Jean Racine Reads the Ancients: Classical Allusions and Ancient Poetics in *Andromaque*, *Britannicus,* and *Phèdre et Hippolyte*

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Abstract: That Jean Racine was an avid reader of ancient literature is well established (Forestier, Knight, Tobin, Phillippo), but underappreciated is his adaptation of allusive techniques employed by the Roman poets. Just as Ovid's Ariadne self-consciously alludes to Catullus' Ariadne, Racine's characters become 'readers' of ancient works and speak with reference to their predecessor-selves. My dissertation demonstrates how Racine creatively interprets scenes from Seneca, Euripides, Tacitus, Homer, and others to carve out a space for his story within the parameters delineated by his ancient predecessors. In so doing he employs to great affect poetic techniques associated with Roman and Hellenistic poetry. These include 'window references,' or intertextual allusions that serve to direct a reader back to the source of a model (Thomas), and 'Alexandrian footnotes' (Ross, Hardie), wherein a poet signposts his engagement with a series of preceding texts that treat similar themes with appeals to tradition or past report. These stylistic techniques that Racine has adopted from his study of Greek and Latin literature allow Racine to graft his own versions of Greek mythology or Roman history onto frameworks established by ancient poets and historians and to reinterpret earlier versions of a story in light of his own contribution to the narrative.

Chapter One:
Jean Racine Reads the Ancients: An Introduction

Et nous devons sans cesse nous demander: "Que diraient Homère et Virgile s'ils lisaient ces vers? que dirait Sophocle, s'il voyait représenter cette scène?"

Again and again we ought to ask ourselves: What would Homer and Vergil say if they read these lines? What would Sophocles say, if he saw this scene performed?

-Racine, Première préface of *Britannicus*

Jean Racine is among the few great European poets who mastered Greek (in addition to Latin) and who would continue to read and reread classical works as he composed his plays.[1] Although scholars have begun to map his use of ancient sources,[2] much work remains to unravel the rich fabric of intertextual allusions that make up his oeuvre and to explain how his deep and broad engagement with the ancient genres of epic, tragedy, and historiography shaped his poetry. I contribute to this endeavor by examining three of Racine's plays in which he capitalizes on conflicting narratives, unusual gaps, and jarring transitions in the texts of Seneca, Vergil, Tacitus, Homer, and Euripides to carve out a space for his own contributions. The three plays I explore span Racine's dramatic career: *Andromaque* (1667), *Britannicus* (1669), and *Phèdre et Hippolyte* (1677). The first of these, *Andromaque*, composed as Racine was still establishing his reputation as a tragedian,[3] demonstrates the flexibility with which Racine engages with Greek and Latin at the beginning of his career, before the literary quarrels that dominated the Parisian intellectual scene at the end of the seventeenth century compelled him to solidify his poetic stance. Racine was not prepared for the intellectual outrage *Andromaque* would provoke, an error for which he would overcompensate in the composition of *Britannicus* (1669), the agonistic preface of which contains more citations than any other Racinian paratext. By the time

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[1] Other notable examples of Greek trained poets from France include the members of La Pleiade who studied Greek under the renowned Hellenist Jean Dorat (1508-88): Pierre de Ronsard (1524-85), Joachim du Bellay (1522-60), and Jean-Antoine de Baïf (1532-89).

[2] Tobin (1971) is the first study to demonstrate Racine's deep engagement with Seneca's tragedies; Levitan (1988) shows how Seneca's prose works underlie Racine's depiction of Burrus in *Britannicus*; and Knight (1950) and Philippo (2003 and 2013) begin to chart Racine's complex relationship with Euripides and other Greek authors.

[3] Both *La Thébaïde* (1664) and *Alexandre le Grand* (1665) had met with moderate success, but with *Andromaque* Racine's reputation as a playwright was assured.

Racine composed *Phèdre et Hippolyte,* , his confidence both as an artist and as a scholar had reached such a peak that he dared to portray his Phèdre as beset by ancient conceptions of love, an emotion that Racine's countrymen with their idolization of *le galant* all but considered their own contribution to the world's stage.

This professed allegiance to Greece and Rome is central to Racine's conception of his ideal audience, as his appeal to the judgment of Homer, Vergil, and Sophocles (quoted in the epigraph to this chapter) indicates. I do not mean to suggest that Racine did not compose his plays first and foremost with an eye to pleasing his French audience, but his overture to the great poets of old justifies, I think, my project, which is at its heart a philological study of the plays and their ancient models.[4] It is certainly the case that not even a classically trained scholar could parse all of Racine's allusions to ancient literature after a single showing of a given play. But Racine, as he states explicitly in the preface to *Britannicus*, composed his tragedies not only for stage performances but also for private study: "But what a spectator has missed might be noticed by the readers," *Mais ce qui est échappé aux spectateurs pourra être remarqué par les lecteurs.* Here and elsewhere he asks his readers to attend to his plays with the same care they might devote to a work of Euripides or Sophocles. In this chapter, I intend to provide a brief introduction to the three plays in which I consider how the programmatic stance Racine develops in his paratextual materials reflects his compositional practices. I will also present an overview of the classical education he received among the Jansenists at Port-Royal-des-Champs together with a description of his extant classical library. For Racine's rigorous study of Greek and Latin, not just as a schoolboy, but throughout his dramatic career, is, to a large extent, the justification for my philological approach to his plays.

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[4] Racine was equally committed to creating a literary work for the general public and the classical scholar. Consider Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux' intended audience for his translation of Longinus' *On the Sublime*. He refuses to let complicated references to lost works from antiquity spoil the general reader's enjoyment of Longinus' treatise lest he scare away those who have not studied Greek (*pour ne point effrayer ceux qui ne savent point le Grec,* LVII). Nevertheless, he carefully notes and defends each of his elisions and simplifications of the text in his *Remarques*, which serve as a scholarly commentary to his translation, (Billault, 2002). Similarly, Racine aims both to enrich and entertain the general public and to elicit a more erudite response from those of his audience who had been classically educated.

Racine's Classically-Themed Plays: A Brief Introduction

Andromaque was Racine's first "blockbuster." After a private opening performance at the Louvre before the court of Louis XIV, the play was publicly debuted at the Hôtel de Bourgogne on November 19, 1667 whereafter it was widely (though not universally) celebrated. In fact, the criticism of the play was so voluminous that Molière was able to produce a comedy from the material entitled *La Folle Querelle ou La Critique d'Andromaque* (1668).[5] Even Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, Racine's confidant and mentor, harbored reservations about his friend's characterization of Pyrrhus, although his objection to the hero's gallantry runs contrary to the more common complaint of his cruelty.[6] Racine's initial response to these attacks was to pen a pair of paratexts that he included in the first printing: a letter addressed to Henrietta of England (known in the French court as Madame), and a short preface that touted the play's ancient models. It has been noted that Racine appeals to the emotional reaction that his reading of *Andromaque* provoked in Madame, as though to suggest that her impassioned, "natural" response to the play condemned the critics who stubbornly refused to let themselves be moved by the Trojan captive.[7] But no less important is Racine's suggestion that intelligence and learning lay behind Madame's tears:

> Mais, Madame, ce n'est pas seulement du coeur que vous jugez de la bonté d'un ouvrage, c'est avec une intelligence qu'aucune fausse lueur ne saurait tromper… On sait, Madame, et Votre Altesse Royale a beau s'en cacher, que, dans ce haut degré de gloire où la nature et la fortune ont pris plaisir de vous élever, vous ne dédaignez pas cette gloire obscure que les gens de lettres s'étaient reserve.
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> But, Madame, it is not only with the heart that you judge the worth of my work, it is with an intelligence that no false spark could deceive…We all know, Madame, although your royal highness has hidden it well, that you do not scorn that obscure

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[5] Molière produced a comedy about the criticism of *Andromaque* attributed to Adrien-Thomas Perdou de Subligny (but rumored to have been written by Molière himself) called *La Folle Querelle ou La Critique d'Andromaque* (1668). The comedy was never popular, but Molière continued to run it to spite Racine, whom he had never forgiven for reproducing his *Alexandre le Grand* at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, a rival theatrical troupe, after Molière had already produced it successfully. In the aftermath of the fallout, Racine had also seduced Molière's leading actress Thérèse du Parc and convinced her to break with Molière professionally.

[6] Forestier (2006) 311.

[7] Forestier (2006) 310.

> honor reserved for scholars, even from that high place of prestige to which nature and fortune have happily raised you.

For Racine, Madame's devotion to scholarly pursuits authorizes her emotional response and entitles her to judge his plays. And, just in case Madame is not prepared to defend his *Andromaque* with easy recourse to the ancient models, he conveniently prints a few choice passages to guide her study in the following preface.

In the preface to *Andromaque* Racine attacks the philological training and reading practices of his critics who threaten to upend the entire genre of tragedy, ignorant as they are of the works of Horace and Aristotle. To the complaint that his Pyrrhus is too violent for the French stage, Racine writes:

> Mais je les prie de se souvenir que ce n'est pas à moi de changer les règles du théâtre. Horace nous recommande de dépeindre Achille farouche, inexorable, violent, tel qu'il était, et tel qu'on dépeint son fils. Et Aristote, bien éloigné de nous demander des héros parfaits, veut au contraire que les personnages tragiques, c'est-à-dire ceux dont le malheur fait la catastrophe de la tragédie, ne soient ni tout à fait bons, ni tout à fait méchants.
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> But I beg them to remember that it is hardly my place to alter the rules of the theater. Horace tells us to depict Achilles as fierce, inexorable, and violent, just as he was, and just as his son is depicted. And Aristotle, far from requiring perfect heroes like we do, prefers on the contrary for the tragic characters, those whose misfortune creates the catastrophe of the tragedy, to be neither completely good nor completely wicked.

By changing the stakes of the conversation from the particulars of his play to the integrity of the genre of tragedy itself, Racine exposes a weakness in his contemporary critics: they do not read ancient literature as thoroughly as he does. He will continue to suggest that his critics are mediocre classicists throughout his career. This three-pronged counterattack in which Racine appeals to the authority of antiquity and the prestige of certain high ranking members of his audience (here, Madame), while at the same time exposing his critics' myopic vision of the dramatic arts will become characteristic of his programmatic stance.

With *Andromaque*, Racine reveals himself to be a close reader of Seneca, Euripides, Vergil, and Homer. While his allusions to these authors are sometimes simple borrowings of plot or language, at other times he seems to reimagine a scene from Euripides or Sophocles and creatively read his own play back onto his ancient predecessor's text. As we will see,

Racinian characters will offer different accounts of past (mythological) events. These conflicting narratives often correspond to different versions in the ancient tradition, and it is only by examining earlier treatments of the myth that we can unpack what is at stake in Racine's play. In other instances, the characters of *Andromaque* become 'readers' of classical literature themselves and appear to consciously act and speak with reference to their predecessor-selves, sometimes in a playful or ironic fashion. When Andromaque supplicates Pyrrhus on behalf of her son's life, for example, she reminds him that he *knows* that she has never grasped another man's knee, consciously alluding to the climactic moment of her namesake's agon with Ulysses in Seneca's *Troades* wherein she does just that (691-93). Characters in *Andromaque* employ the language of recollection (*vous savez trop*, *vous ne l'ignorez pas*) to mark a classical intertext and to "remind" an interlocutor of a scene from an ancient play, a poetic device Racine pioneered in his first extant play *La Thébaïde ou les Frères Ennemis (*1664).[8] Modern classicists have termed this poetic technique 'the Alexandrian footnote' because it was employed by the Hellenistic Greek poets before being adopted by the Roman poets.[9] Racine, I will argue, like the Alexandrian and Roman poets of antiquity, practices a style of poetics that classicists have termed "creative imitation."[10] The textual complexity of Racine's plays underlies his dynamic engagement with themes, language, and poetic techniques of ancient literature. As such the theoretical approaches of intertextuality and reception studies[11] that have moved the study of Roman and Hellenistic poetry beyond lexical analyses of static 'borrowings' promise to open up new ways of reading Racine's plays.

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[8] Racine employs his version of an Alexandrian footnote at 1.1.81 and 5.3.1301. Of Racine's early plays, only the titles survive: *Amasie*, *Les Amours d'Ovide*, and *Théagène et Chariclée*, and so it is impossible to say whether his use of the Alexandrian footnote dates to his earliest compositions.

[9] Ross (1975); Hardie (1993); *et al.*

[10] West and Woodman (1979).

[11] Barchiesi (1984 and 2001); Conte (1986); Edmunds (2000); Hardie (1990 and 1993); Hinds 1998; Hunter (2006); Hunter and Fantuzzi (2004); Putnam (2006); Quint (1993); Thomas (1999); *et. al.*

Encouraged, perhaps, by the critical attention *Andromaque* had attracted, Racine directly challenges Moliere with *Les Plaideurs* (1668)[12] and Pierre Corneille with *Britannicus* (1669). Like Moliere for the genre of comedy, Corneille was the preeminent tragedian of his day, and Roman history was his well established territory. Corneille, at least, seems to have taken Racine's provocation personally, and the opening night of *Britannicus* found the older playwright furiously scribbling notes for a vituperative review of the play in a box he had rented out for himself alone. This time Racine was prepared for the firestorm that would envelop *Britannicus*.[13] In his preface (1670) published the year after the play debuted, Racine meticulously lists Tacitean parallels to combat each of his critics' misguided complaints. He (rather pedantically) recommends that his critics pick up a copy of Tacitus if they find fault with his characterization of Néron (*Il ne faut qu'avoir lu Tacite*). Here we see Racine digging in his heels: If they cannot handle Pyrrhus in love, let them have the cruelest of the Julio-Claudians in all his sadistic glory. And unlike with Pyrrhus, whose traditional brutality Racine endeavors to soften, no attempt is made ameliorate Nero's monstrosity. In the preface to *Britannicus*, Racine claims that he had intended to publish along with the text of his play the passages from Tacitus that had informed its composition. However, once he had collected the passages, he realized they would take up almost the same amount of space as the play itself (*mais j'ai trouvé que cet extrait tiendrait presque autant de place que la tragédie*). Although Racine limits himself to citing about twelve passages from the *Annales* in his preface, the 200-odd pages of excerpts from Tacitus's *Annales* and *Histories* written in Racine's hand suggest that he may very well have composed *Britannicus* with the Latin passages he would employ in defense of his characters in mind.[14]

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[12] This play, based on Aristophanes' *Wasps*, was the only comedy Racine would compose. No French playwright had ever before based a play on Aristophanes.

[13] Boileau certainly thought *Andromaque* affair shaped Racine's poetics, as his *Épître VII* (published in 1677) dedicated to Racine indicates: "*Cinna* owes its birth to the persecution of *The Cid*, and perhaps your pen owes to the censors of Pyrrhus the most noble traits of Burrhus," *Au Cid persécuté Cinna doit sa naissance, / Et peut-être ta plume aux censeurs de Pyrrhus / Doit les plus nobles traits dont tu peignis Burrhus.*

[14] Mesnard (1865) claims that these notebooks date from his school days, so almost ten years before he produced *Britannicus*. He does not give his evidence for this supposition. As I have not seen them myself, I am uncertain as to whether a later date is possible.

In the same preface, Racine justifies his very decision to write prefaces by comparing himself to the Roman comedian Terence:

> Je vois que Térence même semble n'avoir fait des prologues que pour se justifier contre les critiques d'un vieux poète malintentionné, *malevoli veteris poetae*, et qui venait briguer des voix contre lui jusqu'aux heures où l'on représentait ses comédies.
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> I see that even Terence only wrote prologues to bolster himself against the criticism of a malicious old poet, *malevoli veteris poetae* who would come to solicit votes against him up until the moment when he put on his comedies.

Terence's complaint comes from the prologue of *Hecyra* in which Terence denounces the attacks of a rival dramatist who was attempting to sabotage his performances. With this citation of Terence, Racine characterizes himself as a bright young playwright trying to entertain the public and Corneille as the spiteful old poet unwilling to cede space to a new generation. The context for the passage is Terence's apology for writing prologues that address issues of literary criticism instead of providing a summary of the play, as was traditional:[15]

> Poeta quum primum animum ad scribendum appulit,
> Id sibi negoti credidit solum dari
> Populo ut placerent quas fecisset fabulas.
> Verum aliter evenire multo intelligit.
> Nam in prologis scribundis operam abutitur,
> Non qui argumentum narret, sed qui malevoli
> Veteris poetae maledictis respondeat.
>
> When the poet first applied his mind to composition, he believed that this was his only concern, that the stories he composed be pleasing to the public. But now he knows that the situation is very different. For he spends his time writing prologues not to explain his story but to respond to the slanders of a spiteful old poet.

This passage could also describe the change in methodology that occurs between Racine's production of *Andromaque* and his composition of *Britannicus*: He wrote *Andromaque* to entertain his audience, and although his engagement with Euripides, Seneca, and Vergil in that play is unquestionable, he did not imagine then that he would be compelled to defend

[15] Terence is the first ancient dramatist to turn his prologues into a commentary on his compositional choices, a decision he links to the unfair criticism of a certain Luscius of Lanuvium, an older rival whose plays, fittingly perhaps, do not survive.

every little detail of his narrative. also wrote *Britannicus* to please the public, to be sure, but now with a vigilant eye to how exactly he would respond to his critics. This citation of Terence's account of the invention of the literary prologue comes close to suggesting that Racine has been forced to reinvent the theoretical preface to combat his critics. But, in writing prefaces to the printed editions of his plays, Racine is merely continuing a French tradition dating back to the 16th century, his French predecessors being no less concerned with shaping the reception of their plays than Racine himself. This too will become characteristic of Racine's approach to antiquity: Although he frequently engages in the same traditional "French" practices as his contemporaries, he is not above vesting these conventions with ancient authority when the opportunity presents itself. And if, in so doing, he can get in a jab at one of his critics, so much the better.

Racine's first tragedy based on Roman history tells the story of Nero's first murder, an episode narrated briefly in book thirteen of Tacitus' *Annales*. Throughout the play Racine's characters make striking allusions to episodes narrated elsewhere in Tacitus, and the Latin text illuminates the French play in unexpected ways. For example, in a final effort at reconciliation, Agrippine reminds her son of what she has done to ensure his ascendancy and adds that she is prepared to sacrifice even her own life provided that he rule the world (*Britannicus* 4.2), alluding to Agrippina's glib response to the soothsayers' prophecy that Nero would kill his mother in Tacitus (*Annales* 14.9). Knowledge of the passage in the *Annales* gives force to Agrippine's final words and prepares us for the damning prophecy she will sing after Britannicus' murder. The dramatic irony of having the still living Agrippine allude to Tacitus' coda on her death primes the viewer for her son's madness in the final act, a madness that in Tacitus does not set in until after Nero has killed his mother (*Annales* 14.10). The gripping tale of the discordant relationship between Agrippina and Nero is, I will argue, the story that Racine wants to stage. But the ancient plots that capture Racine's fancy are sometimes at odds with the strict dramatic precepts governing unity of time, place, and action. With *Britannicus*, Racine navigates these *règles* by tightly structuring his play around the brief episode of Britannicus' death while expanding the simple plot with details from different episodes of Nero's reign.

Racine, then, purports to tell the story of Britannicus' murder, but he actually explores a much larger swath of Tacitus' *Annales*. This technique is particular to Racine's

poetic process: although he reminds his readers that even the ancient poets allowed themselves gross liberties when refashioning stories for the stage (seconde préface of *Andromaque*), Racine himself rarely makes use of this privilege. He prefers to graft his characters and plots onto the rootstock of an ancient text in a way reminiscent of how Vergil collapses whole books of Homer into brief scenes in his *Aeneid*. By creating characters that draw on experiences only available to their eponymous counterparts in ancient literature, Racine has revitalized not just the characters and plotlines of the ancient poets, but also their very manner of engaging with other texts and variant stories. With *Britannicus*, Racine has not simply written a play based on events from Roman history, he has introduced a new methodology, a new way of incorporating ancient material into contemporary productions. Instead of combing Roman history for little known and partially told episodes that he can then expand upon (as Corneille did in *Cinna* and *Horace*, for example), Racine distills a long and detailed account of one of the most famous Roman emperors by one of the most famous Roman historians into the action of a single day.

In the eight years that intervene between *Britannicus* and *Phèdre et Hippolyte,* Racine composed *Bérénice* (1670), inspired, according to Racine, by a single sentence of Suetonius,[16] and *Mithridate* (1673), modeled on the accounts of the Mithridatic wars in Appian and Plutarch. Both demonstrate his continued interest in ancient historiographical writing. He also composed a play based on events from contemporary history (*Bajazet* 1672), which he set in the East, like the only surviving Greek play about a historical subject.[17] With *Iphigénie* (1674), he returns to the mythological subjects of his early successes. The year 1674 marks a particularly memorable literary moment in Paris, including as it did not only the production of *Iphigénie* but also the publication of Charles Perrault's *Critique de l'Opéra.* In this work Perrault praises Lully and Quinault's *Alceste* and claims that this contemporary production has eclipsed Euripides' eponymous play on the grounds that the French heroes and heroines

[16] In his preface to the play Racine quotes Suetonius as his model: "Titus, who passionately loved queen Berenice and to whom he was widely thought to have been engaged, dismissed her from Rome immediately, although she did not want to leave and he did not want her to go, *Titus reginam Berenicen, cui etiam nuptias pollicitus ferebatur, statim ab Urbe dimisit invitus invitam*, *Tit.* 7.

[17] There are a number of prominent allusions to Aeschylus' *Persians* in *Bajazet* that lead me to believe that a comparison with Aeschylus' play might yield interesting results.

exhibit more gallantry than their ancient counterparts.[18] In his preface (1676) to *Iphigénie*, written shortly before the debut of *Phèdre et Hippolyte,* Racine defends Euripides by exposing the cheap neo-Latin translation of Euripides' *Alcestis* that Perrault had evidently read in lieu of the Greek original and tracing his unfair criticism to a misunderstanding of the Greek. He ends this magisterial display of scholarly acumen by quoting Quintilian's caveat against the glib criticism of ancient poets, "lest they [the critics of Greek literature], as happens to many men, condemn what they do not understand" (*ne, quod plerisque accidit, damnent quae non intelligunt,* 8.2.24), an admonition that Racine might direct to his own critics.

The *Querelle d'Alceste* that ensued was the prequel of what would come to be known as the *Querelle des Anciens et Modernes.* Although this standoff, which, to grossly oversimplify, would pit the defenders of antiquity against the champions of the contemporary age, was still in its infancy, the defence of Greek antiquity no doubt weighed heavily on Racine's mind as he composed *Phèdre et Hippolyte.* The epithets "ancients" and "moderns" are somewhat misleading. Both *les anciens* and *les moderns* were very much invested in the present age and proud of contemporary progress, and both groups bolstered their literary arguments with ancient texts.[19] As *les moderns* came to embrace the relative "modernity" of the Roman empire, favorably comparing Louis XIV to the emperor Augustus, *les anciens* began to align themselves more closely with Greek antiquity, especially Homer and the Attic tragedians. *Les anciens* do not try to reinvest classical literature with the authority it commanded in the middle ages, nor do they contend that ancient civilizations were morally superior to Louis XIV's Paris. On the contrary, the defenders of antiquity appeal to the ingenuous imagination and productive creativity of ancient authors and argues that in them resided an untamed genius, a spark of natural brilliance that the "progress" of modernity had all but snuffed out.[20]

Aristotle's conception of tragedy's psychological effects, its evocation of pity and fear from the audience and Longinus' interest in the honest portrayal of raw emotions in *On*

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[18] Perrault complains that encouraging one's wife to commit suicide is hardly the proper way to treat a lady. He is also appalled by Heracles' drunkenness in Euripides.

[19] Norman (2011).

[20] In his *Art Poetique,* loosely based on Horace's eponymous poem, Boileau strongly denounces the contemporary habit of whitewashing the ancient models, equating this practice with dull poetry, (Norman 2011).

the Sublime, translated into French for the first time by Boileau in 1674, were important touchstones for the argument that the appeal of antiquity lay not in moral authority but in something more human, more primitive, even. Aristotle answers Plato's critique of tragedy by claiming that the tragic hero's character was not meant to be emulated so much as pitied and feared.[21] Longinus takes Aristotle's theory about the psychological effects of poetry one step further, arguing that sublime art entails a loss of rationality. For these ancient critics, great art does not manifest itself in what is simply beautiful or well-crafted, but in what is sufficiently distressing to cause bewilderment (ἔκπληξις), wonder (θαυμαστόν), and even fear (φόβος). Aristotle's focus on Homer and the tragedians and Longinus' clear preference for the poetry of archaic and classical Greece explains, in part, the importance that Hellenic culture (as opposed to Roman) began to take on for *les anciens*. Racine's renewed interest in composing plays based on Greek mythology may be in part due to the way these battle lines were being drawn. His continued interest in the emotional and psychological effects of tragedy can be seen particularly clearly in his preface to *Iphigénie*:

> Pour ce qui regarde les passions, je me suis attaché à le suivre plus exactement. J'avoue que je lui dois un bon nombre des endroits qui ont été le plus approuvés dans ma tragédie. Et je l'avoue d'autant plus volontiers, que ces approbations m'ont confirmé dans l'estime et dans la vénération que j'ai toujours eues pour les ouvrages qui nous restent de l'Antiquité. J'ai reconnu avec plaisir, par l'effet qu'a produit sur notre théâtre tout ce que j'ai imité ou d'Homère ou d'Euripide, que le bon sens et la raison étaient les mêmes dans tous les siècles. Le goût de Paris s'est trouvé conforme à celui d'Athènes. Mes spectateurs ont été émus des mêmes choses qui ont mis autrefois en larmes le plus savant peuple de la Grèce, et qui ont fait dire qu'entre les poètes, Euripide était extrêmement tragique, τραγικώτατος c'est-à-dire qu'il avait merveilleusement excité la compassion et la terreur, qui sont les véritables effets de la tragédie.
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> In regard to the passions, I followed [Euripides] more assiduously. I confess that I owe to him a good number of the passages in my tragedy which have received the most praise. And I confess it all the more freely because this approval has confirmed the esteem and veneration that I have always had for those works of antiquity that

[21] *Les moderns* certainly employed Plato's criticism of Homer and the tragedians to defend their censure of ancient literature, so it is unsurprising, perhaps, to see *les anciens* employing Aristotle's defence of tragedy.

> have survived. I have realized with pleasure, because of the effect that the passages I have imitated from Homer or Euripides have produced in our theater, that good taste and intelligence is the same in every age. The tastes of Paris have been revealed to conform to those of Athens. My audience has been moved by the same things that once moved to tears the most brilliant people of Greece, and this made them claim that among the poets Euripides was extremely tragic, τραγικώτατος, that is to say that he excited to a wondrous degree the pity and fear which are the true effects of tragedy.

Racine credits Euripides with a brilliant portrayal of human emotion, claiming that although he altered details of the Greek playwright's plot, he faithfully translated his depiction of the passions into his own play. And just as Racine assimilates his contemporary audience to the audience of classical Athens, he begins to represent himself as the French reincarnation of his Euripides, who may not, according to Aristotle, have been the best tragedian, but was certainly the most tragic (*Poet.* 1453a). In his preface to *Phèdre et Hippolyte* Racine will embrace even further this characterization of himself as the French Euripides, heralding Phaedra as the most realistic heroine to ever grace the tragic stage. If we see Racine taking pains to soften the edges of his ancient characters in *Andromaque* and anxious to defend all of his poetic decisions with recourse to Tacitus in *Britannicus*, in *Phèdre et Hippolyte* Racine does not apologize. This play, Racine's final classical tragedy in which the pagan gods assume something of their ancient power, and the supernatural, so long exiled from the tragic stage, returns to play a crucial role, is a sweeping encomium of antiquity.

Racine's Classical Education

By the time Racine would begin his education at Port-Royal des Champs in 1649, the teaching of classical Latin had been firmly established in the educational centers of France. Although the study of Greek had not received the same widespread attention, French scholars had largely succeeded in printing scholarly editions of extant Greek texts complete with ancient scholia and annotations, and these texts had become relatively affordable and widely available.[22] Although great strides had been made in the development of dictionaries

[22] Gilles de Gourmont (1499–1533) established the first printing press in France capable of printing Greek texts in 1509. At Guillaume Budé's behest, Josse Bade (1462–1535) incorporated breathing marks and accents into the Greek type set and was able to produce texts significantly more readable than those of his predecessors. But it is the Estienne family,

and grammar aids for facilitating the efficient study of the Greek language,[23] Greek authors would never enjoy the large scale readership of their Latin counterparts, in part because the study of the Greek language was threatened by imputations of heresy from its very inception.[24] Before Guillaume Budé's insistence on the establishment of permanent Greek

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related to Bade by marriage, to whom we owe the ready availability of Greek texts in France by the end of the 16th century. Robert Estienne (1503-59) continued to develop better Greek typefaces. He printed eight *editiones principes* between 1544 and 1551. Under the direction of Henri Estienne (1528-98), the Estienne family press published 74 Greek texts, 18 of which were *editiones principes*. The most famous of these was the 1578 edition of Plato's complete works, the source of the "Stephanus numbers," (Sandy, 2002, 47-78 and Sandys, 1903, 165-77).

[23] The only Greek lexicons available in the first third of the 16th century (e.g. Giovanni Crastone's lexicon and George Hermonymus' glossary) were derived from Byzantine and late-classical *lexica* and *onomastica* that focused on rare or unusual words. These aids offered little help to a beginner student of Greek lacking Greek heritage. The publication of Guillaume Budé's C*ommentarii Linguae Graecae* in 1529 provided aspiring French Hellenists for the first time a lexicon of the Greek language based on classical Greek usage. Like modern Greek dictionaries, Budé quotes classical Greek passages as sources for his definitions and notes syntactic peculiarities (such as unusual uses of noun cases or verb forms). With the publication of Robert Estienne's Greek dictionary in 1548 which was an enlarged and corrected version of Budé's dictionary, and Henri Estienne's further revised *Thesaurus Graecae Linguae* (1572), the French finally possessed an instrumental tool for the productive exploration of Greek literature. Sandy (2002) 62-71.

[24] To support this claim, I offer you two examples and an anecdote. Firstly, in 1523, the Greek books belonging to François Rabelais were confiscated on the order of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Paris. Although they were eventually returned, it seems clear that there existed serious anxiety about church officials learning to read Greek. Secondly, among the philological crimes for which Etienne Dolet was burned at the stake in 1546 (he was known by some as the first martyr of humanism) was the accusation that he had translated the pseudo-Platonic *Axiochus* in such a way so as to suggest that Plato did not believe in the immortality of the soul. According to Sandys, "this charge contributed in no small degree to his being condemned to death," (1903, 180). Dolet was the first to translate Plato into French, thereby opening up the work to a larger audience and attracting greater attention from the church. See also Worth-Stylianou (2002) 137-37. Thirdly, in 1551, Konrad Heresbach (1496-1576), a German scholar of Greek and Hebrew who spent time in Paris, records that he heard a French monk declaring "they have recently discovered a language called Greek, against which we must be on our guard. It is the parent of all heresies. I observed in the hands of many persons a work written in that language called the *New*

posts in Paris,[25] teachers of Greek were only occasionally available to a wealthy, private clientele in the capital.[26] But in 1530, the appointments of Pierre Danès and Jacques Toussain as *lecteurs royaux* inaugurated a long period in France of regular, formal instruction in classical Greek. Their influence may be surmised by the great successes of their students and predecessors, such as Jacques Amyot, François Rabelais, Petrus Ramus, and Adrianus Turnebus, who was appointed *lecteur royal* upon the death of Toussain. The next Greek professor to be named in 1556 was Jean Dorat whose eminent students included the trio who would become known as La Pléiade: Pierre de Ronsard, Joachim du Bellay, and Jean-Antoine de Baïf. For the next decades, Paris would remain an important center of the study of Hellenism in the Western world, but the stricter religious atmosphere in the wake of the Council of Trent augured a return to the medieval traditions of historical and moral exegesis and a privileging of Latin over Greek models.[27] It was this intellectual milieu that Racine was born into in 1639.

Jean Racine was educated by the Jansenists, an austere movement within the Roman Catholic church that valued the rigorous study of Latin and Greek. It is not certain at what age Racine arrived at the Petites Écoles de Port-Royal, but it seems likely that he was no older than six or seven when he began his education there at the side of Antoine Le Maitre, a scholar whose intimate relationship with the boy is insinuated by his appellation of *fils*. It is even conceivable that Racine, who addressed Le Maitre as *père*, had been formally adopted by

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Testament. It is a work teeming with brambles and vipers. As for Hebrew, all who learn it immediately become Jews," (Heresbach, 1551, 26, quoted in Sandys, 1903, 181). Although this anecdote is certainly parodic in tone, it reveals some of the anxieties that the study of Greek evoked in the early modern period.

[25] The Sorbonne was famously hostile to the study of Greek and Hebrew. For this reason, in the preface of C*ommentarii Linguae Graecae* (1529), Budé appealed to Francis I to found the Collège royal, which would permanently employ professors of Greek and Hebrew. Francis I heard Budé's plea and the next year founded the Collège royal (to be renamed as the Collège de France in 1870) and appointed readers of Greek, Hebrew, and Mathematics.

[26] Budé considered himself to be self-taught. He had, however, received some early training in Greek from Hermonymus, a Greek tutor active in Paris early in the 16th century. He also greatly benefited from his friendship with Janus Lascaris, a scholar based in Rome who was able to acquire Greek books for Budé, (Sandy, 2002, 81-3 and 88-89.

[27] Ford (2002) 346-49.

his teacher.[28] In 1649, Racine began his formal study as a student of Port-Royal. From 1653-55, for reasons not altogether understood, Racine studied at the Jansenist collège in Beauvais before returning to Port-Royal to finish the final four years of his education.[29] At the age of eighteen, he was sent to the College of Harcourt in Paris where he first experienced the elite literary world of the French capital. After spending a couple of years in the diocese of Uzès hoping to obtain an ecclesiastical benefice (an "exile" from Paris which the young scholar would melodramatically compare to the exile suffered by Ovid from Augustan Rome),[30] Racine returned to Paris prepared to make a living by writing for the stage. This career choice would undoubtedly mean breaking with the very scholars who had bestowed upon him the tools of his craft.

The rigorous training in the Greek language that Racine received from the instructors of Port-Royal was uncommon outside of the capital. The emphasis that the Jansenists placed on the teaching of Greek was still considered potentially heretical by the Jesuits, who took offence at Claude Lancelot's philological study of the Greek roots of French words on the grounds that the language derived, so they claimed, from the Vulgate alone.[31] Both Lancelot and the theologian Antoine Arnauld, two of the school's most renowned instructors, were actively developing innovative pedagogical methods for teaching Latin and Greek while Racine was a student. Lancelot published in 1644 his widely successful *Nouvelle méthode pour apprendre facilement la langue latine* followed by his 1655 publication of *Nouvelle méthode pour apprendre facilement la langue grecque,* both of which presented

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[28] Racine's mother had died in 1641 and his father in 1643. Godefroi Hermant, the Chanoine de Beauvais where Racine attended collège, writes that Racine was raised (*il avait été élevé*) at Port-Royal before coming to study at Beauvais. Forestier (2006) 51-6 lays out the evidence in favor of an early arrival at Port-Royal.

[29] In 1653, Port-Royal closed for a brief period and sent students to affiliated programs. Racine, perhaps because of a familial connection with Beauvais, did not attend one of the three affiliated schools. Instead, he was enrolled for two years at Pastour de la ville de Beauvais before returning to Port-Royal in the fall of 1655, (Forestier, 2006, 75-9).

[30] Ovid's exile from Rome, was, incidentally, the theme of one of Racine's early tragedies, no longer extant: *Les Amours d'Ovide.*

[31] In response to Lancelot's *Jardin des Racines grecques* (1657), le Père Philippe Labbe had published a pamphlet entitled *Les Étymologies du plusieurs mots français, contre les abus de la secte des hellénistes de Port-Royal* (1661).

rules of grammar and translation in the French language for the first time. Class discussions and *explications des textes* were conducted in French (rather than Latin). The accurate translation of Latin and Greek into the vernacular was emphasized as a way to ensure that students understood the content of what they were reading rather than becoming bogged down in the neo-Latin intermediary popular in other European schools and centers of education.[32]

The classes at the school were tutorial in style. Five or six pupils would work intimately with one or two instructors. The close reading of ancient texts and the appreciation of both the eloquence and sense of the ancients was the focus of the curriculum. The memoirs of Pierre-Thomas Du Fossé, a Port-Royal student slightly older than Racine, provide an invaluable source of information about how Lancelot taught his students:

> Il s'appliquait à me former peu à peu sur des règles qu'il possédait si parfaitement. Il me lisait ou me faisait lire des endroits choisis des poètes ou des orateurs et m'en faisait remarquer toutes les beautés, soit pour la force du sens, soit pour l'élocution. Il m'apprenait aussi à prononcer comme il faut les vers et la prose; ce qu'il faisait admirablement lui-même, ayant le ton de la voix charmant, avec toutes les autres parties d'un grand orateur. Il me donnait aussi outre cela plusieurs règles pour bien traduire, me faisait comprendre combien l'art d'une traduction fidèle, noble et élégante, était difficile et important.
>
> He would set himself to instructing me in the rules that he possessed so perfectly. He would read to me or have me read chosen passages of the poets or orators and would have me comment on all the beautiful aspects of the text, whether in meaning or in diction. He would also teach me to pronounce correctly both verse and prose—a thing that he did admirably well, possessing a charming voice along with all the other attributes of a great orator. Outside of that, he would also provide me with rules for translating well and made me understand how the art of a faithful translation, noble and elegant, was both difficult and important.

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[32] Compare the Jansenist approach to Charles Perrault's call for a self-censoring prudence that would keep ancient cultures hidden from the general public. The faithful translations of ancient texts, he argues, were "*contre la bonne politique*." It would be better, according to *les moderns,* to reserve Greek and Latin for the learned aristocracy, and so to translate Greek texts into the neo-Latin of the educated elite, but not the vernacular languages. Perrault criticizes, for example, Longepierre's translations of Theocritus' *Idylls*, whose shepherds he found crass and obscene, (Norman 2011).

Du Fossé feels compelled to note that translation into French is difficult. Although it was far from the common practice of the time to teach students to translate Latin and Greek into French, this training would have no doubt been extremely useful to Racine when he began to compose for the French stage. Indeed, the annotations Racine makes in his personal copies of ancient texts suggest that finding the correct way to express an ancient sentiment in French remained a primary concern of Racine's throughout his life. Just as Vergil did much to expand the poetic *Kunstsprache* by bringing into Latin stylistic features of literary Greek, so, I think, did Racine aim to enrich the French language with his renderings of Latin and Greek phrases into eloquent French. In the early 19th century, Louis-Marcelin de Fontanes published an essay about an edition of Horace annotated by Racine that is no longer extant in which Racine marks out words and phrases to be translated into French: "He had marked several expressions from Horace as suitable for French poetry. For example, next to *nigrum pulvere* (*Odes* 1.6.14-15) he had written *noir de poussière* and added 'that expression could be successfully brought into our language.'"[33]

Active memorization of Greek and Latin held a prominent place in the culture of the school. Du Fossé recalls in his memoirs reciting whole books of Vergil by heart in competition with his fellow students. In a self-deprecating manner, he admits that although a colleague of his could recite whole books of Vergil with barely a mistake, he was content enough if his full book recitation contained but ten or twelve errors.[34] We should, then, consider likely the possibility that Racine drew heavily from his memory stores when composing his plays and prologues. Ancient historians and church fathers commanded a prominent position in the Port-Royal curriculum (we have extant many of Racine's copies of these texts). Homer and Vergil were also widely read and studied. Ancient tragedy would not

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[33] Il avait marqué plusieurs expressions d'Horace, comme propres à passer dans la poésie française. A côté de celle-ci: nigrum pulvere (ode VI du livre I, vers 14 et 15), il avait écrit noir de poussière, et ajoutait: Cette expression 'peut se transporter avec succès dans notre langue.' (*Mercure de France,* 1800). This passage is cited by Mesnard (1865) v.6 326-27.

[34] Comme notre classe estoit composée de ceux qui étoient les plus auancez dans les études, nous faisions des défis d'émulation les uns contre les autres, à qui reciteroit un plus grande nombre de vers de Virgile, sans faire de fautes. Et il est vray que la memoire du sieur de Ville-neuue l'emportoit sur nous. Car je me souuiens de luy auoir entendu réciter des liures entiers de Virgile, sans presque faire de faute. Pour moy, j'étois fort content, quand je pouuois en reciter un, en faisant dix ou douze fautes. (Du Fossé, 1876-79, v.1. 170).

have been the focus of a Port-Royal course of study, but Arnauld and Lancelot mention Euripides, Sophocles, and Aristophanes among their recommended texts for serious students of Greek.[35]

Anecdotal evidence suggests that Racine had been introduced to Euripides and Sophocles during his time at Port-Royal, and I find this scenario quite plausible.[36] The fact that Racine owned and annotated multiple editions of Sophocles and Euripides suggests, I think, that he read the plays at different points in his life and increases the likelihood of his reading the tragedies both as a student and as a professional dramatist.[37] Racine is also rumored to have read Heliodorus in his last years at Port-Royal. After Lancelot twice caught the boy reading in private and twice burned the novel, the precocious young scholar acquired a third copy of the book, memorized it, and then presented it to his teacher to be burned, or so the story goes.[38] Although these kinds of tales are often too good to be true, Racine, in his 1662 journal *Remarques sur l'Odyssée d'Homère* mentions Heliodorus no fewer than four times, indicating a certain familiarity with the novelist only a couple years after he

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[35] Lancelot (1644) 26-35 lists Homer, Aristophanes, and Euripides as appropriate for advanced-intermediate students. Arnauld lists Euripides and Sophocles. Both teachers thought that the playwrights ought to be read before the orators, which were reserved for the most advanced classes. See Carré (1887) 217 and Phillippo (2003) 14-18 for a more detailed account.

[36] "Le Sacristain de cette Abbaye, homme très habile, mais dont le nom m'est échappé, lui apprit le grec, et dans moins d'une année le mit en état d'entendre les Tragédies de Sophocle et d'Euripide. Elles l'enchantèrent à un tel point, qu'il passait les journées à les lire, et à les apprendre par cœur, dans les bois qui sont autour de l'étang de Port-Royal." (Pellisson and d'Olivet, 1743, 348).

[37] From my brief examination of certain volumes from Racine's personal library, I think it likely that the Aldine editions were his school texts and that he acquired the other more expensive (and scholarly) editions (Turnebus, Stephanus) later, after he had begun to write plays.

[38] Il trouva moyen d'avoir le Roman de Théagène et Chariclée en Grec: le Sacristain lui prit ce livre, et le jeta au feu. Huit jours après, Racine en eut un autre, qui éprouva le même traitement. Il en acheta un troisième, et l'apprit par cœur: après quoi il l'offrit au Sacristain, pour le brûler comme les deux autres." (Pellisson and d'Olivet, 1743, 348). Racine is also thought to have written a lost play based on Heliodorus' *Aethiopica* entitled *Théagène et Chariclée*.

left Port-Royale.[39] There is additional support for the theory that Racine, even at a young age, rejected the strict censorship of literature practiced by the Jansenists. In one of his notebooks on Tacitus dating to his school years, he underlines *Annales* 14.50, a passage in which Nero exiles a certain Fabricius Veiento and orders the books he authored to be burned. But rather than having the intended effect of suppressing Veiento's works, the emperor's censorship actually increased their popularity. Racine's marginal note reads *livres defendus.*[40]

The oldest surviving classical text of Racine's personal library appears to be a copy of the *editio princeps* of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* (Junta 1517), on the title page of which Racine has inscribed his name and the date 1655, the year he returned to Port-Royal from Beauvais. Of the 688 pages, all but the final 50 are heavily annotated by Racine's hand. According to his own notes, he begins the second volume of Plutarch, the *Moralia,* in May of 1656 which suggests that he read the entirety of *Parallel Lives* in about seven months. This demonstrates that at the age of sixteen Racine read Greek with real fluency, especially considering that he was certainly reading other authors at the same time. An edition of the complete works of Vergil annotated by Racine's hand dates to the same period and suggests a similar pace (five or six pages of text a day), and it seems probable that he was reading both of these texts at the same time. His notebooks on Pindar and Homer, *Remarques sur les Olympiques* and *Remarques sur l'Odyssée,* date to his *séjour* in Uzès (1662) and indicate that Racine was continuing to sharpen the skills he had acquired at Port-Royal after his formal studies had come to an end. His annotations of Pindar's Olympic odes show a marked interest in the nuances of Pindaric Greek. In the margins of the Greek text, he translates difficult words and phrases and otherwise attends to understanding well each word of a given poem. In his notebook dedicated to *The Odyssey*, there are fewer philological annotations, indicating, unsurprisingly to any modern classicist, that he read Homer with a certain fluency that

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[39] Mesnard (1865) v.6 60, 66, 82, and 89. Jacques Amyot, whose French translation of Plutarch's *Lives* (Les *Vies des hommes illustres grecs et romaines*, 1559) was held in high regard by men of letters from Montaigne to Shakespeare, had also translated Heliodorus and Longus into French, increasing the probability that young Racine would have heard of these novels and sought them out.

[40] Mesnard (1865) v.6 343 draws this parallel between the Heliodorus anecdote and the passage in Tacitus.

eluded him with Pindar. His annotations of Homer are of a more literary quality. He comments, for example, on how Vergil reworks certain Homeric scenes.[41] This interest in intertextuality, in how an ancient author adapts a passage from a predecessor, will become especially relevant as Racine begins to compose his own plays.

In addition to these texts dating to Racine's younger years, a number of his later acquisitions of ancient works survive, many of which may correspond to the time period of his dramatic *floruit*, although precise dating is difficult. We possess two editions of Euripides, the Aldus (1503) and the Stephanus (1602), both heavily annotated. All nineteen of Euripides' plays are marked with some type of annotations in either one or the other edition, suggesting that Racine had at least familiarized himself with the entire corpus.[42] The Stephanus edition is on the whole more thoroughly annotated than the Aldus, perhaps because it was considered the more authoritative text. Additionally, we possess three heavily annotated editions of Sophocles' seven tragedies, those printed by Aldus (1502), Turnebus (1553), and Stephanus (1603). There are two annotated editions of Aeschylus (Stanley 1663 and Turnebus 1552) an annotated edition of Homer's *Iliad* (Turnebus 1554), two editions of Plato (Valderum 1534 and Stephanus 1578), an edition of Aristophanes (Toussain 1540), an edition of Hesiod (Hackius 1650), an edition of Pindar's odes (Benedictus 1620), a heavily annotated edition of Demosthenes (Benenatus 1570), an edition of Apollonius of Rhodes (Elsevier 1641), an edition of Xenophon (Leunclavius 1625), an edition of Aristotle's *Poetics* (Elsevier 1643), and an edition of the pastoral poets, Theocritus, Bion, and Moschus (Heinsius 1604). In addition to annotated texts, we possess Racine's notebook of passages extracted from Vergil, Horace, Cicero (especially his letters), Pliny, and Livy. We have his pocket copy of Seneca's philosophical works (Elsevier 1649), two editions of Pliny the Elder (Frellon 1563 and Elsevier 1635), and a Sallust (Thysius 1665), along with many editions of early church fathers and historians.[43] The absence of certain texts or authors should not lead us to conclude that Racine was not familiar with them, but the presence of so many classical

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[41] For example, he compares the way the two poets send Hermes / Mercury down from Olympus to advise Odysseus and Aeneas in *Odyssey* 1 and *Aeneid* 4 (Mesnard, 1865, v.6 96).

[42] *Hecuba*, *Supplices*, *Hercules Furen*s, and *Heracleidae* have only non-verbal notes (e.g. underlining, bracketing, dashes, etc). See Phillipo (2003) for details about the Euripides editions.

[43] For the complete list of Racine's extant library holdings, see Mesnard (1865) v.6 167-365.

texts along with Racine's copious annotations, both verbal and nonverbal (underlining, etc.) certainly suggests that Racine's active engagement with antiquity did not end when he graduated from Port-Royal.

Chapter Two:

Reading Seneca: Troy Falls Again in Racine's *Andromaque*

Mais véritablement mes personnages sont si fameux dans l'antiquité que, pour peu qu'on la connaisse, on verra fort bien que je les ai rendus tels que les anciens poètes nous les ont donnés.

"My characters are so famous in antiquity that even if you have only a scant knowledge of that era, you will see clearly that I have returned them to the stage just as the ancient poets gave them to us."
Racine, Première préface to *Andromaque*

In Racine's *Andromaque*, just before Pyrrhus[44] weds his Trojan captive, Hermione bitterly reminds the son of Achilles of the last time he accompanied a Trojan princess to the altar:

> Dans des ruisseaux de sang Troie ardente plongée;
> De votre propre main Polyxène égorgée
> Aux yeux de tous les Grecs indignés contre vous.
>
> Burning Troy plunged into streams of blood; Polyxena's throat cut by your own hand in sight of all the Greeks outraged against you, 4.5.137-39.

These words recall the climactic scene of Seneca's *Troades* in which Polyxena, decked out as a bride, is brutally sacrificed to the ghost of Achilles before a horrified crowd of Greeks and Trojans (1128-31). It is Pyrrhus who walks the maiden down the aisle and buries his sword in her breast, honoring his father's shade with a sacrificial bride. The sheer quantity of blood that gushes forth from Troy's final victim (*prorupit cruor / per vulnus ingens*, *Tr.* 1156-57; *Hec.* 568 *κρουνοὶ δ' ἐχώρουν*) is alluded to in the *ruisseaux de sang* that flood the burning city.[45] In

[44] In this chapter and throughout the dissertation, I use the French spelling of Racine's characters to differentiate them from the heroes and heroines of Seneca and Euripides, *e.g.* Andromaque and Andromache. When the French character's name is not spelled differently from the Latin (as is the case with Pyrrhus and Hermione), I will take care to indicate which incarnation of the character I mean.

[45] "A stream of blood gushed forth from her great wound," *Tr.* 1156-57; "Streams of blood flowed forth," *Hec.* 568. *Cruor* is not simply blood (*sanguis*), but rather the stream of blood

Andromaque, Pyrrhus accompanies another Trojan princess to the altar, this time in order to marry her himself. In the midst of the rite, he is slain by the Greeks led by Orestes, ostensibly because of Pyrrhus' endorsement of Hector's widow and son, but actually because of Hermione's desire to avenge her spurned beauty (2.1.445-48). That both plays end with a bloody wedding between a Trojan princess and Greek hero belies a deep structural similarity between the two works.[46] There are three parallels in the two plays relating to the final ceremony that I want to examine in this chapter: (1) Pyrrhus' willingness to defy the Greeks and especially the house of Atreus, in Seneca with regard to Polyxena's sacrifice, in Racine with regard to his marriage to Andromaque; (2) the use of sacrificial language in both plays to refer to aspects of the wedding ceremony; and (3) the psychological state of Seneca's Polyxena and Racine's Andromaque as they suffer their final misfortunes and wed themselves to men they hate.

Pyrrhus against the Greeks

In Seneca's *Troades*, Pyrrhus comes on stage arguing with Agamemnon, continuing a long feud between the house of Peleus and the house of Atreus that reaches back to the dispute between Achilles and Agamemnon about the distribution of the booty of the city Chryse, as the frequent references to the events of *Iliad* 1 make clear.[47] The present disagreement is over whether to sacrifice Polyxena to Achilles' ghost in order to grant the

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that flows from a wound (*Lewis and Short* 1A). Seneca is translating Euripides' imagery into Latin, and Racine is, in effect, alluding to both accounts with his *ruisseaux de sang*.

[46] Seneca is not Racine's only ancient source for his *Andromaque*, and I will refer to other ancient narratives, such as Euripides' and Vergil's accounts (both mentioned in Racine's prefaces) of Andromache and her experiences after the fall of Troy as necessary throughout the chapter.

[47] Pyrrhus, recalling Achilles' complaint in *Iliad* 1, blames Agamemnon for not granting Achilles an appropriate prize: "Although you are willing and you hurry to grant what is asked, you will give it too late: already have all the leaders taken away their prizes. What kind of lesser gift could be given in return for such bravery?," *velis licet quod petitur ac properes dare, / sero es daturus: iam suum cuncti duces / tulere pretium quae minor merces potest / tantae dari virtutis?,* 207-10. Agamemnon criticizes Pyrrhus as quick to anger, like his father: "To not be capable of controlling your impulse is a juvenile fault; this first blaze of youth seizes some, but for Pyrrhus, it is his father's fervor; I once endured the harsh arrogance and threats of Achilles with indifference," *Iuvenile vitium est regere non posse impetum; / aetatis alios fervor hic primus rapit, / Pyrrhum paternus; spiritus quondam trucis / minasque tumidi lentus Aeacidae tuli*, 250-53.

hero a share of Troy's booty. In Racine's *Andromaque*, a similar feud involving the same families takes place between Pyrrhus and Orestes, the son of Agamemnon. Just as Seneca's Pyrrhus draws upon a conflict started in *Iliad* 1, so does Racine's Pyrrhus allude to a disagreement that began in Seneca's *Troades* when he attacks Orestes' heroism[48] and accuses him of trying to revoke his war prize:

> La Grèce a-t-elle encore quelque droit sur sa vie?
> Et seul de tous les Grecs ne m'est-il pas permis
> D'ordonner des captifs que le sort m'a soumis?
> Oui, Seigneur, lorsqu'au pied des murs fumants de Troie
> Les vainqueurs tout sanglants partagèrent leur proie,
> Le sort, dont les arrêts furent alors suivis,
> Fit tomber en mes mains Andromaque et son fils.
> Hécube près d'Ulysse acheva sa misère;
> Cassandre dans Argos a suivi votre père:
> Sur eux, sur leurs captifs, ai-je étendu mes droits?
> Ai-je enfin disposé du fruit de leurs exploits?
>
> Does Greece still have some right over [Astyanax'] life? Is it not permitted to me alone of all the Greeks to rule the captives that I was allotted? Yes, good sir, while at the foot of the smoking walls of Troy the bloody conquerors shared their spoils, Fate (*le sort*), whose judgments were then followed, made fall into my hands Andromaque and her son. Hecuba made her misery complete at the side of Ulysses, Cassandra followed your father to Argos: Did I extend my rights onto them, onto their captives? Did I help myself to the fruit of their exploits? 1.2.182-92.

Pyrrhus accuses Orestes and the Greeks of coming to his kingdom (Epirus) and undermining his rule by demanding charge of his prisoners of war. *Le sort* is a difficult word to translate: Here, it is Racine's translation of the Homeric *dasmos*: the proper allotment of treasure according to one's rank and military prowess. But it also overlaps semantically with the Homeric concept of *moira*, the fair share or destiny / fate. In revoking what has been

[48] In addition to lodging the same complaint about proper allotment not being respected, both the Senecan and the Racinian Pyrrhus attack the bravery of the House of Atreus. At *Troades* 315-16 Pyrrhus mocks Agamemnon's bravery, suggesting that he feared to ask Achilles' pardon in person and instead sent Odysseus, Ajax, and Phoenix to plead his case. At *Andromaque* 175-80, Pyrrhus mocks Orestes' embassy to sacrifice Astyanax as an exploit unworthy of the son of Agamemnon and a poor attempt at heroism, as Tobin (1999) 43-46 discusses.

bestowed, Orestes and the Greeks abuse the esteem that Pyrrhus, conqueror of Troy, is due. In Seneca, Pyrrhus accuses Agamemnon of not respecting proper allotment with regard to his father; in Racine, he charges Agamemnon's son with the same crime.

Seneca's Pyrrhus attacks Agamemnon for neglecting to grant a prize to his father, Achilles (*nullumne Achillis praemium manes ferent?*, 292),[49] harboring a longstanding resentment about the division of the loot from Troy. According to Pyrrhus, Achilles, although dead, is owed a share for the essential role he played in the downfall of Troy, just as in *Iliad* 1 he is owed a prize for sacking the town of Chryse. While Pyrrhus' objection to the revocation of his war prize in Racine originates with Seneca (and Homer), Euripides' *Andromache* contains a close parallel for another detail of Pyrrhus' complaint. When Peleus arrives at his absent grandson's palace to find Andromache's son Molossus[50] being threatened, he indignantly accuses Menelaus of coming to Epirus to micromanage his home and his grandson's war prize: "What? Will you come here and manage my home? Is it not enough for you to rule over Sparta? My grandson took her as his prize to be sure," *πῶς; ἦ τὸν ἀμὸν οἶκον οἰκήσεις μολὼν /δεῦρ'; οὐχ ἅλις σοι τῶν κατὰ Σπάρτην κρατεῖν;...οὑμὸς δέ γ' αὐτὴν ἔλαβε παῖς παιδὸς γέρας,* 581-84. Racine alludes to this scene as well, in that he has Orestes (house of Atreus) come to Epirus and tell the king (house of Peleus) what to do with his prize. It is no accident that Racine is particularly attracted to passages in Seneca in which the Latin author reworks Greek sources. As I will try to show in this chapter, Racine reads Seneca as a reader of the Greek poets and is drawn to passages in which the Roman playwright responds to or "corrects" another text. Nor does he merely translate these passages into French, but like Seneca, he manipulates them to fit his own context.

Pyrrhus' loaded complaint recreates in *Andromaque* the traditional animosity between the house of Peleus and the house of Atreus. But Orestes' response to the charge quickly gives the lie to Pyrrhus' account of events and indicates that Astyanax was never allotted to Pyrrhus. He was sentenced to death at Troy, as he is in Seneca's play: "Sir, you know full well by what artifice a false Astyanax was offered to death, whither the only son of Hector ought to have been conveyed," *Seigneur, vous savez trop avec quel artifice / Un faux Astyanax fut offert au supplice / Où le seul fils d'Hector devait être conduit*, 1.2.221-23. Orestes' contradiction is

[49] "Will the ghost of Achilles carry off no prize?"

[50] Molossus is the son that Andromache bears Pyrrhus in Epirus.

met with telling silence from Pyrrhus. The Epirot does not refute Orestes' claim or insist on his initial version of what happened in the final days at Troy. In bringing up the death of Astyanax, Orestes alludes to what is perhaps the most memorable scene in Seneca's *Troades* in which a brave Astyanax walks the ramparts of fallen Troy and jumps boldly to his death at the behest of his captors (1068-71). In having Orestes "remind" Pyrrhus that that Astyanax was an imposter, exchanged with the real one by some trickery, Racine reinterprets the climax of Seneca's play to fit within the plot of his own in which Astyanax is still living.

Although the death of Astyanax is a traditional part of the fall of Troy narrative, there are other aspects of Racine's rehashing of the Greeks' final days in Troy that allude more precisely to *Troades* and support my claim that it is Seneca's play that Racine has in mind. In the first scene of *Andromaque*, when Orestes informs the audience and Pylades of Astyanax' survival, he refers to another iconic scene from Seneca's *Troades*. To explain how the boy survived the Greek plot to murder him at Troy, Orestes suggests that Andromaque deceived the cunning Ulysses (*Andromaque trompa l'ingénieux Ulysse,* 74). The scene alluded to is the central action of Seneca's play (519-813), in which Andromache and Ulysses engage in an *agon* of wits that finally ends when Andromache is compelled to admit that her son is alive and forced to deliver Astyanax to the Greeks to be killed. In Euripides' *Troiades*, it is Talthybius who visits the Trojan women to fetch Astyanax, and Andromache agrees without a fight to hand over the boy (709-89). Ulysses does not play a role in Racine's play, nor is the psychological *agon* between Andromache and Ulysses a traditional episode in the fall of Troy,[51] so there is no reason, dramatic or academic, to refer to it here other than to point to this Senecan scene. But in Seneca's play, Andromache *does not* defeat Ulysses' cunning, as Racine's Orestes remembers. On the contrary, she is manipulated by the Ithacan into revealing her son's hiding place. Racine, however, has reimagined how this scene from Seneca ended, and in his version of events, Andromache, not Ulysses, somehow wins the day.

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[51] The conflict between Andromache and Ulysses is generally considered to be Seneca's invention. It is possible that Accius in his lost *Astyanax* had Ulysses demand the child from Andromache, instead of the more traditional Pyrrhus or Talthybius, (Fantham, 1982, 272; Keulen, 2001, 290). Regardless, Racine had at his disposal no other ancient models that depict a standoff between Andromache and Ulysses.

It is rare in tragedy for one character to contradict another's understanding of past events, as Orestes does to Pyrrhus. That Pyrrhus does not dispute Orestes' version indicates a tacit admission that Astyanax was not allotted to Pyrrhus, a scenario that has no ancient precedent. Although Pyrrhus suggests otherwise, we must, I think, imagine that in Racine's backstory, the widow of Hector alone, not her son, was allotted to Pyrrhus, as Orestes claims and as the traditional version of the myth supports. In his first preface to the play, Racine states rather cryptically that he has depicted his characters just as the ancient poets have handed them down to us (epigram to this chapter). On some level, at least, this flippant boast is true. Racine, wanting to recreate that same tension between the Greek leaders that underlies Seneca's play, has his Pyrrhus voice the same complaints against the son of Agamemnon as he did against Agamemnon himself in Seneca. Moreover, Racine avoids simply invalidating one of the most memorable scenes from Seneca's *Troades*— the death of Astyanax. Instead, he weaves his own plot back into Seneca's play by suggesting that the events themselves may be remembered and interpreted differently by different spectators. By having his Pyrrhus misrepresent the events of that day, he can both depict the traditional conflict between the house of Atreus and the house of Peleus and suggest a sequence of literary allusions reaching back from his own play, to Seneca's *Troades*, Euripides' *Andromache*, and Homer's *Iliad*. Although this scenario that has Astyanax living years after the fall of Troy seems at first to render impossible the final scene of Seneca's play, Racine takes pains to suggest that Seneca's scene did indeed take place, with the added detail that it was not the real Astyanax who boldly walked the ramparts of the burning city, but an imposter.

We are left wondering by what trick Astyanax was saved. Was Pyrrhus involved, as Orestes' *vous savez trop* seems to imply? The play leaves this question unanswered. But in Seneca's play there is a hint of Pyrrhus' possible involvement that fits well with Orestes' implied accusation. During the scene in which Ulysses interrogates Andromache about her son, the Greek general begins to tear down Hector's tomb in which the young Astyanax is hiding. Andromache calls on none other than Pyrrhus to protect both her dead husband and living child (*Pyrrhe, genitoris tui / munus tuere,* 666-67).[52] Racine adopts the possibility of an alliance between the houses of Atreus and Priam, but instead of having his Andromaque require it, he puts the sentiment into Pyrrhus' mouth. When Orestes threatens the lives of

[52] "Pyrrhus, defend your father's gift."

Andromaque and her son, the king of Epirus counters that he will aid Astyanax, even against the will of the Greeks (*Hector en profita, Seigneur; et quelque jour / Son fils en pourrait bien profiter à son tour,* 1.2.235-36).[53] Pyrrhus, like Seneca's Andromache, refers to the scene in the *Iliad* where Achilles welcomes Priam into his hut and agrees to ransom him the body of Hector without the permission of Agamemnon or the Greeks (24.552-676). Although Racine does not adulterate Andromaque's hatred of the Greeks and Achilles' family in particular by having her call for an alliance between her family and the house of Peleus, he suggests that Pyrrhus has heard and internalized his captive's plea for help in Seneca and is now intent on saving Astyanax just as she bade his character do in the earlier play. When Racine puts an allusion to an ancient passage into his character's mouth, he is often careful to make sure that the ancient guise of his character (in this case, Seneca's Pyrrhus) would have been privy to the words and ideas that he now presents as his own in the French play.

In addition to Andromache's petition of Pyrrhus, there is an even stranger moment in the lead-up to the ceremonial deaths of Astyanax and Polyxena that may have suggested to Racine a possible collusion between Andromache and Pyrrhus in Seneca's play. Although Helen has been sent to fetch Polyxena for her "wedding," and is in the process of dressing the maiden for her marriage / death rites, Pyrrhus interrupts the women ostensibly in order to grab the girl himself. He does not speak and his entrance is only marked by Hecuba's announcement of it. She remarks on his initial intensity and then his hesitation: "But Pyrrhus is running in with a quick step and grim expression. Pyrrhus, what are you waiting for?" *Sed incitato Pyrrhus accurrit gradu / vultuque torvo. Pyrrhe, quid cessas?* 999-1000. Pyrrhus' brief intrusion appears to be dramatically superfluous.[54] But it is at this moment that in Racine's reworking of the play, Pyrrhus answers Andromache's initial prayer for help and secretly returns her child, having exchanged the real Astyanax with a false one. That Andromache pretends Astyanax is dead in her confrontation with Ulysses lends credence to the idea that she would try this trick again, but this time with Pyrrhus' support. Orestes' *vous savez trop* highlights Racine's creative refashioning of Seneca's play by pointing to these moments in

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[53] "Good sir, Hector profited from it [the Greeks who ill repaid Achilles' services] and one day his son in turn could profit from it as well."

[54] "The silent entry and exit of Pyrrhus is unparalleled in stage drama and theatrically gratuitous," Fantham (1982) 355.

Seneca that seem to call out for an explanation—in this case, Andromache's prayer to Pyrrhus for help and Pyrrhus' sudden and unexplained appearance amongst the Trojan captives. Racine, as we shall continue to see, often marks his intertextual allusions to ancient texts with *vous savez* or a similar phrase.

There is another ancient account of Astyanax' death that Racine would have known. In Euripides' *Troiades*, Andromache does not take part in the song of mourning that ends the play. Astyanax' funeral rites are the climax of the tragedy, and we might expect a moving dirge led by both his mother and grandmother, instead of Hecuba alone. After all, both Andromache and Hecuba sing for Hector's funeral at the end of Homer's *Iliad* (24.723-60), another death that symbolized the ruin of Troy. Instead, as Talthybius reports, Andromache and Pyrrhus leave in a hurry to return to Epirus before Astyanax is even cold:

> Ἑκάβη, νεὼς μὲν πίτυλος εἷς λελειμμένος
> λάφυρα τἀπίλοιπ᾽ Ἀχιλλείου τόκου
> μέλλει πρὸς ἀκτὰς ναυστολεῖν Φθιώτιδας:
> αὐτὸς δ᾽ ἀνῆκται Νεοπτόλεμος, καινάς τινας
> Πηλέως ἀκούσας συμφοράς, ὥς νιν χθονὸς
> Ἄκαστος ἐκβέβληκεν, ὁ Πελίου γόνος.
> οὗ θᾶσσον οὕνεκ᾽, ἢ χάριν μονῆς ἔχων,
> φροῦδος, μετ᾽ αὐτοῦ δ᾽ Ἀνδρομάχη, πολλῶν ἐμοὶ
> δακρύων ἀγωγός, ἡνίκ᾽ ἐξώρμα χθονός,
> πάτραν τ᾽ ἀναστένουσα καὶ τὸν Ἕκτορος
> τύμβον προσεννέπουσα. καί σφ᾽ ἠτήσατο
> θάψαι νεκρὸν τόνδ᾽, ὃς πεσὼν ἐκ τειχέων
> ψυχὴν ἀφῆκεν Ἕκτορος τοῦ σοῦ γόνος:
> φόβον τ᾽ Ἀχαιῶν, χαλκόνωτον ἀσπίδα
> τήνδ᾽, ἣν πατὴρ τοῦδ᾽ ἀμφὶ πλεύρ᾽ ἐβάλλετο,
> μή νυν πορεῦσαι Πηλέως ἐφ᾽ ἑστίαν,
> μηδ᾽ ἐς τὸν αὐτὸν θάλαμον, οὗ νυμφεύσεται.
>
> Hecuba, his one remaining ship is about to ferry to Phthia the spoils of Achilles' son that have been left behind: [Pyrrhus] has gone, having learned of Peleus' recent misfortune, that Acastus has driven him from his land. And so, not having the pleasure of delaying, he has gone in a hurry, and with him has gone Andromache, who groaning at her departure from her country and bidding farewell to Hector's tomb, caused me to shed many tears. She begged him [Pyrrhus] to bury this corpse,

> the son of your Hector who fell from the walls and sent forth his soul, a source of fear to the Greeks. But this shield here, which the boy's father used to wear at his side, she begged him not to carry to Peleus' hearth nor into the chamber wherein she will marry him, 1123-39.

Since Acastus receives no earlier mention in Euripides' play, the scene must have seemed to Racine as abrupt as Pyrrhus' quick entrance onto Seneca's stage to snatch Polyxena.[55] That Peleus would be able to convey a message so quickly to his grandson in Troy surely taxes the limits of verisimilitude, so important to Racine and his contemporaries.[56] Earlier in Euripides' play, after Andromache expresses disdain for the woman who loves her second husband and forgets her first (665-70), Hecuba tells her that she should forget Hector (*τὰς μὲν Ἕκτορος τύχας / ἔασον*, 697-98)[57] and turn her charms on her new husband in order to save her child (699-705). These are the last words spoken before Talthybius enters to lead away Andromache and her child. But now, as Talthybius reports, the widow of Hector speaks of entering Pyrrhus' bedroom and "marrying" her captor (*νυμφεύσεται* is a euphemism for sex). Although in the previous scene she admits she hates the kind of woman who transfers her love to another man when she remarries (666-73), she now wants no memory or keepsake of her first husband to haunt her new bedroom. Is her expressed hatred of the woman who forgets too soon her late husband self-referential? Has she taken her mother-in-law's advice to seduce her new husband after all? What if, in Racine's reading of Euripides' play, Andromache goes one step further and begs Pyrrhus in secret to exchange the boy with another while they flee quickly to Epirus with the real Astyanax, as Hecuba all but suggests she do? It is, of course, not necessary that Racine actually think Euripides meant for his original audience to understand his play in that light. Nevertheless, he capitalizes on this unusually jarring transition.

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[55] Racine would have had access to no other ancient accounts that suggest that Acastus was causing Peleus trouble in Epirus. Pindar *Nem.* 3 and 4 tells of Acastus' plot to destroy Peleus, but there is no mention of Pyrrhus coming to his grandfather's aid, which may well be a Euripidean or Sophoclean invention, as they both wrote lost plays entitled *Peleus* (Gantz, 1993, 226-27).

[56] Lyons (1999) 140.

[57] "Let the fortunes of Hector be."

Racine's Pyrrhus, in addition to channeling Seneca's Pyrrhus and his disagreement with Agamemnon, also appropriates the language of Seneca's Andromache. Before Andromaque even appears on stage, Pyrrhus recalls her namesake in Seneca when he responds to Orestes' demand that he hand over Astyanax with arguments similar to those that Andromache made to Ulysses in Seneca's play. After Orestes has explained his mission to assuage the Greeks' fear by killing Astyanax, Pyrrhus responds with mocking disdain: "Who would believe that such a mission deserved Agamemnon's son as mediator? Or that an entire people, so many times victorious, was worthy of plotting nothing more than the death of a child?," *Qui croirait en effet qu'une telle entreprise / Du fils d'Agamemnon méritât l'entremise; / Qu'un peuple tout entier, tant de fois triomphant, / N'eût daigné conspirer que la mort d'un enfant?*, 177-80. Seneca's Andromache, when she realizes that her supplication is in vain, mocks Ulysses' "bravery" vis-a-vis a helpless child in the same way: "this is a crime particular to your character. You soldier of night, brave at plotting the death of a boy, now at last you dare some deed alone and in broad daylight," *hoc est pectoris facinus tui. / nocturne miles, fortis in pueri necem / iam solus audes aliquid et claro die*, 754-56.[58] Recalling his exploits in the Doloneia of *Iliad* 10, Andromache accuses Odysseus of cowardice. Only now, when pitted against a child, does he dare to act during the day without the aid of other heroes. By having his Pyrrhus parrot sentiments that originate with Seneca's Andromache, Racine demonstrates the extent to which Pyrrhus has been swayed by his Trojan captive and indicates that he has already taken up her battle against the Greeks. As in 1.2.235-36 (discussed above), Racine's Pyrrhus is privy to what occurred between Ulysses and Andromache in Seneca, and, just as her Senecan counterpart expected him to do, he sides with the Trojan princess.

In addition to the protest that the murder of a child is hardly a deed worthy of a great warrior, Racine's Pyrrhus remembers Troy and her former greatness with a nostalgia generally reserved for the fallen Trojans:

> Je songe quelle était autrefois cette ville,
> Si superbe en remparts, en héros si fertile,
> Maîtresse de l'Asie; et je regarde enfin
> Quel fut le sort de Troie et quel est son destin.
> Je ne vois que des tours que la cendre a couvertes,

[58] Tobin (1971) 92 discusses these two passages.

> Un fleuve teint de sang, des campagnes désertes,
> Un enfant dans les fers; et je ne puis songer
> Que Troie en cet état aspire à se venger.
>
> I think what sort of city she was long ago, so high with ramparts, so rich in heroes, Mistress of Asia; and I see now what her fortune, what her destiny was. I see nothing but towers covered in ash, a river dyed with blood, deserted landscapes, a child in chains; and I am no longer able to think that Troy, in that state, aspires to revenge, 1.2.197- 204.

Pyrrhus' vivid nostalgia is reminiscent of Aeneas' summing up of the death of Priam (*Aen.* 2.554-58). Racine alludes to this very passage from Vergil in his first preface when he explains that he softened Pyrrhus' traditional brutality.[59] In Vergil, after Aeneas describes Pyrrhus' brutal slaughter of Priam, his indignant tone relaxes, and he begins to focalize his narrative through the eyes of the dying king, envisioning the last sight that graced the old man's eyes:

> Haec finis Priami fatorum; hic exitus illum
> sorte tulit, Troiam incensam et prolapsa videntem
> Pergama, tot quondam populis terrisque superbum
> regnatorem Asiae.
>
> This was the end of Priam's life; this death took him as was fated while he looked upon Troy in flames and its citadel collapsed, the heretofore ruler of so many peoples and so many lands, the sovereign of Asia, 2.554-57.

Although Racine's Pyrrhus is lamenting the fall of the city of Troy and Aeneas the death of her king, there are a number of shared elements in the two passages: both Pyrrhus and Aeneas stress the fact that Troy's fortifications are now destroyed (*je ne vois que des tours que la cendre a couvertes; Troiam incensam et prolapsa videntem / Pergama);* both city and king were fated to fall (*le sort de Troie; hic exitus illum / sorte tulit*); and Troy was *Maîtresse de l'Asie* while Priam was *regnatorem Asiae.* That Racine's older and gentler Pyrrhus uses words reminiscent of this

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[59] *Aussi n'ai-je pas pensé qu'il me fût permis de rien changer à leurs moeurs. Toute la liberté que j'ai prise, ç'a été d'adoucir un peu la férocité de Pyrrhus, que Sénèque, dans sa Troade, et Virgile, dans le second (livre) de l'Enéide, ont poussée beaucoup plus loin que je n'ai cru le devoir faire* (Racine, Première Préface to *Andromaque*).

particular passage from the *Aeneid* is an acknowledgement of and a tacit apology for Pyrrhus' violent adolescence. Racine contrasts Pyrrhus' earlier brutality with his present moderation.

Pyrrhus speaks the above lines in response to Orestes' claim that Astyanax still terrifies Greek widows and will prove to be a second Hector if allowed to live (1.2.157-65). Seneca's Andromache makes a similar case to Ulysses, who says that Astyanax, should he survive, would become a great sorrow to Greek mothers (736-38) and a second Hector (*futurus Hector*, 551) bent on revenge. Like Pyrrhus, Seneca's Andromache responds to Ulysses first by pointing to the ruins of Troy, and then by rhetorically asking whether a young boy could incite them to revenge:

> Has, has ruinas urbis in cinerem datae
> hic excitabit? hae manus Troiam erigent?
> nullas habet spes Troia, si tales habet.
> non sic iacemus Troes, ut cuiquam metus
> possimus esse.
>
> These, these ruins of a city given over to ash are those the ones this [boy] will stir? Will these hands lift Troy up? Troy has no hopes, if she has hopes such as these. We Trojans lie so defeated that we can hardly be a cause of fear to anyone, 739-43.

Like Pyrrhus, Andromache first points to Troy's destruction, the evidence for which is all around her. She repeats the deictic pronoun *has* to indicate incredulity, and then points to her child (*hic*) and his small hands (*hae manus*) to demonstrate the absurdity of such a fear. Before the wife of Hector even appears on Racine's stage, her sway over Pyrrhus is apparent by the way he imitates her earlier, Senecan words. By having him voice sentiments heretofore associated with Andromache and Aeneas, Racine calls attention to his Pyrrhus' reformed violence, all the while providing a likely explanation for Pyrrhus' tempered demeanor—he was convinced by the arguments Andromache voiced in Seneca's play.

Racine even traces the idea that Pyrrhus' brutality ought to be reformed to Seneca's play. Agamemnon, responding to Pyrrhus' demand that Polyxena be sacrificed to Achilles, first criticizes the young man's unchecked violence that is due to both his youth and his family heritage (250-54). Agamemnon goes on to say that he too used to suffer from an

uncontrollable pride (*fateor, aliquando impotens/ regno ac superbus altius memet tuli,* 266-67),[60] alluding again to book 1 of the *Iliad* where his arrogance caused him to revoke Achilles' war prize and threaten the success of the Greek campaign against Troy. Just as Agamemnon's character in Seneca is a reformed version of his Homeric self, so has Pyrrhus been transformed from a young warrior full of fury and outrage in Seneca into a milder, rather benevolent ruler, whose kindness extends even to his Trojan captives.

In addition to undergoing a similar amelioration of character, Racine's Pyrrhus has internalized the narrative of the fall of Troy that Agamemnon told Pyrrhus in Seneca's play. In reply to Pyrrhus' demand that Polyxena be sacrificed to Achilles, Agamemnon voices his regrets about the total destruction of Troy and says that he will not allow any further atrocities to take place:

> sed regi frenis nequit
> et ira et ardens hostis et victoria
> commissa nocti quicquid indignum aut ferum
> cuiquam videri potuit, hoc fecit dolor
> tenebraeque, per quas ipse se inritat furor,
> gladiusque felix, cuius infecti semel
> vecors libido est. quicquid eversae potest
> superesse Troiae, maneat: exactum satis
> poenarum et ultra est. regia ut virgo occidat
> tumuloque donum detur et cineres riget
> et facinus atrox caedis ut thalamos vocent?
> non patiar.
>
> But rage, the enemy on fire, and victory turned over to the night are not able to be reined in; anything that could seem improper or harsh to anyone was brought about by grievance and darkness; for, it is in darkness that madness becomes rage, and the successful sword, once stained by blood, lusts after more. Whatever there is of fallen Troy that can survive, let it remain. Enough punishment has been exacted. That a virgin princess die and be given as a gift to a burial mound, that she drench his ashes, and that the savage crime of murder be called a wedding? I would not endure it. 279-90.

[60] "I admit that at another time I was impetuous in ruling and I bore myself too arrogantly."

Likewise, in response to Orestes' demand that Astyanax be killed by the Greeks, Pyrrhus reminisces about those same final violent hours using imagery that recalls Agamemnon's speech:

> Tout était juste alors: la vieillesse et l'enfance
> En vain sur leur faiblesse appuyaient leur défense
> La victoire et la nuit, plus cruelles que nous,
> Nous excitaient au meurtre et confondaient nos coups.
> Mon courroux aux vaincus ne fut que trop sévère.
> Mais que ma cruauté survive à ma colère?
> Que, malgré la pitié dont je me sens saisir,
> Dans le sang d'un enfant je me baigne à loisir?
> Non, Seigneur. Que les Grecs cherchent quelque autre proie;
> Qu'ils poursuivent ailleurs ce qui reste de Troie.
> De mes inimitiés le cours est achevé;
> L'Epire sauvera ce que Troie a sauvé.

Everything was just then: Old age and youth relied in vain on their weakness for a defence. Victory and the night, more cruel than we, excited us to murder and confused our blows. My wrath towards the conquered was too severe. But that my cruelty should survive my anger? That regardless of the pity that I feel, I bathe in the blood of a child at leisure? No, good sir, let the Greeks find some other victim; and let them pursue the remains of Troy somewhere else. My hatred has run its course; what Troy has saved, Epirus will protect, 1.2.210-20.

La vieillesse and *l'enfance* refer euphemistically to Priam and his young son, Polites, both of whom Pyrrhus slaughtered one on top of the other at the altar of Zeus, dragging the father through the son's blood (*Aen.* 2. 526-58). Unlike Seneca's Agamemnon, Racine's Pyrrhus does not regret those final violent hours (*Tout était juste alors*). Although he does not apologize for the cruel deeds committed then, neither does he dwell on their violent details. Like Agamemnon, he blames the darkness (*la nuit* / *tenebraeque*) and the frenzy of victory (*la victoire* / *gladiusque felix*) for inciting the Greeks to such cruelty. And like Agamemnon, he is ready to protect what remains of Troy (*ce qui reste de Troie* / *quicquid eversae potest superesse Troiae, maneat*) and will not permit more carnage now that his wrath has subsided. Racine's Pyrrhus has assimilated the lessons Agamemnon proffered his younger, more brazen namesake in Seneca's play. Now, Pyrrhus in his turn becomes the benevolent king and addresses his former interlocutor's son as the rash youth.

Although Racine's Pyrrhus is no longer the king-slaying, virgin-sacrificing warrior of his youth, he still has recourse to rage when incited, not unlike Seneca's Agamemnon, who loses his temper with Achilles' son when the disagreement devolves into an almost comic bout of name calling (301-48). When Orestes refuses to back down from his demands for Astyanax' life and proposes a Greek-led attack on Epirus to retrieve the boy (1.2.128), Pyrrhus threatens to make of Epirus a second Troy: "I agree to it wholeheartedly: let them find in Epirus a second Troy," *J'y consens avec joie: / Qu'ils cherchent dans l'Epire une seconde Troie*, 1.2.229-30. Pyrrhus reaffirms his conception of Epirus as a new Troy when he meets Andromaque in the next scene and promises her, somewhat bizarrely considering her experience of the first Trojan war, a second Trojan war in which ten years of fighting would result in his palace being burned to the ground (*Dussé-je après dix ans voir mon palais en cendre*, 1.4.286)[61] and himself possibly dead (*Je défendrai sa vie aux dépens de mes jours*, 1.4.288).[62] Pyrrhus imagines himself as Hector, who defended Troy for ten years before dying at Achilles' hand. If his devotion to Andromaque and her child was not already evident, he now insists that if Andromaque should agree, he would become a father to Astyanax, teach him to get revenge on the Greeks, and rebuild Troy from the ashes (1.4.325-32). Racine's Pyrrhus does not dream so much of becoming Achilles, as in Seneca's play, but rather his father's primary nemesis, Hector.

In Seneca, the disagreement between Pyrrhus and Agamemnon is finally settled by Calchas, the seer who decides to the disadvantage of Agamemnon, as he is accustomed to do.[63] But as we learn in the final act of the play, the Greeks themselves are horrified at the barbarity of the crime: "Both sides wept, but the Phrygians groaned miserably a timid groan, while the victor [the Greeks] groaned louder," *uterque flevit coetus; at timidum Phryges / misere gemitum, clarius victor gemit,* 1160-61. Just as in *Troades* where the reactions of the Trojans are contrasted with those of the Greeks, in Racine's play the crowd responses are highlighted. Although Pyrrhus and his countrymen are Greeks, the term "*les Grecs*" is reserved for the followers of Orestes, while the Epirots are called simply *le peuple*, as if Racine wanted to make the same distinction between the Greeks and the rest that we see in Seneca. At the climactic

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[61] "Even if I see after ten years my palace in ashes."
[62] "I will defend his life at the expense of mine."
[63] *Il.*1.92-100; Aesch. *Ag.* 198-204; *et al.*

moment of the ceremony, when Pyrrhus declares Andromaque his queen and recognizes Astyanax as sole heir to Troy, the two factions react: "To these words that drew praise from the people, our Greeks responded with a cry of rage," *A ces mots, qui du peuple attiraient le suffrage, / Nos Grecs n'ont répondu que par un cri de rage*, 5.3.1549-50. Here Racine diverges from his Senecan model in that the two crowds respond to the ceremony not with varying degrees of the same emotion but with opposing reactions of a similar intensity (cheers of approval and cries of rage). The "Greeks" of both Seneca and Racine condemn Pyrrhus, but Racine's Greeks take action as a result of their outrage. To better parse the significance of this final scene, let us turn briefly to Euripides' *Andromache* and the account of Pyrrhus' death recorded there.

We might expect Euripides' play (rather than Seneca's) to be Racine's primary model for *Andromaque*. The titles are after all identical, and both the timing (a few years after the Trojan war) and setting (Epirus) of Euripides' play match Racine's. Racine openly adopts Hermione's rabid jealousy of Andromache and her plot to turn the Greeks against the Trojan princess and her son.[64] He also, I will argue, models Pyrrhus' death on Euripides' account. In his *Andromache,* Euripides combines two myths that were previously unconnected—the story of Orestes' rivalry with Pyrrhus over Hermione and the traditional version of Pyrrhus' death in which Apollo kills him at Delphi. The death scenes of both Racine and Euripides are recounted towards the end of each play by messengers. Racine's messenger, Orestes, is hostile towards Pyrrhus and anxious about his rather pathetic performance during the murder, while Euripides' messenger (an unnamed Epirot) is sympathetic to Pyrrhus. Despite the two messengers' tendency towards selective narration, the accounts share a number of similarities. Euripides' messenger reports to Peleus that Orestes had turned the Delphians against Pyrrhus by spreading a rumor that Pyrrhus intended to raid the Delphic treasury. When Pyrrhus stands at the altar about to sacrifice to the god, the crowd attacks him:

> ἔρχεται δ᾽ ἀνακτόρων
> κρηπῖδος ἐντός, ὡς πάρος χρηστηρίων

[64] Racine refers to Euripides' *Andromache* as his source for Hermione's jealousy of Andromache in his preface to the play: *Excepté celui d'Hermione, dont la jalousie et les emportements sont assez marqués dans* l'Andromaque *d'Euripide.*

> εὔξαιτο Φοίβῳ: τυγχάνει δ᾽ ἐν ἐμπύροις:
> τῷ δὲ ξιφήρης ἆρ᾽ ὑφειστήκει λόχος
> δάφνῃ σκιασθείς: ὧν Κλυταιμήστρας τόκος
> εἷς ἦν ἁπάντων τῶνδε μηχανορράφος.
> χὠ μὲν κατ᾽ ὄμμα στὰς προσεύχεται θεῷ:
> οἱ δ᾽ ὀξυθήκτοις φασγάνοις ὡπλισμένοι
> κεντοῦσ᾽ ἀτευχῆ παῖδ᾽ Ἀχιλλέως λάθρᾳ.
>
> [Pyrrhus] goes into the temple to pray to Phoebus before the shrine: He happens to be engaged in burnt sacrifices, but an armed ambush had lain in wait for him, hidden among the laurel. The son of Clytemnestra was the singular contriver of all these things. But he [Pyrrhus] was standing in full view and praying to the god. Men armed with sharp swords and hiding from sight stab the unsuspecting child of Achilles, 1111-19.

In this passage, Pyrrhus' heroic forthrightness (*κατ᾽ ὄμμα στὰς*) is contrasted with the cowardly clandestinity (*λάθρᾳ*) of his attackers. Likewise in Racine, even though the death scene is recounted by Orestes himself, who because of his jealousy is predisposed to minimize Pyrrhus' heroism, Pyrrhus' bold openness (*son audace*, 1538) is contrasted with the way his attackers slip slyly into the crowd (*où nos Grecs dispersés / Se sont jusqu'à l'autel dans la foule glissés,* 5.3.1535-36). In both death scenes, Orestes arranges the mob murder of Pyrrhus but does not take part in the action himself. In Racine's play, Hermione asks Orestes to kill Pyrrhus to avenge the slight to her beauty. Orestes' quick protest that he alone orchestrated the killers (another detail from Euripides' play) and his apology for failing even to strike a blow confirm anxieties as to his bravery. In drawing attention to the cowardice of Orestes, Racine aligns his character with Euripides' Orestes, who is characterized as a second Paris, sneaking into another man's home to steal his wife.

After describing the ambush, Euripides' messenger depicts Pyrrhus' valiant counterattack made from atop the altar: "he stood on top of the altar, a fierce warrior to see," *ἔστη 'πὶ βωμοῦ γοργὸς ὁπλίτης ἰδεῖν,* 1123). Although Orestes refrains from dwelling on his rival's brilliant military prowess in these last moments of glory, his account suggests that Racine's Pyrrhus successfully wards his attackers off for some time: "I saw him defend himself for a while," *Je l'ai vu...quelque temps se débattre*, 5.3.1554). In Euripides, the son of Achilles is on the verge of beating his attackers back when a voice from within the inner

sanctuary of the temple breaks Pyrrhus' stride and urges the Delphians to rally. The voice belongs to none other than Apollo himself (1147-48).[65] After Apollo gets involved, Pyrrhus is quickly bested, and his attackers hurl themselves onto the beautiful corpse: "When he falls to the ground, who does not bring iron, who does not bring a rock to hurl and strike him; his whole beautiful body is destroyed by savage wounds," *ὡς δὲ πρὸς γαῖαν πίτνει, / τίς οὐ σίδηρον προσφέρει, τίς οὐ πέτρον, / βάλλων ἀράσσων; πᾶν δ' ἀνήλωται δέμας / τὸ καλλίμορφον τραυμάτων ὕπ' ἀγρίων*, 1152-55. In Racine too, he is attacked from every side (5.3.1515-16), and although Orestes does not emphasize his rival's beauty, Hermione will fill in that detail shortly (5.3.1538). In Euripides, Pyrrhus' body is then gathered up by men loyal to him and transported back to Epirus to be mourned and buried (1158-60). In Racine, Pyrrhus' body is already in Epirus, and his funeral rites will be performed not by Peleus, but by Andromaque (5.5.1590).

Racine adopts from Euripides the idea of combining the traditional rivalry between Pyrrhus and Orestes over Hermione with Pyrrhus' death but excludes Apollo and the trip to Delphi from his account, streamlining Euripides' version of events to reflect Orestes' jealousy alone. Although Racine suppresses the religious subtext of Euripides' play, in both accounts Pyrrhus is attacked in public by a lurking mob of angry Greeks whom Orestes has incited against him. In both tragedies Pyrrhus is openly performing a ceremony at an altar when cut down— in Euripides' play he is sacrificing to Apollo and in Racine's he is leading Andromaque to the altar to be wed. In Euripides' play, there is a strong suggestion of divine retribution: Pyrrhus is being punished by Apollo for a previous crime, perhaps because Pyrrhus blamed Apollo for his father's death, but certainly also because of his most famous act of sacrilege, the slaying of King Priam supplicating at the altar of Zeus. Pyrrhus is caught unaware by the mob precisely because he considers the altar of a powerful Olympian god a safe refuge (as did Priam), and so the setting of his death, if not the manner of it, mirrors his most famous crime. Although he strips his play of divine intervention, Racine depicts the death of Pyrrhus as one befitting the hero's past transgressions. But, instead of highlighting Pyrrhus' slaying of Priam, he directs our attention to another of Pyrrhus' famous acts of impiety—the sacrifice of Polyxena to Achilles. Pyrrhus, as Hermione reminds us in the scene

[65] For divine voices described by messengers, cf. *IT* 1385-89; *Ba.* 1078-81 and 1088; and *OC* 1623-28.

preceding the murder (4.5.137-39, quoted on page 1), has sacrificed a Trojan princess to his dead father in a macabre parody of a wedding ceremony. What could be a more fitting death for such a man than to be cut down by his fellow Greeks as he leads to the altar a second Trojan princess?

Human Sacrifice: Astyanax & Pyrrhus and Polyxena & Andromaque

Seneca's *Troades* closes with the messenger's account of Polyxena's grim "marriage" to Achilles just as Racine's play all but ends with the secondhand account of the bloody wedding ceremony for Andromaque and Pyrrhus. In Seneca's wedding scene, Pyrrhus sacrifices Polyxena to Achilles' ghost, but in Racine's play, he becomes the sacrificial victim himself. Hermione and Orestes call their plot to murder Pyrrhus a sacrifice. First Orestes, reassuring Hermione of his intention to kill Pyrrhus, aggrandizes the ambush plot with religious language: "Your enemies are going to be sacrificed to you by me," *Vos ennemis par moi vont vous être immolés,* 5.3.1255, and then Hermione, when rebuking Orestes for carrying out the crime: "Were you able to sacrifice him today, cruel man, without all your blood rising up on his behalf?," *Avez-vous pu, cruels, l'immoler aujourd'hui, / Sans que tout votre sang se soulevât pour lui?*, 5.3.1579-80. Although the murder takes place at an altar, there is nothing in Racine's plot that calls for such sacrificial talk—no ghosts or gods demanding to be appeased, as in Seneca. Orestes and Hermione plot regicide, not human sacrifice.

The impetus for the murder plot in Racine is primarily personal, but politics play a role as well: Hermione wants revenge for her unrequited love, Orestes wants to rid himself of a rival suitor, and the total destruction of Troy is as popular with the Greeks as the total destruction of Carthage is for the Romans. Racinian characters often reveal their true emotions by pronouncing contradictory opinions as the situation evolves. Although Racine's characters often veil their cynical, private aims with more noble ones (with the language of sacrifice, for example), a character's underlying motives never lurk far beneath the surface. The audience is never really in doubt as to where a character's true loyalties lie. Nor are the characters onstage deceived as to what another character's words mean, although they may flirt with self-deception.[66] In the scene discussed above, when Hermione learns of Pyrrhus' death, she criticizes him for obeying her words and not seeing through them to their true

[66] Tobin (1999) 47-50 discusses this phenomenon of self-deception in Racine's *Andromaque*.

meaning (*Ne devais-tu pas lire au fond de ma pensée?*, 5.3.1546).[67] After Pyrrhus is killed, she distances herself from the plot and deflates Orestes' claim to greatness by calling the death of Pyrrhus what it really is: murder, or an assassination (*lâche parricide*, 1534; *Pourquoi l'assassiner*, 1537).

Seneca's characters in *Troades* use religious language to cloak unseemly motives as well. Whereas in Racine these motivations are primarily personal, relating to a character's inner anxieties and emotions, in Seneca they are of political expediency. After Calchas sides with Pyrrhus about the decision to sacrifice Polyxena to Achilles' shade, he adds that Astyanax' life is also sought by the fates: "Blood more noble than yours is owed, Polyxena, blood that the fates seek," *nobilior tuo, / Polyxene, cruore debetur cruor, / quem fata quaerunt,* 366-68. Although Calchas does not call this murder a sacrifice, by saying that the fates demand blood, he indicates that some higher religious power is demanding the child's life. Ulysses, when he approaches Andromache to demand Astyanax, begins by aping Calchas' pseudo-religious wording (*hanc [subolem] fata expetunt,* 528),[68] but shifts towards a more practical approach that reveals the cynicism behind his demand: "For as long as your son, Andromache, gives courage to the defeated Phrygians, an anxious trust in an uncertain peace will always hold the Greeks, and fear will compel them to watch their back and won't allow weapons to be put down," *sollicita Danaos pacis incertae fides / semper tenebit, semper a tergo timor / respicere coget arma nec poni sinet, / dum Phrygibus animos natus eversis dabit, Andromache, vester,* 529-33. It is the fear that Astyanax will avenge his father that holds the fleet back, not the anger of a ghost or god, as Ulysses' opening lines suggest. Like Hermione and Orestes with regard to the murder of Pyrrhus, Ulysses uses religious language to explain to Andromache the necessity of the murder of Astyanax, but he is perfectly aware the real reason that the son of Hector must die is a political one. In both plays, then, characters consciously use religious language as a pretext to mask unsightly designs.

This is not the case in other ancient versions of the myth. In Euripides' *Troiades* and *Hecuba*, the reasoning behind the murder of Astyanax are the same as in Seneca—fear of a future Hector—but unlike in Seneca's play, Euripides' Greeks do not prevaricate. Talthybius tells Andromache plainly that the Greeks are going to kill the boy (*κτενοῦσι σὸν παῖδ, Tr.*

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[67] "Should you not have read the depth of my thought?"

[68] "The fates demand this child"

719).[69] Odysseus convinced the Greeks not to raise the child of a highborn Trojan (*λέξας ἀρίστου παῖδα μὴ τρέφειν πατρὸς, Tr.* 723),[70] and there is no passage in the play that suggests Odysseus is ashamed of his role. He is simply doing what any victor in his place would do. Although Talthybius shows some compassion to the bereaved Trojan women, he does not dissimulate. Conversely, by having his characters veil their disreputable deeds with religious terminology, Seneca suggests they are ashamed of their impulses. As such, he draws attention to the moral corruption that all too often defines his tragic heroes and heroines. As in Racine, the other characters of Seneca's play are not deceived. Andromache pays no heed to Ulysses' appeal to the fates. Instead she responds to what underlies Ulysses' words: the Greek fear of Astyanax. As though to undermine the religious framework of Odysseus' claim, Andromache states that even the gods traditionally associated with human sacrifice have never demanded the life of a child (1104-9), suggesting that she hardly believes that Astyanax' death could serve some greater religious good. Although neither the murder of Astyanax nor the murder of Pyrrhus is committed for religious reasons, the perpetrators in both Seneca and Racine refer to the deed with religious terminology, aiming to convince themselves or their interlocutors on stage that the deaths are divinely ordained, when they are clearly nothing of the sort.

The "marriage" of Polyxena to Achilles that ends Seneca's *Troades* is from the beginning of the play a euphemistic term for human sacrifice. Achilles' ghost, as reported by Talthybius, merges the two concepts of marriage and sacrifice: "Let Polyxena be betrothed to my ashes and sacrificed by the hand of Pyrrhus and let her blood water my tomb," *desponsa nostris cineribus Polyxene / Pyrrhi manu mactetur et tumulum riget,* 195-96. Likewise when Calchas settles the quarrel between Pyrrhus and Agamemnon to the former's advantage, he uses the language of sacrifice: "the maiden is to be sacrificed on the grave of the Thessalian ruler," *mactanda virgo est Thessalae busto ducis*, 361), and when Helen goes to fetch the girl for death, she tells her to prepare for marriage (864-65; 871-87). In Seneca, the death of Polyxena warrants the powerful juxtaposition of sacrificial and wedding imagery. For, the shade of Achilles, the semi-divine child of a powerful sea goddess, threatens the living Greeks with unruly seas if they do not bestow upon his tomb Polyxena as his bridal warprize

[69] "The are going to kill your son."

[70] "He said not to raise the child of a nobleman."

(190-202). Less well founded is the sacrificial language Racine's Andromaque employs as she contemplates suicide. Although no divine entity requires her death, as Achilles does Polyxena's in Seneca, when Andromaque finally hits upon a plan to guard intact her son's life and her devotion to her late husband, she describes it as self-sacrifice: "I am going to pledge to Pyrrhus what remains of my life, since I must sacrifice myself," *Je vais donc, puisqu'il faut que je me sacrifie, / Assurer à Pyrrhus le reste de ma vie*, 4.1.1093-95. It is immediately unclear whether Andromaque is speaking about the marriage vows themselves as the sacrifice she will make or her planned suicide. The syntax of this line, however, points to the former interpretation, with *puisqu'il faut que je me sacrifie* sandwiched in the middle of her pledge to marry Pyrrhus. Although she follows these lines with a plan to kill herself immediately after she has entrusted Astyanax to the king, she equates the ritual of marriage with self-sacrifice and seems to consider the marriage act as tantamount to death. We are reminded here of Andromache's summary of Polyxena's good fortune in Seneca: "that [marriage] she thought to be death, but this [death] she thinks to be marriage," *mortem putabat illud, hoc thalamos putat*, 948.

Nor does death appear to be a terrifying prospect to Andromaque, especially when compared to the prospect of marriage. In the first encounter between Pyrrhus and Andromaque, after Pyrrhus tells her that if she scorns his love he will hand her child over to be killed by the Greeks, Andromaque does not even humor the king's marriage proposal. On the contrary, she is quick to resign herself to the death of her son.

> Hélas! Il mourra donc. Il n'a pour sa défense
> Que les pleurs de sa mère et que son innocence.
> Et peut-être après tout, en l'état où je suis,
> Sa mort avancera la fin de mes ennuis.
> Je prolongeais pour lui ma vie et ma misère;
> Mais enfin sur ses pas j'irai revoir son père.
> Ainsi tous trois, Seigneur, par vos soins réunis,
> Nous vous…
>
> Alas! He will die then. He has nothing to defend him except his mother's tears and his innocence. And maybe after all this, in the state that I am in, his death will bring about the end of my troubles. I used to prolong my life and my suffering for him,

> but now at last I will go in his footsteps to see his father once again. And so all three of us reunited by your cares, we thank… (1.4.373-380).

Here she comes close to thanking the author of her son's death for reuniting the family. But, contrary to Andromaque's expressed despondency (*Hélas! Il mourra donc)* Racine's Astyanax has a perfectly good reason to hope for salvation. If his mother were to marry Pyrrhus, then his safety would be ensured by the powerful city of Epirus. But Andromaque is unwilling to consider marriage even though matrimony is without a doubt the most positive outcome available to an ancient war captive.[71] In portraying Andromaque's unyielding resistance to Pyrrhus' advances, Racine does not stray far from his ancient sources that depict her during or directly after the fall of Troy. In Euripides' *Troades*, when Andromache comes on stage bewailing her fate, Hector's own mother criticizes her daughter-in-law's obsessive loyalty to Hector (697-700). In advising her to dismiss her old grief for Hector and to attend to the situation at hand, Hecuba, the queen of suffering, tells Andromache that her mourning is excessive. If she were to please Pyrrhus, on the other hand, Andromache might save Astyanax and prove herself a true friend to the remaining Trojans (701-6).

That Racine's Andromaque easily accepts the death of her son, especially so long after the fall of Troy, is disquieting, to say the least. Her reaction to her son's imminent death is not so glib in Euripides' *Troiades*. In that play, when Andromache learns that her son is to be killed, she claims that this is worse news than her allotment to Pyrrhus. She tenderly addresses her son and bitterly laments the cruelty of the Greeks (720-24). Racine's depiction of Andromaque also differs markedly from Euripides' *Andromache*. In this play, set at the same mythological moment as Racine's play, Euripides constructs an Andromache who cares deeply for Molossus, a son Pyrrhus has sired, and although she does not love Pyrrhus with the same ardor she feels for her first husband, she does not deny him her devotion. In Euripides she is defined by her role of protective mother, and it is to Pyrrhus and his family that she turns to secure her own safety and that of her child. But in Racine, Andromaque practically looks forward to her son's death, hoping that his death will hasten her own along. Lines 1.4.377-79 (quoted above) are very close to Andromache's opening speech in Seneca which she makes *before* Ulysses comes to demand her son. With the words *je prolongeais pour*

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[71] Scodel (1998) demonstrates that legitimate marriage is the coveted fate of the Trojan captive women in Euripides' *Troades* and *Hecuba*.

lui ma vie et ma misère, Andromaque recalls her complaint that Astyanax' survival prohibits her from dying (*morique prohibet,* 419) and prolongs her suffering (*tempus aerumnae addidit,* 420). The repeated aspect of the imperfect tense verb *prolongeais* points to a time when she used to exert some effort to protect her child. But those days are in the past, and now she indulges in what was merely an unrealized fantasy for Seneca's Andromache. Her *j'irai revoir son père* recalls Seneca's Andromache's *iam erepta Danais coniugem sequerer meum, / nisi hic teneret* (418-19).[72] Racine changes Seneca's contrary-to-fact condition into a simple statement, suggesting that her despair, already visible in Seneca's play, has intensified in Racine's. Years after the fall of Troy, Racine's Andromaque expresses a bolder version of the despondent words she spoke after the destruction of the city in Seneca's play. The time between the fall of Troy and the setting of Racine's play, instead of lessening her grief, has increased it.

That her desire to die overwhelms concerns about Astyanax is remarkable, but often overlooked.[73] In the two scenes discussed above, the Roman and French Andromache both entertain these death fantasies even though they have been granted a plausible means of securing Astyanax' future. In *Troades*, Hector has just come to his wife in a dream to beg her to quickly remove the boy from harm (*dispelle somnos...et natum eripe...festina, amove / quocumque nostrae parvulam stirpem domus,* 452-56),[74] but when Hector's ghost departs, she runs after the fading shade, taking no thought of her son. She dallies with the other Trojan women until moments before Ulysses arrives to take the boy.[75] Her negligent execution of Hector's orders is noticed by the old man whose sole dramatic purpose is to encourage her to hurry and hide the boy before it is too late (497). In Racine she has but to marry Pyrrhus to protect her son,

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[72] "I would have already snatched myself from the Greeks and followed my husband, if this boy were not holding me back."

[73] I know of no scholarly discussion of Andromache's depression and suicidal thoughts in either Seneca or Racine.

[74] "Dispel sleep, and take up our son...hurry! Remove the little scion of our house to somewhere else."

[75] The fact that Andromache delays so long carrying out Hector's orders is remarked upon by commentators who feel a need to explain the mother's delay. Fantham chalks her sluggishness up to Seneca's clumsy dramatic style: "We must not ask why she has taken so long to act upon it [Hector's advice]...The urgency of Hector's warning is strangely at variance with the full scale narrative of her report (1982, 274). Racine, at least, seems to have interpreted her delay to take care of the child as reluctance.

a course of action that her confidant, imitating Hecuba's words in Euripides' *Troades*, recommends: "[to resign your son to death] is to be too faithful to your husband. Too much virtue could make you a criminal. Hector himself would advise you to soften your spirit," *Madame, à votre époux c'est être assez fidèle / Trop de vertu pourrait vous rendre criminelle, / Lui-même il porterait votre âme à la douceur, Madame,* 3.8.981-83. But Andromaque cannot bring herself to accept Pyrrhus' generous offer. Her refusal to act in her son's best interest is not, as I understand it, the saintly reaction of a model wife,[76] but something much darker: Andromaque wants to die. Cleone, Hermione's handmaid and no fan of the Trojan princess, sees that Andromaque suffers from a deep depression (2.1.449-55). There is no reason to imagine that her most constantly repeated sentiment is a mere rhetorical expression of misery. Of course, many male mythological heroes flirt with death wishes on occasion and claim they would have rather died at Troy (*Od.* 5.606-12, *Aen.* 1.133-44, etc.), but at other times, their enjoyment of life is quite clear. Conversely, when a heroine expresses a wish to end her life, she usually means it. And Andromaque rarely talks about anything other than wanting to die.

When pronouncing her ever-present wish to die, Andromache regularly expresses it in terms of jealousy of Polyxena's fate, because the younger princess was allowed to die at Troy (Eur. *Tr.* 679-80; Sen. *Tr.* 955-71; *Aen.* 3.321-24). There are, in Seneca's play, not a few apparent similarities between the two women's situations. Both Andromache and Polyxena at different points in Seneca's play think they are to marry Pyrrhus. When Polyxena and the Trojan women believe that Polyxena and Pyrrhus are to be married, they are devastated, and Andromache, speaking for the silent Polyxena, explains to Helen that "all misfortunes are lighter than Pyrrhus as son-in-law to Priam and Hecuba" (*levior mala sunt cuncta, quam Priami gener / Hecubaeque Pyrrhus*, 934-34), an ironic sentiment that foreshadows her own impending allotment to the same man (976). But when Helen admits that the marriage is a euphemism for human sacrifice, Polyxena's dread turns to joy, and she happily "seeks out the befitting adornments of regal dress and allows her hair to be combed," *cultus decoros regiae vestis petit / et admoveri crinibus patitur manum*, 946-47. The marriage and funerary rites to Achilles become one and the same as Polyxena embraces her fate as a bride of death. In Racine, Andromaque

[76] In the seventeenth century, critics found fault with Racine's character Andromaque for her saintly characterization that lacked verisimilitude.

cannot fathom marriage to Pyrrhus when it is first suggested, but when she hits upon a plan to unite marriage and death, as her character has jealously witnessed Polyxena do in Seneca's play, Andromaque agrees to marry the son of her husband's slayer.

As told in both Euripides' and Seneca's *Troades*, the fall of Troy features a macabre wedding in which a Trojan princess dressed in marriage garb goes happily to meet her death. In Euripides' play, after Talthybius has announced to which leader each Trojan woman has been allotted, Cassandra comes on stage decked out in ribbons, ready to board the Greek ship and "marry" Agamemnon, by which she means accompany him to hell: "let me marry my bridegroom in Hades," *ἐν Ἅιδου νυμφίῳ γημώμεθα*, 445). Her glee stems from the fact that she knows Agamemnon will die as well, and she even goes so far as to claim responsibility for his demise: "I will go to the dead victorious, after I have destroyed the palace of the sons of Atreus, by whom we are destroyed," *ἥξω δ' ἐς νεκροὺς νικηφόρος / καὶ δόμους πέρσασ' Ἀτρειδῶν, ὧν ἀπωλόμεσθ' ὕπο,* 446-47. Seneca's Polyxena is no less pleased to learn she is to die rather than be married to one of the living Greeks: "Look how happily her great heart hears of her death," *Vide ut animus ingens laetus audierit necem,* 945. Like Cassandra, Polyxena will attempt to harm her Greek partner by dying. After Pyrrhus plunges his blade into her body she falls hard upon Achilles' grave (*nec tamen moriens adhuc / deponit animos: cecidit, ut Achilli gravem / factura terram, prona et irato impetu*, 1157-59).[77] On Roman gravestones, a common epitaph is *sit tibi terra levis* (let the earth weigh lightly upon you). In falling heavily onto the Achilles' grave, Polyxena inverts the common blessing and uses her dying breath to make death painful for her Greek master.[78] Polyxena, then, shares with Cassandra a certain *joie de mourir* and a persistent desire to cause her captor pain, even in death.

It is this dark tradition of marriage between Trojan princesses and Greek warriors that lies behind Andromaque's decision to attempt her own version of a suicide marriage. But Andromaque's planned suicide differs from her fellow captives from its very conception. Unlike the other women who have never married, Andromaque is widowed and has a child.

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[77] "Not even in dying did she put off her courage: she fell headlong and with angry force, to make the earth weigh heavy on Achilles."

[78] Fantham (1982) *ad. loc.* Polyxena's "curse" that death be difficult for Achilles is successful, if *Od.* 11.487-90 is any indication.

Her duty to Astyanax threatens to adulterate the purity of her hatred. After Andromaque reveals her plan to marry Pyrrhus, she clarifies that she is sacrificing her blood, her hatred (of Pyrrhus presumably), and her love (of Hector, presumably) for the sake of her son, whom she calls by her husband's name:

> Il est du sang d'Hector, mais il en est le reste;
> Et pour ce reste enfin j'ai moi-même, en un jour,
> Sacrifié mon sang, ma haine et mon amour.
>
> He is the blood of Hector, but he is what remains of him, and for these remains I have sacrificed in one day my own blood, my hate, and my love, 4.1.1126-28.

In ascending tricolon, Andromaque begins with what she values least—her life, and ends with that which she holds most dear—her love of Hector. This rather cryptic justification for marriage lacks Cassandra's wild intensity and Polyxena's cold hatred. Neither Cassandra nor Polyxena ever divests herself of the hatred she feels towards her new "husband" when she dies. Rather, it is precisely their hatred of these men that drives Cassandra and Polyxena to die and renders their deaths powerful.

Andromaque speaks in the past tense (*j'ai sacrifié*), as though her primary sacrifice has already been made. She herself has elected to marry Pyrrhus, and, in so doing, she has publicly renounced her hatred of him. How exactly her self-sacrifice is meant to save her son is unclear. If she kills herself, surely Pyrrhus will consider their vows to one another broken. After all, she has already threatened Pyrrhus with suicide (373-80), and his reaction was to be persuaded by Phoenix to hand Andromaque and her son over to the Greeks and marry Hermione (2.5.694-99). Pyrrhus has no love for Astyanax alone, as he has made clear on numerous occasions (1.4.370; 2.5.656; 2.5.706). But Andromaque does not investigate these complications lest they deny her the death she seeks. In seeking to die, she risks destroying Astyanax' single living ally—his mother. The inconsistencies in her reasoning stem from her incompatible desires to save her son and enjoy a death befitting of her status as a Trojan princess in captivity. With this plan of joint marriage and suicide, she attempts to reconcile her motherhood with her desire to be a Trojan princess wed to death, but this turns out to be a difficult pairing. Her willingness to sacrifice her hatred of Pyrrhus suggests that she will

not be wholly successful in her reinterpretation of the macabre wedding rite, and her plan to kill herself to avoid Pyrrhus' marriage bed threatens the safety of her child.

Andromache: Mother and Wife

No character in Seneca's play calls Astyanax by name. He is referred to as the son of Hector (*Priami nepos Hectoreus*, 369; *Hectorea suboles,* 528; *Hectoris natum,* 554) or, as Andromache addresses him, simply Hector (*utrimque est Hector,* 659; *futurus Hector,* 551). Likewise in Racine's play, no character but Orestes (and he only in the first scene of the play) mentions the boy by name. And as in Seneca, Andromaque is especially guilty of denying her son a name. She is the only character to address the boy directly, but at no point does she call him Astyanax. Her tendency to blur the son's identity with the father's is partially due to a strong physical resemblance. At the end of his initial encounter with Andromaque, Pyrrhus sends her to see her son, hoping that the sight of Astyanax will induce her to accept his suit to save her child (1.4.384 and 2.5.645-46). His plan backfires, and to his chagrin she returns from her son's presence more the wife of Hector than the mother of Astyanax:

> Je pensais, en voyant sa tendresse alarmée,
> Que son fils me la dût renvoyer désarmée.
> J'allais voir le succès de ses embrassements:
> Je n'ai trouvé que pleurs mêlés d'emportements.
> Sa misère l'aigrit; et, toujours plus farouche,
> Cent fois le nom d'Hector est sorti de sa bouche.
> Vainement à son fils j'assurais mon secours:
> «C'est Hector, disait-elle en l'embrassant toujours;
> Voilà ses yeux, sa bouche, et déjà son audace;
> C'est lui-même, c'est toi, cher époux, que j'embrasse».
>
> When I saw her maternal tenderness alarmed, I thought that her son would return her to me disarmed. I was about to reap the benefits of his kisses: Instead, I have found nothing but tears mixed with rage. Her misery embitters her; and growing more and more fierce, the name of Hector flew one hundred times from her mouth. In vain did I reassure her that I would protect her son: "It is Hector," she said, while kissing him still; "look at his eyes, his mouth, and even his bravery; It's he himself, it is you, dear husband, that I kiss," 2.5.645-56.

Instead of evoking anxiety for the fate of her son, the sight of Astyanax reaffirms Andromaque's wifely loyalty to Hector. The boy's resemblance to Hector reminds her of the

great man she has lost and feeds her old grievances with Pyrrhus and the Greeks. She insists on calling Astyanax by his father's name, a trait indicative of psychotic mourning wherein the bereaved (often a widow) continues to mistake other living people for the dead man she has lost.[79] As she looks at the boy, she starts to lose touch with reality and sink deeper into reverie about her dead husband. That his eyes and mouth recall his father's is reasonable, but that the *audace* of a captive boy imprisoned for months or years could recall the bravery of the bulwark of Troy seems to stem from Andromaque's prolonged grief alone.

In Seneca too, Astyanax' resemblance to his father (*nimiumque patri similis,* 464) is a source of comfort to Andromache, and like in Racine, it does little to inspire her sense of motherhood. When Hector's ghost appears to Andromache in a dream and begs her to hide their son, Andromache has thoughts only for her late husband. After she recounts how she tried in vain to embrace Hector's shade (*fallax per ipsos umbra complexus abit*, 460),[80] she turns to her son's appearance for solace:

> hos vultus meus
> habebat Hector, talis incessu fuit
> habituque talis, sic tulit fortes manus,
> Sic celsus umeris, fronte sic torva minax,
> cervice fusam dissipans iacta comam
>
> My Hector used to have these features, such was he in gait, such was he in posture, just so did he carry his strong arms, just so did he carry his shoulders high, just so the dangerous menacing expression on his brow, when he shook his flowing hair, his neck thrown back, 464-68).

Like the Racine passage above, Andromache's comparison of the boy to his father becomes less and less realistic. It is reasonable to think that Astyanax' facial features and gait resemble his father's, but a threatening expression and a mane of flowing hair hardly befit a boy whose single line in the play is "Have pity, mother," *Miserere, mater*, 792.

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[79] It is not unusual for people to imagine dead loved ones in the immediate time after death and to mistake other people for them, but prolonged mistakes of that sort are generally a sign of a psychotic break, as Foster (1972) says.

[80] "The deceptive shade slipped through my very embraces."

In Racine, Cephisa, Andromaque's maid, knows that Astyanax' appearance holds a powerful sway over his mother. In the scene just preceding Andromaque's sudden decision to marry Pyrrhus (3.8), Cephisa has Andromaque conjure up the image of her son, so like to that of her late husband (*Ce fils, ma seule joie et l'image d'Hector*, 3.8.1016).[81] Up until this point in the play, Andromaque has refused to give Pyrrhus' marriage proposal any consideration, but the memory of Astyanax' appearance mixed with the knowledge of his imminent death finally persuades Andromaque to save the boy. She justifies her decision to marry Pyrrhus as a way to preserve a piece of Hector (3.8.1036). Although she wavers from her earlier staunch decision to let the boy die, the conflict between saving her living son and remaining loyal to her late husband remains ever present (*O cendres d'un époux! … O mon fils, que tes jours coûtent cher à ta mère*, 3.8.1045-46),[82] and the scene ends with Andromaque going to Hector's tomb to ask him which oath she ought to honor—her marriage vows or her promise to safeguard the boy. Her ambivalence finds a source in Seneca's play, wherein Andromache fluctuates between protecting Hector's ashes and Hector's son. In both plays, she remains the loyal wife of Hector up to the point where Astyanax' death is all but imminent. It is then, in Seneca's play too, that Astyanax' face, so like his father's, gives Andromache pause.

After Ulysses concludes that Andromache is hiding her son's whereabouts, he compels her to reveal the boy's location by threatening to dismantle the tomb of Hector in lieu of sacrificing Astyanax, pitting her fear for Astyanax against her anxiety to preserve her husband's honor. Andromache argues with herself about whom to save:

> hinc natus, illinc coniugis sacri cinis,
> pars utra vincet? testor immites deos,
> deosque veros coniugis manes mei:
> non aliud, Hector, in meo nato mihi
> placere quam te. vivat, ut possit tuos
> referre vultus— prorutus tumulo cinis
> mergetur? ossa fluctibus spargi sinam
> disiecta vastis? potius hic mortem oppetat.—
> poteris nefandae deditum mater neci
> videre? poteris celsa per fastigia

[81] "This child, my only joy and the image of Hector."

[82] "Oh ashes of a husband! Oh my child, at what dear price does your mother buy your life?"

missum rotari? potero, perpetiar, feram,
dum non meus post fata victoris manu
iactetur Hector.— hic suam poenam potest
sentire, at illum fata iam in tuto locant—
quid fluctuaris? statue, quem poenae extrahas.
ingrata, dubitas? Hector est illinc tuus—
erras: utrimque est Hector; hic sensus potens,
forsan futurus ultor extincti patris—
utrique parci non potest: quid iam facis?
serva e duobus, anime, quem Danai timent.

Here is my son, there are the sacred ashes of my husband—which one will win out? I call to witness the cruel gods and the true gods, the shades of my husband. In my son there is nothing except you that pleases me. Let him live, so that he might reanimate your face—but will his ashes be torn from the tomb and drowned? Shall I allow the bones to be thrown out and scattered in the vast waves? Let this one meet his death instead. Will you, his mother, be able to look upon him given over to a heinous death? Will you be able to see him thrown and spinning from the high roofs? I can, I will endure and bear it, as long as my Hector is not thrown down after death by the conqueror's hand...but this one can *feel* his punishment, and death holds that one in safety. Why can't you make up your mind? Decide which one you will save from pain. Are you hesitating, ungrateful woman? Your Hector is over here—you are wrong, Hector is on both sides: this one is alive, and will perhaps be a future avenger of his dead father. It is not possible to save both. What are you doing? Save from the two the one whom the Greeks fear, 643-62.

Andromache calls first on the gods (*immites deos*), cruel though they are because they have overseen the destruction of Troy, as though she is about to pray. But then she ignores them and, in an apostrophe verging on sacrilege, names the shades of her late husband the true gods. She continues her address to Hector alone. It is as though, in dying, he has replaced every relationship his wife heretofore held dear. He is the very gods to whom she prays (645-46); he is her living son (659-63); and when she describes his limbs mangled by Achilles' chariot, she calls them her own (*mea membra* 414). Unable to decide between Astyanax and her dead husband, Andromache asks Hector's ghost (*coniugis manes mei*) for advice. She reassures her dead husband that her son is pleasing only in that he resembles his father. Recalling her earlier reverie (461-75), she asks Hector to let the boy live so that she may see her husband's face again (*ut possit tuos / referre vultus*). But she wavers again when she thinks of

Hector's tomb defiled. She strengthens her resolve to see her son die (*potero, perpetiar, feram)*, only to be swayed back towards protecting him when she sees again how the boy resembles his father.

In Racine too, Andromaque toys with the idea of letting her son die (*Je l'en puis détourner, et je t'y vais offrir*?")[83] before deciding to save him (*Non, tu ne mourras point*).[84] She finally leaves the stage to consult with her husband's ghost, a recourse inspired by the address Seneca's Andromache makes to the dead hero (645).[85] Seneca's Andromache scolds herself for considering another's salvation over her late husband's (*ingrata, dubitas? Hector est illinc tuus*), but then in what is perhaps the apex of her psychological struggle, she concludes that both Astyanax and dead Hector are Hector (*utrimque est Hector)*, and so reduces the boy's identity to that of his father. Astyanax is beloved only inasmuch as he *is* Hector. At the end of her speech, Andromache seems to choose to save the living "Hector" (662), but the choice is, of course, a false one, since the boy is hiding in his father's grave, and Ulysses has already guessed his whereabouts. Conversely, Racine's Andromaque is granted a real choice: she can either save her son or honor her wedding vows to Hector. In deciding on a hybrid suicide-marriage by which she hopes to save both her son and her fidelity, she risks ending up with neither. Pyrrhus will not honor a false marriage, and Andromaque, as she seems to already recognize with her use of the past tense (*j'ai sacrifié,* 4.1.1128), will not be able to commit her life to Pyrrhus in word alone.

Unlike the other Trojan women and the Greeks, Andromache does not care about Astyanax' potential to become Troy's avenger. In neither Seneca nor Euripides does the widow harbor hope that Astyanax will avenge the fallen city. Racine intensifies Andromaque's traditional tendency to keep the boy to herself by having her beg Pyrrhus to hide them far from civilization:

> A de moindres faveurs des malheureux prétendent,
> Seigneur : c'est un exil que mes pleurs vous demandent.
> Souffrez que, loin des Grecs, et même loin de vous,
> J'aille cacher mon fils et pleurer mon époux.

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[83] "I could turn it [Pyrrhus's sword] away, but even so will I offer you to it?"
[84] "No, you will not die at all."
[85] Vergil's Andromache also builds a model tomb for Hector in Epirus, *Aen.* 3.294-355.

> The wretched reach for slight favors, my lord: it is exile that my tears implore from you. Let me hide my son and mourn my husband far from the Greeks and far from you, 1.4.338-40.

The idea of concealing Astyanax stems from the scene in Seneca's play in which Andromache hides the boy in Hector's tomb. Seneca's Andromache is primarily interested in Astyanax because he reminds her of the *private* bond she shared with Hector. Since the possibility of Astyanax growing to adulthood and avenging his people seems extremely unlikely in Seneca's play, her overprotective stance is hardly noteworthy. In Racine, however, Andromaque explicitly rejects Pyrrhus' proposal to turn the boy into Troy's avenger (1.4.333-34). Her insistence that Astyanax remain a mere personal solace to her is particularly odd in this context wherein a real possibility presents itself of raising Astyanx to avenge his country. Andromaque, however, is not interested in shaping a hero. She cannot even see that he represents a real threat to Racine's Greeks, all the more dangerous because of Pyrrhus' powerful backing (*Je vous rends votre fils, et je lui sers de père; / Je l'instruirai moi-même à venger les Troyens,* 1.4.326-27).[86] Instead of acknowledging their fear as a valid one, she delusionally assumes that the Greeks want to harm her son in order that *she* be made to suffer more.

> Est-ce mon intérêt qui le rend criminel?
> Hélas! On ne craint point qu'il venge un jour son père;
> On craint qu'il n'essuyât les larmes de sa mère.
> Il m'aurait tenu lieu d'un père et d'un époux;

> Is it my affection that turns him criminal? Alas! They are not afraid that he will avenge his father one day; they fear that he will dry his mother's tears. He would have taken the place of both father and husband for me, 1.4.276-79.

[86] "I return to you your son and will act as his father; I will teach him myself to avenge the Trojans."

While her self-centered approach to politics and statecraft finds parallels in Seneca and Homer,[87] the new context in which Andromaque finds herself (in Epirus, with a powerful Greek king for an ally) emphasizes the Trojan princess' self-centered vision of her son

Andromaque finally comes to the conclusion that the only way to save the blood of Hector is to sacrifice her love for him and her hatred of Pyrrhus, two traits essential to Andromache's character in both Seneca and Racine, although Andromaque's "hatred" of Pyrrhus takes the guise of indifference in the French play.[88] While Tobin is certainly right to consider indifference the most extreme manifestation of disgust for a French / Racinian audience, there is also a Senecan source for Andromaque's indifference. In Seneca's *Troades*, Andromache comes on stage proclaiming detachment: she no longer has the capacity to feel pain. She berates her fellow Trojan women for continuing their lament. Her Troy, she claims, has long since perished:

> Ilium vobis modo,
> mihi cecidit olim. cum ferus curru incito
> mea membra raperet et gravi gemeret sono
> Peliacus axis pondere Hectoreo tremens.
> tunc obruta atque eversa quodcumque accidit
> torpens malis rigensque sine sensu fero.

Troy fell for you just now, but for me she fell long ago. When that savage dragged away those dear limbs of mine with his swift chariot and the Pelian axle groaned with a heavy cry, trembling beneath the weight of Hector. Since I was destroyed and ruined then, I endure whatever happens now numbed by misfortunes and stiff, without emotion, *Tr.* 412-17.

This self-proclaimed insensitivity to pain is what Racine draws on in the opening depictions of his heroine and probably what inspires him to depict Andromache as initially indifferent to Pyrrhus' initial threat to kill Astyanax (1.4.373-80). But Seneca's Andromache is delusional, for she is still extremely susceptible to emotional turmoil as the scene with

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[87] Racine recalls the passage from book six of the *Iliad* when Andromache begs Hector to stay in the city and defend it from within. There she tells Hector that he is her "father, queenly mother, and brother," Ἕκτορ ἀτὰρ σύ μοί ἐσσι πατὴρ καὶ πότνια μήτηρ / ἠδὲ κασίγνητος, 6.429-30.

[88] Tobin (1999) 47.

Ulysses will soon reveal. Contrary to her claim of indifference, the tortured revelation of her fear becomes the central spectacle of Seneca's play.

Ulysses begins his interrogation of Andromache by threatening violence to her body: "Pain will drive you with lashes, fire, crucifixion, and torture to speak out whatever you conceal. I will dig out the secrets hidden deep in your heart, even though you are unwilling," *Verberibus igni cruce cruciatu eloqui / quodcumque celas adiget invitam dolor / et pectore imo condita arcana eruet*, 578-80. Andromache responds without fear and dares him to bring out the instruments of torture (582-87). A brave mother, she claims, fears nothing (*animosa nullos mater admittit metus,* 588). It is this boast in her maternal pride that inspires Ulysses to rethink his ready acceptance of her story about Astyanax's death: "What are you doing, Ulysses? The Greeks will believe you, but who are you believing? a parent? Does any parent invent this story and not tremble at the omen of hateful death?," *quid agis, Vlixe? Danaidae credent tibi: / tu cui? parenti— fingit an quisquam hoc parens, / nec abominandae mortis auspicium pavet?,* 607-9. The Greek general changes his approach from a physical to a psychological attack. He assails Andromache where she is most conflicted: her fear for her son and her devotion to her dead husband. From the moment when he is reminded of her motherhood, Ulysses gains the upper hand in the *agon* and deftly manipulates his captive until she is forced to beg on her hands and knees for mercy. In the span of a couple hundred lines, Andromache is transformed from a hardened, dispassionate victim, indifferent to additional suffering (409-25) to a miserable suppliant helplessly imploring her enemy (691-703). Her conversational iambic trimeter becomes the sung outburst of lyrical monody, indicating, according to the conventions of ancient drama, that she is overcome with strong emotion.[89] She reveals herself to be a far cry from the stoic hero she impersonates in her opening lines. She is still the devoted mother of Astyanax after all.

When Seneca's Andromache can no longer maintain her act of indifference, she begs Ulysses as a suppliant to spare her son, calling attention to the fact that she has never pleaded for anything else in her life: "I fall before your knees as a suppliant, Ulysses, and I place at your feet my right hand, this hand which the feet of no man have [ever] known," *Ad genua accido / supplex, Vlixe, quamque nullius pedes / novere dextram pedibus admoveo tuis*, 691-93. Racine's Andromaque is more reserved in the presence of Pyrrhus, even when her son's

[89] Cf. the lyrical transition at *Phae.* 1201-12; *Ag.* 759-74; *Thy.* 920-69; and *Med.* 740-842.

death seems certain, but her words to him alluding to Seneca's play are indicative of her growing desperation: "You know well that without you, Andromaque would never have embraced the knees of a master," *Vous ne l'ignorez pas: Andromaque, sans vous, / N'aurait jamais d'un maître embrassé les genoux*, 3.6.915-16. She denies that she has ever before stooped to this level of beggary, an ironic claim, considering she is referring to a scene in Seneca wherein she does just that.[90] Here Andromaque reminds Pyrrhus of the climax of the *agon* between Ulysses and Andromache in Seneca's play and insists that he knows well (*vous ne l'ignorez pas*) that without him, she would never have supplicated a man. Her words are generally thought to refer to the current situation in Epirus—the *sans vous* is taken to mean *hors de vous* with the past contrary to fact conditional referring to the moment before she speaks in which she presumably grasps her captor's knees. This seems to me a rather procrustean way of construing the grammar. What if Andromaque is only referring to that earlier scene of supplication in Seneca's play, and is "reminding" Pyrrhus that her abject supplication of Ulysses was part of the ruse they played on the Greeks to save Astyanax the first time. As such, it was not a real supplication like the present one is. She reminds Pyrrhus that he helped her then and compels him to consider his current offensive against her son in light of his original support. In Seneca, her supplication of Ulysses marks the end of Andromache's claim to indifference. In Racine too, Andromache's suggestion of supplication marks the end of her apathy. Her "indifference" to the fate of her son is revealed to be an act.

Nevertheless a practiced indifference still adorns the wife of Hector as she approaches the altar to be wed:

> Andromaque, au travers de mille cris de joie,
> Porte jusqu'aux autels le souvenir de Troie:
> Incapable toujours d'aimer et de haïr,
> Sans joie et sans murmure elle semble obéir, 5.2.
>
> Andromaque, as she passes through thousands of joyful cries, wears the memory of Troy to the altars. Still incapable of loving and hating, she appears to obey quietly without joy.

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[90] As we saw with Orestes' *vous savez trop* at 1.2.221, when a Racinian character forcefully reminds an interlocutor of something, he/she is alluding to a particular scene or passage in ancient literature and offering a creative reinterpretation of it.

Here is Andromaque's chance to marry her captor in a manner befitting a Trojan captive and rid herself of the responsibility of protecting her son. But for her plan to succeed, she must maintain her traditional indifference. She will not, however, be able to sustain this stoicism in the face of what is to come, and by the end of the play, her impassivity will be transformed into an emotional lament for Pyrrhus and the city of Epirus.

The Fall of Troy

The ending of Racine's play is usually considered a triumph for Andromaque.[91] She has managed to save Astyanax (at least for the time being) and to skirt both death and Pyrrhus' bed. But nothing in her final speech suggests she is happy with the way events have progressed. After Pyrrhus' murder, Orestes parades Andromache before Hermione and compels the Trojan slave to announce the death of Pyrrhus to the author of the crime. Andromaque's tone is far from triumphant:

> Je ne m'attendais pas que le Ciel en colère
> Put, sans perdre mon Fils, accroître ma misère,
> Et gardât à mes yeux quelque spectacle encore,
> Qui fît couler mes pleurs pour un autre qu'Hector.
> Vous avez trouvé seule une sanglante voie
> De suspendre en mon coeur le souvenir de Troie.
> Plus barbare aujourd'hui qu'Achille et que son Fils,
> Vous me faites pleurer me plus grands Ennemis;
> Et ce que n'avaient pu promesse, ni menace,
> Pyrrhus de mon Hector semble avoir pris la place.
> Je n'ai que trop, Madame, éprouvé son courroux,
> J'avais plus de sujet de m'en plaindre que vous.
> Pour dernière rigueur, ton amitié cruelle,
> Pyrrhus, à mon Époux me rendait infidèle.
>
> I did not think that Heaven's anger could increase my misery without losing my son, nor that it could hold before my eyes another sight that would make my tears fall for a man other than Hector. You alone have found a blood-spattered way of suspending the memory of Troy in my heart. More savage today than Achilles and his son, you make me shed tears for my greatest enemies. And Pyrrhus seems to have taken the place of my Hector, a thing that neither promise nor threat was able

[91] Tobin (1999) 45; Lyons (2013) graduate seminar.

> to effect. I too experienced his wrath, I had more reason to complain about it than you. For the final hardship, your cruel affection, Pyrrhus, rendered me unfaithful to my husband, 5.3.1513-26.

Pyrrhus' untimely death has shattered Andromaque's professed indifference to the Greek hero. Her hatred of Achilles' son has been transformed into a devotion akin to that which she felt for Hector. She now addresses the dead man in apostrophe, a literary device heretofore reserved for Hector's shade alone. Her tears, unwilling to well up on behalf of her own son earlier in the play, now fall freely for Pyrrhus. The destroyer of Troy has taken Hector's place in her heart. Pyrrhus, by dying, has accomplished what he was never able to do while alive: he has become Hector and won Andromaque's affection. Andromaque's last speech indicating her new allegiance to Pyrrhus is verified by Pylades' summing up of Andromaque's situation: "Andromaque herself, although so set against Pyrrhus before, now provides him with the duties of a faithful widow," *Andromaque elle-même, à Pyrrhus si rebelle, / Lui rend tous les devoirs d'une veuve fidèle* 5.5.1633-34. And so, in the final moments of the play, Andromaque transfers her affections to a new Hector and becomes the devoted widow of another fallen hero.

This transfer of affection from Hector to Pyrrhus is rendered more vivid by the imagery of the fall of Troy. To have Andromaque mourn Pyrrhus at the end of the play is reminiscent of the final scene in the *Iliad* in which she leads the dirge for Hector's burial. Orestes' report of Pyrrhus' death and his subsequent desire to flee the city in flames is reminiscent of Aeneas' account of Priam's death and his harrowing flight from burning Troy. Like Aeneas with Priam, Orestes observes the scene of death at the altar, but refrains from involving himself. Just as Aeneas returns home through the mayhem to find Creusa, so does Orestes return to the palace to find Hermione. Both heroes intend to escort their partners to the port and join the others fleeing the city (*Du peuple épouvanté j'ai traversé la presse / Pour venir de ces lieux enlever ma Princesse, / Et regagner le port, où bientôt nos amis / Viendront couverts du sang que je vous ai promis.* 5.3.1521-24).[92] And both men fail to convey the woman in question to safety. After the death of Hermione in Racine and the death of Creusa in Vergil,

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[92] "Covered in the blood I promised you, I crossed through the throng of frightened people to come and take my princess from this place and find the port where our friends will meet us."

a fit of madness descends momentarily upon both Orestes and Aeneas before a friendly face (Pylades in Racine; Creusa's ghost in Vergil) compels him to escape the city alone before it is too late. Pyrrhus, it seems, has honored his promise (1.4.325-32) to turn Epirus into Troy after all.

Vergil's *Aeneid*: A Coda to Racine's Play

Racine's preface to *Andromaque* hints at how the Trojan princess fares emotionally in the wake of Pyrrhus' death. He cites a passage from book three of Vergil's *Aeneid* as the primary model for his tragedy, claiming that within those lines lies the whole plot of his play (*Voilà en peu de Vers tout le sujet de cette Tragédie*).[93] In a scene that takes place after Pyrrhus has died, Aeneas meets Andromache in Epirus outside of the city at the makeshift tomb she has built for Hector. Here she is summoning the shade of her dead husband to commune with her as she does in both Seneca (at his real tomb) and Racine. Unsurprisingly, Andromache initially mistakes Aeneas for the dead man she has been summoning. After Aeneas assures the frantic widow that he is not the shade of her late husband, he inquires about her fortune and learns that Orestes has killed Pyrrhus and that Andromache is now the wife of Helenus, but not before Andromache laments her present situation, comparing it (again) unfavorably with that of Polyxena, her usual refrain:

> Deiecit vultum et demissa voce locuta est:
> "O felix una ante alias Priameïa virgo,
> hostilem ad tumulum Troiae sub moenibus altis
> iussa mori, quae sortitus non pertulit ullos,
> nec victoris eri tetigit captiva cubile!
>
> She looked down and spoke with a low voice: O virgin daughter of Priam, alone happy before all the rest, since you were ordered to die at the enemy's tomb beneath the high walls of Troy, you who endured no allotments, nor touched the bed of a victorious master as a prisoner, 3.320-24.

Long after the death of Pyrrhus, Andromache's desire to die still defines her. Since this scene from Vergil takes place after the events of Racine's tragedy, it serves as a coda of sorts for understanding the significance of the play's final events. Andromache is still jealous of Polyxena's fate. She has failed in the end to execute the death she dreamed of—Polyxena's

[93] "There you have in a few verses the entire subject of this tragedy."

marriage-sacrifice. Instead, she remains alive and unhappily yoked to yet another living husband. In Racine, as in Seneca before him, characters rarely manage to escape a certain terrifying circularity. During her time on stage, Racine's Andromaque tries to break free from her fated role of the ever grieving widow of Troy, but, as the despondency of her final speech indicates, and as her brief cameo in Vergil's *Aeneid* demonstrates, she is destined to stay alive and mourn. This nightmare of reliving the same tragedy time and again will prove especially inextricable for the characters of Racine's next classical tragedy, *Britannicus*.

Chapter Three:
Reading Tacitus: Haunted by the Future in Racine's *Britannicus*

J'avais copié mes personnages d'après le plus grand peintre de l'antiquité, je veux dire d'après Tacite. Et j'étais alors si rempli de la lecture de cet excellent historien, qu'il n'y a presque pas un trait éclatant dans ma tragédie dont il ne m'ait donné l'idée.

I have fashioned my characters after the greatest painter of antiquity, I mean after Tacitus. And I was at that time so filled with the reading of that excellent historian that there is hardly a stroke of brilliance in my tragedy that does not stem from him.

-Racine, Seconde préface to *Britannicus*

Britannicus opens with Agrippine[94] waiting before the emperor's door, intent on having a word with her son. In her first lines she bemoans Néron's aggression towards his brother and equates it with her own fall from favor:

> Tout ce que j'ai prédit n'est que trop assuré:
> Contre Britannicus Néron s'est déclaré.
> L'impatient Néron cesse de se contraindre;
> Las de se faire aimer, il veut se faire craindre.
> Britannicus le gêne, Albine, et chaque jour
> Je sens que je deviens importune à mon tour.
>
> All that I predicted is but too certain: Néron has declared himself against Britannicus and, impatient, he no longer holds himself back. Weary of making himself loved, he makes himself feared. Britannicus is getting in his way, Albine, and in my turn I notice that I become more and more burdensome each day, 1.1.9-14.

Agrippine's growing anxiety about her son dominates the first half of the play. She senses that her relevance is diminishing, and although she does not explain immediately how her stepson's well being concerns her, she links her waning influence to the young prince's fate with the parataxis of lines 13 and 14. In Tacitus' *Annales*, however, Tacitus' Agrippina does not fear for her position *before* Britannicus' death. On the contrary, she shamelessly criticizes her son, mocking the emperor's choice of lover by referring to Acte as her "daughter-in-law

[94] In this chapter I use Agrippine and Néron (French spellings) to refer to Racine's heroine and hero and Agrippina and Nero to refer to both the historical characters and their guises in Tacitus and Seneca. Because there is no difference in the French and Latin spellings of Britannicus and Burrus, I will take care to clarify which incarnation of the character I mean.

the handmaid" (*nurum ancillam,* 13.13.1) and dismissing the robe he sends as a gift on the grounds that her son was bestowing on her possessions that were already hers (*dividere filium quae cuncta ex ipsa haberet*, 13.13.4). Although Tacitus links Agrippina's support of Britannicus to Nero's burgeoning hatred of his stepbrother (13.15), the historian depicts Agrippina as unaware that her son is capable of much of anything, much less the kind of political intrigue in which she is practiced, until he kills Britannicus and proves himself his mother's son. It is only after the young prince dies that Agrippina is gripped with such worry that Tacitus tells us she fears for her own life and "begins to understand that her final source of aid had been snatched away and that there was now a precedent for the murder of kinsmen," *sibi supremum auxilium ereptum et parricidii exemplum intellegebat*, 13.16.4. The next time we hear from Agrippina in Tacitus' narrative, she has exchanged her former derision for respect and modestly refrains from blaming her son for hearing charges her enemies have brought against her (13.21).[95] In sum, Tacitus' Agrippina realizes the instability of her position only after Britannicus' death; but Racine's Agrippine is already racked with self-aware anxiety in the play's opening scene.

Racine affirms and reaffirms with vigor that the primary inspiration for *Britannicus* is Tacitus' *Annales*.[96] It is likely that he was also familiar with Suetonius' *Life of Nero.*[97] Other

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[95] I discuss this episode in detail later in the chapter. For now suffice it to note that Agrippina's tone towards her son has changed from aggressive to respectful in the wake of Britannicus' death, indicating that Britannicus' death has made Agrippina aware of her son's capacity for violence.

[96] Greek and Roman historiography enjoyed great popularity in early modern France. Tacitus in particular had become very popular towards the end of the 16th century after the enthusiastic reception of Marc-Antoine Muret's lectures on Tacitus at the University of Rome and Justus Lipsius' scholarly edition of Tacitus that appeared in 1575. Claude Fauchet's 1582 scholarly translation of the complete works of Tacitus into French would have increased the familiarity of the Roman historian. His annotations included both notes on historical names and places and explanations about the difficulty of accurately translating Tacitus's Latin, suggesting that he is writing for a learned audience whose knowledge of or devotion to the Latin language was not quite sufficient to read the historian in his own language. See Worth-Stylianou (2002) 146-49. Montaigne saw parallels between early modern France and Tacitus' world: "*Son service est plus propre à un estat trouble et malade, comme est le nostre present: Vous diriez souvent qu"il nous peingt, et qu'il nous pince*," *Essai* 3.8.

[97] Forestier (2006) 354 and Tobin (1999) both assume Suetonius was a model for Racine.

classical texts that influenced Racine's composition include the Pseudo-Senecan play *Octavia,* the only extant Latin play on an historical subject,[98] and Seneca's *De Clementia*.[99] This is the first play Racine writes that takes a piece of prose writing as its primary model, necessitating the "translation" of a prose narrative for the stage. As Valérie Worth-Stylianou has argued, composing a successful play from Tacitean material had proven difficult for Racine's predecessors, Gabriel Gilbert and Tristan l'Hermite.[100] Racine succeeds where his predecessors falter, I will argue, not because he finds "a new focus barely suggested by the historical account," as she argues,[101] but because his close reading of Tacitus help him home in on particular Tacitean moments that are well suited to the stage. While *Octavia* provides Racine with a dramatic structure for his first historical tragedy, and *De Clementia* provides material for Burrus' advice to Néron,[102] Tacitus' *Annales* provide the lion's share of the ancient material that Racine adapts for his play. When he boasts in his second preface (epigram of this chapter) that he was so filled with Tacitus that there is hardly any detail of the play to which the historian did not give rise, Racine does not mean that he faithfully rendered a series of historical facts into Alexandrine couplets, but rather that his innovative reading of Tacitus and his adoption of the Roman historian's pessimistic outlook colors his composition, from character development to dramatic timing. While Agrippine's oversized role in the play is well enough established,[103] the depth of Racine's engagement with Tacitus'

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[98] Modern scholarly consensus on the authorship of *Octavia* is that the play could not have been written by Seneca because of the play's simpler rhetorical style and references made to events that occurred after Seneca's death in 65 A.D. *Octavia* was probably written by a Senecan imitator in the decades following Nero's death, probably under the Flavian dynasty after the narrative of Nero the monster became commonplace. See Ferri (2003) 5-30 for a full discussion on the issue. Racine was likely aware of the play's disputed authorship, as Lipsius (1588), Heinsius (1611), Scaliger (1627), Vossius (1647), and Gronovius (1661 and 1682) all questioned the play's authenticity.

[99] See Levitan (1989) for a demonstration of Seneca's influence on *Britannicus* and possible explanations as to why Racine refuses to "claim" Seneca as a model.

[100] Gabriel Gilbert wrote *Arrie et Pétus ou les amours de Néron* (1660) and Tristan l'Hermite *La Mort de Sénèque* (1644).

[101] Brody (1962) 186.

[102] Levitan (1989) 188.

[103] Tobin (1999) 78.

Agrippina has been underappreciated.[104] In this chapter, I aim first of all to reconsider passages Racine borrows from Tacitus' Britannicus episode, paying particular attention to the details that Racine modifies or altogether elides. In addition, I examine passages from the play that are modeled on Tacitus' much more animated telling of Agrippina's murder and show how he navigates the generic restraints of his time to introduce to the stage the story he wants to tell.

Although the pride Racine takes in his classical education is often manifest in the great number of sources he mentions in his prefaces,[105] he names the Roman historian as the exclusive model for his play. [106] In his first preface (1670), Racine responds to those decrying his characterization of young Néron as too evil by claiming that one need only read Tacitus (*Il ne faut qu'avoir lu Tacite*) to see that although Nero was initially a decent emperor of Rome, he was always a depraved man in private. In this statement, one might see a veiled criticism of those who read only French reductions of Roman history such as Nicolas Coëffeteau's *Histoire Romaine*. To those denouncing his choice of Narcisse as Néron's confidant, Racine quotes a passage from Tacitus in which Nero is said to be particularly distraught at the freedman's death, characteristically skirting the real problem with making Narcissus the confidant of Nero—the fact that Agrippina had had Narcissus killed immediately following the death of Claudius (A.D. 54), a good three years before the setting of Racine's play. Racine chides Junie's critics for their haphazard study of Roman history, revealing smugly

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[104] Schröder (1997) discusses the parallels between Tacitus' account of Britannicus' death and Racine's, but largely ignores *Annales* 14 as a model for the play. Forestier (2006) 354-55 considers Acte to be an important model for Junie because she is Nero's lover when he kills Britannicus, but I will argue that Poppaea, Nero's mistress when he kills his mother, is the more significant model.

[105] In his first preface to *Andromaque* Racine names Vergil, Euripides, and Seneca as models for the play. In his preface to *La Thébaïde*, Racine names Routrou, Euripides, Sophocles, and Seneca. In his preface to *Iphigénie*, he names no fewer than thirteen ancient sources.

[106] I do not mean to imply that there were not other important ancient sources for Racine's *Britannicus*, just that Racine does not *claim* them. As William Levitan (1989) demonstrates, Seneca's philosophical works, especially his works on tyranny and kingship, were extremely influential on *Britannicus*, although Racine attempts to obscure the fact in his prefaces.

that Junie is *not* modeled on the *vieille coquette* Junia Silana,[107] but on Junia Calvina, a thinly sketched descendant of Augustus and sister of Silanus rather than wife.[108] In his second preface (1676), Racine informs his readers that he had intended to publish a series of passages from Tacitus that informed his writing of the play, but that once he gathered the passages, he realized they would take up almost the same amount of space as the play itself (*mais j'ai trouvé que cet extrait tiendrait presque autant de place que la tragédie*).[109] This is a telling boast: for Tacitus' narrative of Britannicus' death spans all of two subsections in the *Annales*, or less than a single page of a modern OCT. Where do the other forty odd pages come from?

Strikingly, none of the passages Racine cites in his 1676 preface as inspiration for his play come from Tacitus' narration of Britannicus' murder (13.15-17), excepting his quotation of 13.16.4, which describes Agrippina's reaction to Britannicus' death:

> Je ne dis que ce mot d'Agrippine; car il y aurait trop de choses à en dire. C'est elle que je me suis surtout efforcé de bien exprimer, et ma tragédie n'est pas moins la disgrâce d'Agrippine que la mort de Britannicus. Cette mort fut un coup de foudre pour elle ; et "il parut," dit Tacite, "par sa frayeur et sa consternation, qu'elle était aussi innocente de cette mort qu'Octavie; Agrippine perdait en lui sa dernière espérance, et ce crime lui en faisait craindre un plus grand: *sibi supremum auxilium ereptum, et parricidii exemplum intelligebat*."
>
> I will say only this about Agrippine, for otherwise there would be too many things to say about her. She above all did I try to express well, and my tragedy is no less the ruin of Agrippine than the death of Britannicus. His death was a thunderbolt for her, and Tacitus says "it appeared from her fright and dismay that she was just as innocent of that death as Octavia was; in him [Britannicus], Agrippina lost her final source of aid, and that crime made her fear another greater crime: [in Latin] "She was starting to understand that her final source of aid had been snatched away and that there was now a precedent for the murder of kinsmen."

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[107] Coëffeteau's *Histoire Romaine* names Junia Silana but not Junia Calvina, referring to the latter only as the sister of Silanus (Shröder, 1997, 460).
[108] Tacitus mentions her only at *An.* 12.4.1-2 and Seneca alludes to her at *Apocol.* 8.2.
[109] Instead, he resigns himself to quoting a dozen passages from the *Annales* in order to clarify his depictions of the play's *personnages principaux*.

This is the only passage Racine quotes from Tacitus' account of Britannicus' death. It is noteworthy that it concerns neither Britannicus nor his death *per se*, but rather Agrippina's initial ignorance of the affair. Contrary to what he leads us to believe in the preface, Racine's use of it as a model for *Britannicus* is not straightforward. The Tacitus passage describes how Britannicus' murder takes Agrippina completely by surprise. She is so far from suspecting the death of Britannicus that the same shock and fear that graced the face of naive Octavia adorned also her own practiced visage. But, as her lines quoted in the opening paragraph to this chapter indicate, Racine's Agrippine claims to have predicted (*prédit*) Néron's animosity towards Britannicus before Néron even considers killing his brother, suggesting that she is hardly oblivious to the danger threatening the prince (1.19-14). Racine, then, begins his play where the Tacitus' episode ends—with a distraught Agrippina wary of her son's potential for parricide. In Racine's play, Britannicus' death is less a sudden *coup de foudre* for Agrippine than the expected eruption of a long simmering geyser.

In Tacitus, the death of Britannicus and the death of Agrippina are spread out over a period of four years, making it no simple matter to weave these stories together while respecting the conventions of unity that govern early modern French tragedy.[110] Scholars regularly note that Racine takes liberties with Tacitus' timeline, and it would be hard to argue that he strictly obeys the historical dating. Nevertheless, the timeframe of the play that Albine announces in the opening scene is significant. In Tacitus Nero killed Britannicus in 55 A.D. (13.16) and his mother in 59 A.D. (14.8). The play, however, is set at the end of his third year in power (57 A.D.), halfway between the Britannicus and Agrippina episodes, an early indication that Racine has collapsed these two episodes from Tacitus into one. Racine quotes the passage from Tacitus' Britannicus episode (13.16.4) in part to justify his choice to make Agrippine and her demise central to his play, pointing out as he does that Britannicus' death causes Agrippina to fear her son. But as he is wont to do in his prefaces, he sidesteps the real issue at hand: he has purported to write a play about the death of Britannicus, an episode that hardly involves Agrippina at all. But it is Agrippine who dominates Racine's stage and the story of her demise that captivates both the audience and the playwright

[110] The three unities heralded by 17th century French critics were those of day, place, and action. Adherence to them provided the playwright opportunities to display his technical virtuosity, much like adherence to a certain metrical scheme (Lyons, 1999, 140).

himself.[111] If anything, Racine's statement that his play is just as much about the downfall of Agrippina as the death of Britannicus understates Agrippine's role in Racine's play. She is the first character to monopolize the stage; she introduces the Britannicus plot as though she is the real target of Néron's ire (1.1.57-58); and, for the most part, Racine models her dialogue and action on passages from Tacitus that have nothing to do with Britannicus' death, as I aim to show.

Act I: Shifting Alliances

As in many Greek and Roman plays, the opening dialogue of a Racinian play serves as a prologue of sorts to inform the audience about the setting of the play and to explore where the main characters stand with respect to each other. These prologues are tightly constructed, and the details they reveal rarely turn out to be cursory.[112] With their quick succession of details and facts, they rely on an audience largely familiar with the traditional versions of the story. In Racine, the opening scenes are particularly full of allusions to passages from ancient texts that enable Racine to succinctly relay the motives and biases of his primary characters; for, it is their conflicting ambitions that will fuel the action of the play.[113] To set the scene, Albine "casually" mentions to Agrippine that Néron has ruled for three years (1.1.25), placing the timeframe of the play directly between the traditional dates of Nero's murder of Britannicus and murder of Agrippina. She describes his temperament as similar to that of Augustus in his final years (1.1.29-30), that is to say, benevolent and merciful, but Agrippine corrects her description, warning that Néron's reign will end where Augustus' began, that is to say, with slaughter (1.1.33-34). After relaying Junie's nightly abduction, Agrippine confides in her handmaid the root of her fear:

César ne me voit plus, Albine, sans témoins.

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[111] Racine never talks about his character Britannicus with the enthusiasm he reserves for Agrippine. In neither preface to the play does he so much as mention the young prince by name.

[112] I spent the summer of 2016 at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris looking at Racine's personal copies of ancient texts that he annotated. I am still processing the material, but I have noticed that he generally writes significantly longer and more frequent notes in the marginalia of the prologue scene, suggesting that he is particularly interested in how the ancients introduce the plot of their plays.

[113] Cf. my discussion of the opening scene of *Andromaque* in chapter two.

> En public, à mon heure, on me donne audience ;
> Sa réponse est dictée, et même son silence.
> Je vois deux surveillants, ses maîtres et les miens,
> Présider l'un ou l'autre à tous nos entretiens.
>
> Caesar no longer sees me without witnesses, Albine. In public, at certain times, he grants me audience, but his response is practiced, along with his silences. I notice two overseers, his masters and mine, and one or the other presides over all our meetings, 1.1.118-22.

Néron, we learn, is denying his mother the former intimacy they once shared. In Tacitus, Agrippina's ostracism from Nero's court begins in the aftermath of Britannicus' death *after* Nero has murdered his brother (*statim relictum Agrippinae limen: nemo solari, nemo adire praeter paucas feminas, amore an odio incertas,* 13.19.1).[114] Nero reaffirms his policy of avoiding his mother at the beginning of book fourteen, shortly before ordering her death (*igitur Nero vitare secretos eius congressus,* 14.3.1).[115] That a play nominally centered on the death of Britannicus is from the beginning so focused on the young prince's stepmother and what she traditionally suffers in the lead up to her own death is an early indication that Racine is interested in telling another story.

In the scene following Agripinne and Albine's conversation, Burrus distracts Agrippine while Néron slips out a back door (1.2). At this early point in the play, the commander of the praetorian guard supports Néron's policies concerning the abduction of Junie unconditionally. To Agrippine's allegation of Junie's innocence, Burrus responds, "You know that the rights she [Junie] brings with her could turn her husband into a rebel prince," *Vous savez que les droits qu'elle porte avec elle / Peuvent de son époux faire un prince rebelle*, 1.2.239. Racine's characters often gloss a citation of a particular passage by calling on an interlocutor's "memory" of the intertext in question, as we saw in the chapter on *Andromache*.[116] Racine uses the phrases *vous savez, ne doutez pas*, or the like to mark such an intertext. With his *vous savez* Burrus alludes to Agrippina's reasons for killing the brothers of Junia Calvina (Junie's namesake in Tacitus). Book thirteen of the *Annales* begins with the

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[114] "Right away Agrippina's doorway was deserted. No one consoled her and no one visited her except for a few women, whether out of love of hatred."
[115] "Nero avoided meeting with her privately."
[116] See pages 24-27.

following account of the death of Junius Silanus, one of Augustus' few descendants to have survived the paranoid reigns of Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius:

> Prima novo principatu mors Iunii Silani proconsulis Asiae ignaro Nerone per dolum Agrippinae paratur, non quia ingenii violentia exitium inritaverat...verum Agrippina fratri eius L. Silano necem molita ultorem metuebat, crebra vulgi fama anteponendum esse vixdum pueritiam egresso Neroni et imperium per scelus adepto virum aetate composita, insontem, nobilem et, quod tunc spectaretur, e Caesarum posteris: quippe et Silanus divi Augusti abnepos erat. haec causa necis.
>
> The first death in the new principate, that of proconsul Junius Silanus, was brought about by the guile of Agrippina without Nero's knowledge, not because the violence of his character provoked death, but because Agrippina feared an avenger, since she had set in motion the death of his brother Lucius Silanus. Additionally, an oft-repeated rumor spread that the people preferred a guiltless and noble man of appropriate age and royal descent to the boyhood of Nero and his reign obtained through crimes. Kinship to the Caesars was something respected back then: for Silanus was also the grandson of divine Augustus. This was the cause of his death. 13.1.1.

Tacitus clarifies that, like Junie, Silanus is in no way to blame for his sad fate. He offers two reasons for Agrippina's attack on Junius Silanus: her fear he would avenge his brother's death and his relationship to Augustus. The second reason is a clarification of the first: should Junius Silanus wish to avenge his brother, his Augustan bloodline would make him a real contender for the throne. Agrippina murders Silanus because he poses a threat to her son's rule only a few months before Nero kills Britannicus for the same reason (13.15). Racine's Burrus justifies Nero's rough treatment of Junie because of her family lineage. With his *vous savez,* he reminds Agrippina of her traditional policy regarding the Silanus family and compels her to admit that Junie is dangerous. Agrippine does not disagree.[117] On the contrary, she quickly admits that Junie does threaten the emperor as Burrus claims (*Je vous entends*, 1.2.245). Those of the audience familiar with Tacitus or who had reread the Britannicus episode in preparation for attending the play would perhaps hear in Burrus' *vous*

[117] Although it is fairly common for Racinian characters to contradict or correct one another, no character in Racine's tragedies disagrees when his / her interlocutor prefaces a statement with a *vous savez* or a like phrase, as if the character employing *vous savez* calls upon the primary text as a witness that cannot be refuted.

savez an indication of Junie's precarious position in Néron's court. Like her brother, she is the grandchild of Augustus.

Junius Silanus was not the only member of the Silanus clan to be done in by Agrippina. Shortly before she married Claudius, Agrippina had orchestrated the death of Lucius Silanus. Although Lucius' death does not immediately prefigure Britannicus', the details of the story are arguably more relevant to Racine's play. In 48 A.D., before Agrippina had married her uncle and become queen, Claudius engaged his daughter Octavia to Lucius, hoping that by adopting him into the family, he might stay the growing fears of the citizenry about the instability of the Julio-Claudian dynasty (12.3). Agrippina, already plotting on behalf of her young son, intended to reserve Octavia for Nero. To this end, Agrippina accused Lucius Silanus of incest with his sister Junia in order to render him an unfit match for her stepdaughter. Her ruse proved effective, and Silanus committed suicide on the day of Agrippina's wedding to Claudius (12.8). Racine highlights Agrippine's involvement in the Lucius Silanus affair, but with a couple of interesting twists.[118]

The first time Lucius Silanus' death is alluded to is in the prologue scene when Agrippine justifies her policy of supporting Junie and Britannicus, regardless of her earlier opposition to the Silanus family:

> **Albine**: Vous, leur appui, madame?
> **Agrippine**: Arrête, chère Albine,
> Je sais que j'ai moi seule avancé leur ruine ;
> Que du trône, où le sang l'a dû faire monter,
> Britannicus par moi s'est vu précipiter.
> Par moi seule, éloigné de l'hymen d'Octavie,
> La frère de Junie abandonna la vie,
> Silanus, sur qui Claude avait jeté les yeux,
> Et qui comptait Auguste au rang de ses aïeux.
>
> **Albine**: You support them, Madame?
> **Agrippine**: My dear Albine, stop. I know that I accelerated their ruin myself, that because of me Britannicus fell from the throne where his blood ought to have elevated him. Because of me alone, Junie's brother took his life, driven from

[118] Schröder (1997) 461-63 discusses Racine's indebtedness to this Tacitus passage but does not comment on the alterations Racine makes to Tacitus.

> marriage with Octavie, Silanus, to whom Claudius looked [as a potential successor] and who counted Augustus among his ancestors, 1.1.59-67.

In Agrippine's version of events, Silanus commits suicide because he is heartbroken over his loss of Octavia. The order of the clauses in lines 64 and 65 suggests that although Agrippine only intended to separate Silanus from Octavia (*Par moi seule, éloigné de l'hymen d'Octavie*), Silanus elected to take his own life. The phrase *abandonna la vie* has a romantic flavor to it. The rhyme of *l'hymen d'Octavie* with *abandonna la vie* emphasizes the relationship between the breaking up of his marriage and his decision to kill himself.[119] Agrippine restates this amorous revision of the Silanus / Octavia affair later in the play when she reels off a litany of her benefices to her son: "I named you his son-in-law and gave you his daughter. Silanus, who loved her, abandoned his life over it and stained that unfortunate day with his blood," *Je vous nommai son gendre, et vous donnai sa fille: / Silanus, qui l'aimait, s'en vit abandonné, / Et marqua de son sang ce jour infortuné,* 4.2.1140-42. Here too, Agrippine's ordering of the phrases suggests that Silanus killed himself because he had loved Octavia, not because Agrippine wanted him dead.

Tacitus, however, makes it clear that Silanus' suicide was not self-imposed, as it rarely was under the empire:

> Die nuptiarum Silanus mortem sibi conscivit, sive eo usque spem vitae produxerat, seu delecto die augendam ad invidiam.
>
> On the day of [their] marriage, Silanus committed suicide, whether because he had held out hope of living up until then or in order to maximize public ill will because of his choice of days, 12.8.

As in the passage describing Agrippina's murder of Junius Silanus (13.1.1, quoted above), Tacitus employs the rhetorical technique of providing two possible reasons for a character's motivations when, in fact, both are true. Silanus could no longer hope to be allowed to live because Agrippina had risen to prominence. The only freedom remaining to him as a Roman aristocrat was to choose when and how to kill himself. He elects to end his life on

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[119] Schröder (1997) 460-65 discusses these two passages, but does not notice that Racine has modified Tacitus' text in this significant way.

Agrippina's wedding day to publicize the violent measures of the emperor's new bride. No passage in Tacitus suggests that Silanus was particularly besotted with Octavia. While he may or may not have been fond of his fiancée, theirs was a political union first and foremost. Racine deliberately misinterprets Silanus' suicide according to his own cultural mores when he implies that his death was merely an unfortunate side effect of Agripinna's aggressive matchmaking instead of the callous murder of a young noble carried out by an ambitious mother. We might consider briefly whether Agrippine is a reliable narrator of events. Given her current shift of allegiance to Junie, we might expect her to downplay her part in the Silanus affair. But the fact that neither Albine nor Néron corrects her version of the incident[120] suggests, I think, that Racine has purposefully reinterpreted the episode in a way that would quickly be understood by his French audience, versed as it was in the culture of *le galant*.

The treatment of the Silani in Seneca's *Octavia* may have provided Racine with the idea of focusing on Lucius' death and adapting it to fit his play. In the prologue scene of that play, Octavia's nurse (*nutrix*) goes through the litany of crimes committed by Agrippina and her son. Like Racine's characters, she skips over the murder of Junius Silanus, and highlights the murder of his brother Lucius instead:

> mactata soceri concidit thalamis gener
> victima, tuis ne fieret hymenaeis potens.
> pro facinus ingens! feminae est munus datus
> Silanus et cruore foedavit suo
> patrios penates, criminis ficti reus.
>
> The son-in-law fell as a sacrificial victim at his father-in-law's wedding, lest he become powerful by marrying you. What a monstrous deed! Silanus, guilty of a fabricated crime, was given as a gift to his wife [Agrippina] and he stained his ancestral gods with his blood, 145-49.

The Latin text's underscoring of the relationship between father-in-law and son-in-law stands in contrast to Racine's emphasis on the relationship between the two lovers. Whereas

[120] In cases where Racine wants to indicate that a character is presenting an unreliable narrative about the past (mythical or historical), he often has the character's interlocutor give an alternative version. Cf. *Andromaque* 1.2.221-23.

in Racine's play, the point of Lucius Silanus' story is that he died for love of Octavia, in the Roman play, the outrage lies not in the broken bonds between lovers, but those between father-in-law and son-in-law. Nevertheless, in *Octavia*, Lucius Silanus' fate is particularly relevant to Octavia's story, even if he did not kill himself on her account. Octavia's nurse counts Lucius Silanus' death as the original crime to which the others committed first by Agrippina and then by Nero can be traced (the murder of Claudius, the murder of Britannicus, the murder of Agrippina, and soon, the murder of Octavia, 164-74). After the nurse catalogues these murders, Octavia answers that Nero will kill her too if she does not kill him first (*Extinguat et me, ne manu nostra cadat,* 174)—a statement full of dramatic irony, since the play is about her last day in Rome. The dialogue between Octavia and the nurse creates a heavy sense of foreboding, as Octavia compares her plight to mythical heroines and the nurse recounts the recent crimes of Agrippina and her son. If Octavia's murder is to serve as the finale, so to speak, of Nero's crimes, it makes sense to begin the list of murders with Lucius Silanus', and to create a chiasmic relationship between Nero's first and last crimes. By highlighting his murder, the nurse invokes an alternate narrative for Octavia that is no longer possible. The conclusion that Octavia's affairs would be much improved had she married the good and noble Silanus is difficult to deny.[121]

Ronald Tobin sees Octavia as a partial model for Junie,[122] and the fact that both Octavia and Junie are descendants of Augustus who have lost their brothers because they posed a threat to Nero's rule speaks in favor of this comparison. For Racine, Silanus' death does not represent the lost potential of a happy marriage for Octavia (who never appears on stage), but rather for Junie. And instead of auguring the death of Octavia, the death of Silanus foreshadows the death of Octavia's brother, who, like Silanus before him, has become involved with a royal woman who possesses the cultural capital to make her husband an emperor. There is a strong parallel between Agrippina's traditional actions against the elder Silanus brother (kill him to preserve Octavia for Nero) and Néron's plot against Britannicus (kill him to preserve Junie for himself). Both Silanus and Britannicus are

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[121] When tragic heroines are experiencing marital doubts or difficulties, they will often recall with a hint of nostalgia their other suitors or imagine what life would be like had they not met their spouse (*Tr.* 1-48; *Med.* 1-11).

[122] Tobin (1999) 70.

good men about to marry women whose royal blood could turn their husbands into contenders for the emperorship. The former's marriage is thwarted by Agrippina because she fears Octavia would render Silanus a potential emperor and the latter's by Néron because he fears Junie would make of Britannicus the same. Racine's emperor, then, has appropriated his mother's eye for potential political threats and her taste for brutal politics.

Burrus' allusion to Agrippine's history of attacking the Silanus brothers works on two levels. On the stage, the character Agrippine is made to "remember" her Tacitean hatred of the Silanus family and forced to condone Burrus' support of Néron's seizure of Junie. This has the immediate effect of efficiently resolving a conflict between two characters and moving the action of the play along. Many of the audience members would not stop to question why Burrus should count on Agrippine's "knowledge" of the dangers the Silanus family poses, and would simply transition to listening to Agrippine complain about Néron's slight to her reputation. At the same time, Racine rewards the readers of Tacitus in the audience by nodding to Agrippina's long history of enmity with the Silanus family.

Like Seneca's Octavia, Agrippine thinks that the situation in the palace is such that she must act first or suffer what Nero has planned for her:

> **Agrippine**: Je m'assure un port dans la tempête.
> Néron m'échappera si ce frein ne l'arrête.
> **Albine**: Mais prendre contre un fils tant de soins superflus?
> **Agrippine**: Je le craindrais bientôt s'il ne me craignait plus.
>
> **Agrippine**: I insure for myself safe port in a storm. Néron will escape me if this restraint does not stop him.
> **Albine**: But taking so many unnecessary precautions against a son?
> **Agrippine**: I should fear him soon, if he no longer fears me, 1.1.172-75.

Albine's shocked reaction to her mistress' support of Britannicus and Junie suggests that Agrippine's anxiety is premature. After all, as Agrippine herself has announced, Néron's ire is directed at Britannicus, not her (1.1.13). But like Octavia, she feels that she must act now or regret it later. *Je le craindrais bientôt s'il ne me craignait plus* appears to be a loose translation of Octavia's *Extinguat et me, ne manu nostra cadat*. Each heroine knows full well that Nero will destroy her should she fail to act first. But Octavia, at least, does not possess the strength of character to carry off a plot of regicide, as her nurse reminds her (*Natura vires non dedit tantas*

tibi, 175).[123] Agrippine, however, fosters none of her daughter-in-law's native weakness. When she says that she will not make good her promises with impotent anger (*impuissant courroux,* 1.3), she distances herself from the helpless Senecan heroine. Her threat to Néron should not be dismissed. She has, after all, already killed one Roman emperor.

Although Seneca's Octavia and Racine's Agrippine are very different heroines, both prologues are dialogues between a confidant and a woman close to Nero (wife or mother) who eventually is murdered by him. In the prologues to both plays, events in Nero's life that have already happened are alluded to and events that will occur in the future are foreshadowed. Agrippine may even allude to to the attempt Nero makes on her life in Tacitus by employing the metaphor of a ship in a storm (1.1.172). Both heroines consider Britannicus their only ally against the emperor. Octavia, in her first lament, calls Britannicus her only hope (*spes una mihi,* 68), a line the Roman playwright may have borrowed from Tacitus *Annales* 13.16.4, the passage quoted by Racine in his preface in which Britannicus is described as Agrippina's *supremum auxilium.* Octavia's reliance on Britannicus is perfectly understandable considering that he is her brother and last male kin. As Albine's shocked reaction implies, the fact that Agrippine, at this early date, ties her own fate to Britannicus, the boy she disinherited from the throne, is unexpected. The opening scene of Seneca's *Octavia* is full of dramatic irony that builds suspense about the approaching death of Octavia. One might expect that the prologue to a play entitled *Britannicus* would look forward to the death of the eponymous hero. On the contrary, if someone, not knowing the title of the French play, were to read Racine's prologue alongside of Seneca's, he would be justified in thinking that this is a play about the death of Agrippine, not her stepson.

On first encountering Racine's *Britannicus*, we might wonder if Néron exaggerates the threat a married Britannicus and Junie would pose his rule. After all, Racine depicts Britannicus as an immature, trusting youth and Junie as an inexperienced, unambitious girl. As a result, Néron's aggressive stance towards the happy couple appears at the outset to be something between that of paranoid ruler and sadistic monster. But if the past is any guide, Néron is not wrong to be suspicious of their union, especially considering the role his mother has played in uniting the young couple. Agrippina is depicted in Tacitus as a

[123] "Nature has not granted you such strength."

politically calculating matchmaker, first with her own marriage to Claudius and then with the marriage of Octavia and Nero. Her hand in Britannicus' nuptials can hardly be considered that of a kindly matron, as she "innocently" suggests to Burrus (*En vain pour détourner ses yeux de sa misère, / j'ai flatté ses yeux d'un hymen qu'il espère,* 1.2.247-48).[124] In addition to the reputation of her namesake in Tacitus, Albine's shocked response (*Vous, leur appui, madame?*, 1.1.59) to Agrippine's admission of support of Britannicus and Junie highlights the absurdity of the idea that Agrippine could facilitate the marriage of Britannicus and Junie without having in mind some political plot. Racine's Néron, it seems, has learned to recognize his mother's ruses and is capable of thwarting her careful plans with his own marriage plot.

Having been duly reminded by Burrus of her Tacitean distrust of Junie's family, Agrippine turns to lamenting her waning influence, complaining melodramatically that Néron has proclaimed to the world her fall from favor by detaining Junie (*Néron lui-même annonce ma ruine,* 1.2.276).[125] Burrus finally takes his leave, making it clear that he harbors little respect for the histrionic mother of the emperor (*La douleur est injuste: et toute les raisons / Qui ne la flattent point aigrissent ses soupçons,* 1.2.281-82).[126] His approval of Néron's seizure of Junie justifies, to some extent, Agrippina's earlier crimes against Junie's brothers. In Tacitus' account, however, he was strongly opposed to her campaign of murder. After Tacitus recounts the spate of killings Agrippina effected in the wake of Claudius' death, he writes that Burrus and Seneca[127] intervened and arrested her killing spree: "And the slaughter would have continued, had not Burrus and Seneca been opposed," *Ibaturque in caedes, nisi Afranius Burrus et Annaeus Seneca obviam issent,* 13.2.1. Burrus and Seneca are wary of the freedman Pallas on the grounds that he executes Agrippina's crimes. Although Tacitus has already described Pallas' involvement in Claudius' wedding to Agrippina and adoption of Nero

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[124] "In vain have I soothed his eyes with a marriage for which he hopes to avert his eyes from his misery."

[125] "Nero himself announces my ruin."

[126] "Your grief is unjust: whatever does not flatter it increases your suspicions."

[127] Racine has all but removed the character of Seneca from his play and subsumed the roles played in Tacitus by Burrus and Seneca into the character of Burrus alone. Levitan (1989) argues that it is Racine's anxiety concerning the degree to which he has been influenced by Seneca's depiction of tyranny that causes him to diminish the role Nero's childhood tutor played in these events.

earlier in the *Annales* (12.2), at the beginning of book thirteen, as though Pallas' villainy is also relevant to Britannicus' death, he recounts again how Seneca and Burrus distrusted Pallas, repeating his earlier criticisms but now focalizing them through the characters of Burrus and Seneca:

> certamen utrique unum erat contra ferociam Agrippinae, quae cunctis malae dominationis cupidinibus flagrans habebat in partibus Pallantem, quo auctore Claudius nuptiis incestis et adoptione exitiosa semet perverterat.
>
> To both Seneca and Burrus there was a shared struggle against the savage nature of Agrippina, who, burning with all desire for evil domination, had on her side Pallas, at whose instigation Claudius had destroyed himself with an incestuous wedding and a deadly adoption, 13.2.2.

Seneca and Burrus distrust Pallas because of his loyalty to Agrippina. The adoption of Nero proved fatal (*exitiosa*) to Claudius because Agrippina was compelled to poison her husband by her fear that Claudius was on the verge of announcing his preference for Britannicus as his successor. But Britannicus as emperor would be disadvantageous to Seneca and Burrus, both of whom owe their promotions to Agrippina. It is perhaps indicative of Tacitus' own biases against Agrippina that Seneca and Burrus would find fault with Agrippina for this crime, since they both benefited from Agrippina's favor and stand to gain even more advantage from Nero's rule. Regardless of what they think of her methods, the political standing of Burrus and Seneca is directly tied to Agrippina's, as Burrus will come to admit both in Racine and in Tacitus.

Just as Pallas's dismissal is a prelude to Britannicus' death in Tacitus, so does Néron's banishment of Pallas at the beginning of the second act spell ruin for Racine's young prince. Outraged that his mother and Britannicus are conferring privately with Pallas about Junie's seizure, Néron orders Burrus to dispose of his mother's ally: "may the day's end find [Pallas] no longer in Rome nor in my court. Go: this command concerns the health of the empire," *que la fin du jour / Ne le retrouve plus dans Rome ou dans ma cour. / Allez: cet ordre importe au salut de l'empire*, 2.1.369-70. That Pallas' banishment is meant to curb Agrippine's influence is made clear upon Burrus' successful return, for, Néron's first question to Burrus is about Agrippine's reaction (*Et de quel oeil / Ma mère a-t'elle vu confondre son orgueil*?, 3.1.761-62).[128]

[128]"And with what eye did my mother see that her pride was thwarted?"

Likewise in Tacitus, Nero's dismissal of Pallas is his first open attack against his mother's influence: "But Nero, hostile to those on whom his mother's arrogance leaned for support, removed Pallas from the care of affairs over which Claudius had positioned him, a position from which he all but played the part of ruler," *et Nero infensus iis quibus superbia muliebris innitebatur, demovet Pallantem cura rerum quis a Claudio impositus velut arbitrium regni agebat,* 13.14.1. Two sections later, Britannicus is dead.

In Tacitus' account, when she learns that Nero has dismissed Pallas, Agrippina reacts to the insult with fury:

> Agrippina ruere ad terrorem et minas, neque principis auribus abstinere quo minus testaretur adultum iam esse Britannicum, veram dignamque stirpem suscipiendo patris imperio quod insitus et adoptivus per iniurias matris exerceret. non abnuere se quin cuncta infelicis domus mala patefierent, suae in primis nuptiae, suum veneficium: id solum diis et sibi provisum quod viveret privignus. ituram cum illo in castra; audiretur hinc Germanici filia, inde debilis rursus Burrus et exul Seneca, trunca scilicet manu et professoria lingua generis humani regimen expostulantes. simul intendere manus, adgerere probra, consecratum Claudium, infernos Silanorum manis invocare et tot inrita facinora.
>
> Agrippina flew to terror and threats, nor did she hold back from testifying to the ears of the emperor the fact that Britannicus was now a grown man, the true and worthy son to take up his father's empire which an adopted son, grafted onto the family tree, was now ruling because of his mother's crimes. She threatened that she would not object if all the crimes of an ill-fortuned house should lie open, her marriage, first of all, and her use of poison. That her stepson lived was the only matter about which she and the gods had had the foresight to effect. She threatened that she would go to the army camps with him; on this side let the daughter of Germanicus be heard and on the other, the crippled Burrus with his maimed hand and Seneca the exile with his pedantic tongue demanding governance of mankind. At the same time, she stretched forth her arms, heaped up reproaches, and invoked the deified Claudius, the infernal ghosts of the Silani and so many crimes committed in vain, 13.14.2.

Notice that in this passage that prefigures Britannicus' death, Agrippina still enjoys unlimited access to her son (*neque principis auribus abstinere quo minus testaretur*). She harangues Nero without fear of his growing power on the grounds that it was she who acquired the throne in his name. Racine's Burrus, although he has not yet spoken to Agrippine about Pallas'

dismissal, weaves details of Agrippina's reaction into his advice to the emperor. When Néron asks him how his mother reacted to the news of Pallas' dismissal, Burrus predicts Agrippine's grief and coming reproaches, signing the allusion to Tacitus with a *ne doutez point*: "Sir, do not doubt in the least that this blow touches her and that her grief will soon express itself with reproaches," *Ne doutez point, Seigneur, que ce coup ne la frappe, / Qu'en reproches bientôt sa douleur ne s'échappe*, 3.1.763-64). The army, he reminds the emperor, is loyal to her because of Germanicus (*Rome et tous vos soldats honorent ses Aïeux; / Germanicus son père est présent à leurs yeux,* 3.1.769-70).[129] Within the confines of Racine's play, Burrus' fears about Agrippine seem like an overreaction. His suspicions are less supported by anything Agrippine has said or done on the French stage than by what her counterpart in Tacitus has threatened. That Burrus imagines this extreme scenario of Agrippine promoting Britannicus to the throne with the support of the army *before* Agrippine has threatened it suggests that Burrus is "remembering" Agrippina's threat from Tacitus' narrative. Finally, the old soldier warns the emperor of his mother's power and daring (*Elle sait son pouvoir, vous savez son courage,* 3.1.771).[130] With his second *vous savez*, Burrus refers Néron to the deed that Tacitus (12.42) considers to be Agrippina's most audacious—her murder of emperor Claudius and her quick-thinking maneuvers that lead to Burrus and the army swearing allegiance to her son instead of Britannicus (12.65-69), a passage to which Racine's Agrippine herself alludes with pride (4.2.1174-96).

Agrippine reacts to the news of Pallas' exile by claiming that her outrage stems in large part from the fact that her son owes his empire to Pallas, since it was the freedman who convinced Claudius to adopt the boy:

> Vous le savez trop bien; jamais, sans ses avis,
> Claude qu'il gouvernait n'eût adopté mon fils.
>
> You know all too well that without Pallas' advice, Claudius, over whom he held sway, would never have adopted my son, 3.3.813-14

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[129] "Rome and all your soldiers revere her ancestors. Germanicus, her father, is present before their eyes."

[130] "She knows her power; you know her courage."

With her intertextually charged *vous le savez trop bien*, Agrippine reminds Burrus of the role he played in ensuring Nero's promotion after Claudius' death. She is frustrated that Burrus was willing to collaborate then, when he stood to profit handsomely from her murder of Claudius, but is no longer willing to participate in her schemes. Just as Burrus draws Agripinne's attention to her inconsistent policy concerning the Silanus family, Agrippine now demonstrates Burrus' own hypocrisy. He supports her son's rule that was made possible only through her savvy if brutal politicking, but now that his position has been established in Néron's court, his loyalty to her wavers.

Agrippine's response to Burrus confirms that the old soldier was right to highlight *Annales* 13.14 as an important intertext for the play:

> J'irai, n'en doutez point, le montrer à l'armée,
> Plaindre aux yeux des soldats son enfance opprimée,
> Leur faire, à mon exemple, expier leur erreur.
> On verra d'un côté le fils d'un empereur
> Redemandant la foi jurée à sa famille,
> Et de Germanicus on entendra la fille;
> De l'autre, on verra le fils d'Enobarbus,
> Appuyé de Sénèque et du tribun Burrus,
> Qui, tous deux de l'exil rappelés par moi-même,
> Partagent à mes yeux l'autorité suprême.
> De nos crimes communs je veux qu'on soit instruit;
> On saura les chemins par où je l'ai conduit.
> Pour rendre sa puissance et la vôtre odieuses,
> J'avouerai les rumeurs les plus injurieuses;
> Je confesserai tout, exils, assassinats,
> Poison même…
>
> I will go, do not doubt it, and show him [Britannicus] to the army, and before the eyes of the soldiers I will lament his oppressed childhood and compel them to make amends for their error. They will see on one side the son of an emperor requesting again the loyalty sworn to his family and they will hear the daughter of Germanicus; on the other side, they will see the son of Enobarbus supported by Seneca and by the tribune Burrus, both of whom were recalled from exile by myself to share in my eyes the highest authority. I want them to learn of crimes committed in common; they will know the paths by which I led him. To render his power and yours hateful,

> I will admit to the most injurious rumors; I will confess everything, exiles, assassinations, even poison…, 3.2.839-54.

Agrippine repeats Burrus' *ne doutez pas* to mark the fact that she is reminding him of a passage from Tacitus, the same passage that Burrus alludes to in the preceding scene. As Burrus predicted to Néron, Agrippine threatens to dethrone the emperor and stand Britannicus up in his place. But Agrippine expands Burrus' brief allusion with additional details from Tacitus. She is willing, like her Tacitean counterpart, to sacrifice her own standing to ensure Néron's ruin. In both Racine and Tacitus, she threatens to confess the crimes she and Burrus committed to place Nero on the throne, her poisoning of Claudius in particular (*je confesserai tout, exils, assassinats, / poison même, 3.2.853-54; non abnuere se quin cuncta infelicis domus mala patefierent, suae in primis nuptiae, suum veneficium,* 13.14.2). She also threatens to lead Britannicus before the army to garner support (*j'irai, n'en doutez point, le montrer à l'armée, 3.2.839; ituram cum illo in castra,* 13.14.2). But the details of the scenario Agrippine paints do not match Tacitus' narrative exactly. In both texts, she depicts the soldiers as making a choice between herself and Britannicus on one side and Nero, Seneca, and Burrus on the other. In Tacitus, she assures Nero that the daughter of Germanicus would wrest support of the army from Burrus with his physical handicap and Seneca with his overly academic rhetorical style. In Racine, the word order of 844 focuses our attention first on Germanicus and then on his daughter as his living mouthpiece (*et de Germanicus on entendra la fille*). This is the source of her influence among the army. But she omits her Tacitean attack on Burrus' handicap and Seneca's rhetoric. In Racine she is addressing her complaint to Burrus, not her son, and one of the ramifications of this change of interlocutor (Nero to Burrus) is that Agrippine refrains from repeating these nasty insults to the soldier's face. Why not have Agrippine threaten Néron directly, as she does in the *Annales*? In Tacitus Agrippina enjoys liberal access to her son during this time period, whether to berate or to flatter him, but in Racine, as we have already established, she is estranged from her son from the very beginning of the play. Because of this choice, Racine does not stage the scene between Néron and Agrippine but envisions instead a similar one between Burrus and Agripinne. Although it may not seem initially all that revolutionary to have Néron begin to avoid his mother before Britannicus' death, this small change lets Racine work the story of Agrippina's downfall into the parameters of his play.

Tacitus depicts the slow evolution (from 54-59 A.D) of Burrus' attitude to Agrippina. By the time Nero is proclaimed princeps, he has already become disillusioned with his benefactress, as 13.2 (discussed above) describes. Not long into Nero's reign, however, Burrus realizes that the security of his own position would be threatened should Agrippina lose her influence. When Agrippina recedes in the wake of Britannicus' death, her enemies are emboldened to bring charges against her. Upon hearing the accusation that Agrippina is supporting Rubellius Plautus in his conspiracy, Nero determines not only to punish Agrippina and Plautus, but also to demote Burrus from his post since he owes his position to Agrippina (*ut non tantum matrem Plautumque interficere, sed Burrum etiam demovere praefectura destinaret tamquam Agrippinae gratia provectum et vicem reddentem,* 13.20.1).[131] For the first time in Tacitus' account (but not the last), Burrus is forced to defend the emperor's mother. He counsels Nero to grant his mother a hearing and barely manages to free her from blame (13.20.3).

Racine's Burrus, although initially hostile to Agrippine, also comes to realize within the timeframe of the play that his safety is linked to Agrippine's well-being. During the scene where Burrus meets with Néron to affirm Pallas' dismissal, Burrus' attempt to convince the emperor to leave Junie be is met with mocking resistance: "Trust me, Burrus, love is another thing entirely, and I would have some difficulty lowering your gravity to that level," *Mais, croyez-moi, l'amour est une autre science, / Burrhus; et je ferais quelque difficulté / D'abaisser jusque-là votre sévérité*, 3.1.796-98. Néron's tonal shift does not go unmarked by Burrus. When Néron quits the stage, Burrus considers the change of circumstances in soliloquy: "Finally, Burrus, Néron reveals his true character: this brutality that you thought you could guide is about to break free of your weak bonds," *Enfin, Burrhus, Néron découvre son génie: Cette férocité que tu croyais fléchir, / De tes faibles liens est prête à s'affranchir*, 3.2.800-802. Now he realizes he will need an ally if he is to return the emperor to his senses. Agrippine is the obvious choice (3.2.807-809). Later, Néron confirms that, like his Tacitean counterpart, he assumed that Burrus was loyal to Agrippine (4.3.1310-14). Racine has compressed this longer episode from Tacitus

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[131] "He decided to kill not only his mother and Plautus, but also to remove Burrus from command of the guards on the grounds that he was promoted thanks to Agrippina and that he was repaying her in turn."

down to the bare details—Nero expects Burrus to be partial to his mother and considers punishing him along with her, and Burrus is compelled to facilitate a compromise (brief though it be) between the emperor and Agrippina. In Racine, instead of agreeing to Burrus' call for a truce (4.1.1103-6), Agrippine threatens to support Britannicus' bid to rule. We learn from the next scene that Agrippine abuses the emperor with the express purpose of gaining an audience with him (3.5.874).

Having spent the first thousand-odd lines of the play trying to speak with her son, Agrippine finally succeeds in waylaying him during the private meeting between Junie and Britannicus (3.7). When Néron realizes that his mother has outwitted him again by allowing Junie and Britannicus to see one another, he orders Burrus to detain Agrippine and remove her guards. Burrus is dismayed: "What, sir, without granting her a hearing? Your own mother!," *Quoi, Seigneur, sans l'ouïr? Une mère!* 3.9.1093). This line is a loose translation of Burrus' response to Nero's initial plan to kill his mother in Tacitus, there reported in indirect speech: "the right to a defense ought to be granted to everyone, but especially to a parent," *sed cuicumque, nedum parenti defensionem tribuendam*, (3.20.3, discussed above). Although Néron responds with initial outrage to Burrus' suggestion that he grant Agrippine an audience, in the next scene, he allows his mother to defend herself, indicating that, like his Tacitean counterpart, he has been convinced by Burrus' plea for leniency after all.

To sum up, in both Tacitus and Racine, Burrus initially dislikes Agrippina and tries to reduce her influence on and access to her son. But, as she becomes more and more despised by Néron, Burrus begins to speak up on her behalf. In Tacitus, Burrus manages to stave off Nero's ire for a few years, but his late support is not enough to save Agrippina's life in the end. In Racine, whose play fits many years of Nero's rule into a much shorter timeframe, the futility of Burrus' lukewarm support is soon to be revealed.

Nero in Love: Acte and Poppaea

In Tacitus' *Annales*, Nero has two affairs: the first with Acte, a former slave (13.12-13), and the second with Poppaea, the wife of Otho, future emperor of Rome (14.1). He is amorously involved with Acte when he decides to kill Britannicus and with Poppaea when he plots to kill his mother. Although Racine reveals in his preface that his primary model for Junie is Junia Calvina, there are aspects of the Néron / Junie relationship that can be traced to Nero's historical lovers. Georges Forestier considers Acte to be an important model for

Junie, because Nero's affair with Acte is told in book thirteen as a prelude to Britannicus' murder:

> Or il se trouve que l'épisode amoureux de Britannicus possède un fondement historique. Dans le texte même de Tacite, le premier différend violent entre Néron et Agrippine, qui devait justement conduire à l'assassinat de Britannicus, éclata lorsqu'il tomba passionnément amoureux d'une affranchie, Acté. Historiquement, c'était donc déjà parce qu'il souhaitait s'abandonner sans frein a une passion interdite—interdite parce qu'il était déjà marie a Octavie et qu'un empereur ne devait pas afficher son amour pour une simple affranchie—que Néron rejeta le joug de sa mère, déclenchant ainsi l'engrenage infernal, (2006) 354-55.

It is true that Agrippina was no admirer of Acte and that she makes her opinion public. Her nickname for Acte, "my daughter-in-law the handmaid" (*nurum ancillam*), suggests that Agrippina's disapproval of the affair stems from the fact that Acte's low status is an embarrassment. Her other insult, "my rival the freedwoman" (*libertam aemulam*), suggests that, in addition to the classist complaint, Agrippina is annoyed that another woman has frequent access to the *princeps* (13.13.1). Her use of the word *aemulam* is unexpected. She appears to mean that Acte has become a rival for Nero's attention, but there is a sexual connotation to the word as well.[132] Agrippine translates this Tacitean insult into French and uses it to describe Néron's interest in Junie when she laments to Albine that she has been given a rival (*C'est à moi qu'on donne une rivale,* 3.5.880). This conflict over Acte is the first of many disagreements between mother and son in Tacitus' narrative. In Racine's play, however, it does not seem likely that the Junie affair was the first issue over which Agrippine and Néron butt heads. As we have seen, their relationship is strained from the very beginning of the play, suggesting that Junie's seizure represents a culmination of a longstanding tension, not the beginning stages of it. In Tacitus, when her taunts prove futile, Agrippina offers the young pair her own bedroom for sex (13.13.2). She does not imagine that Nero's affair with Acte could threaten his marriage with Octavia. The primary similarity, then, between Nero's affair with Acte and Néron's infatuation with Junie is that both affairs prefigure Britannicus' death.

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[132] The second *OLD* definition for *aemulus* is "A rival in love," and Tacitus 14.42 is quoted as an example.

Since Poppaea is introduced to the historical narrative years after Britannicus' death, she is not generally thought to be an important model for Junie. Although Poppaea's coy worldliness shares little with Junie's good simplicity, there are, nevertheless, important similarities between them. Unlike Acte, Poppaea is a noblewoman. Although Poppaea does not descend from Augustus' family, she shares with Junie the fact that she is a high-ranking, powerful aristocrat with the political cachet to turn husbands into emperors (exactly what Néron and Burrus fear Junie will do for Britannicus). Not even Nero would consider divorcing his stepsister for a former slave, but Poppaea possesses all the credentials of an emperor's wife. In Racine, Néron's attraction to Junie causes the tensions between Agrippine and her son to erupt. In Tacitus, Poppaea coaxes Nero to disregard his mother, divorce Octavia, and marry her (14.1). Tacitus highlights the fact that it is Nero's affair with Poppaea that brings the simmering animosities between mother and son to a head. Book fourteen of the *Annales* opens with the following sentence that, with a few names changed, could serve as a summary of Racine's play:

> Gaio Vipstano C. Fonteio consulibus diu meditatum scelus non ultra Nero distulit, vetustate imperii coalita audacia et flagrantior in dies amore Poppaeae, quae sibi matrimonium et discidium Octaviae incolumi Agrippina haud sperans crebris criminationibus, aliquando per facetias incusare principem et pupillum vocare, qui iussis alienis obnoxius non modo imperii, sed libertatis etiam indigeret.
>
> In the consulship of Gaius Vipstanus and Gaius Fonteius, Nero put off no longer the long meditated crime. His boldness was increased by the duration of his rule and he was more inflamed every day with love for Poppaea, who hardly hoping for marriage for herself and divorce for Octavia while Agrippina remained alive, upbraided him with frequent accusations and sometimes sarcastically called him a little boy, who beholden to the commands of others was bereft not only of the empire but also of his own freedom.

There are five details from this passage (all absent from Tacitus' account of Britannicus' death) that Racine works into his play: 1) Nero has contemplated a horrendous crime for a while and is now on the verge of committing it; 2) he has ruled for a long enough time that he no longer shies away from acting boldly; 3) he is in love with a well connected noblewoman and would like to divorce his wife Octavia; 4) Agrippina is blocking his

amorous advances and wants him to stay married to Octavia; and 5) his self esteem is easily threatened by accusations of being manipulated by others, especially his mother, making him, ironically, rather easy to manipulate. The *diu meditatum scelus* to which Tacitus refers is Nero's murder of Agrippina, which Tacitus implies Nero has been contemplating since shortly after Britannicus' death (13.20.3); in Racine, it is Britannicus' murder that is long meditated. In Racine, Agrippine echoes Tacitus' portrayal of Nero's readiness to act after a period of long consideration when she says in the prologue scene that he will no longer hold himself back, implying that up until this point, he has curbed his desires (*L'impatient Néron cesse de se contraindre,* 1.1.10-14). In Tacitus, Nero's murder of his brother is not long premeditated but follows sharply on the heels of his recognition that his brother's plight evokes sympathy from others. In both the above passage and Racine's play, the fact that Nero is no longer new to the throne increases his willingness to disregard the advice of others and act on his own. In the *Annales* passage, Tacitus indicates that Nero is finally bold enough to take on his mother because of this tenure. In Racine's play, Albine informs us that Néron has been in power for a while now and should be capable of ruling alone (1.1.25-26). Moreover Burrus accuses Agrippine of trying to infantilize a man who has held the reigns of government for three years (1.22.195-99). In Tacitus Nero's love for Poppaea will not result in marriage as long as Agrippina is alive. In Racine, Agrippine does all that she can to thwart Néron's plans to marry Junie. In Tacitus, it is Poppaea herself who forces Nero to confront his mother's policy of obstruction by exploiting his weak self esteem and mocking his dependence on his mother; Racine, however, refrains from besmirching Junie's purity with such mean-spirited teasing. Instead, it is Narcisse, Néron's confidant, who takes up Poppaea's psychological manipulation of the princeps and coaxes him to give his lust free rein.

After Burrus convinces Néron to relinquish his plan to murder Britannicus, Narcisse employs Poppaea's taunts to convince the wavering emperor to reinitiate his plan to kill his brother. First he suggests that Britannicus will uncover the plot on his life and decide to kill Néron instead (*Mais peut-être il fera ce que vous n'osez faire,* 4.4.1408).[133] When Néron is not convinced, Narcisse dangles before him his lust for Junie, again to no avail (*Et l'hymen de Junie*

[133] "But perhaps he will do what you do not dare to do."

en est-il le lien? / Seigneur, lui faites-vous encor ce sacrifice?, 4.4.1410-11).[134] For as long as Narcisse tries to elicit Néron's hatred of Britannicus or desire for Junie, his cajoling falls on deaf ears and the emperor remains firm in his decision to spare the boy (*Quoi qu'il en soit, Narcisse / Je ne le compte plus parmi mes ennemis*, 4.4.1414). [135] But when Narcisse abandons Britannicus and turns to provoking Néron's anxiety about his mother, the freedman regains his hold on the young emperor:

> **Narcisse**: Agrippine, Seigneur, se l'était bien promis:
> Elle a repris sur vous son souverain empire.
> **Néron**: Quoi donc? Qu'a–t–elle dit? Et que voulez–vous dire?
> **Narcisse**: Elle s'en est vantée assez publiquement.
> **Néron**: De quoi?
> **Narcisse**: Qu'elle n'avait qu'à vous voir un moment,
> Qu'à tout ce grand éclat, à ce courroux funeste,
> On verrait succéder un silence modeste ;
> Que vous–même à la paix souscririez le premier,
> Heureux que sa bonté daignât tout oublier.
> **Néron**: Mais, Narcisse, dis–moi, que veux–tu que je fasse?
> Je n'ai que trop de pente à punir son audace ;
> Et, si je m'en croyais, ce triomphe indiscret
> Serait bientôt suivi d'un éternel regret.
>
> **Narcisse**: Agrippine swore she would do it. She has regained her sovereign hold on you, sir.
> **Néron**: What is this? What did she say? And what do you mean?
> **Narcisse**: She boasted about it quite publicly.
> **Néron**: About what?
> **Narcisse**: That she had only to see you for a moment to turn this mighty uproar and dark anger into a modest silence. She said that you begged for peace first, that you were happy her magnificence was willing to forget everything.
> **Néron**: But, Narcisse, tell me what you want me to do. I want to punish her boldness, and if I have any say, that indiscreet triumph of hers will soon be followed by an eternal regret. 4.4.1414-26.

As soon as Narcisse mentions Agrippine's name, Néron's confidence begins to falter, and his calm measured sentences devolve into a slew of nervous questions (*Quoi donc? Qu'a–t–elle dit? Et que voulez–vous dire?*). Narcisse takes full advantage of the emperor's broken syntax,

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[134] "And Junie's wedding [to Britannicus]—is that the bond? Sir, do you make even this sacrifice for him?"

[135] "Whatever should come of it, Narcisse, I count him no longer among my enemies."

and draws out his anxiety by replying that his mother's boast is public knowledge before telling him what she said. Narcisse uses the rumor of Néron's dependence on his mother to goad Néron into taking action against his brother. By claiming that Agrippine is taking credit for Néron's change of heart, the freedman implies that the only way to show that he is not his mother's puppet is by following through with his initial plan to kill Britannicus.

Although Néron does not capitulate immediately, his deferential response to the news of his mother's boasts (*Mais, Narcisse, dis–moi, que veux–tu que je fasse?)* reveals that Narcisse has regained his control over Néron. The freedman has found the wedge to separate Néron from Burrus' influence and turn him again towards thoughts of vengeance. We might wonder why Narcisse is so intent on convincing Néron to murder his stepbrother. What does the freedman have to gain? Racine provides no motive. If we understand Poppaea to be a model for Narcisse, we can, at least, trace his intention to separate Néron from his family's influence back to her situation. Like Narcisse, Poppaea manipulates the emperor by mocking his dependence on his mother. By clothing the freedman with Poppaea's manipulative qualities, Racine keeps Junie pure without sacrificing Tacitus' depiction of the uneasy and insecure emperor.

The Shadow of Agrippina's Death

In Tacitus, Nero's affair with Poppaea results first in Nero's avoidance of his mother and then in his decision to kill her. Because of the similarities between the Junie and Poppaea affair, the suspense Agrippine creates about her own demise in Act I, and other details of the play that recall events and passages from *Annales* 14, Racine's audience is primed to expect some account of the death of Agrippina. Agrippine's reaction to the seizure of Junie is overblown, as we have seen, and the oddity of her fatalism seems to call out for an explanation.[136] Before the private conversation between Narcisse and Néron, Burrus managed to convince Néron to spare Britannicus' life, a scene for which Tacitus offers a parallel. But in Tacitus, Burrus convinces Nero to reconsider Agrippina's murder, not his brother's. After Britannicus has died and after Nero has removed his mother's guards, the emperor decides to kill his mother too, but Burrus convinces him to reconsider:

[136] Pommier (1995) 31-32.

> Nero trepidus et interficiendae matris avidus non prius differri potuit, quam Burrus necem eius promitteret, si facinoris coargueretur; sed cuicumque, nedum parenti defensionem tribuendam; nec accusatores adesse, sed vocem unius et ex inimica domo adferri.
>
> Nero, anxious and eager for the death of his mother, could not be put off until Burrus promised her death if she were convicted of the crime, arguing that the right to a defense ought to be granted to anyone, but especially a parent. He noted that no accusers were present, but merely the voice of one person from a hostile house (13.20.3).

By the time Burrus learns that Nero is considering killing his mother, the emperor has already determined to carry out the deed. Likewise in Racine, Burrus learns of Néron's plot to kill Britannicus late, after others (*sc.* Narcisse) have already wielded their influence (4.3.1383-84). Like his namesake in Tacitus, Racine's Burrus begs Néron not to murder kinsmen rashly. He suggests that Néron did not come up with evil plan on his own, but that, like Nero's decision to kill his mother in Tacitus, it came from someone else (4.3.1325-26). And, just as in Tacitus' version Burrus is initially able to calm Néron's furor, but in the end fails to hold back the ruler intent on murder.

Nero wavers in his decision to kill his mother for most of *Annales* 13*,* but he does not hesitate to kill his brother nor does he regret it later. Tacitus notes only the remarkable coldness with which the emperor witnessed his death:

> ille ut erat reclinis et nescio similis, solitum ita ait per comitialem morbum quo prima ab infantia adflictaretur Britannicus, et redituros paulatim visus sensusque.
>
> He was reclining and seemed to be unaware and said that it was only a bout of epilepsy with which Britannicus had been afflicted since childhood and that his sight and senses would return to him little by little, 13.16.3.

Racine's Burrus alludes to this passage in Tacitus when he recounts to Agrippine how Néron witnessed his brother's death: "Néron saw him die without changing color," *Néron l'a vu mourir sans changer de couleur* (5.7.1710). But Néron's tyrannical calm is followed by a frenzy (*sa propre fureur,* 5.8.1718) which has no parallel in the Britannicus episode. In Tacitus the murder of Britannicus takes place while the emperor's family is dining in the way they are

accustomed to dine, with the children of the emperors sitting together with other young nobles and no additional pomp.

> Mos habebatur principum liberos cum ceteris idem aetatis nobilibus sedentis vesci in aspectu propinquorum propria et parciore mensa,
>
> It was customary for the children of the emperors to sit with other nobles of the same age and be fed in view of their relatives but at a smaller table, 13.16.1.

The routine nature of Tacitus' family dinner stands in contrast to the anticipated party Racine's Néron throws in his brother's honor. At the beginning of Act V, an exuberant Britannicus rushes to Junie to tell her he has been reconciled with the emperor and that Néron plans to honor him before the young people of the court in a public demonstration of reconciliation:

> Oui, Madame, Néron (qui l'aurait pu penser?)
> Dans son appartement m'attend pour m'embrasser.
> Il y fait de sa cour inviter la jeunesse:
> Il veut que d'un festin la pompe et l'allégresse
> Confirment à leurs yeux la foi de nos serments,
> Et réchauffent l'ardeur de nos embrassements.
>
> Yes, Madame, (who would have believed it?) Néron is waiting for me now in his rooms with open arms. There he is inviting the youth of the court because he wants the spectacle and joviality of the party to confirm before their eyes the veracity of our truce and rekindle the passion of our reconciliation (5.1.1481-86).

Here, Racine has it both ways—the young people of the court witness Britannicus' poisoning as they do in Tacitus, but there is nothing habitual about the celebration Racine's Néron throws in his brother's honor. This public spectacle of feigned reconciliation recalls the eve of the shipwreck plot in Tacitus in which Nero hosts an elaborate banquet in his mother's honor and publicly promises a rapprochement before trying to kill her. [137]

[137] With the help of Anicetus, prefect of part of the Roman navy, Nero builds a faulty boat to convey his mother home. A weight in the boat is to sink it mid sea and the death of the emperor's mother is to be chalked up to fortune (14.3-4).

Agrippina, Tacitus informs us, greets the news of her son's apology with "the easy credulity of her sex for pleasant things," *facili feminarum credulitate ad gaudia,* 14.4. In the last act of Racine's play, Agrippine's naïve gullibility about Neron's intentions is a central theme. While Britannicus rushes off to die, Agrippine stays behind with Junie to vaunt her success: "Enough, I have spoken and everything has changed," *Il suffit; j'ai parlé, tout a changé de face,* 5.3.1583). She lapses into a pleasant reverie about the careful attention her son paid her, how he embraced her, how he clung to her bosom and confided in her matters of state:

> Néron m'en a donné des gages trops certains.
> Ah! si vous aviez vu par combien de caresses
> Il m'a renouvelé la foi de ses promesses!
> Par quels embrassements il vient de m'arrêter!
> Ses bras, dans nos adieux, ne pouvaient me quitter.
> Sa facile bonté, sur son front répandue,
> Jusqu'aux moindres secrets est d'abord descendue:
> Il s'épanchait en fils qui vient en liberté
> Dans le sein de sa mère oublier sa fierté,
> Mais bientôt, reprenant un visage sévère,
> Tel que d'un empereur qui consulte sa mère,
> Sa confidence auguste a mis entre mes mains
> Des secrets d'où dépend le destin des humains.
>
> Néron has given me true pledges. Oh, if you had only seen with how many caresses he assured me of the truth of his promises! And with how many embraces he just now begged me to stay! His arms weren't able to leave me as we said goodbye. His easy generosity was spread out over his brow and he told me every little thing. He poured it all out, just like a boy who comes on his own to his mother's breast to forget his pride. But then, taking on a more serious face, the face of an emperor who consults his mother, his august confidence put into my hands secrets upon which the fortune of mankind depends.

Notice how Racine blends Tacitus' infantilizing, sexualized mother of Nero with the power hungry, politically ambitious wife of Claudius. Compare her speech here to the last scene between Nero and his mother in Tacitus. After greeting her warmly on the beach, Nero escorts her to the banquet he has prepared in her honor:

> ibi blandimentum sublevavit metum: comiter excepta superque ipsum collocata. iam pluribus sermonibus, modo familiaritate iuvenili Nero et rursus adductus, quasi seria consociaret, tracto in longum convictu, prosequitur abeuntem, artius oculis et pectori haerens, sive explenda simulatione, seu perituraе matris supremus adspectus quamvis ferum animum retinebat.
>
> There, flattery lifted her fear since she had been received courteously and placed above the emperor himself. After Nero had drawn out the evening with much talk, now with youthful familiarity, now serious as if he were confiding grave matters, he accompanied her as she was leaving, clinging closely to her eyes and chest either to complete the pretense or because the final sight of his mother about to die arrested his heart, savage though it was (14.4.4).

In both passages the tone of his conversation changes from one of boyish intimacy to royal seriousness. In Tacitus his youthful familiarity turns stern as though entrusting her with serious matters *quasi seria consociaret*. Likewise in Racine, his childish flood of words transforms into *un visage severe*. Nero's *physical* display of affection for his mother is what fools her. In Racine he embraces and caresses her; in Tacitus he clings to her eyes and chest. Both passages invoke Agrippina's breasts, which are not only a symbol of her maternity (and hence, Nero's infancy) but also of her sexuality and her penchant for politically expedient incestuous relationships. Racine neither affirms nor disavows the rumor of incest between mother and son—notice that here he translates Tacitus' *pectori haerens* into a metaphor—he pours out his heart *like* a boy coming to his mother's breast—but Agrippine's words, here and elsewhere, can often be construed so as to allude to the rumored affair. For example, she is intensely jealous of Junie and refers to her as a "rival"—*C'est à moi qu'on donne une rivale*, she says meaning that Junie is *her* rival, not Octavia's. Additionally, Agrippine calls Néron an ingrate, a term generally reserved for the unrequiting partner of a love affair—an almost stock character in French tragedy.

Tacitus closely juxtaposes Agrippina's delight in her extravagant reception with her terrible realization that she has been deceived, creating a dramatically unsettling effect, a violent *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis* at the same instant. Agrippina was reclining on a couch listening to a friend "joyfully recalling the son's remorse and the mother's recovery of influence," when a large weight fell crashing from above, crushing one of her maids but sparing herself. Agrippina understands right away that *she* is the object of the plot. Like

Agrippina, Agrippine is conversing with a friend about her son's welcome apology when a sudden tumult interrupts her naïve reverie and demonstrates in an instant her mistake.

In Tacitus, when Nero discovers that his mother has swum away from the shipwreck unharmed, he panics (*pavore exanimis*, 14.7.1). We can see Racine's appropriation of the emperor's first bout of madness in Néron's wild running through the city in search of Junie. Albine comes on stage to beg help from Agrippine and Burrus (*Venez sauver César de sa proper fureur,* (5.8.1718),[138] and her description leads us to believe that he is crazed because of his love for Junie. After killing his brother, Néron runs wildly through the city of Rome. His flight is referred to as madness (*fureur*), an etymological reference to the *furies* Agrippine ordered to pursue him a mere 30 lines earlier:

> Je prévois que tes coups viendront jusqu'à ta mère.
> Dans le fond de ton coeur, je sais que tu me hais ;
> Tu voudras t'affranchir du joug de mes bienfaits.
> Mais je veux que ma mort te soit même inutile ;
> Ne crois pas qu'en mourant je te laisse tranquille.
> Rome, ce ciel, ce jour que tu reçus de moi,
> Partout, à tout moment, m'offriront devant toi.
> Tes remords te suivront comme autant de furies,
> Tu croiras les calmer par d'autres barbaries:
> Ta fureur, s'irritant soi–même dans son cours,
> D'un sang toujours nouveau marquera tous tes jours.
>
> I predict that your violence will reach even your mother. I know you hate me in the depths of your heart. You want to break free from the yoke of my kindness. But I want my death to grant you not even that. Don't think that by dying I will let you go in peace. The city of Rome, this sky, this very day (which you received from me) will present me before you in every place and at every moment. Your regrets will pursue you no less than my Furies. You will think you can calm them by other atrocities. Your madness, inflaming itself even as it progresses, will stain all of your days with a blood that is always new (5.6.1679-86).

Although she is very much alive, Agrippine speaks as though she were dead. The closest parallel to Agrippine's haunting outburst is in the pseudo-Senecan play *Octavia*. In *Octavia*,

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[138] "Come save Caesar from his own madness!"

Agrippina's ghost returns to Rome to attend her son's marriage to Poppaea, bringing with her a marriage torch from hell and an avenging fury (*ultrix Erinys).*

> ultrix Erinys impio dignum parat
> letum tyranno, verbera et turpem fugam
> poenasque quis et Tantali vincat sitim,
> dirum laborem Sisyphi, Tityi alitem
> Ixionisque membra rapientem rotam.
>
> My avenging Fury is preparing a fitting death for an impious tyrant. Lashings and cowardly flight and punishments that would overcome even the thirst of Tantalus, the dread labor of Sisyphus, the bird of Tityus and the wheel that seizes Ixion's limbs, 619-23.

The avenging Fury (*ultrix Erinys)* that escorts her to her son's wedding find a parallel in the furies that Agrippine threatens will follow Néron after her death. And the cowardly flight (*turpem fugam*) that Agrippina's ghost predicts is taken up by Racine in Albine's final portrayal of the mad emperor (5.8.1718)

Both Racine and the author of Octavia are expanding on the rumor of the emperor's lingering madness in the wake of Agrippina's death: "It was only when the crime was accomplished that its magnitude was understood. For the remainder of the night, sometimes transfixed in silence, but more often rising in panic and devoid of reason, he awaited the dawn as if it would bring his extermination, " *Sed a Caesare perfecto demum scelere magnitudo eius intellecta est. reliquo noctis modo per silentium defixus, saepius pavore exsurgens et mentis inops lucem opperiebatur tamquam exitium adlaturam*, 14.10.1). For Tacitus, his madness is a prelude to the series of crimes and murders he will commit in the rest of book fourteen, the same murders to which Agrippine alludes when she says her son will try to appease her Furies with more murder; in Racine, it is Agrippine who sings of her own demise before crediting herself for the murders that will follow.

Tacitus ends his account of Agrippina the younger with a short coda that tells the story of a prophecy she had received years ago:

> Hunc sui finem multos ante annos crediderat Agrippina contempseratque. nam consulenti super Nerone responderunt Chaldaei fore ut imperaret matremque occideret; atque illa "occidat" inquit, "dum imperet."

> Agrippina had expected that this would be her end many years before and she had considered it of no importance. For, when she asked about Nero, the Chaldaeans answered that he would rule and that he would kill his mother. "Let him kill me," she said, "provided that he rule" (14.9.3).

Even before the last scene of the play, Racine's Agrippine demonstrates her knowledge of the prophecy. In her first speech, spoken before her son's door, she says that everything she has predicted is coming true (*Tout ce que j'ai prédit n'est que trop assuré,*1.1.9). To what is she referring here, if not the prophecy she receives in Tacitus? In alluding to this prophecy, Agrippine primes the audience to expect her death from the very beginning of the play. Agrippine's response to her son when he accuses her of plotting against him contains a clear verbal echo of the prophecy with which Tacitus ends his account:

> Je n'ai qu'un fils. O ciel, qui m'entends aujourd'hui,
> T'ai–je fait quelques voeux qui ne fussent pour lui?
> Remords, crainte, périls, rien ne m'a retenue ;
> J'ai vaincu ses mépris ; j'ai détourné ma vue
> Des malheurs qui dès lors me furent annoncés ;
> J'ai fait ce que j'ai pu: vous régnez, c'est assez.
>
> I have but one son. O sky, you who hear me today, have I made any wishes except for him? Regret, fear, dangers, nothing held me back; but I conquered his disdain, I looked away from misfortunes from the moment when they were announced to me. I have done what I could: You reign, that is enough.

The summary of her life's work (*vous régnez, c'est assez*) is in effect a translation of Tacitus' *occidat, dum imperet*. Racine's Agrippine knows the prophecy given to Tacitus' Agrippina, and like her Roman counterpart, she is willing to sacrifice her life to ensure Nero's rule. Although the episode from Tacitus is not recounted in *Britannicus*, it is key to understanding the meaning behind *vous régnez, c'est assez:* Agrippine is willing to die.

Conclusion

"She is the one above all that I tried to express well, and my tragedy is no less the disgrace of Agrippine than the death of Britannicus," says Racine in his first preface to the

play.[139] While the deed may be absent, other signs of Agrippina's demise are present, lurking in the words of the characters and their reactions to one another. In *Britannicus*, Racine tells the story of the death of Britannicus, but it is the fraught relationship between mother and son that lingers before the audience when the curtain closes. Racine alters in small but significant ways Tacitus' account of Britannicus' death. He incorporates into his play many details from Tacitus' much longer narrative about Agrippina's death. He acknowledges certain tragic moments in Tacitus' text, such as Agrippina's exuberant relief at Nero's false reconciliation followed by her sudden understanding of her son's plot. The author of *Octavia* incorporates Nero's violent past by introducing Agrippina's ghost to remind us of Nero's earlier crimes. Racine, taking his lead from the Roman playwright, creates a scenario even more haunting by granting his living Agrippine the power of a dead heroine to enact dreadful curses.[140] In the first scene of the play, Agrippine boasts that she will stalk Neron even in death: "But I will pursue him all the more that he escapes me," *Mais je le poursuivrai d'autant plus qu'il m'évite,* 1.1.123. Her curse in the last act of the play suggests in chiasmic fashion that little has changed since that initial scene: Nero kills Britannicus to escape his mother, but she will not let him go, even if he kills her (*Ne crois pas qu'en mourant je te laisse tranquille*, 5.6.1683).[141] The play ends with a sense that Néron's crime will be performed again and again, but soon with Agrippine as the victim, or Octavie, or Seneque. The horror that results from this kind of circularity is familiar to us from Tacitus' *Annales* and Seneca's tragedies. This is no Aristotelian tragedy wherein a terrible crime is committed because of a mistake. Néron is no Oedipus who sleeps with his mother and kills his father in ignorance. He is an Atreus who will outdo his parent's crimes, a tyrant who will never be satisfied with the reach of his violence.

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[139] *C'est elle que je me suis surtout efforcé de bien exprimer, et ma tragédie n'est pas moins la disgrâce d'Agrippine que la mort de Britannicus.*

[140] Cf. Euripides' Phaedra and Vergil's Dido.

[141] "Do not think that I will leave you alone when I die."

Chapter Four:

Reading Euripides: Love, Madness, and the Sublime in *Phèdre et Hippolyte* (1677)[142]

ἔστι μὲν οὖν φιλοπονώτατος ὁ Εὐριπίδης δύο ταυτὶ πάθη, μανίας τε καὶ ἔρωτας, ἐκτραγῳδῆσαι.
"Euripides takes great pains to compose tragedies about these two passions: madness and love.
-Longinus, *On the Sublime*, 15.3

Quand je ne lui devrais que la seule idée du caractère de Phèdre, je pourrais dire que je lui dois ce que j'ai peut-être mis de plus raisonnable sur le theater.
"If I owed to [Euripides] Phèdre's character alone, I could say I owe him the most realistic portrayal I ever put on the stage."
-Racine, Préface to *Phèdre et Hippolyte*.

George Forestier calls Jean Racine's *Phèdre et Hippolyte* "*le couronnement d'une conception ancienne,*" both because it was the last classical tragedy he would write and because it was his most daring.[143] The French audience was already familiar with the story of Phaedra and Hippolytus. Unlike the previous two plays we have discussed, tragedies about the myth had been composed and performed regularly for the past century (Robert Garnier, 1573; Jean Yeuwain, 1591; Guérin de La Pinelière, 1634; Gabriel Gilbert, 1647; Mathieu Bidar, 1675; and most infamously, Jacques Pradon, 1677, who composed his play to compete directly with Racine's).[144] The humanist dramatists (Garnier and Yeuwain) did not stray far from Seneca's text. Like the Roman play, the main characters of their works consist of a sexually depraved Phèdre bent on conquest and a rather wooden, if perfectly honorable, Hippolyte.[145]

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[142] Although *Phèdre et Hippolyte* was shortened to *Phèdre* in the 1687 edition of Racine's collected works, I employ the original title throughout this chapter.

[143] Forestier (2006) 539.

[144] Racine reminds his readers in his 1677 preface of the popularity of the Phaedra and Hippolytus myth: *Je ne suis point étonné que ce caractère ait eu un succès si heureux du temps d'Euripide, et qu'il ait encore si bien réussi dans notre siècle, puisqu'il a toutes les qualités qu'Aristote demande dans le héros de la tragédie, et qui sont propres à exciter la compassion et la terreur.*

[145] Yeuwain's play was a translation of Seneca's *Phaedra* and Garnier's follows Seneca's text so closely that it is often considered a free adaptation of the Latin text. de Caigny (2016) outlines how French dramatists of the sixteenth and seventeenth century move from direct translation of ancient texts to writing their own plays that refer back only to the French tradition in the mid seventeenth century. Slaney (2016), however, demonstrates that although the humanists are heavily indebted to Seneca's text, they produce astonishing innovations as well.

While Seneca's *Phaedra* remained the point of entry into the ancient myth for the seventeenth century tragedians, his status as an undisputed master of the tragic stage was beginning to be questioned. As the intellectual atmosphere of Louis XIV's France became more concerned with establishing a series of rules to govern the genre of tragedy, the salacious details of the Roman play were judged inappropriate for the French stage, with the result that much of the passionate intensity in Seneca and the early French plays was finessed or excised altogether. Gilbert, for example, avoids the incestuous implications of the ancient tale by making Phèdre the fiancée rather than wife of Theseus, an adaptation that Bidar and Pradon would follow. Hippolyte, on the other hand, is slowly transformed into the very picture of *le galant*, his traditional misogyny and arrogance all but discarded. He even acquires a love interest of his own; in Gilbert, he falls in love with Phèdre herself. In the hands of these playwrights, the myth all but loses its ancient context; the tale is stripped of its pagan divinities and the characters divested of their destructive passions. [146]

That Racine was influenced by Euripides' *Hippolytus* is commonly acknowledged, but it is generally assumed that his heroine is based on Seneca's model.[147] In this chapter I aim to demonstrate Racine's underappreciated engagement with the Greek playwright by examining how Racine deals with the issue of Phèdre's culpability. Although Racine certainly employs details from later treatments of the myth, whether borrowed directly from Seneca's *Phaedra* or inherited from the broader French tradition, I will argue that he either tacitly apologizes for his divergence from Euripides' story or takes pains to demonstrate the suitability of the Senecan and French details to a Euripidean context. In his preface to *Phèdre*, Racine affirms that the complex portrayal of his title character stems from Euripides' depiction (second epigraph of this chapter). He does not mention Seneca's heroine at all, but as we saw with *Andromaque*, that is hardly evidence of disinterest. Still, his description of the heroine is closely aligned with Euripides' character:

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[146] Forestier (2006) 540-42 discusses these plays and how they differed from Racine's.

[147] Tobin (1999) 125 claims that Racine's play "bears a close resemblance to Seneca's *Hippolytus*, except for one major aspect: the relationship between Hippolyte and Aricie." See also Tobin (1971) and Coffey and Mayer (1990) 34-5. In addition to the plays of Euripides and Seneca, Racine would have also been familiar with the treatment of the myth by Ovid (*Heroides* 4) and Vergil (*Aeneid* 6.445 and 7.761-62).

> En effet, Phèdre n'est ni tout à fait coupable, ni tout à fait innocente. Elle est engagée, par sa destinée et par la colère des dieux, dans une passion illégitime, dont elle a horreur toute la première. Elle fait tous ses efforts pour la surmonter. Elle aime mieux se laisser mourir que de la déclarer à personne, et lorsqu'elle est forcée de la découvrir, elle en parle avec une confusion qui fait bien voir que son crime est plutôt une punition des dieux qu'un mouvement de sa volonté.
>
> Phèdre is neither totally culpable nor totally innocent. She is caught up in an illegitimate passion because of her fate and the anger of the gods, a passion at which she is the first to be horrified. She exerts great effort to overcome her desire. She prefers to let herself die than admit it to anyone, and when she is forced to reveal it, she speaks of it with a confusion that demonstrates that her crime is more a punishment from the gods than an action of her own choosing.

Like Racine's conception of the queen, Euripides' Phaedra struggles mightily to best her unbidden lust and almost succeeds in thwarting Aphrodite's plot by preferring death to dishonor (419-23). On the contrary, Seneca adapts Euripides' play in such a way so as to suggest that Phaedra alone deserves the blame for her adulterous lust.[148] His Phaedra practically boasts about her willing submission to her emotions: "but madness compels me to follow the worse arguments. My heart goes knowingly off the cliff," *sed furor cogit sequi / peiora. vadit animus in praeceps sciens* (178-79). The nurse insists to her mistress' face that she is driven by lust and aristocratic permissiveness, not the gods: "Then dread lust sneaks in, the companion of great wealth," *tunc illa magnae dira fortunae comes / subit libido* (206-7). The "confusion" with which Racine claims Phèdre speaks, is his own innovation to the ancient myth. Both Greek and Roman heroine state their affliction with clarity and diagnose their

[148] It has been suggested that Seneca has adapted Euripides' lost *Hippolytus* because his Phaedra is portrayed as significantly more wanton and shameless than the Phaedra of Euripides' extant play. There is, however, very little evidence supporting the idea that either Euripides' first *Hippolytus* or Sophocles' *Phaedra* was read by the Romans. I find the idea that Seneca was engaging primarily with Euripides' extant play and "correcting" what he judged to be an unrealistic portrayal of an adulterer perfectly plausible. The republican and Augustan playwrights, perhaps unwilling to engage with the incestuous implications of the myth, did not compose plays about the pair, so Seneca's potential models were Euripides' two plays, Sophocles' *Phaedra*, and Ovid's fictional letter from Phaedra to Hippolytus (*Her.* 4). See Mayer (2014) 475 and Mayer (2002) 65-70 for discussions on how Seneca incorporated these models.

illness and its attending symptoms in an almost clinical manner. Phèdre's "confusion," I think, is Racine's translation of Longinus' ἔκπληξις, a term denoting confusion, mental disturbance, or passion, that Longinus uses to define the effects of the sublime.

Two Olympian deities bookend Euripides' tragedy: Aphrodite provides the impetus for the plot (1-57) and Artemis its resolution (1282-1439). Even when their physical bodies are absent, statues of the two goddesses preside over every scene of the play. Seneca, on the other hand, banishes the Olympians from the stage altogether and regularly suggests that references to the gods are merely rationalizations of moral shortcomings.[149] When Seneca's Phaedra justifies her passion as the inescapable result of Cupid's arrow (186-94), the nurse channels the poet's cynical view of the gods with her reply: "Foul lust fashioned the rumor that Amor is a god, lust that delights in vice," *Deum esse amorem turpis et vitio favens / finxit libido,* 195-96. As far as the gods are concerned, Racine charts a middle course. He does not bring the gods on stage, but neither do his characters disavow the powers with which the Greek deities are traditionally vested. On the contrary, characters in Racine's play invoke Venus frequently, especially in scenes where her presence is strongly felt in the Greek play. Théramène names her twice when he warns Hippolyte against avoiding her charms (1.1.61 and 1.1.123) and Phèdre addresses her four times when she finally admits to Oenone the root of her sickness (1.3.249; 1.3.257; 1.3.277; 1.3.306).[150] In indicating both in his preface and within the text of the play that responsibility for the destruction to which her passion gives rise does not rest solely with the queen, Racine distances himself from Seneca, in whose play Phaedra proudly embraces her *furor*. In suggesting that her *passion illégitime* is due to *destinée* and *la colère des dieux*, Racine aligns his plot with the version of the tale told by Euripides, whose play begins with a prologue spoken by a vengeful Aphrodite intent on punishing Hippolytus by compelling his stepmother to fall in love.

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[149] I discuss Seneca's cynical views of religion and the gods on pages 39-42 of my chapter on *Andromaque*.

[150] For comparison, there is no mention of any member of the Greek Pantheon in either *Andromaque* or *Britannicus*. Diane is mentioned twice in *Iphigénie* 1.1.60 and 5.6.1782, but as I hope to write about at a later date, *Iphigénie* (1674) represents the beginning stages of Racine's move towards a more Greek poetic stance, as influenced by his reading of Longinus.

Phèdre and her Nurse: Who is to blame for Hippolyte's Death?

As in early modern Paris, so in Athens, the Phaedra and Hippolytus myth had proven popular on the stage. Euripides composed two plays entitled *Hippolytus*, the first of which survives only in fragments. Sophocles also produced a *Phaedra* that was probably performed in between Euripides' two productions.[151] In the *hypothesis* attached to the extant play, the Hellenistic critic Aristophanes of Byzantium states that Euripides' first version did not succeed because the excessively brazen portrayal of Phaedra failed to evoke sympathy from the audience: "This is his second *Hippolytus*, the one referred to as *garlanded*. It seems to have been written later, since in this tragedy he has corrected that which was unseemly and worthy of blame." Aristophanes the comic poet alludes to Euripides' initial characterization of Phaedra when he has Aeschylus accuse his young rival of penning whores (πόρναι, *Ran.* 1043) like Stheneboia and Phaedra.[152] After his initial *Hippolytus* met with defeat, Euripides seems to have created the nurse as a character to facilitate a rebranding of his heroine.[153] In our extant play, the nurse betrays Phaedra's confidence to Hippolytus. Without her intervention, the queen, we assume, would die silently of starvation, and her secret passion with her. Athens approved of these modifications, and the second *Hippolytus* was awarded first prize at the City Dionysia, making it Euripides' only play to win a dramatic competition in his lifetime. The Stephanus (1604) edition of Euripides (which Racine owned and annotated) printed the *hypotheses* with the plays. Additionally, his prefaces suggest a propensity for reading the fragmented texts of antiquity with care,[154] and he was a certainly a close reader of Aristophanes, as his patterning of *Les Plaideurs* (1668) after *Wasps* demonstrates. He must, I think, have been well aware that Euripides had composed two

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[151] Barrett (1964) 12.

[152] Stheneboia is another Greek mythological figure of the "Potiphar's wife" type. Homer tells the story of how she fell in love with her stepson Bellerophon and accused him of rape after he refused her advances (*Il.* 6.119–211).

[153] From the surviving fragments, the nurse does not seem to have been a character in either Euripides' first play or Sophocles' *Phaedra*. See Barrett (1964) 15-45.

[154] In the preface to *Iphigénie,* for example, Racine cites no fewer than thirteen ancient sources for his play (Aeschylus, Sophocles, Lucretius, Horace, Euripides, Ovid, Stesichorus, Pausanias, Euphorion, Vergil, and Quintilian), some of whom are well known while others are decidedly obscure.

plays about Hippolytus and Phaedra and that the first failed because of Phaedra's questionable morality. He may nod to the *hypothesis* of *Hippolytus*, albeit cryptically, when he says the following in his preface to the play:

> J'ai même pris soin de la rendre un peu moins odieuse qu'elle n'est dans les tragédies des Anciens, où elle se résout d'elle-même à accuser Hippolyte. J'ai cru que la calomnie avait quelque chose de trop bas et de trop noir pour la mettre dans la bouche d'une princesse qui a d'ailleurs des sentiments si nobles et si vertueux. Cette bassesse m'a paru plus convenable à une nourrice, qui pouvait avoir des inclinations plus serviles, et qui néanmoins n'entreprend cette fausse accusation que pour sauver la vie et l'honneur de sa maîtresse. Phèdre n'y donne les mains que parce qu'elle est dans une agitation d'esprit qui la met hors d'elle-même, et elle vient un moment après dans le dessein de justifier l'innocence et de déclarer la vérité.
>
> I even took care to render [Phèdre] a little less detestable than in the tragedies of the ancients where she decides to accuse Hippolyte herself. I consider that insult too low and dark to put into the mouth of a princess who otherwise possessed such noble and virtuous sentiments. This meanness appeared to me more suited to a nurse who might possess more servile inclinations. Nevertheless, she undertook that false accusation to preserve the life and honor of her mistress. And Phèdre only agreed to the plan because her soul was so agitated that she was not herself. She arrives just after the fact to justify her innocence and declare the truth.

Euripides created the character of the nurse for the very reasons Racine provides for extending her purview—because a direct proposition was "too low to put into the mouth of a princess." Euripides solved this issue of impropriety by having the nurse, eager to save her mistress' life, accost Hippolytus in private and tell him of Phaedra's love against her mistress' wishes (601-68). Racine extends Euripides' logic further in the same direction by employing the nurse in the rape accusation too. Since Racine does not generally depict his secondary characters as less noble that his principal ones (as is common in Attic tragedy), and, outside of this passage, does not describe tragic confidants as servile, I feel confident in supposing that he has Euripides' nurse in mind. Euripides invented the nurse to reduce Phaedra's share of blame for Hippolytus' death: If she had kept her promise not to speak to Hippolytus (520-21), the young man's untimely end would have been averted. Although Racine claims to reject "*les tragédies des Anciens*" as far as Phèdre's morality is concerned, he is in fact merely

expanding on the changes that Euripides had already made to the myth to reduce even further the queen's culpability.

Euripides and Racine introduce their heroine in a similar way. After paying his respects to Artemis' statue, Hippolytus enters the palace as Phaedra is wheeled out of it (108). In Racine too, Hippolyte narrowly misses confronting Phèdre as she enters the stage for the first time (1.2). Both Phaedras complain of weak limbs in their first lines ("the joints of my limbs are loosed," λέλυμαι μελέων σύνδεσμα φίλων, 199; "My knees are shaking and give way beneath me," *Et mes genoux tremblants se dérobent sous moi,* 1.3.154). Euripides' Phaedra suffers from the looseness of limbs characteristic of Aphrodite's victims in early Greek poetry.[155] Racine translates Euripides' loose limbs as faint knees, exchanging the Greek image with one to which a modern audience is more accustomed. In both plays Phaedra's companion (the nurse / Oenone) prepares us for the queen's entrance. Euripides' nurse addresses the ancient chorus (176-88), but Oenone responds to Hippolyte's inquiry about her own anxious appearance (142):

> Hélas, Seigneur! quel trouble au mien peut-être égal?
> La reine touche presque à son terme fatal.
> En vain à l'observer jour et nuit je m'attache.
> Elle meurt dans mes bras d'un mal qu'elle me cache.
> Un désordre éternel règne dans son esprit.
> Son chagrin inquiet l'arrache de son lit.
> Elle veut voir le jour.
>
> Alas, Sir, what misfortune could equal mine? The queen approaches her end. I am at her side, watching her day and night in vain. She is dying in my arms of an illness she won't reveal. A relentless disorder rules her heart. An uneasy grief tears her from her bed. She wants to see the day, 1.2.143-49.

In Euripides, however, no one asks about the nurse. Instead, the chorus leader looks with horror on the changed color of Phaedra's body (δέμας ἀλλόχροον βασιλείας, 175) and expresses a deep longing (ἔραται ψυχή, 173) to learn what ails the queen. The nurse responds with characteristic platitudes and self-indulgence:

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[155] Eros is called the limb loosener in Greek lyric, e.g. Sappho fr. 130**.**

ὦ κακὰ θνητῶν στυγεραί τε νόσοι.
τί σ᾽ ἐγὼ δράσω; τί δὲ μὴ δράσω;
τόδε σοι φέγγος, λαμπρὸς ὅδ᾽ αἰθήρ,
ἔξω δὲ δόμων ἤδη νοσερᾶς
δέμνια κοίτης.
δεῦρο γὰρ ἐλθεῖν πᾶν ἔπος ἦν σοι,
τάχα δ᾽ ἐς θαλάμους σπεύσεις τὸ πάλιν.
ταχὺ γὰρ σφάλλῃ κοὐδενὶ χαίρεις,
οὐδέ σ᾽ ἀρέσκει τὸ παρόν, τὸ δ᾽ ἀπὸν
φίλτερον ἡγῇ.
κρεῖσσον δὲ νοσεῖν ἢ θεραπεύειν:
τὸ μέν ἐστιν ἁπλοῦν, τῷ δὲ συνάπτει
λύπη τε φρενῶν χερσίν τε πόνος.

> Oh the pains mortals endure and hated diseases! What shall I do for you; what shall I not do? Here is the sunlight, here the bright sky. The mattress from your sickbed is outside the palace, for to come out here was your every word. But soon you will hurry into your bedroom again. You slide away again and take joy in nothing. Nor does the present please you, but you hold as beloved whatever is absent. It is better to be sick than to care for the sick. The one is a singular thing, but the other complicated, as it includes the pain of the heart and the toil of the hands, 176-88.

Although the tone of these two speeches is very different, the content is not. Both Oenone and the nurse highlight Phaedra's frantic desire to see the day (1.2.149; 178) and describe Phaedra's illness as their own tragedy (1.2.143; 186), emphasizing their sedulous attendance on the patient (1.2.145; 188). But Oenone is responding to Hippolyte's question about her own worried countenance and so avoids the solipsism of Euripides' nurse. Since Phèdre with her disturbingly changed body is not yet visible, Hippolyte can reasonably inquire about Oenone's anxious disposition and Oenone can employ the nurse's rather self-centered sentiments without appearing self-absorbed. As usual, Racine develops the personalities of the minor characters of ancient tragedy, endowing them with a name and other personalizing attributes, but he still goes out of his way to align them with an ancient model. We see in these two passages that Racine has borrowed themes and language from Euripides' play, but recast the context of the speech to render Oenone less servile.

Oenone initially alludes only briefly to the volatility of Phaedra's mind (*Un désordre éternel,* 1.2.147) described in detail by Euripides' nurse (178-85). But when Hippolyte exits

and Phèdre enters the stage, Oenone fleshes out Phèdre's characteristic mental disorder. Like Euripides' nurse, she describes Phèdre's conflicting desire to be inside the palace one moment and outside the next:

> Comme on voit tous ses voeux l'un l'autre se détruire!
> Vous-même condamnant vos injustes desseins,
> Tantôt à vous parer vous excitiez nos mains.
> Vous-même rappelant votre force première,
> Vous vouliez vous montrer et revoir la lumière;
> Vous la voyez, Madame, et prête à vous cacher,
> Vous haïssez le jour que vous veniez chercher?
>
> See how all her wishes contradict one another! You yourself just now condemned your plans as unfair when you incited my hands to dress you. You wanted to rise and see the light—you almost seemed to possess your previous strength. But now that you see the day you just yearned for, you hate it and are eager to hide?, 1.3.162-68.

Racine's Oenone waits for Phèdre's entrance before describing in detail her mistress' conflicting desires. The staging of Racine's scene allows an agitated Phèdre to demonstrate to the audience her mind's anxious wanderings while Oenone interprets her frantic shifts and provides some of the backstory to the queen's present situation. Racine, here and elsewhere, breaks up Euripides' longer monologues into shorter speeches and streamlines Euripides' scene in a way that maximizes dramatic potential.

Of particular concern to Oenone and Euripides' nurse is Phaedra's obsession with the light. Since the action of Greek tragedy takes place outside the house, and aristocratic Greek women, especially sick ones, have little cause to leave it, Euripides concocts a reason to circumvent the queen's modest tendency to stay in the house.[156] He blends this dramatic necessity with Phaedra's personality by indicating that her love of day acts as a metaphor of sorts for her attraction to the pure and chaste. For, it is in part Hippolytus' allegiance to Artemis and virginity that she (ironically) finds so captivating. She channels Hippolytus' own language in her desire to "drink the pure (καθαρῶν) waters of a dewy spring" and sleep

[156] In Euripides' first *Hippolytus*, Phaedra also came on stage searching for the sunlight (fr. A Barrett; 443 Nauck). For φέγγος as sunlight, see Barrett (1964) n. 208.

upon an "unshorn (κομήτῃ) meadow," 208-11.[157] In Racine, Phèdre offers an additional explanation for her desire to see the day one moment and shun it the next. In her first speech, Phèdre ignores Oenone's exasperated pleas and addresses the Sun in apostrophe, reminding us that he is her mother's father. She has ventured outside, she claims, to see her grandfather once more before she dies:

> Noble et brillant auteur d'une triste famille,
> Toi, dont ma mère osait se vanter d'être fille,
> Qui peut-être rougis du trouble où tu me vois,
> Soleil, je te viens voir pour la dernière fois.
>
> Noble and shining father of a wretched family, you, whose daughter my mother used to boast that she was, you, who are perhaps turning red at the sight of my present misfortune, Sun, I come to see you for the last time, 1.3.169-72.

That the Sun may blush to look upon the shameful plight of his granddaughter alludes to the fact that in Greek mythology Helios is accustomed to witness the love affairs of gods and men as his chariot draws across the heavens above the Earth.[158] Phèdre wants to see the Sun because he is the only family member accessible to her in exile. But as soon as she comes outside, she becomes embarrassed because he is the only being who can illuminate the cause of her suffering. References to the sun and daylight are frequent in Euripides' play, no doubt an allusion to the etymology of Phaedra's name, but the familial relationship she shares with Helios is never clearly stated. Seneca, however, draws an explicit connection between Phaedra's attraction to the light and her family lineage. In her opening prologue, Phaedra traces Venus' hatred of her family to the Sun's interference in Venus' love affair with Mars:

> stirpem perosa Solis invisi Venus
> per nos catenas vindicat Martis sui

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[157] Barrett *ad loc.* understands Phaedra's use of Hippolytus' language to indicate that she is in love with him. I think that she is also voicing her approval of his chastity, which, as his hunting song demonstrates, is bound up in his love of the wild.

[158] The story of Helios informing Hephaestus that his wife Aphrodite was making love with Ares in his house is told first by Homer at *Od.* 8.256-366. Seneca and Racine are also familiar with Ovid's telling of the story that highlights Venus' revenge against the Sun at *Met.* 4.167-213.

> suasque, probris omne Phoebeum genus
> onerat nefandis: nulla Minois levi
> defuncta amore est, iungitur semper nefas.
>
> Venus is wreaking vengeance on me for the chains that bound her to Mars because she detests the descendants of the hateful Sun. She weighs down the entire race of Phoebus with outrageous crimes. No daughter of Minos ever managed to love innocently. She is always connected to some perversion, 1.3.124-28.

In this passage Seneca explains why Aphrodite chooses to employ Phaedra in her plot to destroy Hippolytus—she is the descendant of the Sun, Venus' traditional enemy. Racine is concerned with the justness of punishments in Euripides' play,[159] so it is unsurprising that he incorporates Seneca's rationalization of the goddess' hatred of Phèdre into his own work. But, whereas Seneca immediately undercuts Phaedra's claim that the gods are responsible for her passion by having the nurse deny that they even exist, no character in Racine's play ever questions whether Venus is powerful, much less real. Racine includes this detail about Phèdre's family to explain her Euripidean desire to see the light and to provide a backstory to Aphrodite's hatred of Cretan women, employing a Senecan adaptation in the service of Euripides' story.

When she first appears on the stage in both Euripides and Racine, Phaedra is oppressed by her ornaments and veils, as though the clothing that weighs her down physically acts as a metaphor for the societal norms that burden her mentally. In Euripides she demands that her hair be set free ("To wear this headdress on my head is intolerable. Take it off and spread my locks upon my shoulders," βαρύ μοι κεφαλῆς ἐπίκρανον ἔχειν: / ἄφελ', ἀμπέτασον βόστρυχον ὤμοις, 201-2) before she launches into her "huntress in the woods" hallucination (215-22). Racine's Phèdre, also as prelude to a dreamy reminiscence about the forest (1.3.176-78), complains similarly of her burdensome hairstyle: "How these empty ornaments and veils weigh me down. What tiresome hand has knotted and arranged the hair upon my head?,"*Que ces vains ornements, que ces voiles me pèsent! / Quelle importune main, en formant tous ces noeuds, / A pris soin sur mon front d'assembler mes cheveux?,* 1.3.158-60. Phaedra's

[159] In his preface he claims that he has provided Hippolyte with a weakness (falling in love with Aricie) to render the youth's misfortune more deserved and to avoid inciting the audience's indignation at the harsh punishment of a man wholly innocent.

desire to let loose her hair and escape to the forest in both plays demonstrates her mental instability. When Euripides' nurse and Racine's Oenone express bewilderment at Phaedra's woodland fantasy (232-38; 1.3.179), both Phaedras regain their senses for a moment and are suddenly ashamed of publicly revealing immodest details about their internal turmoil. They each launch into a series of questions and come to the conclusion that their madness is heaven-sent:

> δύστηνος ἐγώ, τί ποτ᾽ εἰργασάμην;
> ποῖ παρεπλάγχθην γνώμης ἀγαθῆς;
> ἐμάνην, ἔπεσον δαίμονος ἄτῃ.
>
> What have I done, wretched as I am? Whither have I been led away from good sense? I was mad; I have fallen by the fury of some divinity, 239-41.
>
> *Insensée, où suis-je? et qu'ai-je dit?*
> *Où laissé-je égarer mes voeux, et mon esprit?*
> *Je l'ai perdu. Les dieux m'en ont ravi l'usage.*
>
> Where am I and what have I said while I was mad? Where have I let wander my desires and my mind? I have lost it. The gods have taken it from me, 1.3.179-81.

Notice how both heroines conceive of their madness: first a spatial confusion followed by a realization that the gods have afflicted their mental capacity. Both Phaedras, briefly aware of the insanity that threatens to engulf them, let fall tears ("tears stream from my eyes," κατ᾽ ὄσσων δάκρυ μοι βαίνει, 245; "my eyes are filled with tears despite my efforts," *mes yeux malgré moi se remplissent de pleurs,* 1.3.184) and express shame ("my eye has turned to shame," ἐπ᾽ αἰσχύνην ὄμμα τέτραπται, 246; "my shameful troubles," *mes honteuses douleurs,* 1.3.183). I can find no passage elsewhere in Racine's oeuvre more faithfully modeled on an ancient text. The similarity of language and context between these two scenes is matched only by the exchange that follows in which Phaedra admits the root of her illness.

Seneca also depicts Phaedra as burdened by her clothing in his play. But he does not position his scene at the beginning of the play like Euripides and Racine. Instead, after his Phaedra has tried to convince the nurse to support her love for Hippolytus (85-273), and the chorus has sung an extended ode about the illicit love affairs of the Olympians (274-357),

Phaedra reenters the stage and demands, like her Euripidean predecessor, to let her hair down: "Maidservants, remove these clothes woven with purple and gold...let my hair pour over my neck and the top of my shoulders," *Removete, famulae, purpura atque auro inlitas / vestes... colla perfundant comae / umerosque summos,* 387-95. But unlike in Racine and Euripides, Seneca has already established his heroine as unabashedly devoted to her passions. As such, her lines are marked by an eroticism absent from the scenes in Euripides and Racine. In her first appearance on the stage, no semblance of shame holds Seneca's heroine back from proudly pronouncing to her nurse the passion she harbors for her stepson (85-128). The nurse begs Phaedra to hide her love ("check the flames of this impious love, I pray, expel from your chaste mind this savage crime," *compesce amoris impii flammas, precor…expelle facinus mente castifica horridum*, 165-69). Phaedra responds to her nurse's moralizing with a spirited collection of motley arguments: I am ruled by love (218-19), Theseus is a friend to the adulterer (244); Theseus is probably dead (220-21); If Theseus is not dead, he will forgive me (225); Hippolytus is wild and can learn to love (240); If Hippolytus flees, I will chase him (233-35; 241); I cannot help it; I am my mother's daughter (243), Theseus deserves it (244-45), and so on. At no point in their long exchange does Seneca's Phaedra suggest any remorse for her illicit passion.

In a final attempt to change her mistress' mind, Seneca's nurse gets down on her knees and begs Phaedra as a suppliant to suppress her desire: "As a suppliant I beg you by these white hairs of old age and my heart worn down by cares and my dear breast: stop your madness and help yourself," *Per has senectae splendidas supplex comas / fessumque curis pectus et cara ubera / precor, furorem siste teque ipsa adiuva*, 246-48. Suddenly Phaedra is convinced and prepared to conceal her passions: "I will obey, nurse," *paremus, altrix,* 251. This is an almost parodic allusion to Euripides' scene in which the nurse forces her mistress to *reveal* the cause of her illness by grasping her hands and knees in supplication (325-36). Seneca's Phaedra abruptly changes her position on love only after she has put forward a variety of arguments to normalize her passion. She even expresses her change of heart with riddling syntax: "let love that does not wish to be ruled be conquered," *qui regi non vult amor / vincatur,* 251-52. The nurse understands Phaedra to mean that she will conquer her passion even though her heart would prefer not to be ruled. Behind her statement, we may hear a note of Senecan irony: for, the *amor* she cannot control will indeed be bested by the end of the play, but only

because both the subject and object of that love will be dead. In the same breath in which Phaedra affirms her commitment to *pudor* and *fama* (250; 252), she voices her intention to follow her husband to the underworld. To her nurse's horror, Phaedra threatens suicide, and is instantly "transformed" into Euripides' heroine. The fact that she insists that her passion is tenable before abruptly changing her mind suggests that her death wish is a final (and successful) attempt to convince her nurse to act on her behalf.[160] Seneca, I think, is calling into question the very premise of his predecessor's play by suggesting that Phaedra was always faking her sense of shame. The quick recovery Phaedra makes after she "faints" on top of Hippolytus in the next scene supports this interpretation (585-600).

On the other hand, no one questions Phèdre's desire to do the right thing in Racine's play, nor does Phèdre undermine her own sincerity by whimsically changing her approach to morality, although like any Racinian character, she is susceptible to a degree of self delusion. Oenone's persuasive interrogation that leads to Phèdre's revelation parallels the way Euripides' nurse convinces her mistress to divulge her secret lust. In Euripides, after trying every other avenue of investigation at her disposal, the nurse, rightly considering it a matter of life or death, finally resorts to supplication, a cultural practice in which the suppliant grasps the knees or hands of someone invested with the power to grant their prayer. The ritual was considered extremely powerful in early and classical Greece.[161] Phaedra is shocked at her nurse's intense plea: "What are you doing? Are you employing force by grasping my hand?," τί δρᾷς; βιάζῃ χειρὸς ἐξαρτωμένη, 325; "leave me, by the gods, and let go of my right hand," ἄπελθε πρὸς θεῶν δεξιάν τ᾽ ἐμὴν μέθες, 333. Racine, whose audience might not immediately grasp the compulsion inherent to ancient supplication, has Oenone recall for Phèdre her constant maternal devotion (as Seneca's nurse does when she tries to convince her patient to *suppress* her erotic desire) to intensify the claim of her supplication: "Do you remember that I caught you in my arms when you were born? I deserted my country and children for you," *Songez-vous qu'en naissant mes bras vous ont reçue? / Mon pays, mes enfants, pour vous j'ai tout quitté,* 1.3.234-35). Phèdre responds with horror and, like her Greek

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[160] Phaedra's sudden transformation from passionately amorous to despondently suicidal is generally understood as indicative of Seneca's lack of literary finesse, (Coffey and Mayer, 1990, *ad. loc.*).

[161] Seen Naiden (2006) for a book length study on the ritual of supplication.

counterpart, calls Oenone's relentless hounding "violent"(*Quel fruit espères-tu de tant de violence?,* 1.3.237). Oenone grasps her mistress' knees in supplication, employing the gestures of the ancient ritual (*Par vos faibles genoux que je tiens embrassés,* 1.3.244), and continues to ignore her mistress' pleas for leniency. After Oenone refuses to relent, Phèdre, like Phaedra, agrees to talk (1.3.246; 335).

What follows could be considered a loose translation of Euripides. Oenone and the nurse both agree to listen ("Speak, I am listening," *Parlez. Je vous écoute,* 1.3.246; "I will be quiet. It is your turn to speak now," σιγῷμ᾽ ἂν ἥδη: σὸς γὰρ οὑντεῦθεν λόγος, 335); then both Phaedras recall their mother Pasiphae ("into what monstrosities did love throw my mother," *Dans quels égarements l'amour jeta ma mère!,* 1.3.250; "o wretched mother, what a love you loved," ὦ τλῆμον, οἷον, μῆτερ, ἠράσθης ἔρον, 337); each then remembers her sister Ariadne ("Ariadne, my sister!," *Ariane, ma soeur!,* 1.3.253; "and you, wretched sister, wife of Dionysus," σύ τ᾽, ὦ τάλαιν᾽ ὄμαιμε, Διονύσου δάμαρ, 339); then the confidants beg Phaedra to stop abusing her family ("what deadly trouble is driving you against your own blood today," *Et quel mortel ennui, / Contre tout votre sang vous anime aujourd'hui?,* 1.3.255-56; "my child, what ails you? Why are you maligning your family?," τέκνον, τί πάσχεις; συγγόνους κακορροθεῖς); the Phaedras answer that they are perishing now in the way the other women of Minos' household have died ("I die, the last of my line and the most miserable," *Je péris la dernière, et la plus miserable,* 1.3.258; "Wretched me, how I am ruined as the third [after Pasiphae and Ariadne]," τρίτη δ᾽ ἐγὼ δύστηνος ὡς ἀπόλλυμαι, 341); The confidants then ask Phaedra if she is in love and if so with whom ("Are you in love…with whom?," *Aimez-vous?... Pour qui?,* 1.3.259-60; "What do you mean? Are you in love, my child? With whom?," τί φῄς; ἐρᾷς, ὦ τέκνον; ἀνθρώπων τίνος, 350); the Phaedras refuse to utter Hippolytus' name but reveal his mother's ethnicity ("You know the son of the Amazon," *Tu connais ce fils de l'Amazone,* 1.3.262; "What is his name again, that son of the Amazon," ὅστις ποθ᾽ οὗτός ἐσθ᾽, ὁ τῆς Ἀμαζόνος, 351); the confidants then name Hippolytus (*Hippolyte! Grands dieux!,* 1.3.264; Ἱππόλυτον αὐδᾷς, 352), and the Phaedras finish their interlocutors' half line with a sophistic claim ("It is you who named him," *C'est toi qui l'as nommé*, 1.3.264; "you hear these things from you, not me," σοῦ τάδ᾽, οὐκ ἐμοῦ κλύεις, 353); the confidants are astonished and outraged ("Heavens above, my blood runs cold in my veins. Oh despair! Oh crime! Oh deplorable people," *Juste ciel! tout mon sang dans mes veines se glace. / Ô désespoir! Ô crime! Ô*

déplorable race!, 1.3.265-66; "Alas! What have you said, my child? How you have destroyed me! Women, this is unbearable. I cannot go on living," οἴμοι, τί λέξεις, τέκνον; ὥς μ᾽ ἀπώλεσας. / γυναῖκες, οὐκ ἀνασχέτ᾽, οὐκ ἀνέξομαι / ζῶσ᾽, 353-54). There is no such scene in Seneca or the earlier French plays. Euripides' influence on Racine is unmistakable.

In response to their confidants' horrified reaction, both Phaedras respond with an extended speech, and here, the almost line-by-line translation of Euripides comes to an end. Racine takes from Euripides' Phaedra a description of her plan to starve herself to death to maintain her reputation ("By dying I hope to maintain my honor," *Je voulais en mourant prendre soin de ma gloire,* 1.3.309), but he leaves out, for now at least, her harsh denouncement of women and adulterers (Eur. *Tr.* 406-18). Nevertheless, the primary intertext for this speech also comes from Euripides' play. When Phèdre tells Oenone how she fell in love, she alludes to the monologue with which Aphrodite opens *Hippolytus*:

> Mon mal vient de plus loin. À peine au fils d'Égée,
> Sous les lois de l'hymen je m'étais engagée,
> Mon repos, mon bonheur semblait être affermi,
> Athènes me montra mon superbe ennemi.
> Je le vis, je rougis, je pâlis à sa vue.
> Un trouble s'éleva dans mon âme éperdue.
> Mes yeux ne voyaient plus, je ne pouvais parler,
> Je sentis tout mon corps et transir, et brûler.
> Je reconnus Vénus, et ses feux redoutables,
> D'un sang qu'elle poursuit tourments inévitables.
>
> My sickness dates from far back. I had recently married the son of Aegeus and my future peace and happiness seemed certain when Athens showed me my haughty enemy. I saw him, I blushed, I turned pale at his sight. An ache arose in my lost soul. My eyes could no longer see, I was not able to speak, I felt my whole body shiver and burn at the same time. I recognized Venus and her terrible fires, relentless torment of the blood she pursues, 1.3.269-78.

Phèdre refers to Hippolyte as her "*superbe ennemi*," channeling Aphrodite's complaint of Hippolytus' arrogance. Phèdre informs Oenone that the disease was first inflicted long before the action of the play began (*Mon mal vient de plus loin,* 1.3.269). Similarly, Aphrodite tells us that she set her plot against Hippolytus and Phaedra in motion a long time ago ("I

prepared most of these things a long time ago," τὰ πολλὰ δὲ /πάλαι προκόψασ', 22.) Phèdre claims that she first laid eyes upon Hippolyte when he visited Athens. This is a simplified version of Aphrodite's story in which Hippolytus' visit to Attica to participate in the Eleusinian mysteries was the occasion on which Phaedra saw her stepson and fell in love with him:

> ἐλθόντα γάρ νιν Πιτθέως ποτ᾽ ἐκ δόμων
> σεμνῶν ἐς ὄψιν καὶ τέλη μυστηρίων
> Πανδίονος γῆν πατρὸς εὐγενὴς δάμαρ
> ἰδοῦσα Φαίδρα καρδίαν κατέσχετο
> ἔρωτι δεινῷ τοῖς ἐμοῖς βουλεύμασιν.
>
> Phaedra, the noble wife of [Hippolytus'] father saw him once when he came from Pittheus' palace [in Troezen] to the land of Pandion [Attica] to see and practice the holy mysteries [of Demeter]. She was seized in her heart by a terrible love because of my plans, 24-28.

When Phèdre says she "recognized" Venus (277), she is alluding to these lines in which Aphrodite credits herself for the queen's erotic desire (τοῖς ἐμοῖς βουλεύμασιν, 28). Note also how both Phèdre and Aphrodite emphasize the role vision plays in inciting love (*Je le* ***vis****, je rougis, je pâlis à sa* ***vue****… Mes* ***yeux*** *ne* ***voyaient*** *plus;* **ἰδοῦσα** Φαίδρα καρδίαν κατέσχετο / ἔρωτι δεινῷ). The eyes are regularly *loci erotici* in ancient love scenes,[162] and Phèdre's personal account of the experience of falling in love is fittingly much more vivid than Aphrodite's ruthless prologue. Phèdre's detailed description of the symptoms is missing from Aphrodite's prologue. For these, she turns to Sappho 31, an intertext that was recognized even in the seventeenth century.[163] In her most famous fragment, Sappho depicts the scene before her (φαίνεταί μοι) as a prelude to a full-blown description of how her body reacts to the sight of her beloved:

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[162] Ap. Rhod. 3.287-89. 450-58; Chariton 1.1.6-7; Ach. Tat. 1.4.2-5, *et al.*

[163] Hilaire-Bernard de Longepierre in his translations of the poets Sappho and Anacreon *Les Poesies d'Anacréon et de Sapho* (1684) 275 suggests that Racine has Sappho in mind when he wrote this passage. See also Dejean (1989) 3-20 for a discussion of how Sappho's poetry influenced Racine's tragedies.

φαίνεταί μοι κῆνος ἴσος θέοισιν
ἔμμεν' ὤνηρ, ὄττις ἐνάντιός τοι
ἰσδάνει καὶ πλάσιον ἆδυ φωνεί-
σας ὐπακούει

καὶ γελαίσας ἰμέροεν, τό μ' ἦ μὰν
καρδίαν ἐν στήθεσιν ἐπτόαισεν,
ὠς γὰρ ἔς σ' ἴδω βρόχε' ὤς με φώνας
οὔδεν ἔτ' εἴκει,

ἀλλὰ κὰμ μὲν γλῶσσα +ἔαγε, λέπτον
δ' αὔτικα χρῶι πῦρ ὐπαδεδρόμακεν,
ὀππάτεσσι δ' οὐδ' ἒν ὄρημμ', ἐπιρρόμ-
βεισι δ' ἄκουαι,

κὰδ' δέ ἴδρως κακχέεται, τρόμος δὲ
παῖσαν ἄγρει, χλωροτέρα δὲ ποίας
ἔμμι, τεθνάκην δ' ὀλίγω 'πιδεύης
φαίνομ' ἔμ' αὔτᾳ.

> He seems to me equal to the gods, that man who sits opposite you and hears you speaking sweetly and laughing with desire. As for me, when I see you even for a moment, my heart flutters beneath my breast and speech eludes me. My tongue [breaks] and a thin flame immediately creeps beneath my skin. My eyes see nothing, my ears are abuzz, and sweat pours down. A shivering seizes me all over and I am greener than grass. I look like I am about to die.

Like Sappho, Phèdre describes an intense sensory experience: a change of color (*je rougis, je pâlis à sa vue*; χλωροτέρα δὲ ποίας) and a temporary loss of vision and speech (*Mes yeux ne voyaient plus, je ne pouvais parler,* ὀππάτεσσι δ' οὐδ' ἒν ὄρημμ', ἐπιρρόμ- / βεισι δ' ἄκουαι) followed by a combination of hot and cold sensations (*Je sentis tout mon corps et transir, et brûler;* λέπτον / δ' αὔτικα χρῶι πῦρ ὐπαδεδρόμακεν… τρόμος δὲ / παῖσαν ἄγρει). On Racine's stage, Phèdre, who both appears close to death and is literally about to die embodies Sappho's climactic ending: "I look like I am about to die."

The inclusion of Sappho 31 is especially significant because of the context in which Racine likely encountered it. Longinus' treatise *On the Sublime* had recently been translated by

Racine's longtime mentor and friend, Nicolas Boileau.[164] For Longinus, a confrontation with the sublime, whether literary or physical, brings about a sudden loss of rationality. The confusion and madness Phèdre experiences when she sees her beloved or remembers his beauty is the ecstasy of Longinus' poetic sublime, "for, what is wonderful always goes together with a sense of dismay," 1.4.

Having correctly identified the goddess responsible for her plight, Phèdre prays to the goddess of love herself for help when desire threatens to consume her:

> Par des voeux assidus je crus les détourner,
> Je lui bâtis un temple, et pris soin de l'orner.
> De victimes moi-même à toute heure entourée,
> Je cherchais dans leurs flancs ma raison égarée.
> D'un incurable amour remèdes impuissants!
> En vain sur les autels ma main brûlait l'encens.
>
> I thought I could turn back [the flames] with sedulous vows. I built a temple and embellished it with care. I surrounded myself with sacrifices constantly and sought in their entrails the good sense I had lost. Powerless antidotes against an incurable love. My hand burned incense on the altars in vain, 279-84.

Here again, Racine adopts a detail from Aphrodite's prologue by having Phèdre build a temple to Venus. In the Greek play, Phaedra's temple is an aetiological story to explain the name and placement of Aphrodite's shrine on the acropolis which the Athenians referred to as the "Aphrodite next to Hippolytus" shrine.[165]

> καὶ πρὶν μὲν ἐλθεῖν τήνδε γῆν Τροζηνίαν,
> πέτραν παρ᾽ αὐτὴν Παλλάδος, κατόψιον
> γῆς τῆσδε ναὸν Κύπριδος ἐγκαθίσατο,
> ἐρῶσ᾽ ἔρωτ᾽ ἔκδημον, Ἱππολύτῳ δ᾽ ἔπι
> τὸ λοιπὸν ὀνομάσουσιν ἱδρῦσθαι θεάν.
>
> Before coming to this land of Troezen [Phaedra] built a temple for Cypris overlooking this land because she loved a foreign love. Future generations will call this shrine "Aphrodite next to Hippolytus," 29-33.

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[164] Sappho 31 survives because Longinus presents it as an example of the literary sublime.
[165] Pausanias tells us of a shrine of Aphrodite near Hippolytus' hero-sanctuary on the Acropolis: D'Ooge (1901) 259-61 discusses the archeological evidence.

Since this shrine was located on the acropolis above the Theater of Dionysus (where Euripides' spectators are seated), we can imagine Aphrodite pointing to it as she employs a deictic adjective (τήνδε γῆν) to describe how it "overlooks" Attica. By drawing this connection between the geography of the theater and the plot of the play, Aphrodite breaks for a moment the dramatic illusion to insist on the proximity of the characters on stage and the relevance of the myth to contemporary life. Racine may not be particularly interested in the religious landscape of ancient Athens, but his incorporation of this detail into Phèdre's speech serves to underscore Aphrodite's ominous presence. As in Euripides, the emphasis on Phèdre's temple to Venus serves to contrast the heroine's piety to the goddess' ruthlessness. Unlike Seneca, who uses his "footnotes" to Euripides' text to distance himself from the Greek worldview, Racine expands on Aphrodite's aside in order to demonstrate its relevance to Euripides' play.

To explain why Phaedra might build a temple to the goddess who hates her, Racine looks to Vergil. When Dido recognizes the fires of Venus burning in her breast, she frequents the temples of the gods, sacrifices choice animals, and begs for divine help (*Aen.* 4.54-73). Like Dido who cannot rid her mind of Aeneas (*haerent infixi pectore vultus / verbaque,* 4.4-5),[166] and who suffers visual and auditory hallucinations of him when he is not present (*illum absens absentem auditque videtque,* 4.83), Phèdre sees Hippolyte before her constantly (*J'adorais Hippolyte, et le voyant sans cesse,* 1.3.285). And like Dido who sees her beloved in the face of his son (*gremio Ascanium genitoris imagine capta / detinet*, 4.84.),[167] Phèdre sees Hippolyte in the face of his father (*Mes yeux le retrouvaient dans les traits de son père,* 1.3.290). Moreover, Phèdre employs a striking Vergilian image to explain how her desire, suppressed for so long, has resurfaced:

> Par mon époux lui-même à Trézène amenée
> J'ai revu l'ennemi que j'avais éloigné.
> Ma blessure trop vive aussitôt a saigné.
> Ce n'est plus une ardeur dans mes veines cachée:
> C'est Vénus tout entière à sa proie attachée.

[166] "His face and words cling fast to her pierced heart."

[167] "She holds Ascanius to her bosom, captivated by the image of his father."

> I was brought to Troezen by my own husband. I saw my enemy again whom I had previously avoided. My wound still alive began to bleed right away. It is no longer a fervor hidden deep in my veins, but Venus herself who has leaped onto her prey, 1.3.302-6.

Phèdre's description of her initial passion as a wound (*blessure*) hidden in her veins (*dans mes veines cachée*) corresponds to Vergil's famous depiction of Dido's passion for Aeneas: "but the queen, long since wounded by an intense love, nourishes the wound in her veins and is seized by a hidden fire," *At regina gravi iamdudum* ***saucia*** *cura /* ***vulnus*** *alit venis et* ***caeco*** *carpitur* ***igni,*** 4.1-2. After Anna encourages her sister to pursue Aeneas, Vergil describes Dido's wound as "alive" ("the silent wound lives beneath her breast," *tacitum* ***vivit*** *sub pectore vulnus,* 4.67). Racine employs this image of Phèdre's living wound (*Ma blessure* ***trop vive***) and describes the wound as bloody (*saignê*), activating an intertext to Vergil's metaphor of Dido as a wounded deer:

> uritur infelix Dido totaque vagatur
> urbe furens, qualis coniecta cerva sagitta,
> quam procul incautam nemora inter Cresia fixit
> pastor agens telis liquitque volatile ferrum
> nescius: illa fuga silvas saltusque peragrat
> Dictaeos; haeret lateri letalis harundo.
>
> Ill-fated Dido is on fire and wanders raging through the whole city just like a heedless deer that a far off shepherd has pierced with an arrow in the Cretan woods. He, unaware, leaves the flying iron behind. But she wanders through the forests and the woodlands of Crete in flight, and the fatal shaft clings to her side, 4.68-73.

The Cretan woods where the deer is wandering correspond nicely to Phédre's birthplace. The image of the hunter oblivious of the harm he has inflicted is a fitting metaphor for Hippolyte (who is also a renowned hunter) and his utter ignorance of Phèdre's plight. Vergil leaves us to imagine what lucky beast will happen upon the dying animal. For Racine, that predator is Venus herself (*C'est Vénus tout entière à sa proie attachée*). The vividness of Phèdre's last line, intensified as it by the Vergilian intertext, underscores Aphrodite's presence and recalls the scenario of Aphrodite's prologue: the goddess of love, sensing that her victory is

near,[168] arrives to Troezen to witness the final act, so to speak, of the tragedy she has staged. Even though she does not actually appear on Racine's stage, her supernatural presence dogs Phèdre and will continue to pursue her until she is dead.

Phèdre remarks bitterly that her husband is responsible for bringing her from Athens to Troezen (*Par mon époux lui-même à Trézène amenée),* where she is compelled to face Hippolyte again, a detail present in Aphrodite's speech as well:

> ἐπεὶ δὲ Θησεὺς Κεκροπίαν λείπει χθόνα
> μίασμα φεύγων αἵματος Παλλαντιδῶν
> καὶ τήνδε σὺν δάμαρτι ναυστολεῖ χθόνα,
> ἐνιαυσίαν ἔκδημον αἰνέσας φυγήν,
> ἐνταῦθα δὴ στένουσα κἀκπεπληγμένη
> κέντροις ἔρωτος ἡ τάλαιν᾽ ἀπόλλυται
> σιγῇ, ξύνοιδε δ᾽ οὔτις οἰκετῶν νόσον.
>
> When Theseus left the Cecropian land [Attica] to escape the blood pollution he had incurred for murdering the sons of Pallas, he sailed to this land with his wife since he had agreed to spend a year long exile away from Athens. From that time on the wretched woman, groaning and struck out of her wits by the goads of love, has been dying in silence and no one of the house knows her disease, 34-40.

Here, in this passage of Euripides, are the seeds of political instability that underlie Racine's Troezen. Both Euripides' Theseus and Racine's Thesée are living in Troezen to escape blood pollution incurred for killing the sons of Pallas (in Racine, Aricie's brothers). But Racine diverges from Euripides' backstory on one important count: the reason for Theseus' absence from Troezen during the timeframe of the play. In Euripides' play, Theseus is visiting the oracle at Delphi. In Racine, he is thought to be in the underworld attempting to steal Persephone from her husband, a detail generally recognized as a borrowing from Seneca.[169] But when Thésée returns to Troezen, he corrects the rumor, informing us that he was actually in Epirus helping Pirithous steal the wife of the tyrant whom her husband calls Persephone (956-64). As Racine notes in his preface, this "correction" to the traditional

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[168] "I prepared many things a while back and, now there is but a little work left," τὰ πολλὰ δὲ / πάλαι προκόψασ᾽, οὐ πόνου πολλοῦ με δεῖ, 23-24.
[169] Tobin (1971) 131.

myth is found in Plutarch, who tells of how Theseus went to Epirus to help steal this woman for Pirithous after his friend had helped him steal Helen from Sparta (*Life of Theseus* 31.4). But he does not explain why he present's Seneca's version only to correct it. Perhaps the rumors in Troezen that Thésée has gone down to Hades to steal Persephone provoke further sympathy for Phèdre and her infidelity. Moreover, the historicization of Greek myth is generally appealing to Racine, but the Epirus version has the added benefit of reducing Thésée's traditional culpability. Seducing the king of Epirus' wife is certainly wrong, but it does not entail a direct affront to the gods as stealing the wife of Hades does.

An additional ancient model sheds light on Thesée's absence: Sophocles' *Trachiniae*. In a nod to this play, which begins with Hyllus, a son of Heracles, leaving Tracchis to find his father (86-91), Racine's tragedy opens with Hippolyte planning to leave Troezen in search of his father (1.1.1-7). The myths surrounding Heracles and Theseus are conflated even in the ancient tradition, so there is a certain rationale in Racine borrowing from a play that describes Heracles' homecoming after his final labor has been completed. At the beginning of Sophocles' play, Heracles has already completed his traditional twelve labors. Likewise, at the beginning of Racine's play, Thésée has already completed his labors (1.1.74-82). Both Thésée and Heracles are returning home not from slaying monsters, but from a final "extra" labor that they have elected to take on for amorous reasons: Heracles has been besieging Oechalia in Euboea to abduct Iole, the beautiful daughter of king Eurytus, and Thésée is trying to steal the king of Epirus' wife for the friend who helped him abduct Helen. Additionally, both Deianira and Phèdre are living in exile because of their husbands' blood pollution. Both heroes return home to find their wives in the thralls of misfortune brought on by intense passion (Deianira for her own husband and Phaedra for her stepson) that could have easily been avoided if the heroes in question had managed to spend a little more time at home. While the errant husbands of Sophocles and Racine may not deserve the enormity of devastation that awaits them at home as Seneca's Theseus does, neither are they wholly blameless as Euripides' Theseus is.

Racine uses Thésée's rumored descent into hell to drive the plot and shift registers. Just as Phèdre finishes her admission of love, Panope arrives to inform her that her husband is dead (1.4). Oenone quickly overcomes her shock at this unexpected announcement and advises the queen to seduce Hippolyte for the sake of the country. Phèdre agrees to live,

claiming that her duty to her young son will revive her (*l'amour d'un fils,* 1.5.365), trying to align herself with Euripides' Phaedra (whose devotion to her children is never in doubt). In Seneca, instead of being led to believe Theseus is dead by reports, Phaedra actively hopes that her husband will not return from Hades (219-21). No one else in Seneca's play lends credence to this belief. Her nurse is certainly not convinced: "Don't place your trust in Dis…Theseus alone will find the forbidden paths," *Ne crede Diti… solus negatas invenit Theseus vias,* 222-24. Racine employs the Senecan detail of the rumor of Theseus' death in order to facilitate an encounter between Phèdre and Hippolyte (no such face-to-face scene exists in Euripides), but he alters the tone of Phaedra's reception of her husband's death so as to render his heroine innocent of Seneca's Phaedra's open hostility. When Thésée is thought to be dead, Phèdre takes on something of the boldness of Seneca's queen. And the famous confrontation between Phèdre and Hippolyte is certainly modeled on Seneca's scene. But, Racine's allegiance to Euripides' heroine will return with the arrival of the news that Thésée lives.

When Seneca's Phaedra gathers the courage to proclaim her love to Hippolytus, she sweetens the proposition with the prospect of governance, stressing that her husband will not return from Hades:

> mandata recipe sceptra, me famulam accipe:
> te imperia regere, me decet iussa exequi,
> muliebre non est regna tutari urbium;
> tu qui iuventae flore primaevo viges
> cives paterno fortis imperio rege,
> sinu receptam supplicem ac servam tege.
> miserere viduae—
>
> Take the ruling scepter and receive me as a slave. It is right for you to rule and for me to follow commands. It is not right for a woman to protect the realms of cities. You, vigorous in the springtime of your youth, rule the citizens with the right of governance inherited from your father. But take me into your lap as a suppliant and protect me as a slave. Pity a widow, 617-23.

Since no one but Phaedra assumes Theseus is dead in Seneca, Hippolytus is horrified at his stepmother's suggestion and insists that his father will return safely ("My father will come home safe right away," *aderit sospes actutum parens,* 624). Phaedra proclaims again that he is

dead (625) and maligns her husband as a rapist (627). Hippolytus insists that Theseus' return will be granted by the just gods (*aequi caelites,* 629), but promises to protect her children and to look after her as Theseus would ("I will conduct myself honorably so that you will not think yourself widowed. I will fill my father's place as far as you are concerned," *et te merebor esse ne viduam putes / ac tibi parentis ipse supplebo locum,* 632-33). Racine's Phèdre adopts these tactics from her counterpart in Seneca, and like Phaedra, she initially meets with a kind reception: She too stresses that her husband is dead ("No one sees the banks of the dead twice," *On ne voit point deux fois le rivage des morts,* 2.5.646) and that she needs his protection (609-22). Since all of Troezen assume Thésée to be dead, not just Phèdre, Hippolyte responds with compassion, not horror (2.5.618), but like his counterpart in Seneca, he encourages her to hold out hopes that Thésée will return ("Perhaps your husband still looks upon the light," *Peut-être votre époux voit encore le jour,* 2.5.619) and suggests that the gods will keep him safe (2.5.621). Up until this point, there is a softness in the French scene not present in Seneca, a kindness facilitated by the fact that Hippolyte assumes that, like him, his stepmother is grieving the king's death.

In Seneca's play, Phaedra states quite plainly that she is in love (640-43). When Hippolytus somehow misunderstands the object of his stepmother's affection, she quibbles that she loves Theseus as a young man and suggests that Hippolytus is his father's youth incarnate: "Hippolytus, it is like this: I love the features of Theseus but not those he has now, rather the ones he possessed earlier when he was a boy," *Hippolyte. sic est: Thesei vultus amo / illos priores quos tulit quondam puer,* 646-47. She goes on to reimagine Hippolytus as the slayer of the minotaur ("If you had come with your father to the Cretan sea, my sister would have spun the thread for you instead," *si cum parente Creticum intrasses fretum. / tibi fila potius nostra nevisset soror,* 661-62). Like her Senecan counterpart, Phèdre compares Hippolyte's face to his father's:

> Que dis-je? Il n'est point mort, puisqu'il respire en vous.
> Toujours devant mes yeux je crois voir mon époux.
> Je le vois, je lui parle, et mon coeur... Je m'égare,
> Seigneur, ma folle ardeur malgré moi se déclare.

> What am I saying? He is not dead, since he breathes in you. I think I see my husband still before my eyes. I see him, I speak to him, and my heart…I forget myself. Sir, my mad passion declares itself despite me 2.5.623-30.

Whereas Seneca's Phaedra compares the faces of Hippolytus and Theseus to normalize her perverse love, Racine's Phèdre is actually confused. As in the scene with her nurse when her mind wanders to the forest, Phèdre marks her bout of madness with a *Que dis-je?*. Hippolyte is not offended by her hallucination. Again he sympathizes with father's widow, although his use of *prodigieux* is full of dramatic irony: "I see the effect of your wondrous / monstrous love. Thésée is present before your eyes even though he is dead," *Je vois de votre amour l'effet prodigieux. / Tout mort qu'il est, Thésée est présent à vos yeux,* 2.5.631-32. Phèdre is encouraged and launches into a fantastic revisioning of Thesée's trip to Crete, taking the reverie of Seneca's Phaedra one step further by imagining herself in Ariadne's place: "My sister would have armed your hand with the deadly thread. But no, in this version I would have come forward," *Ma soeur du fil fatal eût armé votre main. / Mais non, dans ce dessein je l'aurais devancée,* 2.5.652-53). Hippolyte is willing to attribute even this liberty to her extreme grief.

In Seneca, as soon as Hippolytus understands Phaedra's purpose, he curses womankind and threatens to kill her (704-9). In Racine, Hippolyte hears Phèdre's admission in silence. Phèdre finally expresses his outrage for him and proposes that he kill her, laying hands on the sword at his side herself: "Here is my heart. Hit me here, or lend me your sword should your arms fail you," *Voilà mon coeur. C'est là que ta main doit frapper…Au défaut de ton bras prête moi ton épée,* 2.5.704-10. With both Phaedras begging to be impaled by their swords, the two Hippolytuses flee the scene in horror. In Seneca's play, Phaedra decided to commit suicide directly after her confrontation with Hippolytus (854). Her "madness" is a result of her unsuccessful propositioning of Hippolytus. But Racine's heroine now returns to where she left off with Euripides' text, and like the Greek model, it is the return of her husband that turns her thoughts towards death.

When Oenone announces that Theseus has returned home. Phèdre berates her nurse and laments that she will die dishonored ("I have followed your advice and I die dishonored," *J'ai suivi tes conseils, je meurs déshonorée,* 3.3.838), recalling Euripides' Phaedra's attack on her nurse ("I will no longer die with an honorable name," τοιγὰρ οὐκέτ᾽ εὐκλεεῖς / Θανούμεθ᾽, 687). Phèdre activates an intertext with Phaedra's first long speech in

Euripides when she imagines the walls themselves speaking: "It seems to me that these walls, that the beams of the house are about to break out in speech, ready to accuse me," *Il me semble déjà que ces murs, que ces voûtes / Vont prendre la parole, et prêts à m'accuser,* 3.3.854. In Euripides, the vivid image of the house announcing the crime of adultery ("How do they not shudder at the darkness, their ally, lest the beams of the house let fly speech," οὐδὲ σκότον φρίσσουσι τὸν ξυνεργάτην / τέραμνά τ᾽ οἴκων μή ποτε φθογγὴν ἀφῇ, 417-18) is a prelude to her public commitment to death. With the threat of incrimination ringing in her ears, Phèdre resolves to die (*Mourons*, 3.3.857). Both heroines consider their children and the damage to a mother's stained reputation (424-25; 3.3.861-64) and both come to the conclusion that death is a more enviable fate than dishonor (426-27; 3.3.858-59). From this point on, Phèdre's reputation (*gloire; honeur*) becomes her primary concern. Although she takes a Senecan detour, so to speak, and flirts with the idea of actually consummating a relationship with Hippolyte in a way that Euripides' heroine never does, this Senecan boldness lasts only for as long as she thinks her husband is actually dead. When she learns that Thésée lives, she resolves to die and vests herself again in the morality of Euripides' heroine.

Racine's heroine is not guilty of Euripides' Phaedra's final crime, but she does consider it. Before hanging herself in Euripides' play, Phaedra inscribes a tablet which Theseus finds hanging around the neck of her corpse. He does not read the letter aloud, but its contents are clear enough from the violent reaction of the king: "It cries out, the tablet shouts terrible things! How will I flee the weight of evils? I am destroyed, I have been destroyed. Oh! Oh! I have seen in these words a curse crying out! Wretched me!," βοᾷ βοᾷ δέλτος ἄλαστα. πᾷ φύγω / βάρος κακῶν; ἀπὸ γὰρ ὀλόμενος οἴχομαι, / οἷον οἷον εἶδον γραφαῖς μέλος / φθεγγόμενον τλάμων, 876-80. In Racine, when Panope tells the king that his wife is deranged, she reveals that Phèdre is writing something down: "She has begun to write a letter three times, changed her mind, and three times she has torn it up," *Elle a trois fois écrit, et changeant de pensée / Trois fois elle a rompu sa lettre commence,* 5.5.1476-77). Like Euripides, Racine does not tell us what Phèdre was writing. She has written, I think, the same damning words as her Greek predecessor, but in the end the French heroine decides to destroy the letter. In this small detail, Racine reveals, perhaps, some of his own anxiety about staging a scene in which Phèdre would falsely accuse her beloved of rape. But, by having his

heroine be tempted by her Greek counterpart's crime, Racine demonstrates his awareness of Euripides' text and highlights the alterations he makes to it. His Phèdre, though strongly tempted by her predecessor's act, in the end refrains from actively carrying it out. After learning of Phèdre's mad letter writing, Thésée begins to doubt the reports of Hippolyte's guilt. At this point Théramène arrives to inform him that his son is dead and the play is brought to a close. But before turning to that final scene, let us consider the relationship between Hippolyte and the man who hymns his death.

Hippolyte: The Austere Virgin?

I began this chapter with a reference to the variant titles of Racine's play. The tragedy is most commonly referred to as *Phèdre*, the shortened form of the title first used in the 1687 edition. Ronald Tobin justifies the shortening of the title by stating that "the title change defines the true focus of Racine's tragedy." The abbreviated title, he thinks, highlights Racine's indebtedness to Seneca's play and his concentration on Phaedra to the exclusion of Hippolytus.[170] In what follows I aim to show that Racine is just as invested in Hippolytus as Euripides was before him and much more so than Seneca, whose Hippolytus is little more than a foil for his stepmother. At first glance, the opening scenes of Euripides and Racine appear to share little in common. Aphrodite's prologue in Euripides is followed by Hippolytus' lyric dedication to Artemis of a virginal garland (58-88). At the close of his prayer, he is confronted by an unnamed servant (Θεράπων) concerned about the unequal attention he is devoting to the statues of Artemis and Aphrodite that stand before the palace. Racine's play begins with Hippolyte announcing his decision to quit Troezen. His interlocutor is a certain Théramène, a character whose name is not associated with the Hippolytus myth before Racine. Racine does not name an ancient source for this character in his preface as he usually does when justifying the addition of a new character to a classical myth.[171] Théramène's easy familiarity and fatherly affection with the young Amazon suggests they share an intimate relationship. The man has known Hippolyte from birth (*Toi, qui connais mon coeur depuis que je respire*, 1.1.66) and has taught the boy to appreciate the great

[170] Tobin (1999) 124.

[171] Junie in *Britannicus*, Ériphile in *Iphigénie*, and Aricie in *Phèdre et Hippolyte* are all provided with ancient eponymous models in Racine's prefaces.

deeds of his frequently absent father (*Tu me contais alors l'histoire de mon père,* 1.1.74). We even learn at the end of the play that Thésée entrusted his son to Théramène at a young age (5.6.1489). In the first scene of the play, Théramène continues to mentor Hippolyte, encouraging him to relax his traditional austerity and bow to the will of *amour* (1.1.119-37). Although we do not learn much about the servant and his relationship with Hippolytus from the brief scene in Euripides, we can say for certain that, like Théramène, he is older than Hippolytus (114), of lower social status (88-89), and possesses a degree of familiarity with the young prince that allows him to speak his mind without fear. Note also the similarity of Théramène's name to the Greek word for servant (*therapon*), and the fact that Racine's Théramène shares no resemblance with historical or literary characters who bear the name Theramenes from the Greek tradition. Racine, I think, acknowledges and adapts the beginning of Euripides' first dialogue scene and fits it into his own play. Here is Euripides' dialogue:

Θεράπων: ἄναξ — θεοὺς γὰρ δεσπότας καλεῖν χρεών —
ἆρ᾽ ἄν τί μου δέξαιο βουλεύσαντος εὖ;
Ἱππόλυτος: καὶ κάρτα γ᾽: ἦ γὰρ οὐ σοφοὶ φαινοίμεθ᾽ ἄν.
Θεράπων: οἶσθ᾽ οὖν βροτοῖσιν ὃς καθέστηκεν νόμος;
Ἱππόλυτος: οὐκ οἶδα: τοῦ δὲ καί μ᾽ ἀνιστορεῖς πέρι;
Θεράπων: μισεῖν τὸ σεμνὸν καὶ τὸ μὴ πᾶσιν φίλον.
Ἱππόλυτος: ὀρθῶς γε: τίς δ᾽ οὐ σεμνὸς ἀχθεινὸς βροτῶν;
Θεράπων: ἐν δ᾽ εὐπροσηγόροισίν ἐστί τις χάρις;
Ἱππόλυτος: πλείστη γε, καὶ κέρδος γε σὺν μόχθῳ βραχεῖ.
Θεράπων: ἦ κἀν θεοῖσι ταὐτὸν ἐλπίζεις τόδε;
Ἱππόλυτος: εἴπερ γε θνητοὶ θεῶν νόμοισι χρώμεθα.
Θεράπων: πῶς οὖν σὺ σεμνὴν δαίμον᾽ οὐ προσεννέπεις;
Ἱππόλυτος: τίν᾽; εὐλαβοῦ δὲ μή τί σου σφαλῇ στόμα.
Θεράπων: τήνδ᾽, ἣ πύλαισι σαῖς ἐφέστηκεν πέλας.
Ἱππόλυτος: πρόσωθεν αὐτὴν ἁγνὸς ὢν ἀσπάζομαι.
Θεράπων: σεμνή γε μέντοι κἀπίσημος ἐν βροτοῖς.
Ἱππόλυτος: οὐδείς μ᾽ ἀρέσκει νυκτὶ θαυμαστὸς θεῶν.
Θεράπων: τιμαῖσιν, ὦ παῖ, δαιμόνων χρῆσθαι χρεών.
Ἱππόλυτος: ἄλλοισιν ἄλλος θεῶν τε κἀνθρώπων μέλει.
Θεράπων: εὐδαιμονοίης νοῦν ἔχων ὅσον σε δεῖ.

Servant: King, for it is best to reserve the term "masters" for the gods. Would you take a bit of good advice from me?
Hippolytus: Yes, certainly; or else I would not appear wise.
Servant: Do you know the law established by men?
Hippolytus: I don't know. What are you asking me about?
Servant: To hate arrogance and what is not friendly to all.
Hippolytus: Well said. Is it not the case that the arrogant man is hateful to mortals?
Servant: And is there a certain charm among the approachable?
Hippolytus: Much, surely. And gain with little effort.
Servant: Surely you expect the same thing among the gods?
Hippolytus: Yes, if we mortals use the laws of the gods.
Servant: Why, then, do you not pay your respects to an august goddess?
Hippolytus: Which one? Take care that your words don't trip.
Servant: This one here. The goddess that stands at the gates.
Hippolytus: I address her from afar, since I am chaste.
Servant: But she is holy and distinguished among mortals.
Hippolytus: None of the gods worshiped by night pleases me.
Servant: It is right to honor the gods.
Hippolytus: Men have their likes, in gods and men alike.[172]
Servant: May you have the sense you need and be well fortuned, 88-105.

The confrontation between Hippolytus and his servant in Euripides' play is an unconventional bit of dialogue, and there are scholarly disagreements both about the meaning of particular lines and the significance of the whole scene.[173] The stern character of Hippolytus who enjoys a personal relationship with Artemis is contrasted to an older slave who advises the young man to relax his pride and acknowledge Aphrodite. The slave's reasoning, however, is hard to follow. The servant uses the adjective σεμνός in both its negative ("haughty") sense when he subtly criticizes Hippolytus' arrogance (93) and its positive ("august") sense when he describes Aphrodite as a holy (σεμνή) deity, worthy of address (101). In addition to employing the polyvalent σεμνός in a confusing manner, the servant draws unclear distinctions and parallels between laws governing mortals and gods. Although a general lack of clarity undercuts the force of his words, his inclusive view of religion is bolstered by its similarity to Aphrodite's prologue. By calling attention to Hippolytus' arrogant disapproval of the goddess and her rites, the scene reinforces

[172] I have adopted Kovacs' succinct translation for this line.
[173] Kovacs (1980) 130-37 lays out the different opinions.

Aphrodite's primary complaint about the young prince: "he refuses sex and does not touch marriage," ἀναίνεται δὲ λέκτρα κοὐ ψαύει γάμων (14). Racine, I think, reads the scene more or less as Barrett and Mikalson suggest: Hippolytus' overweening pride is demonstrated by his arrogant refusal to bow before Aphrodite's statue, and his kind-hearted servant tries in vain to correct his impiety before it is too late.[174]

Théramène, when he realizes that Hippolyte is leaving Troezen to escape his love of Aricie, recalls the arrogance that pitted hero against goddess in Euripides' play:

> Pourriez-vous n'être plus ce superbe Hippolyte,
> Implacable ennemi des amoureuses lois,
> Et d'un joug que Thésée a subi tant de fois?
> Vénus par votre orgueil si longtemps méprisée,
> Voudrait-elle à la fin justifier Thésée?
> Et vous mettant au rang du reste des mortels,
> Vous a-t-elle forcé d'encenser ses autels?
> Aimeriez-vous, Seigneur?
>
> Could it be that you are no longer that haughty Hippolyte, implacable enemy of the laws of love and of the yoke to which Theseus submitted so many times? Could it be that Venus, so long disdained by your pride, wants to prove Thésée right at last? Has she finally placed you with the rest of mankind and forced you to worship her altars? Sir, are you in love?, 1.1.58-65.

Théramène's use of the deictic pronoun with Hippolytus' name (*ce superbe Hippolyte*) suggests an allusion to a literary work. The adjective *superbe* indicates that the work Racine has in mind is Euripides' *Hippolytus* in which Hippolytus' arrogance is his defining quality. When Théramène reminds his friend that he is the "implacable enemy of the laws of love," he refers to the cryptic laws that Euripides' servant mentions (98) and Hippolytus' abject refusal to heed them (88-95). Lines 61-64 recall Aphrodite's boasts that she destroys the arrogant (ὅσοι φρονοῦσιν εἰς ἡμᾶς μέγα, 6) and her intent to punish Hippolytus for his arrogant abstention from sex and marriage. Théramène's suggestion that Hippolyte is now brought down to the level of mortal by his newfound love (1.1.63) recalls the servant's insistent

[174] Barrett (1964) *ad. loc.* and Mikalson (1991) 144-47. See also Kovacs (1980) who argues that Euripides' Hippolytus is a semi-divine character whose strict devotion to Artemis alone is no sacrilege.

distinction between gods and mortals in Euripides' passage, but also hints that there is something divine about the young man, a point to which I will return. When Théramène asks Hippolyte whether Venus has finally compelled him to worship her (*Vous a-t-elle forcé d'encenser ses autels*), he alludes to the scene quoted above between Hippolytus and the Θεράπων, in which Hippolytus refuses to pay proper respect to Aphrodite's statue. The servant in Euripides' play tries in vain to convince Hippolytus not to neglect the goddess of love: "why, then, do you not address this venerable deity?"

For Euripides' Hippolytus, worshiping Aphrodite is tantamount to approving of her rites (*i.e.* sex). When Hippolyte tells Théramène he will leave Troezen rather than risk falling in love with Aricie, the older man advises Hippolyte to soften his stance towards Venus ("What brave souls have Venus not tamed?," *Quels courages Vénus n'a-t'elle point domptés?,* 123). Whereas Euripides juxtaposes Hippolytus, a chaste companion of Artemis, and the *therapon,* a (somewhat lowly) devotee of Aphrodite, Théramène compares Hippolyte's modesty to his father's promiscuity (1.1.62), foreshadowing the ease with which Thésée will accept Oenone's false accusation about his son. This contrast is avoided in Euripides, and Theseus' traditional womanizing is repressed by the characters of that play. Seneca, on the other hand, foregrounds Theseus' affairs.[175] His Phaedra complains about her husband's characteristic infidelity in her opening lines which serve both to introduce Theseus as a character and to justify her passion for Hippolytus: "Look how my husband is away, a fugitive from his home, and he shows his wife the fidelity Theseus is accustomed to show," *profugus en coniunx abest / praestatque nuptae quam solet Theseus fidem*, 91-92.[176] Racine also draws attention to Theseus' extramarital affairs, but not so much to excuse Phèdre's desire as to contrast the father's love of women with the son's aversion to them. He suggests a psychological explanation for Hippolyte's devotion to virginity: the extreme sexuality of his father has suffocated his interest in the opposite sex and made of him a rather late bloomer.

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[175] The depiction of Theseus as a womanizer seems to originate with Seneca. Although Ovid in his *Heroides* 4 has Phaedra bring up the fact that Theseus married two sisters (4.66), it is her husband's companionship with Pirithous that incenses her jealousy, not his affairs with other women: "Theseus, unless we deny reality, prefers Pirithous to Phaedra and to you," *Praeposuit Theseus — nisi si manifesta negamus — / Pirithoum Phaedrae Pirithoumque tibi,* 4.112-13.
[176] Phaedra alludes to the "fidelity" Theseus has shown his previous two wives: Ariadne and Hippolytus' mother.

In Euripides, after Hippolytus goes into the palace, the Θεράπων begs Aphrodite to show mercy:

> ἡμεῖς δέ, τοὺς νέους γὰρ οὐ μιμητέον
> φρονοῦντας οὕτως, ὡς πρέπει δούλοις λέγειν
> προσευξόμεσθα τοῖσι σοῖς ἀγάλμασιν,
> δέσποινα Κύπρι. χρὴ δὲ συγγνώμην ἔχειν:
> εἴ τίς σ᾽ ὑφ᾽ ἥβης σπλάγχνον ἔντονον φέρων
> μάταια βάζει, μὴ δόκει τούτων κλύειν.
> σοφωτέρους γὰρ χρὴ βροτῶν εἶναι θεούς.
>
> For my part I will pray to your statue, mistress Aphrodite, speaking in a way that befits slaves, for, the mindset of young men is not to be imitated. Grant pardon: and if because of his youth, he has a harsh heart and speaks nonsense, it is improper to listen. For gods should be wiser than men, 88-120.

The servant's prayer suggests to the audience that Aphrodite is within her right to attack Hippolytus. Nevertheless, the old man prays that she forgive his master's youth. His critique of harsh punishment for youthful crimes foreshadows the piteous death Hippolytus will suffer. In Racine, Théramène is shocked that Hippolyte is in love and indicates that they have previously disagreed about the youth's avowed chastity. He suggests that although Hippolyte is presently amorously inclined, he was, until just recently, the austere virgin Euripides describes. It is only now, at the beginning of Racine's tragedy, that Hippolyte's disdain for Venus has begun to fade. Racine's adaptation of Euripides' scene serves not only to position his play with regard to the Greek model but also to reduce Hippolyte's traditional culpability. When he discusses the popularity of the character Phaedra in his preface, Racine voices approval for the Aristotelian tragic hero who is neither morally corrupt nor flawless. He claims that his Phèdre has all the characteristics that Aristotle requires to evoke pity and fear.[177] And although Racine suggests that he has rendered Hippolyte *more* flawed by making him fall in love with an enemy of his father, he also reduces his character's traditional derision of Aphrodite by the same stroke. When Hippolyte dies at the end of the play, the

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[177] *Je ne suis point étonné que ce caractère ait eu un succès si heureux du temps d'Euripide, et qu'il ait encore si bien réussi dans notre siècle, puisqu'il a toutes les qualités qu'Aristote demande dans le héros de la tragédie, et qui sont propres à exciter la compassion et la terreur.*

injustice of his fate is all the more pronounced because we cannot attribute to him any sin that might warrant such harsh punishment. As he admits to Aricie, he is no longer the arrogant disdainer of love: "Even I, proudly dismissive of love for so long, submit now to the common law," *Moi, qui contre l'amour fièrement révolté…Asservi maintenant sous la commune loi,* 2.2.531-35.

The pathos of Théramène's personal account of his friend's violent death is heightened by our recollection of the first scene of the play in which Théramène jokes with Hippolyte about his burgeoning sexuality and warmly advises him to give Venus and her charms a chance. After watching Hippolyte die a brutal death at the hands of a monstrous bull conjured by his father, Théramène returns to the palace to find Thésée anxiously reconsidering his hasty decision to curse the boy: "Perhaps I believed false witnesses and raised my cruel hands against you too soon. Ah! My prayers will be answered to great distress!" *J'ai peut-être trop cru des témoins peu fidèles. / Et j'ai trop tôt vers toi levé mes mains cruelles. / Ah! de quel désespoir mes voeux seraient suivis!,* 5.5.1485-87. Thésée's anxiety has no model in the ancient plays, but the choral ode that prefaces the scene in Euripides serves the similar purpose of creating an atmosphere of doubt and uncertainty before the messenger announces Hippolytus' death. They sing "no longer is my mind at ease, but I see things that are beyond my expectation," οὐκέτι γὰρ καθαρὰν φρέν᾽ ἔχω, παρὰ δ᾽ ἐλπίδ᾽ ἃ λεύσσω, 1120. Far from evoking this kind of sympathy for Hippolytus before he dies, Seneca's choral ode that prefigures the messenger's speech expresses scornful indignation at Phaedra's lust.[178] In both Seneca and Euripides, the chorus leader announces the approach of the messenger in very similar terms, emphasizing the messenger's speed (*citato gradu*, 989; σπουδῇ, 1152) and sorrowful face (*lugubrem vultum,* 990; σκυθρωπὸν, 1152). Seneca does not, however, translate Euripides' genitive of possession (ὀπαδὸν Ἱππολύτου). The description of the messenger as Hippolytus' servant suggests that Euripides' chorus recognizes him from earlier in the play. It is likely, taking into account the economy of actors, that this messenger

[178] "Dire lust conquers the holy; falseness reigns in the high hall...Austere virtue carries away perverse rewards for doing right: evil poverty pursues the chaste and the adulterer reigns powerful in vice. O empty modesty and false virtue!," *vincit sanctos dira libido, / fraus sublimi regnat in aula… / tristis virtus perversa tulit praemia recti: /castos sequitur mala paupertas /vitioque potens regnat adulter: / o vane pudor falsumque decus!,* 981-2; 985-88.

and the *therapon* were played by the same actor. Hippolytus' servant is more engaged than most tragic messengers. He urges the king to see his dying son and sets the stage for Artemis' reconciliation: "If you take my advice, you will not be savage to your son in misfortune," ἐμοῖς δὲ χρώμενος βουλεύμασιν / οὐκ ὠμὸς ἐς σὸν παῖδα δυστυχοῦντ᾽ ἔσῃ, 1263-4. Racine understands the messenger and the therapon to be one and the same character. Inspired by the pathos of Euripides' messenger speech and the opening scene between Hippolytus and the servant, Racine expands their friendship to personalize the portrayal of Hippolyte and encourage the audience's participation in the communal grieving of his untimely end. This is the inspiration for Théramène.

Like Euripides' servant, Théramène encourages Thésée to consider Hippolyte's innocence (5.6.1494), paving the way for Thésée's full recognition of his tragic circumstances. Théramène's account of Hippolyte's death borrows details from the terrifying image of the half-bull half-serpent from Seneca, but relies on Euripides' account for the more intimate details. For example, Théramène characterizes the horses that kill him as fed by Hippolyte's own hands (*Traîné par les chevaux que sa main a nourris,* 1548), recalling the plea Hippolytus makes his horses in Euripides, "Stay, you who have been fed at my mangers," Στῆτ᾽, ὦ φάτναισι ταῖς ἐμαῖς τεθραμμέναι, 1240. Whereas Seneca's play ends in tragic aporia with Theseus begging hell to open up and accept him, the sympathetic messenger reports in Racine and Euripides help transition the characters on stage into a more reflective state. In Euripides, after Artemis has cleared his name, Hippolytus uses his dying breath to forgive his father and acquit him of murder. In Racine, it is Phèdre who spends her final moments of life clearing her beloved's name, taking on momentarily something of the grace and poise of the goddess she longed to emulate in her fits of madness. Thésée grants his son his dying wish to accept Aricie as a daughter. The king then begins a dirge for the prince: "Let us go and mix our tears with the blood of my ill-fated son," *Allons /Mêler nos pleurs au sang de mon malheureux fils*, 5.7.1647-48, recalling Euripides' chorus as they exit the stage hymning their grief and shedding tears for the prince: "An unforeseen pain has come to all the citizens in common; a flood of tears will come again and again," κοινὸν τόδ᾽ ἄχος πᾶσι πολίταις / ἦλθεν ἀέλπτως. / πολλῶν δακρύων ἔσται πίτυλος, 1462-64. Both Greek and French tragedies end on a melancholy note of loss.

Conclusion: Phaedra and Hippolytus: Matching Crimes?

In Euripides, Phaedra and Hippolytus share the stage and the tragedy, but Seneca focuses on Phaedra and her perverse passions to the exclusion of Hippolytus. In Seneca's portrayal, Hippolytus and Phaedra share very little in common, an incompatibility highlighted in the confrontation scene in which communication practically breaks down because the two cannot understand one another (585-715).In contrast, Euripides highlights the similar personalities of Hippolytus and Phaedra. They are both foreigners (Phaedra is from Crete and Hippolytus' mother was an Amazon);[179] they are young members of Theseus' household ardently attracted to the outdoors and the "virgin" purity of nature (73-87; 208-11); and, most importantly, they both subscribe to a strict morality that completely forbids extramarital affairs. Euripides' Phaedra understands all too well Hippolytus' outrage: the crime provokes in her the same horror. Their misogynistic comments about the promiscuous wife complement one another. But in one salient way they are very different: Hippolytus hates love, and Phaedra, much to her chagrin, has fallen in love. Why, a reader of the Greek play might ask, does the goddess not use her incredible power to make Hippolytus himself fall in love and spare the innocent Phaedra? Racine expands these similarities to include this last one. By depicting Hippolyte as in love with Aricie, an enemy of his father, Racine alters Venus's traditional punishment to one he considers more fair: instead of causing Phaedra alone to fall in love, he has Venus attack Phèdre and Hippolyte alike.

Phèdre and Hippolyte both risk insulting Thésée with their choice of lover: Phèdre because she is his wife and Hippolyte because Aricie is of the family of the Pallatides, his political rivals. Racine traces the origins of their passions back to Thésée: His dictum against loving Aracie makes her more desirable, and his constant absence and infidelity permits his wife's affection to wander to another man who shares her husband's face. Finally, they both have the same response to falling in love: they both try to escape the place where the object of love is. Phèdre exiled Hippolyte to Troezen when she first fell in love with him (1.3.295) and Hippolyte is leaving Troezen to escape Aricie when he learns of his father's death.

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[179] A man had to descend from both an Athenian mother and father to be granted citizenship.

Aricie, like so many of Racine's "additional" characters, has an ancient pedigree: she is part of the Hippolytus story in the Italian version of the myth.[180] Vergil tells of a son of Aricia and Hippolytus who joined the Latins in war: "And the most beautiful offspring of Hippolytus went to the war, distinguished Virbius, whom his mother Aricia sent," *Ibat et Hippolyti proles pulcherrima bello, / Virbius, insignem quem mater Aricia misit, Aen.* 7.761-62. Servius concludes that Aricia refers to the name of the town, not a mythological wife of Hippolytus. Racine, however, reasonably reads *mater Aricia* to mean that Aricia was a woman who bore a child (Virbius) to Hippolytus, suggesting that the cursed prince made it out of Troezen after all. In addition to providing him with ancient "permission" to give Hippolyte a girlfriend, the Vergilian intertext hints at an alternative ending to Racine's tragedy: Hippolyte and Aricie survive and live happily ever after in Italy where they found together the town that will eventually produce the mother of emperor Augustus.[181] We are reminded, perhaps, of Racine's portrayal of Astyanax as surviving the Trojan war in order that he might father French kings.[182]

Although the play ends with Thésée and his household mourning the death of the young prince, there are passages earlier in the play that nod to this alternative ending. In addition to Hippolyte's rather remarkable insistence that the gods will protect him from his father (5.1.1351-52),[183] Phèdre recalls mistaking him for a god when she was trying to worship Venus:

> Quand ma bouche implorait le nom de la déesse,
> J'adorais Hippolyte, et le voyant sans cesse,
> Même au pied des autels que je faisais fumer,
> J'offrais tout à ce dieu, que je n'osais nommer.
>
> Whenever my mouth was calling out the name of the goddess, I was loving Hippolytus, seeing him before me constantly. Even at the feet of the altars where I

[180] *Cette Aricie n'est point un personnage de mon invention. Virgile dit qu'Hippolyte l'épousa, et en eut un fils, après qu'Esculape l'eut ressuscité. Et j'ai lu encore dans quelques auteurs qu'Hippolyte avait épousé et emmené en Italie une jeune Athénienne de grande naissance, qui s'appelait Aricie, et qui avait donné son nom à une petite ville d'Italie.*

[181] Servius tells us that Aricia was the hometown of Octavian's mother, Atia.

[182] See my discussion in the *Andromaque* chapter 25-26.

[183] We might rather expect him to claim he would prefer death to dishonor, etc.

> was sacrificing, I was offering everything to the god that I dared not name, 1.3.285-88.

In this passage Phèdre prays to Hippolyte as a god and hints at his future divination. We recall that Phèdre is alluding here to a shrine on the acropolis at which young Athenian girls would dedicate locks of their hair to the deity. At the end of Euripides' play, Artemis descends to Troezen to establish the cult of Hippolytus: "In exchange for these misfortunes, I will give you the greatest honors in the city of Troezen. Unmarried girls will cut their hair for you and you will harvest the great sadness of their tears," 1423-27.[184] While Racine leaves the details of this cultic ritual out of his narrative, he incorporates into his final scene other aspects of Artemis' final speech.

When Phèdre comes on stage for the last time, she has already ingested the poison that will kill her. She channels the sentiments of Euripides' Artemis who, after establishing the parameters of Hippolytus' cult, clears from blame both the son and wife of Theseus. She assumes a regal, authoritative tone befitting her divine model as she addresses her husband:

Les moments me sont chers, écoutez-moi, Thésée.
C'est moi qui sur ce fils chaste et respectueux
Osai jeter un oeil profane, incestueux.
Le ciel mit dans mon sein une flamme funeste.
La détestable Oenone a conduit tout le reste.
Elle a craint qu'Hippolyte instruit de ma fureur
Ne découvrît un feu qui lui faisait horreur.
La perfide abusant de ma faiblesse extrême.
S'est hâtée à vos yeux de l'accuser lui-même.

These moments are dear, hear me, Thésée. It was I who dared to cast a profane and incestuous eye on your chaste and respectful son. Heaven sent into my breast a fatal flame. The hated Oenone accomplished the rest. She feared Hippolytus would reveal the fire that

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[184] σοὶ δ', ὦ ταλαίπωρ', ἀντὶ τῶνδε τῶν κακῶν
τιμὰς μεγίστας ἐν πόλει Τροζηνίᾳ
δώσω: κόραι γὰρ ἄζυγες γάμων πάρος
κόμας κεροῦνταί σοι, δι' αἰῶνος μακροῦ
πένθη μέγιστα δακρύων καρπουμένῳ.

horrified him, once he knew of my madness. Although she had sworn, she took advantage of my extreme weakness and rushed to you to accuse him, 1622-30.

Phèdre's speech is direct and to the point. Her mind is no longer ruled by *un désordre éternel* as she calmly insists upon the truth. Just as earlier Phèdre channels the voice of Euripides' Aphrodite, now she focalizes Artemis' perspective. The details of her account match Artemis' explanation to Theseus in Euripides' play:

ἀλλ᾽ ἐς τόδ᾽ ἦλθον, παιδὸς ἐκδεῖξαι φρένα
τοῦ σοῦ δικαίαν, ὡς ὑπ᾽ εὐκλείας θάνῃ,
καὶ σῆς γυναικὸς οἶστρον ἢ τρόπον τινὰ
γενναιότητα: τῆς γὰρ ἐχθίστης θεῶν
ἡμῖν ὅσοισι παρθένειος ἡδονὴ
δηχθεῖσα κέντροις παιδὸς ἠράσθη σέθεν.
γνώμῃ δὲ νικᾶν τὴν Κύπριν πειρωμένη
τροφοῦ διώλετ᾽ οὐχ ἑκοῦσα μηχαναῖς,
ἢ σῷ δι᾽ ὅρκων παιδὶ σημαίνει νόσον.

But I have come for this, to reveal your son's heart as just so that he dies with a good name and to reveal the madness of your wife, or her certain kind of nobility. For she fell in love with your son because she was stung by the goads of the one of the divinities most hateful to me since I take pleasure in virginity. And while she attempted to conquer Cypris with her will, she was destroyed against her will by the contrivances of her nurse who revealed to your son her sickness, even though she had sworn, 1298-1306.

Both Phèdre and Artemis attest first and foremost to Hippolytus' blamelessness (*ce fils chaste et respectueux;* φρένα / τοῦ σοῦ δικαίαν). They both then insist on clearing Phaedra's name, for, she did her best to resist a powerful divinity (*Le ciel mit dans mon sein une flamme funeste;* τῆς γὰρ ἐχθίστης θεῶν / ἡμῖν ὅσοισι παρθένειος ἡδονὴ /δηχθεῖσα κέντροις). Then the nurse and the false oath she swore (*la perfide;* δι᾽ ὅρκων) is blamed for the whole tragedy. Had she only kept her promise, Hippolytus' untimely death would have been averted. The effect of having Phèdre transmit Artemis' divine sentiments onto the French play is powerful: Phèdre's divinely inspired words bring a sense of closure to the play and suggests a way forward for Thésée, who has just lost his son and wife. Racine invests his Phèdre with the

same kind of nobility (τρόπον τινὰ / Γενναιότητα) as Euripides does his heroine, a kind of dignity wholly lacking in the conclusion of Seneca's play.

Chapter Five:
Jean Racine Reads the Ancients: A Conclusion

nos quoque has apes debemus imitari et quaecumque ex diversa lectione congessimus, separare…deinde adhibita ingenii nostri cura et facultate in unum saporem varia illa libamenta confundere, ut etiam si apparuerit, unde sumptum sit, aliud tamen esse quam unde sumptum est, appareat.

We too ought to imitate these bees and separate what we have gathered from our reading of different sorts of things…and then, we ought to mix those different ingredients with the application of our natural ability together into a single flavor in such a way that our mixture is clearly shown to be different from its source, even if that source is apparent.

-Seneca, *Letter to Lucilius 84*

My study of *Andromaque*, *Britannicus*, and *Phèdre et Hippolyte* demonstrates something of the depth of Racine's engagement with his ancient models and traces how his intertextual approach evolves as his fascination with Senecan aporia in the early plays cedes space to the kind of closure and divinely inspired reconciliation associated with Greek tragedy. I do not mean, of course, to imply that he was not reading Greek texts closely at the beginning of his career. On the contrary, allusions to Homer and Euripides are, as we have seen, far from rare in *Andromaque*. A close study of Seneca's *Troades* in light of these Greek versions of Andromache's mythology suggested to Racine how certain details in Seneca could be reimagined. In my chapter on *Andromaque*, I show how Racine takes pains to carve out a space for his own version of the myth within the parameters delineated by Seneca and Euripides. My boldest conclusion concerns the reception of the play's eponymous heroine. Although the ending of Racine's play is usually heralded as a triumph for Andromaque, who has succeeded in remaining faithful to her late husband in body, I argue that this reading oversimplifies the mental state of a perennial victim of war trauma who has been made to witness a second husband die violently before her eyes. The chaotic aftermath of Pyrrhus' death paired with Andromaque's final speech demonstrate that the Trojan captive has been compelled against her will to reexperience the nightmare of the fall of Troy. She looks on helplessly as her enemies publicly slay her bridegroom and the city of Epirus goes up in flames around her. Unable to escape her tragic destiny, she becomes, I argue, the mourning widow of a second slain hero. The end of the play grants Andromaque no end to her grief. In Racine's Vergilian coda to the play, we find Andromache, who has been wedded to yet a third heroic husband, bitterly lamenting her lot and jealously recalling Polyxena's macabre

fate. By bringing together the different episodes of her story and producing a tragedy that is bookended by different ancient treatments of Andromache's traditional misery, Racine has constructed a labyrinthine nightmare for his heroine that defies her every attempt at escape.

Racine's early conception of tragedy, as evidenced by both *Andromaque* and *Britannicus*, is very much indebted to the dark worldview espoused by imperial Roman authors. The pessimism of Seneca and Tacitus looms large in these plays. Like *Andromaque*, the end of *Britannicus* leaves us with an eerie feeling that the tragedy we have just witnessed is but one representation of a single day in a long chronicle of horror-filled episodes. By pointing to passages from ancient texts that lie outside of the temporal constructs of his play, he imbues his characters with a chilling sense of *déjà vu* and creates a sensation of reliving again and again the same tragedy. At the climax of *Britannicus*, Agrippine calls down curses upon her murderous son, suggesting that Neron will not escape his domineering mother even by killing her (*Britannicus* 5.6). Agrippine foretells the series of murders Nero will commit in the wake of her death and even claims responsibility for them by indicating that her furies will spur on his unquenchable desire for blood after she dies. After Nero kills his mother in Tacitus, her memory continues to haunt the emperor long after her burial. Tacitus describes the cacophonous wailing that arises from Agrippina's grave site and suggests that we trace the emperor's uneasiness to his mother's disquieting fury that not even death can calm (*Annales* 14.10). That crime of matricide defines the last of the Julio-Claudians and his other atrocities pale beside it. Though *Britannicus* does not tell the tale of Agrippina's death, the fraught relationship between mother and son underlies the entire play, and, as both Racine and Tacitus suggest, Nero's subsequent crimes as well.

In his preface to *Andromaque*, Racine cites a short passage from Vergil (*Aen.* 3.292-309) and claims that within those lines lie the entirety of his tragedy. This statement is, of course, misleading. But, in describing his compositional practice in these terms, Racine suggests an affinity between his poetics and those of Pierre Corneille, who would include in his paratextual materials short passages from Latin literature that inspired his plays. And these texts that Corneille cites (e.g. the sketch of the conflict between the Horatii and the Curiacii in Livy 1 or the brief mention of a certain Cinnan conspiracy under Augustus in Seneca and Suetonius) are passages that seem to call out for embellishment. By quoting the passage from Vergil, Racine suggests that, like his older contemporary, he began writing

Andromaque with a short passage from Roman literature in mind and filled in the characters and details with his own imagination as he saw fit. But as we have seen, Racine's characters are not self-contained within the confines of his play, not even in his earliest compositions. His characters are, on the contrary, very much aware of their counterparts in the texts of Seneca, Euripides, and Homer, and they take on new life and depth when examined in close proximity to their ancient models. In the preface to *Britannicus* Racine dispenses with the programmatic fiction he suggests in *Andromaque*, boasting instead that every detail of his play derived from Tacitus alone. If Corneille begins his composition with a few sentences from Livy, Suetonius, or Seneca and expands that thin passage into an entire play, Racine begins with a large collection of stories about Andromache's experiences as a victim of war or a detailed historical account of Nero's family dynamics and collapses these episodes into the tight temporal frame of his play. This technique allows him to include references to events that precede his plot and allusions to events that will follow it, all the while restricting his play to the confines of a single day.

French tragedy before Racine was not accustomed to depicting the pagan gods on stage, and so it is no surprise to find the Olympians conspicuously absent both in body and in word in *Andromaque* and *Britannicus*. But for these two stories at least, there are ancient precedents for eliminating divine presence. No gods grace the pages of Tacitus' histories; it is, rather, human depravity that drives that historical narrative. Likewise, in Euripides' *Troades*, Athena and Poseidon appear in the prologue of the play only to inform the audience of their decision to desert the earth, disgusted as they are at the sacrilege the sack of Troy has occasioned (*Tr.* 1-97).[185] But as we have seen, Apollo does generally play a role in the story of Pyrrhus's death in the ancient accounts. And, whereas Racine suppresses Apollo's traditional involvement in Pyrrhus' death in *Andromaque*, he highlights Venus' role in Phèdre's demise in *Phèdre et Hippolyte*. In having his characters pronounce so frequently the name of Venus, and in using the construct of Venus' ire to reduce Phèdre's culpability, Racine reinvests the Greek pantheon with some of its ancient authority.

The religious undertones of *Phèdre et Hippolyte*, suggestive as they are of a divine afterlife for Hippolytus even after his horrible death has been recounted, go far to infuse the

[185] Aeneas, in his description of the gods' utter contempt for Troy provides an additional source for the idea that the gods have abandoned Troy and the Trojans (*Aen.* 2.588-623).

play with a sense of the Longinian sublime. The final scenes of *Andromaque* and *Britannicus* leave us with a sense that nothing has changed, that nothing has been learned. Andromaque is left grieving another hero and Néron is left fixated on a future murder. But Phèdre, even as she is about to die, is altogether changed, and for the better. She has openly confessed her crime. Gone are her petty jealousies and her carnal desires. In their place rests a calm acceptance of the terrible effects of madness and love. The play ends on a note of raw simplicity. This is a different kind of tragedy whose new attraction to the sublime will pave the way for Racine's final masterpiece, *Athalie* (1691).

Greek and Roman antiquity, more than glossing Jean Racine's poetic *oeuvre* with a veneer of authority, provided him with a series of dynamic models against which he could test and measure the ideas of his time. During the relatively oppressive monoculture of Louis XIV's Paris, the liberty to examine freely these stimulating approaches from antiquity provided Racine with the intellectual space to explore provocative subject matter without fear of religious censorship. His study of the way Greek and Roman dramatists, poets, historians, and philosophers reworked stories from myth and history to suit their particular literary program shaped his approach to his immediate and ancient predecessors and delivered him from the fate of literary provincialism. Through the translation and creative imitation of ancient texts, especially Greek ones, Racine and his allies (e.g. Boileau and Longepierre) aimed to involve the public in the exploration of new and provocative ways of approaching political, romantic, and psychological themes. The quarrel between *les anciens* and *les moderns* was not merely an academic argument, at least not at this early date. It was a popular affair, whose grand questions about the place of literature in society and the psychological nature of man were vigorously debated in cafes and salons, and Racine's plays were at the very center of these debates.

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