on ne l'a jamais applaudie, mais seulement excusée, ..

Many of Seneca's themes offer no easy moralistic solution, and audacious criminals such as Atreus, Clytemnestra, and Medea carry out their plans successfully,<sup>(1)</sup> while innocent victims such as the Trojan women endure pain. Yet, at the same time, the Roman philosopher does deal with questions of personal guilt and retribution, and Oedipus, Hercules, Deianira, and Phaedra all accept responsibility for their actions, and assume their punishments to be the just reward for their crimes. From the Renaissance period onwards, Seneca's moral slant was found to be more in keeping with Christian attitudes than was the emphasis of the Greek theatre, where an error of judgement is often the cause of immense suffering, and where, inevitably, divine providence is cast in a questionable light. The contrast between the two forms of tragedy is well illustrated in Sophocles' and Seneca's respective treatments of the Oedipus theme, and whereas in the eighteenth century Voltaire followed the example of the Greek dramatist and showed Oedipe to be fundamentally innocent, the Catholic writers, Folard and La Motte, endowed their hero with a clear moral guilt after the Senecan tradition.

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(1) Seneca seems to deplore the excesses to which these characters' passions carry them, but the reader cannot but admire the audacity of Atreus and Medea.

So far we have based our conclusions almost exclusively on a discussion of Seneca's role in the eighteenth century as compared with that of the Greek tragedians,<sup>(1)</sup> and it is always easy to forget or to minimize the part which French dramatists of the preceding century had to play. While the Thyestes, Agamemnon, and Hercules Furens had either been avoided or fundamentally altered by the neo-classicists of the seventeenth century, and thus still retained their originality for later interpreters, all the other Latin plays had already been imitated by well known dramatists,<sup>(2)</sup> and their work inevitably exerted its own influence on the following century. Reverence for Racine made writers hesitant to attempt subjects which he had made his own, and Phèdre offers an extreme example of this problem, for it provided what was, in substance, the final word on the subject for neo-classical drama, and deterred any eighteenth-century tragedian from attempting a new version. A slight alteration of the subject of Britannicus enabled Péchantré to produce La Mort de Néron, and Richerolle's Astyanax offered a modification of Andromaque, but such plays, by their very nature, invited unfavourable comparison with their illustrious predecessors. The fact that a number of Senecan themes had already been exhausted obviously limited the breadth of his influence in the eighteenth century, and even in subjects such as Oedipus which remained popular, the influence of Corneille eclipsed that of Seneca. On the other hand, the Troades did retain something of its own personality, and was able to inspire original imitation, as did the Hercules Oetaeus in the

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(1) The influence of the Octavia can also be compared with that of the historians, Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio, who were generally used more than the pseudo-Senecan work.

(2) Corneille imitated the Medea and Oedipus, while Racine imitated the Phoenissae in La Thébaïde, the Troades (to a certain degree) in Andromaque, the Octavia in Britannicus, and the Phaedra in Phèdre. La Fosse's Polixène, which contained elements from the Troades, was also important, as was Rotrou's pre-classical Hercule mourant, and the later plays of La Thuillerie and Dancourt on that theme.

work of Lefèvre, and the Phoenissae in the Oedipe chez Admète of Ducis.

To place Senecan drama in a clear perspective, we must note that the incidence of imitation of the Latin plays was not particularly high in the eighteenth century. There would appear to be no more than twenty surviving tragedies in which there is evidence of direct knowledge of Seneca,<sup>(1)</sup> which is only a very small percentage of the total number produced. Surprisingly, this does not in fact mark a decrease on the number of Senecan plays produced in the neo-classical period of the seventeenth century,<sup>(2)</sup> although many of these earlier works did owe a more substantial debt to the Latin writer. Several of the eighteenth-century dramatists, such as Morand, Châteaubrun, Renout, Lefèvre, Richerolle, and Lemercier, referred to Seneca only once, seeking inspiration from varied sources for the remainder of their work, and of the Senecan plays a number were unsuccessful, gaining no more than a single performance.<sup>(3)</sup> Yet against these and the other negative conclusions which have been reached, must be balanced the positive points which have been made in the Roman dramatist's favour, and it is our final task to resolve the question of whether there is any justification for speaking in terms of a revival of interest in Senecan drama in the eighteenth century. In view of the evidence which is available, we must conclude that the Latin tragedies did have something new to offer in this period, and as such merit discussion, but that, although circumstances were more conducive than in the second half of the seventeenth century to an appreciation of the real force of Seneca's work, his reputation was no longer sufficiently weighty to encourage a

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(1) Of these more than a quarter did not gain performance at the Comédie-française.

(2) That is to say the years from approximately 1640 to 1699.

(3) This is true of Morand's Mégare, Renout's Hercule, Clément's Médée, and Richerolle's Astyanax.



widespread increase of interest, or to halt an overall process of decline.

It is, of course, somewhat arbitrary to fix on the end of any particular century as a significant point for ending a study of this kind, and Seneca's dramas were not instantly forgotten as the first years of the nineteenth century approached. Souriguère de Saint-Marc's Octavie, which was performed at the Comédie-française in 1806, demonstrates this fact. The writer was an intense admirer of the Roman philosopher, to whom he dedicates his work, apostrophizing the great Stoic as follows (p. i):

Ombre illustre d'un grand homme, reçois ce faible et respectueux tribut de mes veilles.

Seneca's opposition to the tyranny of Nero offered the dramatist consolation for his own proscription during the reign of terror in France, and gratitude was the motive for portraying him on the stage. Of the Roman Octavia Souriguère says nothing, and he does not indicate whom he considered its author to be, although his play shows that he was acquainted with the drama.

In the same year a little known dramatist named Touzet published a Clytemnestre, and he, too, was clearly familiar with the Latin plays, for in his Avant-Propos (p. vii) he writes of the Agamemnon:

Cependant il faut avouer que quoique cette oeuvre de Sénèque ne soit pas bonae frugis, de la bonne veine, il s'y trouve des beautés du premier ordre. Quelquefois son dialogue a de la grace et de la concision. ... On trouve aussi dans cette pièce de très-heureuses sentences parmi le grand nombre de celles qu'il y a semées;

Nevertheless, in spite of individual examples of the survival of Seneca as a dramatic model, mythological themes and neo-classical tragedy in general were fundamentally unsuited to the post-Revolutionary era. Mme. de Staël evokes the literary mood at the turn of the century when she writes that ancient subjects are more suited to a monarchic than to a republican regime (De la Littérature (1800), II, 153):

Les sujets antiques et leurs imitateurs produisent moins d'effets dans la république que dans la monarchie:

les distinctions de rang rendoient encore plus sensibles les peines attachées aux revers du sort; elles mettoient entre l'infortune et le trône un immense intervalle que la pensée ne pouvoit franchir qu'en frémissant.

In this new egalitarian society tragedy must offer enlightenment, as well as 'quelques grandes vérités morales' (op. cit., II, 157), and this is, in some ways, an extension of Voltaire and Clément's contention that tragedy should be a theatre of truth and not of ancient superstition.<sup>(1)</sup> Since mythology is not a representation of modern thought, it no longer has anything left to offer (De la Littérature, II, 167):

Si l'on vouloit se servir encore de la mythologie des anciens, ce seroit véritablement retomber dans l'enfance par la vieillesse: le poète peut se permettre toutes les créations d'un esprit en délire, mais il faut que vous puissiez croire à la vérité de ce qu'il éprouve. Or, la mythologie n'est pour les modernes ni une invention, ni un sentiment. ... Ces formes poétiques, empruntées du paganisme, ne sont pour nous que l'imitation de l'imitation; c'est peindre la nature à travers l'effet qu'elle a produit sur d'autres hommes.

It was an inevitable process of evolution that writers should come to rely on their own experiences of life for the source of their literary inspiration, rather than on a culture some two thousand years old, and the gradual movement towards a greater relevancy in tragedy, which had begun in the eighteenth century, could have no other ultimate result. Mme. de Staël's ideas form an important bridge between French classicism and the theories of the Romantics, in whom we see a glorification of the personal element in poetry. In the preface to Cromwell (1827) Victor Hugo sets out the Romantic manifesto, combating the pretensions of classicism and arguing for the need for renewal in dramatic art. The cultural divide between ancient Greece and France has now become an argument of the utmost importance, and Hugo proposes that mythology should be replaced by modern folk-lore and that the drame should be the poetic mode of the modern era. The rules of

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(1) They had expressed these views in connection with the theme of Medea. See the chapter on that play for further details.

classicism and the narrow restrictions which these place on art are utterly rejected (p. 434):<sup>(1)</sup>

Mettons le marteau dans les théories, les poétiques et les systèmes. Jetons bas ce vieux plâtrage qui masque la façade de l'art! Il n'y a ni règles, ni modèles; ou plutôt il n'y a d'autres règles que les lois générales de la nature qui planent sur l'art tout entier, et les lois spéciales qui, pour chaque composition, résultent des conditions d'existence propres à chaque sujet.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century studies of contemporary manners succeeded the Romantics' taste for medieval themes. There was some return to mythological subjects, and plays such as Ernest Legouvé's Médée (1854) related these stories to contemporary questions, in this case the sorry plight of women seduced and then abandoned by their lovers. Seneca had not fallen entirely from view, and a prologue freely translated from the first act of the Thyestes by Henri de Bornier was added to Crébillon's Atrée et Thyeste when it was revived at the Comédie-française in 1866. Two years later the same writer, clearly much interested in Seneca, produced an Agamemnon, which closely imitated the Roman drama of that title, and this was greeted enthusiastically by critics. Yet, as de Bornier tells us in the preface of his play, the Latin dramatist's work was generally regarded as third rate, and he could no longer be considered a significant influence on modern tragedy. It is perhaps at this point that it is fitting to leave Seneca, a dramatist who offered a paternal hand to French tragedy as it was striving to find an identity in the sixteenth century, and who, now that his offspring had grown up and gone its own way, could maintain no more than a fleeting connection with its activities.

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(1) Théâtre complet (Pléiade edition (ed. Roland Purnal/J. J. Thierry/Josette Mèlèze) 1963-4), volume I.

APPENDIX I

Eighteenth-Century Editions of the Tragedies of Seneca

- 1701 L. Annaei Senecae Cordubensis Tragoediae.  
Omni studio, ac diligentia à mendis expurgatae.  
(Florence)
- 1702 L. A. S. Tragoediae cum notis Farnabii.  
(Nürnberg)
- 1713 L. A. S. Tragoediae, ad editionem Gronovii  
emendatae. Cum notis Thomae Farnabii. Accedunt  
Hieronimus Avantius et Georgius Fabricius de  
generibus carminum apud L. A. S. Tragicum.  
(Amsterdam)
- 1713 L. A. S. Tragoediae.  
(Contained in volume II of the Opera et Fragmenta  
Veterum Poetarum Latinorum Prophanorum et  
Ecclesiasticorum, edited by Michael Maittaire).  
(London)
- 1721 L. A. S. Tragoediae.  
(Contained in volume II of the Corpus Omnium  
Veterum Poetarum Latinorum tam Prophanorum quam  
Ecclesiasticorum, another edition of the above-  
mentioned work).  
(London)
- 1728 L. A. S. Tragoediae. Cum notis integris Johannis  
Frederici Gronovii, et selectis Justi Lipsii,  
M. Antonii Delrii, Jani Gruteri, H. Commelini,  
Josephi Scaligeri, Danielis et Nicolai Heinsiorum,  
Thomae Farnabii aliorumque; itemque observationibus  
nonnullis Hugonis Grotii. Omnia recensuit ...  
Joannes Casparus Schröderus.  
(Delft)

- 1754 L. A. S. et aliorum Tragoediae, cum notis Thomae Farnabii.  
(Breslau)
- 1763 L. A. S. Troades, Tragoedia, in tres actus, (quo melius exercitatione publicae inserviret) redacta, habitaque in Schola Mercatorum Scissorum anno MDCCLXIII.  
(London)
- 1766 L. A. S. Tragoediae.  
(Contained in volume II (Ethnicos Poetas Majores Continens) of the Collectio Pisaurensis Omnium Poematum, Carminum, Fragmentorum Latinorum, edited by Pasquale Amati).  
(Pesaro)
- 1770 L. A. S. Medea, cum animadversionibus, et interpretationibus Petri Mariae Soderini, de Cler. Reg. Schol. Piarum.  
(s. l.)
- 1776 L. A. S. Tragoedia Agamemnon.  
(Contained in the Nova Chrestomathia Tragica Graeco-Latina. Edita a Io. Carol. Volborth A. M.).  
(Göttingen)
- 1785 L. A. S. Tragoediae, ad optimas editiones collatae. Praemittitur notitia literaria studiis societatis Bipontinae.  
(Zweibrücken)
- 1798 Hercules Furens. Specimen novae recensione Tragoediarum L. A. S., auctore Torkillo Baden.  
(Kiel)

APPENDIX II

Eighteenth-Century French Translations of the Tragedies

of Seneca

- 1778 L'Hymen vengé, en cinq chants. Suivi de la Traduction libre en vers françois de Médée, tragédie de Sénèque; & de quelques pièces fugitives. Par M<sup>x x x</sup> (Morelly).  
(London and Paris)
- 1779 Histoire universelle des théâtres de toutes les nations, volumes VI-VIII (complete prose translation of the tragedies, produced by 'une société de gens de lettres', consisting of Coupé, Testu, Desfontaines, and Le Fuel de Méricourt).  
(Paris)
- 1782 Traduction de différens morceaux de la tragédie d'Hypolite, de Sénèque.  
(Contained in the Poésies et pièces fugitives diverses de M. le chevalier de B<sup>x x x</sup> (Boufflers) (Paris), and also in the Oeuvres diverses, en vers et en prose, de M. le chevalier de B<sup>x x</sup> (London 1787))).
- 1783 Oedipe, tragédie de Sénèque, traduction nouvelle; suivie d'une comparaison de différentes pièces sur le sujet d'Oedipe (by de Limes).  
(Amsterdam and Paris)
- 1795 Théâtre de Sénèque. Traduction nouvelle, enrichie de notes historiques, littéraires et critiques, et suivie du texte latin, corrigé d'après les meilleurs manuscrits (by abbé Coupé).  
(The Latin text is lacking).  
(Paris)

Extracts from the tragedies are also translated in various places (e.g. Louis de Court's L'Heureux Infortuné, histoire arabe, avec un recueil de diverses pièces fugitives en prose et en vers; Brumoy's Le Théâtre des Grecs; the Encyclopédie (V, 673); Clément's De la Tragédie (I, 194-205); the Bibliothèque universelle des dames; and La Harpe's Lycée (V, 91-2)).

APPENDIX III

The Jesuit Theatre

From the sixteenth century onwards it had been the practice of the Jesuit fathers to hold dramatic performances within their educational establishments. They could not lay claim to being the originators of the scholastic theatre, for plays in both Latin and French, often by the leading dramatists of the day, had earlier seen the light in the colleges of the University.<sup>(1)</sup> Nevertheless, they did much to establish their own particular brand of drama, staging plays composed by their professors of rhetoric rather than opening their doors to external writers.

As early as 1599 the Ratio Studiorum laid down strict guidelines for drama, stipulating that only plays written in Latin on pious or holy subjects, with all female roles excluded, were to be tolerated (Reg. Rectoris, art. 13):

Tragoediarum et comoediarum, quas non nisi latinas ac rarissimas esse oportet, argumentum sacrum sit ac pium, neque quicquam actibus interponatur quod non latinum sit et decorum; nec persona ulla muliebris vel habitus introducatur. (2)

These rules are echoed by père Jouvancy in his De Ratione discendi et docendi (p. 109-13). In practice they were occasionally relaxed, with some female characters being included and some plays written in French.<sup>(3)</sup>

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(1) The new French tragedies based on imitation of the ancients, such as Jodelle's Cléopâtre captive (1552), were customarily performed in the colleges of the University.

(2) Pachtler's edition of the text, which can be found in the Monumenta Germaniae Paedagogica of Karl Kehrbach, band V (Berlin 1887).

(3) Père Folard's Oedipe (1720) is one example of a Jesuit tragedy written in French. By writing in the vernacular the Jesuits could hope to reach a wider audience. That plays in French were also produced by other /  
contd, overleaf



Ballets were also added to the repertoire. Nevertheless, Jesuit drama retained its primarily didactic purpose, teaching by offering obvious examples of virtue. It also had an important social function, educating the young in the practice of public speaking.

That romantic love was an unnecessary accompaniment of tragedy was a view strictly upheld by the Jesuits, and this differentiates their writing from the mainstream of French tragedy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They based their argument on the practices of the Greek and Roman theatre, and in this respect imitated the ancients more faithfully than their counterparts writing for the public stage. Père Le Jay discusses this subject in the preface to Josephus fratres agnoscens (1695), and gives considerable weight to the authority of Seneca:

nemo tamen aequus rerum aestimator negaverit, scripsisse eum (i.e. Seneca) plurima, quae si è severioribus Theatri regulis paulisper immutentur, non ultimum inter nobilissimas (sic) Tragoedias habere locum possint. At quasnam ille Amori, quem rejicimus mandavit partes tot inter eximia Dramata, quae pene integra nostrates Poëtae suos in usus exscripserunt ?

The Roman dramatist was an obvious model for a genre written primarily in Latin, and the metre appointed for Jesuit tragedy in the De Ratione is the iambic metre of Seneca (p. 112):

Numerum Iambici versus & sonum à Senecâ, & P. Petavio quaere:

Comparisons were commonly made between the best known Jesuit tragedians of the eighteenth century and Seneca. In the Siècle de Louis XIV Voltaire described his former teacher, père Charles Porée, who was also a distinguished writer of drama, as 'éloquent dans le goût de Sénèque',<sup>(1)</sup> and on Porée's death père Des Billons praised him for

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contd. from p. 411 / teaching orders in the eighteenth century is demonstrated by the performance of a French Hercule at the Oratorian college of Niort in 1746.

(1) M. XIV, 116.

having surpassed the efforts of the Roman dramatist.<sup>(1)</sup> Later writers have also taken up these comparisons. La Servière<sup>(2)</sup> writes of Porée that

Sa tragédie n'est pas, comme celle de Corneille et de Racine, une action, une lutte ardente entre des devoirs, des passions, des intérêts opposés; à l'exemple de Sénèque, son modèle préféré, il écrit des plaidoyers en vers, des disputes oratoires; chaque acteur soutient une thèse et développe quelques beaux lieux communs; les personnages parlent beaucoup et agissent peu.

Similarly Pierron<sup>(3)</sup> establishes a parallel between the Latin writer and père Le Jay, who was also well known for his dramatic efforts, stating that Le Jay

avait fait une étude attentive du style de Sénèque le tragique. Il se sert avec une certaine adresse des façons de dire de Sénèque.

However, in reality, the link between Seneca and the Jesuit tragedians is not as simple as it appears. Certainly the Roman plays provided an example for writers seeking to express themselves in the same language, and it is easy to make generalized comparisons, but specific similarities are extremely difficult to find. It should be remembered that in the late seventeenth century père Jouvancy had expressed a certain hostility towards Seneca's rhetoric, and this attitude precluded any direct imitation of the Latin dramatist's style in the later period. Several Jesuit tragedies from the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries still survive, and an examination of a selection of these shows that the Latin of the French Jesuits was often very different from that of Seneca. Their generally paratactic style bears evidence to the influence of the French language, and there is a significant amount of unclassical

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(1) Epicedium in obitum Caroli Poraei à Societate Jesu (s.l.n.d.), p. 3. (B. N. Yc 10284).

(2) J. de La Servière, Un Professeur d'ancien régime: le père Charles Porée S.J. (1676-1741) (Paris 1899), p. 275.

(3) Alexis Pierron, Voltaire et ses maîtres (Paris 1866), p. 106.

vocabulary. The Biblical subject matter of the majority of these plays also differentiates them from the work of Seneca.

Pierron (p. 107) writes that père Le Jay has a liking for monologues, which he describes as a Senecan trait. However, this is another vague similarity between the two playwrights which is not really borne out by close analysis. Seneca's most obvious use of the monologue is in the prologue to his dramas, and yet many of Le Jay's plays (Josephus fratres agnoscens, Daniel, Damocles, and Abdolominus, for example) open with a discussion between two characters. Probably the most fruitful contribution which Seneca could make to this scholastic genre was his use of the pithy epigram to make a moral statement, and not surprisingly, since they were expressly intended to offer a moral message, many of the French dramas abound in sententiae.<sup>(1)</sup>

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(1) La Servière (p. 280) highlights this tendency in père Porée's work.

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