

# AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF GENDER AND DEATH IN CORNEILLE'S TRAGEDIES

by

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(Under the Direction of Francis Assaf)

## ABSTRACT

This study presents an analysis of the relationship between gender and death in Corneille's tragedies. He uses death to show spectators gender-specific types of behavior to either imitate or reject according to the patriarchal code of ethics. A character who does not conform to his or her gender role as dictated by seventeenth-century society will ultimately be killed, be forced to commit suicide or cause the death of others. Likewise, when murderous tyrants refrain from killing, they are transformed into legitimate rulers. Corneille's representation of the dominance of masculine values does not vary greatly from that of his contemporaries or his predecessors. However, unlike the other dramatists, he portrays women in much stronger roles than they usually do and generally places much more emphasis on the impact of politics on the decisions that his heroes and heroines must make. He is also innovative in his use of conflict between politics, love, family obligations, personal desires, and even loyalty to Christian duty. Characters must decide how they are to prioritize these values, and their choices should reflect their conformity to their gender role and, for men, their political position, and for females, their marital status. While men and women should both prioritize Christian duty above all else, since only men were in control of politics and the defense of the state, they should value civic duty before filial duty, and both of these before love. Since women have

no legal right to political power, they are expected to value domestic interests above political ones. Women who are married should be devoted to their husbands before their own parents, and loyalty to the State follows. Unmarried women must prioritize familial duty before romantic love, and this often means that they will have to sacrifice love for their father's political interests. Therefore, their personal interests come last.

INDEX WORDS: Pierre Corneille, Anthropology and literature, Tragedy, Seventeenth-century literature, Gender and death, Death in tragedy, Representation of death, Masculine and feminine ethics, Gender and patriarchal society, Politics and death, Vengeance and death, Representation of the king, Masculine and feminine ambition, Love and death in tragedy, Christian tragedy, Mythological plays, Sociology and literature, Greek and Roman tragedy, Sixteenth-century tragedy

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Dr. Francis Assaf and to Gene Clampitt, my husband.

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## INTRODUCTION

This study presents an analysis of the relationship between gender and death in Pierre Corneille's tragedies. I will demonstrate how he uses death to provide his spectators with models of behavior to either imitate or reject according to the patriarchal code of ethics. Through these models, Corneille illustrates the existence of not one universal system of values that all men and women should adhere to, but two distinct value systems that are gender specific. Both males and females are put in situations where they are forced to choose between two ideals that they value, including civic duty, love, family obligations, personal desires, and loyalty to God. Nevertheless, they must decide how to prioritize their values, and their choices should reflect their conformity to their gender role. An individual whose value system does not coincide with that prescribed by seventeenth-century society for his or her gender is generally killed or forced to commit suicide, or even provokes the death of others.

I have chosen this topic as a continuation of my thesis, *La mort chrétienne dans la tragédie du dix-septième siècle* as it also dealt with the subject of death in seventeenth-century tragedy. Also, two of the three plays that I had used in it, *Polyeucte* and *Théodore*, were by Corneille, whom I greatly admire. When studying Corneille, however, one must be aware of the tremendous quantity of research that has already been done on his tragedies, since he is one of the seventeenth century's best-known playwrights. I wanted to perform an original study of his work and not simply repeat what other scholars have already said; therefore, I chose to examine the relationship between gender and death in his tragedies to discern gender-specific behavioral

patterns that impact his representation of tragic death. While scholars have studied both death and gender in Corneille's plays, most tend to treat each of these themes separately, with Mitchell Greenberg's *Corneille, Classicism and the Ruses of Symmetry* being perhaps the only other work which examines the relationship between the two in great detail. And although Greenberg's book is very insightful, it does not treat death and gender in all of Corneille's tragedies, and Greenberg does not use his findings to draw conclusions concerning seventeenth-century social and political protocol for women and men.

In order to draw accurate conclusions concerning Corneille's treatment of masculine and feminine death, it is necessary to examine the relationship between death and gender in all of his tragedies. I will discuss not only the different ways in which males and females die, but also the reasons why they die, the consequences of masculine and feminine death within each tragedy, and the effects that male and female death have on the spectator. However, because Corneille shows certain characters' deaths as more relevant to the principal drama of his plays than others, such as Polyeucte's death compared to Néarque's, I will analyze them in greater detail. In addition, I will also discuss specific situations in which the *lack* of death, which I am referring to as *non-death*, is significant. Some of Corneille's tragedies, such as *Cinna*, suggest that death is inevitable, yet a change in events causes it not to occur. It is important to uncover the reasons why the author chooses to save characters' lives when their death was imminent, especially since the turn of events also reverses the tone that had been set throughout the beginning of the play. Similarly, in *Sophonisbe*, Corneille places characters in a situation in which it would be more honorable for them to commit suicide rather than to continue to live and be dishonored. Because *Sophonisbe*'s Syphax and Massinisse are criticized for not committing suicide, their

non-death merits discussion as well. Finally, in *Théodore*, the heroine wants to be martyred, but she is made to suffer by being denied death.

Because all of the material in the first three chapters is intended to provide the reader with a background for my study and does not deal specifically with Cornelian tragedy, I have divided my dissertation into two separate parts. Part I: Anthropology, Gender and Death in Non-Cornelian Literature, and Part II: Gender and Death in Corneille's Tragedies. Each part is then subdivided into chapters according to its subject.

Because literary anthropology is a fairly recent development, I have devoted chapter 1, The Significance of Anthropological and Sociological Studies of the Literature of the Seventeenth Century, to explaining its history and objectives, and to demonstrating how scholars have used it to show how literature portrays the social and political trends of the seventeenth century. By discussing the literature of this period, I intend to illustrate how it reflects the values of the time during which it was written. Scholars have demonstrated through sociological and anthropological studies that seventeenth-century literature was written for the upper class and illustrated its values and that writers wrote for a limited public and were not overtly critical of their society. Modern readers, therefore, must be aware of the subtlety in the style of seventeenth-century authors who were writing for the upper classes.

Even though one can gain a clear understanding of the relationship between death and gender in Cornelian tragedy by analyzing his works alone, without knowing whether his portrayal of gender and death is similar to or differs from that of his predecessors and his contemporaries, this study would remain incomplete. Chapter 2, therefore, examines death and gender in pre-Cornelian tragedy, while chapter 3 addresses the question of death and gender in non-Cornelian tragedy. Chapter 2 gives a brief overview of the relationship between gender and

death in pre-Cornelian tragedy, concentrating on ancient Greek and Roman tragedy as well as that of the French Renaissance. Since most seventeenth-century dramatists were inspired by the tragedy of antiquity, an analysis of Greek and Roman tragedy not only shows the historical background for later tragedy but also provides a basis for comparison between the portrayal of death and gender in seventeenth-century tragedy and that of its origins. I have particularly chosen to study tragedies that were often reproduced by later authors, such as Euripides's and Seneca's versions of *Medea*. Yet I will also discuss Euripide's play *Alcestis*, not because of its popularity, but because of its explicit depiction of gender roles and duty in Ancient Greece through its portrayal of death. My discussion of sixteenth-century theater shows how Renaissance authors reflected society's moral and esthetic values through their illustration of masculine and feminine death prior to Corneille's arrival on the stage. Likewise, it allows the reader to see how tragedy of different periods reflects society's changing values. For this study, and for the plays I will examine in chapter 3, therefore, I will discuss works from popular playwrights in order to give a realistic impression of the kinds of plays and the values that would have been presented on the sixteenth-century stage.

Chapter 3, Death and Gender in Non-Cornelian Tragedies of the Baroque Period, illustrates the relationship between death and gender in tragedies written by Cornielle's contemporaries. Although Corneille is often associated with Racine, who wrote during the latter part of the seventeenth century, or the classical period, the former wrote the majority of his tragedies, especially his masterpieces such as *Le Cid* (1637) and *Horace* (1641), during the baroque period. Even though Corneille wrote his last tragedy, *Suréna*, as late as 1674, since he was at the height of his popularity during the first half of the century, he truly was a baroque playwright. In order to establish a basic standard for the ways in which other baroque authors

portray the relationship between gender and death, this chapter will present a brief study of a representative sample of tragedies written by well-known seventeenth-century authors, including Mairêt, Théophile de Viau, and Tristan l'Hermite. This chapter, therefore, will provide a basis for comparison of the representation of death and gender in his works and in those of his contemporaries. This is particularly useful since Corneille has repeatedly been referred to as a feminist for his time and was even criticized by many of his contemporaries because of his strong female characters, including Sophonisbe, *Cinna's* Emilie and *Horace's* Camille, to name a few (Schmidt 14-15; Lasserre 178).

For the sake of thematic discussion, I have separated divided Part II into four chapters based solely on the primary motivation for killing or dying: Politics, Feminine Ambition and Vengeance, Love, and Christian and Mythological Plays. Although normally Corneille's primary political plays are thought to be *Cinna*, *Le Cid*, *Horace*, and *Polyeucte*, commonly referred to as the Tetralogy, since I am basing my treatment of his plays on the principal reason for which the hero(ine) attempts or threatens to kill, kills, or dies, the only one of these particular plays which shows death and killing as the result of nothing other than politics is *Horace*. This division of the dissertation allows for the discussion not only of the main characters but the minor ones as well and allows the reader to look at death of any one character or in any one play from a variety of perspectives.

Death in one play may be discussed in more than one chapter because each chapter has a central focus that is very different from the others. Since both themes of love and politics are present in all of Corneille's tragedies, for example, it is not possible to analyze one aspect without some mention of the other, yet I must treat the two themes separately since love and politics are separate and distinct sources of motivation for killing, dying, or even committing

suicide. In *Horace* (1641), the hero kills his sister's fiancé because Rome asks him to fight against him, and when she denounces Rome, he kills her as well. Since Horace only kills for political reasons, I discuss this play in chapter 4: Politics. Also, because *Horace* contains the only example of a male who kills a female in all of Cornelian tragedy, most of this chapter is devoted to it. Nevertheless, other tragedies that I will discuss in this chapter are *Sophonisbe* (1663), in which a female commits suicide out of patriotism, even though women cannot hold political power, *Attila* (1668), in which the king's brutal politics cause him to kill to see himself dominate others, and *Othon* (1665) and *La Mort de Pompée* (1644), in which kings kill out of fear of losing their political power.

Whereas chapter 4 deals primarily with masculine politics, chapter 5, Feminine Ambition and Vengeance, presents females who are willing to use deadly force to gain or maintain political power and those who wish to kill someone to avenge themselves of a wrongdoing. Although *Nicomède's* Arisnoé (1651) does not desire to hold power directly, she is ambitious for her son so that she can control him, and wants to have her stepson killed so that he can be crowned. *Rodogune's* Cléopâtre (1647), however, does not wish to give up her throne and tries to kill her sons and the future queen in order to do so. In the other plays discussed in this chapter, *Cinna* (1643) and *Héraclius* (1647), a female wants to use one male to kill another in order to avenge herself. Interestingly, though, only one of these women actually succeeds in killing anyone.

Chapter 6, Love, uses death and gender to show that excessive love is dangerous and that love and the masculine ethic do not coexist well. As mentioned earlier, Corneille always combines both love and politics in his plays, usually forcing his heroes and heroines to choose between the two. Corneille's tragedies generally show that men who choose loyalty to love over political duty, such as Sertorius (1662) and Suréna (1675) will suffer and even die because of

their decision. Even in *Pertharite* (1653), although the main character does not die because he prioritizes love over patriotism and even recuperates his throne, he comes across as a very unheroic male. The most interesting character in this play is Rodelinde, the queen, who is willing to kill her own children to ruin the usurper's good reputation, mainly out of love and devotion to her husband's memory. While most of the characters in the aforementioned plays suffer only because they have misplaced priorities, with the exception of Rodelinde, in *Sertorius*, *Suréna* and *Clitandre ou l'innocence délivrée* (1631), characters commit or try to commit murder because of jealousy provoked by overzealous love that is unrequited. Their slavery to love, therefore, causes them to engage in destructive behavior as well. Corneille's only tragedy illustrating the conflict between love and duty in which love does not interfere with a male's ability to be heroic is *Le Cid* (1637). The hero chooses duty over love and kills his fiancé's father to protect his family honor, and because he prioritizes his values correctly, he will be victorious in both love and battle.

The final chapter, Christian and Mythological Plays, covers the remainder of Corneille's tragedies and shows how the divine influences the ways in which heroes and heroines view death. While each of the plays discussed in this chapter contains a central theme presented in a previous chapter, the significance of the divine in them requires that they be dealt with separately. Even though it seems that the least distinction that Corneille makes between male and female death is in his two Christian tragedies, *Polyeucte* (1643) and *Théodore* (1646), gender does play an important part in them because feminine desirability causes an obstacle to both Polyeucte and Théodore's salvation through martyrdom. In *Polyeucte*, the hero is tempted by his wife to choose human love over divine love, and in *Théodore*, the heroine is temporarily denied her martyrdom and is made to suffer by being prostituted, primarily because she is the object of a

male's love. In both of these plays, God's grace helps Christians to overcome the obstacle to their salvation and to welcome death, making the divine a principle reason why their martyrdoms do not inspire the spectators to pity them. Corneille's treatment of the divine in his mythological tragedies differs from that of his Christian tragedies in that he uses it to illustrate the need for both men and women to exercise free will. *Œdipe* (1659) and *Andromède* (1651) show males who dare to brave the gods by rebelling against their demands for a human sacrifice, which makes them admirable. Nevertheless, both also portray men whose lack of courage before the gods and the threat of death renders them ignoble, especially since they are accompanied by strong, courageous women who are willing to face death for the good of the State. Corneille's other mythological tragedy, *Médée* (1639), still uses divinity to show that one must choose one's own destiny, but in a much different fashion. In it, Corneille portrays a goddess who had given up her divine self for love of a human. Once he betrays her, she decides to kill their children in order to free herself from her earthly ties and regain her divine nature. Thus, she chooses self-determination by rejecting motherhood.

Finally, the conclusion presents a synthetic view of the relationship between gender and death in Cornelian tragedy and presents gender-specific behavioral patterns that impact his representation of tragic death. His representation of male and female death provides positive and negative models of conduct for both sexes and shows the existence of separate value systems for males and females of the seventeenth century. He most often illustrates each by showing death as a negative outcome from misplaced priorities. Also, the conclusion gives a comparison of Corneille's portrayal of the relationship between gender and death to that of his contemporaries and his predecessors. While all of the dramatists discussed show differences in masculine and feminine death, Corneille shows the differences as being a result of conformity or non-

conformity to the patriarchal code. He, therefore, uses death to try to teach his spectators correct values for their gender. Contrarily, other baroque dramatists use death, especially feminine death, with the principal goal of evoking terror and pity, although it was frequently used to give a negative image of males who cannot control their physical desires. Ancient Greek tragedy also differs from Cornelian tragedy in that it most often uses death to illustrate positive values of females who sacrifice their lives for masculine values. It does, however, contain plays such as Euripides's *Medea* that show females who perform despicable acts, but, like Corneille, ancient Greek dramatists often sympathize with females who are victimized by masculine society. Sixteenth-century French dramatists, however, wished to evoke strong emotions and therefore portrayed women who were completely heinous and tyrants who were exceedingly cruel in order to show the danger of letting passion dominate reason. Though some of Corneille's plays illustrated this same point, the plays from the Renaissance insist more on depicting this one theme than on presenting gender-specific values.

## PART I

### ANTHROPOLOGY, GENDER AND DEATH IN NON-CORNELIAN LITERATURE

## CHAPTER 1

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL STUDIES OF THE LITERATURE OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

#### *The History of Anthropological and Sociological Studies of Literature*

Until the mid-eighteen hundreds, the term anthropology was reserved specifically for the study of humans in terms of their biological traits. However, until the early nineteenth-century French scholars such as Maine de Biran, Lévi-Strauss, and G. Durand, who believed that experience played a primary role in the development of the individual as a whole, began to consider it necessary to include in the study of mankind human mentality and behavior as they reflect the society in which people live. Thus began the division of anthropology into two major categories: biological and mental, with biological anthropology being used to describe physical traits of humans, including their physiological characteristics and their evolution as a species, and with mental anthropology dealing with many different aspects of the human psychology. (*Encyclopaedia Universalis* 2, 50-3).

According to the *Encyclopaedia Universalis*'s definition:

L'*anthropologie mentale* recouvre à la fois l'étude comparée des individus isolés et l'étude comparée des productions culturelles des individus en groupe. L'on peut de nos jours discerner: --l'*anthropologie psychologique et psychosociale*, qui

compare les comportements psychiques des individus isolés ou en relation avec leur entourage; --l'*anthropologie sociale et culturelle*, qui compare les techniques d'adaptation de l'homme à son milieu naturel (écologie) et les produits des différentes cultures et sociétés.... (51)

Because literature is a rich source of information for psychological studies of individuals and the society in which they live, it is this second type of anthropology that is the primary focus of both anthropological and sociological studies of literature. As Laurence Ellena states in her text *Sociologie et Littérature: La référence à l'œuvre*, for sociologists, "Les références littéraires sont un marqueur culturel et intellectuel de la sociologie. Les sociologues présentent dans ce cadre des auteurs et des domaines de prédilection qui séparent et unissent leurs manières d'appréhender le monde social sous plusieurs aspects" (145). Nevertheless, it is important to note that anthropology as a science focuses on the individual. Since writing reflects the expression of individuals within a society, several anthropologists have signaled its importance in their studies such as Georges Balandier's "L'effet d'écriture en anthropologie," Mondher Kilani's "Du terrain au texte," Martin de la Soudière's "Ecrire l'hiver," and Richard Brown's *Clefs pour une poétique de la sociologie* (1989) (Ellena 10-11; *Communications* 58, 1994).

According to Donini and Novack in their *Origins and Growth of Sociological Theory*, sociological sciences based on factual observation and deductions developed out of social philosophy, in which authors described how a society should be rather than how it actually is (1-2). But because anthropology focuses on individuals within the society and how their behavior reflects their own mentality and beliefs, the *Encyclopaedia Universalis* associates mental anthropology more closely with the sciences of psychology and philosophy than with sociology. Nevertheless, since the primary focus of my dissertation is to show how Corneille presents to the

seventeenth century theater-going noble class various models of behavior (especially death) for both males and females either to imitate or to scorn, one could say that his plays use anthropological models to serve a sociological purpose: to encourage individuals to behave according to the gender roles that society has established for them. For this reason, I will be discussing my work in relation to other sociological as well as anthropological studies of literature.

Despite the fact that Auguste Comte (1798-1857) is considered to be the father of sociology, having coined the term and been one of the earliest philosophers to develop a systematic formula for analyzing social phenomena (Donini and Novack 51; J. H. Abraham 86), he was not the very first to attempt a detailed description of a society. Donini and Novack and J. H. Abraham cite Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), whose *Prolegomena* presents “an overview of society in general, the geographical distribution of peoples, nomadic tribes, political ranks, sedentary societies, economic organizations, and what would today would be called the sociology of knowledge” (3). His book is considered the first work of its type known (J. H. Abraham 54). Nevertheless, modern sociology and its offshoot, anthropology, with established systems for theoretical analyses, have truly existed in their present forms as sciences only since the middle of the nineteenth century, beginning with Comte’s *Cours de philosophie positiviste* (1830-1842), Burnett Taylor’s *Primitive Culture* (1871), and Durkheim’s *Règles de la méthode sociologique* (1894). As such, literature is the primary source for societal studies prior to this period. Because of the development of sociology as an independent science primarily during the twentieth century, many differences can be noted between sociological studies of literature from the seventeenth century and those of twentieth century literature. Thus, in order to sharpen the focus of my inquiry and situate my study within the context of anthropological and sociological

studies of literature in general, this chapter will present an overview of previous such studies of literature of the seventeenth century and show how these studies differ from those of twentieth century literature.

When sociologists such as Weber, Marx, Durkheim, and Engels began in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to analyze the social world, they encountered a great deal of opposition as the new discipline had what could be considered the unrealistic goal of describing “la vérité du monde,” as did much of the literature of the nineteenth century (J. H. Abraham 13; Ellena 7). Because of its subjective nature, sociology was in its beginning not considered a true science: In his book *Les Trois Cultures: Entre science et littérature, l'avènement de la sociologie*, for example, Wolf Lepenies describes early sociology as a *troisième culture* which oscillated somewhere between science and literature because, although claiming to be a science, it allowed itself to be influenced by “literary temptations” (Ellena 8). In previous centuries, even, the issues and questions raised by social philosophy, sociological theory’s predecessor, had not been readily accepted as legitimate. During the seventeenth century, for example, many rejected it as not having a strong enough scientific basis to serve any practical purpose; yet scientists such as Bacon, Galileo and Descartes, who instituted the scientific method, would later be considered to be Comte’s predecessors (Donini and Novack 4, 68).

As it evolved as a more objective science, sociology has gained validity. The question still remains, however, as to what sociology is to include and what principles, norms, concepts, etc. it should be based upon. Sociologists do continue to agree that literature is not only a good resource to use when studying a society but also that it is indeed essential to consult it. For many sociologists, literature helps not only with its presentation of social facts, but it also allows them

to gain a more profound understanding of that society in deeper terms, for example, tastes, attitudes, and social relations<sup>1</sup>.

### ***Literature and the Evolution of Sociology***

Apart from a fairly small number of works written by authors such as d'Aubigné, Philippe Duplessis-Mornay, and Pierre de l'Estoile, who kept journals and chronicled events of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth-centuries, literature is the primary source available to sociologists who wish to study the workings of the society of this period (Coward 71). Due to the lack of other resources, there has been very little debate on either the validity or the usefulness of consulting the traditional literature of the time to learn more about the society. Consequently, a fairly large number of sociological studies based purely on the literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have been written. On the contrary, there is little in terms of purely literary-based sociological studies of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, with the exception of Lewis Coser's systematic study of novels in his *Sociology Through Literature* (1963), in which he presents general social phenomena as shown through the works of Steinbeck, Balzac, Zola, Proust, and others. Perhaps this is because sociologists have found little need to explore purely through literature the workings of a society in which they are currently living and experiencing first hand.

Nevertheless, many sociologists use literary references to serve as examples of an observation that they are making. For example, sociologists, and the educated public as well, often describe brutal and power hungry rulers as Machiavellian, referring to the aggressive political philosophies outlined in Machiavelli's *The Prince*. Sociologists may either simply refer

to or cite part of a work, or they may allude to complete works, “des œuvres intégrales”, which is most frequently done with poetry. Ellena explains that the most common use of literature in sociology, though, is the first: by allusion. The text or even a character, such as Madame Bovary, is simply mentioned with or without the name of the author and /or the literary genre. This use of literature as theoretical proof is especially true of novels of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. She describes the authors of this time such as Balzac and Flaubert as “s’étant donné pour vocation d’observer la réalité sociale et d’en rendre compte le plus exactement possible” (32).

Because of the realistic and relatively objective depictions that these authors give of a certain *milieu* of 19<sup>th</sup> century society, sociologists such as Alain Touraine, in his *Sociologie de l’Action* (1965), refer almost exclusively to the *roman réaliste* for their studies. Nevertheless, many sociologists have delved into other branches of literature that are by nature more subjective, such as poetry, science fiction, the *nouveau roman*, and Proust’s *recherche du moi* in *A la recherche du temps perdu*. George Blandier used George Orwell’s *1984* to show the effect of the information era on the individual and society, and both Pierre Bourdieu and Raymond Boudon have studied the way that Proust’s characters and their behavior do not serve so much to aid in the narration of the story as to give a greater portrait of social rapports of the time. As Ellena states,

Chez Pierre Bourdieu, si *La recherche*, par le biais notamment des personnages mis en scène—dont les propos illustrent et appuient des théories et principes--, permet la connaissance du social, c’est parce que, pour l’auteur, elle en est une à part entière...Il s’agit bien ... de présenter cette œuvre comme une analyse du social préexistant à la sienne et dans laquelle il retrouve énoncés, sous la métaphore romanesque, à travers les faits et gestes des personnages, des éléments

importants de ses théories sociologiques...et un appui pour la compréhension du monde social. (137)

Thus, although most literature is less objective than it is subjective, it does retain the possibility of serving to inform its readers on the society of its time.

Given that since the latter part of the nineteenth century, sociologists will have already performed studies of the societies in which they live, it would appear that the development of sociology precludes any need for sociological studies of literature. Nevertheless, literature such as *A la recherche* which primarily serves a psychological purpose, provides sociologists and anthropologists an even greater asset: it allows the reader to enter into the mind of the author at the time. As Vincent de Gaulejac states about the subjectivity of the novel in general in his *La névrose de classe: trajectoire sociale et conflits d'identité*, "...[S]a subjectivité nous éclaire sur notre propre existence. (...) Le roman est un outil d'investigation privilégié de l'articulation du psychique et du social'" (n. p.). For this reason, literature provides them with a perspective that cannot be gained through observation or the study of history, statistics, economics, and geography alone (Ellena 87-8). In order to demonstrate the ways in which writers are influenced by the social, political, and religious atmosphere of their time, I will address some of the ways in which seventeenth-century writers portray the developments, events and mentalities of their society. Modern readers approaching a seventeenth-century text should be aware of the constraints put on seventeenth-century authors who were forced to please a very limited audience and who risked losing their very lives if they portrayed values contrary to those of the ruling body.

*History's Influence on the way Writers Depict the Society and  
Mentalities of Their Time*

Despite the fact that there are many differences in the ways society is portrayed in literature of the seventeenth century and modern literature, one point remains constant: historical events always influence the perception that authors have of their society and the way that it is conveyed through their literature. In order to discuss the ways in which history influenced literature of the early part of the seventeenth century, however, it is necessary to look at the second half of the sixteenth century, and more specifically, back to the Wars of Religion, which led to the massacre of thousands of Protestants, to find the dominant influence on both Protestant and Catholic authors of the baroque period.

Even though the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in France had been filled with violence and death, primarily because of the outbreak of the bubonic plague in 1348 and the constant territorial battles of the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453), it was the start of the Wars of Religion in 1562 that made French literature be used for propaganda:

Protestant authors in verse and prose defended justification by faith, predestination, the role of the Church and the love of Christ. Catholic writers championed good works, the received wisdom of doctrine and the authority of the ecclesiastical hierarchy... But as the chaos deepened, literature grew less intellectual and more emotive in character. Argument gave way to vilification, satire turned vituperative, and language of love was replaced by images of violence and horror, and religious poets became obsessed with sin and death. The

final decades of the century, dominated by the themes of the mutability of things, decay and metamorphosis, are indelibly marked by the spirit of the baroque. (Coward 67)

One of the most familiar works of this type is Agrippa d'Aubigné's *Les Tragiques*. In his introduction to d'Aubigné's work, I. D. McFarlane illustrates the hostile nature of the work by giving the following description of its beginning:

Book I opens with an invocation to God, but it is essentially a vivid portrait of the disasters which have beset France during the years that followed the outbreak of the Wars of Religion. Sometimes, the poet works upon the reader's feelings by appealing to his sympathy for the suffering people of France, at others he vents his wrath against those princes and powers, such as Catherine de Medici and the Cardinal de Lorraine, who bear a heavy load of responsibility for all that has happened. (d'Aubigné 5)

In addition, in the later books of *Les Tragiques*, especially V through VII, d'Aubigné emphasizes more heavily the miserable state of the living and the ideas of death and the afterlife, again demonstrating the increasingly popular depiction of death in literature (5).

Although the wars officially were to end in France just prior to the turn of the century in 1598 when Henri IV signed the Edict of Nantes, other factors, including famine and epidemics, contributed to society's obsession with death and decay, which would continue into the seventeenth century when more such problems would again ravage the country during the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). Already, however, by the end of the sixteenth century, the horrors of death, even violent death, had become a commonplace spectacle.

Because of the horrors of death that they witnessed regularly during the wars, members of society began to sense and fear the fragility of life and the instability of their situation (Rojat 6). Rather than live in fear and horror, many authors began to reject the fear of life's fragile nature and embrace death as a source of inspiration or the central focus of their works. Some religious authors wrote devotional poetry which "uses images of death and putrefaction to express the alienation of the soul from the world where all is vanity" and equates death to "confidence in Christian salvation" (Coward 69-70).

Dramatists responded in a number of ways to the situation: In *La Tragédie*, Jacques Morel states that, "à l'urgence précisément *tragique* de l'événement ou à l'inquiétude qu'il entretient dans les esprits, l'art dramatique répond, soit en cultivant l'esthétique aristocratique et exigeante de la pastorale, soit en s'évadant parmi les aventures de la tragi-comédie romanesque, soit enfin en renchérissant dans la tragédie sur les violences contemporaines, par souci peut-être d'une sorte d'homéopathie, assez proche en somme de la *catharsis* aristotélicienne" (25).

In her article, "'A Positive Idea of Non-Being': the Baroque Conceptualization of Death in the Works of Religious and Libertine Prose and Verse Writers," Patricia Harry explains the seventeenth-century view of death for both Christians and non-Christians as one which has a positive impact. Christian authors were fascinated by the moment when one passes from life to death. The body still appears to be alive, yet life is no longer present. Because of the implications that this life-in-death image has for Christians who believe in Jesus's death and resurrection, these authors exploited this transitional moment to portray death and its non-finality. As Harry states in reference to a poem by Dom Simplicien Gody in his *Honnestes poésies* (1632), "By enlivening the process of dying, the poet suggests the possibility of life in death; rehearsing one's death prepares the way for the life beyond the grave..." (201).

Baroque dramatists also did not hesitate to present death, violent or otherwise, on stage. It served, as Morel said, as a source of catharsis for a society that witnessed death daily. Although the characters who died were often innocent victims, as was Mairet's *Sophonisbe* and Tristan's *Mariane*, they were usually shown as being victorious through their death, as if they had consciously chosen their destiny in order to remain faithful to their beliefs and values. As such, they are no longer seen purely as victims but as strong, responsible individuals who die without regret, even if horribly (Morel 28).

As Harry explains, though, not all of these positive references to death were based on religious convictions. *Libertin* authors, who did not believe in personal immortality, such as Théophile de Viau and Cyrano de Bergerac, used the finality of death to emphasize their belief in the importance of living for the present. Death begins from the moment you are born. Knowing you will die and not suffer any consequences for what you do during life should lead you to follow your true Nature, be it good or evil. Even though not all *libertin* authors approach death in exactly the same way, they generally emphasize the importance of a person's existence at present. As Harry states:

...both [Cyrano and Théophile] are inspired by the *carpe diem* theme, espoused within the framework of epicurean physics and ethics. Both prize sensuality, but they view death from a completely opposite vantage point; Where Théophile concentrates on the plight of the individual, Cyrano's ultimate value is the plenitude of Nature, which replaces divine providence...if Cyrano's ideology is exactly the opposite of Christians', the rhetorical means through which he expresses it dovetails theirs; for, like them, he conceptualizes death as a positive something. (207)

Thus, although Théophile emphasizes the nothingness of what is after death and Cyrano expresses the idea that people return to what they were before their life began, for both authors, the moment of death is not important. The manner in which people live their lives before they die is (204-05).

### ***Richelieu's Impact on Seventeenth-Century Literature***

The most significant changes in French literature of the baroque period began around 1630. Henri IV did not like writers, and Louis XIII was just not interested in them, and authors themselves were ashamed to be compensated for their writing because it would dishonor them. But when the Louis passed a great deal of his power over to Richelieu as a result of his own unpopularity and that of the monarchy, this had a tremendous impact on the literature of the time, for Cardinal Richelieu realized that writers could be politically useful to the monarchy and gave “rewards” to “those who served the right causes” (Coward 81).

The result of this encouraging of writers to praise the monarchy and defend the crown with the hopes of attaining personal reward led to a strong, nationalistic society which valued personal glory and had a strong sense of patriotism which was to be defended at all costs:

S'instaure ainsi un État fort, dans lequel la désobéissance est crime d'État, le duel interdit, et dans lequel une répression sans pitié peut s'abattre sur les nobles insoumis comme sur les provinces contestataires. Ainsi, tandis que peuvent se développer les images de grandeur et d'héroïsme si chères à l'époque cornélienne, ou encore le goût pour l'ostentation et le romanesque d'une nouvelle génération

baroque, commencent à s'imposer les notions d'ordre, de mesure, d'équilibre, plus caractéristique de l'époque classique. (Rojat 7)

This evolution toward admiration of the heroic, the great, and the orderly was the beginning of the movement toward the age of classicism.

In sociological terms, this militant patriotism had quite a negative effect for those authors who did not give such a flattering portrait of society. Vanini was burned at the stake in 1619 for impiety and Théophile was imprisoned in 1622 for his free-thinking, and even in 1662, Claude le Petit was executed for *Le Bordel des Muses*. As Coward states, "Bound by patronage and hopes of preferment, and wary of upsetting the authorities...[authors] were also obliged to respect the values of their public" (81). Because of the dangers that writers incurred in opposing the government as well as the pressure to write literature which would help in their own personal gain, it could be said that literature of the early baroque period, prior to the intervention and compensating of authors by nobles and the government in 1630, was more accurate in its portrayal of society, social values and thoughts since it was not as important to please anyone. It would be much more difficult for sociologists to try to extract a true portrait of society from latter baroque literature since it was so controlled and would continue to be so through Louis XIV's reign.

Unfortunately, Richelieu and Louis XIII died when Louis XIV was only four years old, and Anne of Austria assumed the regency, with Richelieu's successor, Mazarin, as Prime Minister. The latter's unpopularity and authoritarian ways, however, along with poverty, over-taxation, apathy of law enforcement officials, and refusal by the Parlement of Paris to continue trying cases under such conditions, eventually led to another internecine war, the Fronde (1648-53) from which Mazarin arose victorious and established a truly absolutist government<sup>2</sup>.

One lesson that Mazarin had learned from Richelieu was the value of using writers to publicize royal power. Like Richelieu, “Mazarin recompensed those who defended the independence of the monarchy” (Coward 81). In his *Artisans of Glory*, Orest Ranum describes the symbiotic nature of the relationship that existed between royalty and the writers who immortalized the dead, usually the ancestors of the current rulers, and implied through their works that prior history “became a history of services rendered to the ruling dynasty” (3). He states,

The writer whose art it was to praise the dead and educate the young through the written word...worked for pay and protection, and these varied according to his talents. To increase opportunities for commissions and favor, the writer had to develop nothing short of an ideology about his services, and he would integrate that ideology into royal biographies and family histories. (*Artisans* 22)

Thus, writers benefited both financially, through commissions, as well as politically, through the favor and protection of the crown, and the ruling dynasty benefited by having writers defend their actions using what could be referred to as royal propaganda.

Literature was the obvious choice at the time for absolutist propaganda that would appeal to the noble class, and Louis XIV would continue to make use of it for his own glorification. Most authors themselves were nobles (Coward 81), and although the aristocratic class was the smallest, it was the most educated and the most influential. The vast majority of French people of the seventeenth century were “paysans ou petites gens des villes” and were not literate, therefore authors wrote to appeal to the smaller, noble class who had aspirations of gaining the crown’s favors through their patriotism (Rojat 8).

### ***Moral Refinement and Literary Guides for Noble Socialites***

As the evolution toward classical values continued, so did abhorrence of past brutality and crudity that existed under the rule of Henri IV, especially among elite nobles who frequented the court. This generated a vast quantity of literature aimed at refining morals, discourse, and behavior to suit the “prudishness” of the new, morally conscious society that began to place value on *honnêteté*, or the art of pleasing others. As Rojat states:

Né en réaction contre la grossièreté des mœurs et des manières qui caractérisait la cour d'Henri IV, contre les excès que favorisaient les époques troubles des guerres, cet idéal résulte d'une prise de conscience de la nécessité de conférer à l'homme une grandeur et une dignité nouvelles...Le développement de l'idéal d'honnêteté la [la Noblesse] transformera ...La Cour devient alors le centre du bon goût et du bel esprit. (8)

One of the founding works of this movement is Nicolas Faret's *L'honnête homme ou l'Art de plaire à la cour* (1630). Jean Mesnard explains in his article “‘Honnête homme’ et ‘honnête femme’ dans la culture du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” that the term *honnête* implies above all the art of pleasing others or “*l'art de se faire aimer*” (22-23). According to Mesnard, Faret's work is the first to be known to have used the term “honnête homme”, although many other authors wrote on the subject in their works such as Jacques Du Bosc's *L'honnête femme* (1632), Antoine de Courtin's *Le nouveau traité de la civilité* (1671), and Morvan de Bellegarde's *Réflexions sur la politesse des mœurs* (1698). Their works, whose continuing popularity led to their production up through the end of the century, served as guides for those who needed instruction in how to present themselves at court, particularly the *noblesse de robe* who were merely “wealthy

*bourgeois* ennobled by appointment to judicial office or by the purchase of titles sold by the crown as a means of generating revenue” (Coward 82). Other authors, such as Madame de Lafayette, chose a more indirect approach to teaching the concept of *honnêteté* by providing models of behavior through literary works like *La Princesse de Clèves*, whose Madame de Clèves, whom I will be discussing in more detail later, is an absolute paragon of virtue and propriety although she may have to struggle to remain so.

The term *honnêteté* has a social implication by nature since it is founded on the idea of making oneself pleasing to *others*. According to Mesnard, one can be pleasing to others through birth, nature, or education, but the primary way to show one’s nature and education is through conversation. As he explains, “Or le lieu de l’art de plaire est la vie sociale en général, dont il produit l’agrément. Cet art s’exerce principalement dans la conversation, occasion privilégiée pour chacun de manifester ses qualités sociales, mais il gouverne généralement tous les rapports humains” (22).

### ***Sociology and the Question of the Précieux***

Because of the extremely important role that conversation plays in *honnêteté* and the primarily social role that women had in the seventeenth century, the *précieux* movement, centering on women and the art of conversation, began to thrive through the rise of literary *salons*, although few women, if any, at the time actually claimed to be *précieuses* because of the affected mannerisms that were associated with the title and which were often made fun of in works such as Molière’s *Précieuses Ridicules*. As Charles Sorel stated in his “Lettre pretieuse à des Pretieuses” in 1663,

On a parlé des Précieuses comme si c'étoit un nouvel Ordre de femmes et de filles qui fissent plus les capables que les autres en leurs Discours et en leurs manières d'agir; mais nous n'en avons jamais veu aucune qui ait voulu avouër d'en être, et quoi que quelques-unes tinssent beaucoup des Coûtumes qu'on leur attribuoit, elles se sont tenuës cachées à cause de la guerre qu'on leur a faite. (236-37)

Many works of the time make reference to the *précieuses*; however, most uses of this term are made in a derogatory context, poking fun at women's attempts to educate and better themselves. According to Ian Richmond's article "Préciosité et valeurs", "Au milieu du 17<sup>e</sup> siècle, l'éveil des aspirations féminines est accueilli d'un gros rire masculin" (91). Nevertheless, there are such works as *La Précieuse* by Michel de Pure and *Le grand dictionnaire des précieuses* by Baudeau de Somaize which depict the existence of a new type of female. Modern sociologists such as Richmond and Ian Maclean, though, continue to debate the validity of these texts and the actual existence of a self-defined group of *précieuses*. Sociologist Carolyn Lougee published *Le paradis des femmes: women, salons, and social stratification in seventeenth-century France* (1977) which highlights *préciosité* as a great feminist movement; however both Richmond and Maclean state that her study was based on unreliable sources and point to the interesting fact that no works written in the seventeenth century which were specifically intended for the *précieuses* were actually written by females (Maclean 50; Richmond 90).

### ***The Image of Women as Shown through Seventeenth-Century Literature***

The questionable nature of the *précieuses* does not stand alone when it comes to the way that women are portrayed in literature of the seventeenth century. The status of the female in the

*roman libertin* is less than clear as well. Whereas in the seventeenth-century traditional novel, women were always loyal and love was always pure, Richard Hodgson states in his article “‘Tous les plaisirs du monde’: l’image de la femme dans le roman libertin du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle” that females are depicted in two very different ways in the less traditional *roman libertin*. They were either idolized as virgin goddesses, or they were whores:

Dans de nombreux romans libertins de l’âge baroque, deux attitudes diamétralement opposées envers la femme se manifestent: d’une part, l’idéalisation de la femme qui remonte à l’époque de l’amour courtois et dont le principe fondamental est l’idée que la femme aimée est un être surhumain, une ‘divinité’; d’autre part, la conception de la femme comme objet dont l’homme use et abuse et dont il se lasse très vite. (134; 127-28)

His explanation of this contradictory treatment of women is that there were two views of women at the time: they were considered either “l’incarnation du diable et la source du péché”, thus not worthy of respect, or that they “devraient être égale de l’homme dans tous les domaines de la vie sociale” (129). Hodgson indicates, however, that the abusive treatment of women in the *roman libertin* is not intended to sympathize with or justify this behavior. On the contrary, he concludes that this type of novel gives a more realistic portrait of seventeenth-century French society and of the difficulties that women experienced in such a male-dominated society than the typical *roman pastoral* or *roman héroïque*. The *roman libertin* parodies the idealization of women in these novels to show their inaccuracy in this respect (135). As he says,

Il est vrai que la plupart des personnages féminins dans un roman comme le *Francion* de Sorel sont les victimes de l’agression masculine et qu’en général dans le roman libertin les femmes souffrent beaucoup, mais la plupart du temps,

leur souffrance n'a rien à voir avec le fait d'être femmes...[Sorel, Tristan l'Hermite, Louis Du Bail, and de Viau] montrent dans leurs œuvres beaucoup de sympathie pour les femmes de leur époque, à tel point qu'on pourrait qualifier de féministes certaines de leurs prises de position. (132)

Not only does Hodgson conclude that many of the *libertin* authors take a relatively feminist position on the way they portray the treatment of women, but also on the right of women to derive pleasure from sex by separating it from the ideas of marriage and sin and from the dominance of the male over the female that marriage traditionally entailed. Thus, even “virtuous” women in the *roman libertin* are not overly so, and prostitution has no negative connotations. Christian morality, therefore, is replaced by a certain amorality and “natural laws” that govern sexual desire and pleasure (138-41).

Theater and traditional novels present more typical images of the female as wife and mother than do the *roman libertin*. Elisabeth Badinter's study, *L'amour en plus* is one of the founding sociological studies on the role of the mother in the seventeenth century, and Maria Mann, in her text, *La mère dans la littérature française (1678-1831)* makes use of Badinter's findings to analyze the role of the mother specifically in French literature. Her findings show that the way mothers are represented in these traditional texts is rather uniform: “En tant que personnage littéraire, la mère est une figure dépourvue d'autonomie car elle n'existe que par rapport à d'autres personnages: l'enfant avant tout, mais aussi le père” (10). More interestingly, she shows that, in literature, there is an inversely proportional relationship between the presence of the father and the presence of the mother in the work and also in the exercise of power within the household: the more authority the father has, the weaker the mother is (Mann 10-11).

### *Children and Seventeenth-Century Literature*

As for the place of children in literature, they simply are not discussed until they are of age to be presented to the court. This reflects the Augustinian attitude that existed until the end of the seventeenth century that children were “le signe même de la corruption de l’homme” and were to be shown no compassion or tenderness, an attitude that, according to Badinter, dominated pedagogy throughout the seventeenth century (Mann 18). More often than not, in the aristocratic household, children, particularly daughters, were not treated with malevolence, but instead, they spent very little time with their parents. According to Badinter:

...la petite fille, mise en nourrice aussitôt après sa naissance, ne revenait d’habitude à la maison que vers l’âge de quatre ou cinq ans pour être confiée à une gouvernante jusqu’à sept ans. Après ce court séjour chez les parents, on la plaçait au couvent en attente de mariage....(*Amour* 118-25) Le mariage était conclu par les parents qui visaient moins au bonheur de leurs enfants qu’à la renommée qu’ils allaient acquérir par le mariage. Il n’était donc pas question d’un mariage d’amour, fruit d’un libre choix des époux, mais tout simplement d’une union basée sur un contrat. La volonté des parents et leur autorité étaient incontestables, les rapports entre les parents et les enfants qui en résultaient étaient extrêmement rigides. (in Mann 37)

The first author to make exception to this impersonal handing-over of a child to be raised by someone else was Madame de Lafayette with her introduction of Madame de Chartres, the mother in *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678). This mother was a young widow and chose to raise her own child rather than to take advantage of her freedom to go socialize among the aristocracy

as was normal for the time. Described as a person of extraordinary virtue and merit, she teaches her daughter the joy of being virtuous and that the only way to remain so was to put forth a sincere effort and to love her husband and to be loved by him (Mann 269). Despite the admiration that was given to Madame de Chartres for her devotion to her child, however, it would not be until the 18<sup>th</sup> century that moralists would begin to insist upon the presence of the mother in the young child's life (268).

### ***Absolutism's Influence on Seventeenth-Century Poetry, Theater and Heroic Novels***

Due to the lack of clear terms by which to define post-Renaissance poetry and the fact that the majority of it was written by authors who had previously been considered as “minor”, literary critics long neglected poetry as a major literary genre of the baroque period. Nevertheless, more recently, critics such as Jean Serroy, through his anthology *Poètes français de l'âge baroque*, have begun to bring to light the immense popularity of poetry that existed during the pre-classical period and the esthetics that it represents. At a time when poets still valued the emotion and imagination that characterized the Renaissance period yet began to embrace the technical perfection of the classical period, poetry began to flourish. “L'âge baroque a en effet vu se développer en France une intense activité poétique, marquée par la publication d'innombrables recueils collectifs, et dont les limites chronologiques peuvent précisément être datées des années 1570 aux années 1670: un siècle où triomphent à la fois les ressources de l'imagination et la virtuosité formelle” (Serroy 26). Nevertheless, as the popularity of baroque esthetics began to wane in favor of more formal writing, poetic production began to decrease. The imaginative aspect of poetry made it rather unsuitable to the intellectually

centered classical writers, and most of the poetry that was written served to glorify the king (27; Coward 100).

Despite the decrease in production of poetry after 1660, La Fontaine's fables were quite well received. He used animals, peasants, and wit to confront very serious issues at the time, especially concerning human morality, about which Coward states: "His insight into human drives and his meditation on the vanity of things makes him the most lucid moralist of his century, and with his teasing ironies, by far the most engaging. At a time when poetry was dominated by the systematic celebration of the reign of Louis XIV, La Fontaine showed the vulnerability of social consensus to the subversive power of human individuality" (100).

The reign of Louis XIV was the culmination of the classical era, which was dominated primarily by theater. As I will be dealing in greater detail with theater throughout the rest of the dissertation, I will only discuss it briefly here as it provides insight into the values that literary society placed on the glorification of the king. Not only did classical theater attain the regularity and *mesure* that it lacked in the baroque era, it had also become the favorite means by which dramatists glorified their king, thus helping to assure their own career. Thus, in accordance with classical Aristotelian demands that plays represent noble characters, it was quite common for dramatists to put on stage political issues surrounding the king, his use or abuse of his power, his treatment of the people and their duties toward him and the crown. These concepts, however, are not limited to the theatrical stage. They are also reflected, if only marginally, in heroic novels of the classical era: As Marlies Mueller states in her *Les idées politiques dans le roman héroïque de 1630 à 1670*:

...un certain nombre de questions bien distinctes mais liées, surgissent à maintes reprises à travers ces romans: celle du droit d'un peuple de se révolter contre le

monarque, celle des obligations réciproques entre souverain et vassal, celle du droit de ce dernier à la résistance face à l'injustice royale, celle des droits de l'aristocratie et de la population locale vis-à-vis d'un état centralisateur et, dans un sens plus général, celle de l'absolutisme et de ses critiques. (16)

And again, because of the author's need to appeal to the monarchy in order to secure his career, these works do not present a realistic portrait of their society but instead an idealized one since it was difficult for novelists, "soumis à la formalité du privilège, cet équivalent d'une censure" to openly oppose the régime. Instead, they often took a completely opposite standpoint: "Aussi proclament-ils maintes fois, le caractère sacré du roi et sa suprématie absolue. On acceptait que l'art [d'écrire] fût au service de la glorification du principe monarchique, et il est impossible d'apprécier jusqu'à quel point cette célébration de la royauté était sincère" (15). Despite their obviously skewed view of society, these novels do serve a purpose for sociological studies: given that they are written to appeal to the noble class, they reflect its values. The importance placed on portraying characters with a noble birth, or an appropriate style of discourse, and who only associate with those members of society who can be described as *honnête*, helps to illuminate the sociologist on the exact nature of the values of the noble class at the time (19).

### ***A Brief Overview of Descartes and Pascal's Impact on Seventeenth-Century Thought***

Throughout Louis XIV's reign, the dominant influence on society's view of the world was still Christianity; however, after the king's death, this trend begins to change. The painstakingly rational method by which classical literature had been produced began to influence the way man viewed his role in the world. A significant group, the rationalists, began to change

their concept of mankind. Rather than accepting themselves and their existence on earth purely in terms of God's plan for the afterlife, they began to move toward a more secularized view of the natural world, to contemplate their role within it and to search for universal *truths* (Coward 90-95). Not all rationalists, though, had the same ideas about establishing the proper method for determining what truths were, yet they generally saw man as a "reasoning animal" (Donini and Novack 76). René Descartes (1596-1650), the founding force behind Cartesianism, had already claimed in his *Discours de la méthode pour bien conduire sa raison et chercher la vérité de sciences* (1637) that truth could only be established through reasoning. His logic resulted in the questioning of the function of literature and of establishments that had previously been accepted as given: As Coward states,

In cultural terms, Cartesianism implied a new definition of literature as the imitation of life, not on ancient models, and directed attention towards the analysis of psychological states and moral dilemmas. His promotion of truths achieved by disinterested 'longues chaînes de raison' made received wisdom unreliable and the principle of authority suspect, so that even religious and political assumptions were opened up to critical examination by the end of the century. (95)

Thus, the sociological implications of his work are quite significant through its revolutionary impact on attitudes of the time.

Pascal also changed the way man sees his place within the world, however, instead of establishing the basis of truth on pure reasoning, he used man's needs and his nature, which, in accordance with his Jansenist beliefs, "must be placed within a spiritual context, since salvation is all one must face" (in Coward 96). Another of Pascal's concepts of the human condition is

founded in anthropology through his view of *le Moi*. In his article “Le concept de figure dans les *Pensées*”, Guillaume Ansart shows how Pascal summarizes the human condition as fairly pitiful in that people lack true substance behind that which they appear to be to others. “Au terme de l’analyse, la substance abstraite de l’âme se révèle un être vide, un néant. Derrière les qualités empruntées, on ne peut découvrir aucune substance propre du Moi” (51). Ansart cites Pascal’s fragment 806, which illustrates the social aspect of the *Moi*:

Nous ne nous contentons pas de la vie que nous avons en nous et en notre propre être. Nous voulons vivre dans l’idée des autres d’une vie imaginaire et nous nous efforçons pour cela de paraître. Nous travaillons incessamment à embellir et conserver notre être imaginaire et néglignons le véritable...Grande marque de néant de notre propre être de n’être pas satisfait de l’un sans l’autre et d’échanger souvent l’un pour l’autre. (Ansart 51)

The view that others have of a person is substituted for the *vide* which is the reality. Although Pascal seems to give a very negative portrait of the true nature of man’s existence, both he and Descartes made extremely significant impacts on man’s view of himself which continue to be discussed in sociological studies of not just their own era, but of subsequent ones as well.

### ***The Predecessors of Mental Anthropology: The Moralists***

A particularly significant group of seventeenth-century authors was the moralists, such as La Bruyère and La Rochefoucauld. They took on the task of describing *types* of individuals within their society. These types, which were often referred to as *caractères*, were established on the nature of the individual and his moral behavior. This type of work has provided a rich

source of information for anthropologists such as Louis Van Delft who explains in his *Littérature et Anthropologie*, which is based primarily on La Bruyère's *Les Caractères, ou les mœurs de ce siècle*, that

...en tant que genre, en tant qu'œuvre littéraire très élaborée même, le *caractère* est la formulation la plus éloquente et la plus exacte de l'antique anthropologie, qui distribue les hommes selon des classes, des types...Le moraliste...ne se contente pas d'observer les hommes, il les distingue, il les classe, il les 'marque' au vu de l'essence qu'il croit reconnaître en chacun d'eux. Cette sorte de poinçon qu'il applique sur les individus, qui les 'fixe' à jamais et les rend à jamais identifiables, déchiffrables, *lisibles*, c'est précisément le *caractère*. (42)

These *caractérologues* do not intend to correct the morals of their society. They merely wish to categorize individuals according to their type. However, once a person is categorized, the *caractérologue* insists that he or she remain true to that type. As Van Delft says, "Puisque lui—lui seul—sait comment les caractères sont faits, doivent être faits, il lui appartient, se persuade-t-il, de *corriger* ceux qui sont mal tracés, qui ne sont pas conformes au moule, qui n'ont pas la netteté du caractère dans l'atelier de l'imprimeur", citing La Chétardie, saying: "Ne sortez point de votre caractère" (38).

Although this insistence upon the need for a person to conform to his or her character type is certainly not an objective science, the act of studying individuals and their behavior and classifying them smacks of mental anthropology. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, this type of anthropology and sociology as a whole, would have to wait until the 19<sup>th</sup> century for their acceptance as truly respected sciences and not be immediately dismissed as overly subjective.

### *Summary*

In conclusion, although early seventeenth-century literature is not bound by the necessity to please anyone, throughout most of the seventeenth century after the intervention of Richelieu and the monarchy's compensating authors who supported their cause, literature as a whole begins to take on a pro-active nature. Authors attempted to gain the king's favor by providing positive models of the monarchy and the king, thereby helping the government gain the support of the noble class, and countless writers provided manuals and models of behavior for those who wished to learn the proper ways to be "honnête". Other authors, such as the *moralistes* attempted to give accurate portraits of the types of individuals within their society and encouraged people to attempt to remain faithful to their type. Even authors such as Descartes and Pascal, who expanded the idea of literary production as an intellectual act during the classical era and applied it to their view of the world, did not do so as a negative reaction to any belief. It was a positive expansion of an already-existing belief in the importance of exercising intellectual thought. In general, therefore, literature of the seventeenth century as a whole strives to be *pro-active*, giving its readers models of what to strive for in terms of who to be and how to think. Yet seventeenth-century authors who wrote after 1630 also had to be careful to not criticize the values of the nobility since such overt opposition to the values of the ruling class could lead to their banishment or execution. Modern readers should be aware of the limits imposed upon seventeenth-century writers since they may have to read their works very closely in order to truly understand what the authors are actually trying to say.

While this chapter provides a general background of sociological and anthropological studies of literature of all genres, chapter 2 specifically addresses the question of gender and

death in pre-Cornelian tragedy to provide a basis for comparison of Corneille's representation of gender and death that of his predecessors. Only by comparing Corneille's portrayal of masculine and feminine death with that of authors from different periods can we get a clear picture of the evolution of societal views of gender roles are represented through death.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ellena 9; Donini and Novack 2

<sup>2</sup> *Fronde* 6-7; Rojat 7; Coward 81

## CHAPTER 2

### DEATH AND GENDER IN PRE-CORNELIAN TRAGEDY

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, literature is a product of the society in which it was written. Before discussing the ways in which seventeenth-century French tragedy in particular reflects differences in masculine and feminine death, however, I intend to provide a background for my study of death and gender in Corneille's tragedies, most of which were written during the baroque period, as well as to show that the representation of masculine and feminine death on the theatrical stage does indeed reflect the views of the society in which it was written. This chapter will present a general analysis of death and gender in pre-Cornelian tragedy, specifically concentrating on that of ancient Greece and Rome as well as that of the French Renaissance. Through analysis of plays of different time periods, I will demonstrate how the representation of tragic death changes, for both males and females, in accordance with a society's current political, philosophical, moral, religious, and esthetic views, as well as its understanding of gender roles at the time.

As many of the tragedies written in France during the seventeenth century are inspired by classical Greek tragedy, it is of interest to study the relationships that exist between the representation of death and that of gender during this time (Forsyth 85). Since the principal authors of seventeenth-century France based their sense of tragic esthetics on the Aristotelian model, there are many similarities in the way that they portray death in relationship to a character's gender and the way in which Sophocles, Euripides, and Aeschylus did. One of the

most significant aspects of Aristotle's view of tragedy is that, although the primary element that renders a play "tragic" is that it inspires terror and pity, there is a limit as to the degree of violence that should be presented on stage. For the Greeks, the goal of tragedy is not merely to entertain, but is also meant to move the spectator to feel terror and pity without horrifying and disgusting the spectator. As Aristotle says in the *Poetics*, although depicting monstrous deaths on stage inspires terror, it is not ideal for the art of tragedy. "Those who employ spectacular means to create a sense not of the terrible but only of the monstrous, are strangers to the purpose of tragedy; for we must not demand of tragedy any and every kind of pleasure, but only that which is proper to it. And since the pleasure which the poet should afford is that which comes from pity and fear through imitation, it is evident that this quality must be impressed upon the incidents" (Introduction, 7.3). Unlike the latter seventeenth century's particularly sensitive view that any form of death on stage is offensive to the spectator, as well as the view of the humanist tragedians of the latter sixteenth and early seventeenth century, who revel in the horror of spectacular death, Aristotle's esthetics merely limit the degree to which on stage death can be monstrous without entirely forbidding its presentation (Loraux vii; Deforge 30). Thus, much of what we know about death through tragedy in ancient Greece comes to us through description rather than spectacle. This is especially true of feminine death since there are no examples of on-stage death of females other than that of Euripides's *Alcestis* in which, although the heroine dies, she will eventually be rescued from Hades by Hercules, thus negating her death (Loraux 22-23). Although Loraux chooses not to discuss *Alcestis* in her treatment of feminine death in Greek tragedy since Alcestis returns from the dead, this death is one of the most revealing in terms of how it reflects the role of women in Greek society. As stated by Rabinowitz in the play's introduction, "it defines one ancient Greek model of female excellence, one that is based on a

woman's first being married, then having children, and being willing to die for her husband" (*Women on the Edge* 97). For, although men die heroic deaths for which they gain honor and immortal recognition for themselves, women's only true glory in death was to choose to die in service of their husbands, fathers, or sons. Other than this, she was to have none (Loraux 2; *Women on the Edge* 98). Specifically, Pericles addresses the issue of women's glory saying, "if I must say anything on the subject of female excellence...it will be all comprised in this brief exhortation. Great will be your glory in not falling short of your natural character; and greatest will be hers who is least talked of among men whether for good or for bad" (in *Women on the Edge* 98). As Alcestis dies for her husband, however, she is allowed a certain degree of recognition not typical of women of her time. For ancient Greece was an extraordinarily patriarchal society, and it was therefore expected that women would maintain a very discreet role in society, including that they were to remain inside the home and obey their husbands or guardians. Additionally, since they were considered permanently legal minors, this included obedience to their adult male children (Syropoulos 3; Foley 8). As Syropoulos says in his *Gender and the Social Function of Athenian Tragedy*, "women's position in the social reality of Athens comprised two main aspects: invisibility in the public sphere, to the largest possible extent, and supervision by, and submission to, male relatives" (4).

As minors who lived their lives within the home, it is unsure whether or not women were allowed to attend the theater in Athens. What is certain, however, is that women were not well educated and that men not only wrote but also performed the tragedies (Foley 3). Thus, these tragedies may not give us much insight into the actual mentalities and attitudes of women in classical Greece, however they allow us to see how the men of that time viewed and portrayed women in such a patriarchal society, thereby lending insight into the differences between men's

and women's roles within Athenian society. Thus, despite the stylized nature of Greek tragedy and its dominance by the male sector of Greek society, Segal says, "The Greek tragedies...not only are great works of art, they are also cultural texts, which were presented before the entire citizenry of Athens at the state festivals. It is legitimate, therefore, to look at this play not just as an autonomous, self-reflective literary and linguistic construct but also as a dense symbolic representation of social behavior, reflecting on a culture's way of dealing with a recurrent crisis in human life" (213-14). In particular, the play *Alcestis* reflects one such crisis: the death of a wife and mother within the Athenian household. As Segal notes, "The play [*Alcestis*] represents a veritable anthropology of death, a kind of miniature encyclopedia of attitudes and responses, from the heroic self-sacrifice of the wife—established at once as the touchstone against which all other reactions to death are measured (cf. 83-85)—to the unthinking self-centeredness of the husband and the children's sense of helpless loss" (213).

*Alcestis* gives us a particular insight into the role of women and wives in ancient Athenian society. In order to show his gratitude toward Admetos for his hospitality, Apollo, who had been sentenced by Zeus to be a servant in the former's house for a crime he had committed, did Admetos the favor of tricking the Fates into allowing another person to die for him on his designated day, provided he find someone willing to take his place. Although he has no reason to ask anyone to do this other than his own personal cowardice before death, he approaches both his parents and his wife, the latter of whom agrees to die in the place of her husband (vv. 1-18). Because of her sense of duty as a wife and her self-sacrifice in light of this duty, Alcestis herself is portrayed as the "best of women." When the chorus states, "Let her know that she dies now with glory, / by far the best woman under the sun" (vv. 150-51), the servant explains that the

reason for her glory is because of her own self-effacement as shown through her willingness to submit to his request to allow him to live by dying for him. As he says:

How not the best? Who would deny it?

What must she be like, the woman who surpasses her?

How could any woman show more honor

to her husband than by being willing to die for him?

(vv. 154-57)

Through her sacrifice, she gains the only type of glory possible for a wife of her time, which is the glory of being known as good wife.

Alcestis goes to her death not enthusiastically, but willingly, and she makes it very clear to Admetos that she is indeed sacrificing herself for him at his request. After reminding him that she chose to accept his demand, she says to him,

So be it. You should now remember the favor you owe me;

I demand nothing of equal worth—

for there is nothing more valuable than a life—

(vv. 299-301)

Since Alcestis believes that “there is nothing more valuable than a life”, she feels that not even the glory that she will obtain from being “the best wife” will be worth her sacrifice, but she is still bound by her sense of conjugal duty to grant his request that she take his place in death.

As a wife, and thus a subordinate, Alcestis has a certain obligation to be willing to take the place of her husband in dying merely because he asked her to do so. Had she not accepted his request, she would have been seen as selfish and arrogant, valuing her own life, the life of a woman, over a man’s, especially the patriarch of the family. In ancient Greece, women were not

considered as valuable as men, and their primary function was to bear children: more specifically, male heirs. The responsibility of being the family's caretaker, however, remains with her husband. As Segal says, "The wife, once she has produced male heirs, is the most expendable member of the household, the one most easily 'sacrificed'" (233). Since Alcestis has already given Admetos sons, she has fulfilled her primary role within the family, and given the choice between Alcestis and Admetos, she is the one who rightly *should* die. As expressed by Iphigenia in Euripides's *Iphigenia at Aulis*, "It is more important for one single man / to [live] than a thousand women" (vv. 1393-94).

Though Admetos passively accepts Alcestis's willingness to die for him and never so much as hints at withdrawing his request until after she has passed away, he would have preferred that either of his parents take his place in death. After all, they are old. When Pheres, Admetos's father, comes to bring offerings to his dead wife, Admetos chastises him severely for making his young wife die for him when he, being old and near the end of his life anyway, could have died instead. Because of his parents' refusal to die for him, he denies their parenthood, transferring the roles of *both* mother and father to his beloved wife who was willing to make such a great sacrifice for him:

Being put to the test you showed who you are  
and I do not consider myself to be your natural child.  
Surely you surpass everyone in your lack of spirit,  
you, so old and at the end of your life,  
had neither the will nor the courage to die  
for your son, but rather you let

this woman from outside the family do it, she who  
alone justly counts as mother and father to me.

(vv. 640-47)

Thus, through her death, Alcestis has entered into the masculine realm of society: She has gained glory, a typically masculine attribute, and has become not only a mother figure for Admetos, who will sacrifice her life in order to save her children, but also a father figure through her undaunted male courage.

Despite being chastised by his son, Pheres will make it clear to Admetos that he had no right to ask anyone to die in his place, especially not his own father. Admetos conveniently ignores the fact that the patriarch of his own family should be revered and not be expected to give up his life for his child. As Pheres states:

I gave you life and brought you up  
as master of this household. I am not obliged to die for you;  
for this was not a custom that I inherited from my father,  
that fathers should die for their children, nor is it a  
custom anywhere in Greece.

(vv. 681-86)

Thus, although mothers may die for their children, as does Eurydice for her sons in Sophocles's *Antigone*, fathers would never be expected to do so (Loraux 23). For an elderly father to choose to die for his son could be interpreted as suicide, and for a man to kill himself would be utterly dishonorable and show him to be weak and unworthy of his gender. In Plato's *Laws*, for example, Plato comments on the shameful nature of suicide, expressing the need to make it a formally punishable offense because of its "total lack of manliness" (in Loraux 9).

Just as Alcestis has taken on masculine qualities through her death, Admetos has taken on qualities generally associated with females at the time by his cowardice in the face of death. Although Admetos accuses his father of lack of courage, it is indeed he who lacked the courage to accept his own fate and die when he was destined to do so. As such, he has brought about his own emasculation, making himself, as his father says, “weaker than the woman who died for [him]” (vv. 697-98).

On her deathbed, Alcestis herself acknowledges her husband’s entrance into the feminine world, as she reminds him that he will now be responsible for taking care of the children once she is gone. She gives up her role as a mother, handing the children over to Admetos, saying, “...receive these children from my hand. / ... / You will now be the mother to these children instead of me” (vv. 375-377). Noting the blatant omission of any reference to Admetos’s role as father in her words, it can be said that he takes on a role that is normally viewed as exclusively feminine, which is that of the mother. Thus, Alcestis’s passage from life to death marks the moment at which Admetos gains entrance into the realm of the feminine as “mother”. Likewise, it is at this point that Alcestis accomplishes the feat that marks her as courageous and worthy of becoming Admetos’s “father”. Thus, the physical exchange of Alcestis’s body for her husband’s marks a reversal in gender roles for both parties (Segal 229).

While *Alcestis* provides us with an example of the ideal woman who gains glory merely because of her self-effacement in light of her conjugal duty, other plays, such as Aeschylus’s *Agamemnon* and Euripides’s *Medea* depict less flattering images of females who choose to take action through murder in order to remedy a wrong that has been done to them or a loved one. Despite the fact these females do not always represent the “best of women”, as did Alcestis, they are also certainly not shown as being completely horrid and unjustified in their actions. This

fact, as well as the overwhelming presence of the active female on the Athenian stage, has raised the much-debated issue of whether or not ancient Greek tragedy could be considered an outlet for feminist views on the part of the male sector of ancient Greek society<sup>1</sup>. Although this issue is still under debate, what is clear is that ancient Greek dramatists do attempt to gain sympathy for women burdened by the oppression of a patriarchal society through their portrayal of these females. It is uncertain, however, if they do this to add to the play's effectiveness in inspiring pity for the heroine or if they use this as a technique to make the spectator contemplate the position of females within Athenian society<sup>2</sup>. As Foley explains:

Although many female characters in tragedy do not violate popular norms for female behavior, those who take action, and especially those who speak and act publicly and in their own interest, represent the greatest and most puzzling deviation from the cultural norm...[R]ecent critics, including myself, have hypothesized that female characters are doing double duty in these plays, by representing a fictional female position in the tragic family and city and simultaneously serving as a location from which to explore a series of problematic issues [such as the role of the female in the society] that men prefer to approach indirectly and certainly not through their own persons. (4)

Because females have no part whatsoever in the political sector of Athenian society, when tragic women do decide to take action to avenge a wrongdoing, it is almost always for domestic reasons: Medea avenges herself for her husband's unfaithfulness; Antigone buries her brother purely out of her sense of sisterly duty; Electra conspires with Orestes to kill their mother and her new husband who killed their father; and in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra kills her husband for having sacrificed their daughter (Foley 7). When committing their crime, none

of these women has a specifically political, or masculine, goal in mind, but because they take action, they are portrayed with masculine qualities.

Although these females are described as having masculine traits, such as Clytemnestra, who is not only a female ruling in the place of her husband but also rules “with the confidence and the hard will of a man” (55) and speaks “wisely and like a man” (74), they are certainly not unjustified in taking vengeance upon the wrongdoer. The fact that they do so, and in the process earn some degree of sympathy from the spectator for their plight, suggests the right of the individual to punish another for a crime against him, or, on the theatrical stage, her. This notion, which is essential to Greek tragedy, is a reflection of ancient Greece’s democratic society and stresses the possibility for the individual to seek justice on his or her own behalf. (Vickers 101, 109).

Agamemnon, Clytemnestra’s husband, is a prime example of a person whose murder seems almost justifiable. Before any action actually occurs in the play, Aeschylus is very careful to set the mood for the spectator and tell of Agamemnon’s horrid sacrifice of his and Clytemnestra’s daughter. Aeschylus even initially makes it sound as if he did this for an unworthy cause and that it was merely Agamemnon’s pride and his desire for glory that caused him to commit this horrifying act. In the play, the “old men of Argos” quote Agamemnon’s deliberation of whether or not to go through with the sacrifice, explaining that if he did not do it, the gods would not allow the winds to carry his ships into battle at Troy and subsequently his men would have been angry with him for denying them this opportunity for glory. The “first old man” critically describes the actual sacrifice itself as an act of madness, guided by evil and for an unworthy cause, implying that Agamemnon should not have killed Iphigenia and that her mother has a right to seek revenge. He says:

With this,  
Agamemnon bent low,  
and Necessity strapped on him her yoke.  
Madness took hold.  
His mind changed course in the evil blast  
and reeled in its utter ruthlessness.  
From that moment he could stop at nothing.  
His mind, sickened by Necessity,  
grew bold with evil.  
Only then did he have the heart  
to seek his daughter's death,  
first sacrifice to a war to win back a whore,  
the life of a child for a fair wind.

(67)

It is significant that Agamemnon “bent low”, for how low must a father stoop in order to kill his own child, especially for “a war to win back a whore”? Though this “whore”, Helen, does not actually appear in the play, she is repeatedly mentioned and described in disparaging terms such as “hell to men”, “plague-bride”, “destroyer of men” and “destroyer of cities” (95) and is accused of being the reason for which so many sons, husbands, and fathers are dying (80), stressing the fact that Iphigenia’s father sacrificed his own daughter for someone of so little worth. Helen, therefore, the epitome of damnation, sexual promiscuity, death, and destruction, stands in opposition to Iphigenia, the pure, innocent virgin who is, in fact, sacrificed not only for

Greece but also for Helen, the victory prize that men will bring back to their homeland in exchange for Iphigenia's life.

Although it may initially seem as if Aeschylus wants to present Agamemnon as having been absolutely wrong in sacrificing his daughter, he later presents the opposite reaction as it was because of her sacrifice that the Greeks were able to go to war and earn their famed victory over Troy. The "first old man" who had originally criticized Agamemnon's seemingly heartless act then recants and says to the king:

Ten years ago,  
when you marshaled the armies  
to repossess that worthless whore,  
you threw all Greece into a panic,  
we thought you evil,  
a man gone mad with power,  
sending so many young lives to their graves.

And then that sacrifice  
to save your demoralized men  
from desertion and mutiny.

Horrible, we said,  
a mad man's desperate decision!

[...]

But times change, and so do minds.

And I welcome you now in friendship,

and praise you for this victory you have brought us.

(100)

Although Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter may have seemed cruel and heartless, as king, he had the duty of doing what was necessary in order for his country to gain glory, and for his men, there would be nothing more glorious than for them to conquer Troy, their most hated enemy, and, should they not succeed, there would be no more noble death than for them to die fighting. For a man to die in battle was the most honorable death that he could hope for. As Loraux says, "A man worthy of the name could die only by the sword or the spear of another, on the field of battle." (11). Thus, had Agamemnon not sacrificed Iphigenia, he would have deprived both his country and his men as individuals of the opportunity for glory; but as a father who loved his daughter, his decision to kill her was not an easy one. He laments:

If I massacre my daughter,  
the ships sail  
and we reach Troy.  
But if I massacre my daughter,  
the pride of my house,  
my joy,  
my love,  
what am I to myself but a monster,  
and a monster to all the world?  
It is a heavy price either way.

(66)

As Hugh Denard explains, “while ‘reasonable doubt’ is raised about Agamemnon’s character as a man and father, it is generally allowed that heroes are troublesome types—sooner or later they, and everyone else, have to pay a price for the hero’s path to immortal glory” (Aeschylus 24). Even though his dilemma is understandable, Agamemnon’s struggle between his patriotic duty and his paternal love incites pity in the spectator; for what could be more pitiful than for a father, the protector of his children, to have to slaughter his own daughter who trusts him completely? This certainly appeals to the esthetics of the time; for Aristotle says that in order to incite pity, the characters involved should have some sort of close relationship in which trust can be violated: “But when the tragic incident occurs between those who are near or dear to one another - if, for example, a brother kills, or intends to kill, a brother, a son his father, a mother her son, a son his mother, or any other deed of the kind is done - these are the situations to be looked for by the poet” (Section 4, 7.4).

Although we may feel sorry for Agamemnon because of his dilemma, as the play moves along, we begin to see that the most pitiful character described in this play is Iphigenia herself, whose gruesome sacrifice is described in detail, as she falls to her knees, begging her father for mercy, is gagged “like a horse, bridled” and hoisted into the air, unable to speak:

Her saffron robe,  
a bridal dress,  
drops from her shoulders,  
pale skin,  
fair, shivering in the windblast,  
behold the bride,  
a gross deception.

[...]  
And gagged,  
silent,  
she darts pitiful arrows,  
shafts of grief,  
at her sacrificers,  
but as in a painting  
unable to speak.  
She knows them all,  
sang for them often at her father's banquets,  
in her father's halls...

(68)

Not only is she being sacrificed by her father, whom she had trusted, she knows the others as well and is only able to beg for mercy with her eyes as she is unable to speak. Thus even her father's friends, whom she is able to see and recognize, participate in her gory murder, ending her life with a sense of betrayal from those whom she knew and trusted, other than her mother, who will now pay her father back for what he has done. As the chorus says after recounting Iphigenia's ghastly death, "For what is to come, / let good prevail." (69).

Although the reasons for which these tragic heroines seek justice may be legitimate, what is perhaps inexcusable, and what particularly strips these women of their "femininity," is the manner in which most of them, with the exception of Antigone, do so: through conscientious plotting and carrying out of murder, including that of innocent children. The supreme example of this is, of course, Medea. Because females are responsible for bearing and nurturing children

as well as taking care of their husbands, femininity is most often associated with motherhood and love rather than violence. Men, on the other hand, are the defenders of the State and family honor, and by virtue of this, violence is conventionally linked to masculinity. Since Medea renounces her role of nurturing mother in favor of violence, she can no longer be seen as feminine and takes on masculine attributes.

Euripides's *Medea* presents a portrait of a woman who has devoted her whole life to one man who, despite the fact that he has children with her and has pledged his loyalty to her, has recently secretly married the king of Corinth's daughter, who he believes will bear him royal heirs (594-97). Her situation, therefore, has as its focal point male-female conflict, which is a prominent theme in Greek tragedy (Foley 9). Through the chorus's reaction upon learning of Jason's recent marriage as well as that of Aigeus, king of Athens, we hear that Medea's sense of injustice is indeed legitimate and that her feelings of hurt and betrayal are not merely symptoms of her misunderstanding of the relationship that she and Jason had. Both the chorus and Aigeus express sympathy for her and criticize Jason's disloyalty. Aigeus responds in shock to the news that Jason has a new mistress, saying, "No! Has he really dared this shamefullest [*sic.*] of deeds? /... / Woman, your sense of pain is quite excusable" (vv. 695, 703); and the chorus, acting as the voice of reason, chastises Jason after he tries to justify his actions, saying, "I still think that in betraying your own wife you were unjust" (vv. 577-78).

Jason does not realize exactly the risk that he is taking. For Medea is not like the typical, passive females that he may be accustomed to. She is very strong-willed, active, aggressive, and vengeful. As Ruby Blondell states in the play's introduction, she also has many positive traits, which are used more often in reference to males: "[She is not] effeminate or cowardly. On the contrary, she displays many stereotypically male attributes, such as courage, intelligence,

decisiveness, resourcefulness, power, independence, and the ability to conceive and carry out a plan effectively” (*Women on the Verge* 162). There is nothing that Medea can do politically or legally to remedy the situation or to avenge herself; for the king himself is the one who proposed the marriage to his daughter, and as a female, Medea is powerless other than in the domestic environment. Thus, this is where she will strike (Foley 8). As Blondell says, “[W]omen’s power over men is located within the family. So when the violent, vengeful nature typical of the heroic male is unleashed in the person of a woman, it leads to acts of appalling violence against intimate family members...” (intro. *Women on the Verge* 165-66). Although at this point in the play, Medea does not know her exact plan, she foretells her upcoming bloody and unfeminine vengeance, saying:

...Elsewhere womankind is full of fear,  
a coward both in self-defense and at the sight  
of steel; but when she meets injustice in the marriage-  
bed, no mind exists that is more bloodthirsty.

(vv. 263-66)

When Medea realizes the importance that Jason places on his children and the continuation of his lineage, she devises the perfect plan for revenge, which is to destroy everything that is important to him by killing off his entire household, leaving him no heirs and no wife with whom to have more children, rendering him, in a sense, impotent. Once the deed is accomplished, his greatest complaint is that she has made him childless, thereby destroying him (vv. 1326). As Blondell says, “She rightly sees that only the death of Jason’s sons *and* his new bride, who might bear other sons (compare 804-5), will make him suffer just as he has hurt her, not only by stripping

him of family and friends, but by striking at the heart of his social status and gender identity through the destruction of his entire house (compare 114, 139, 794)” (*Women on the Verge* 162).

Although Medea does have many masculine characteristics and is extremely vengeful, she is actually quite conventionally feminine in her sense of conjugal duty and in her love for her children. Although their murder will serve as the primary way in which she is able to make Jason suffer for the wrong that he has done to her, she does indeed love them very much (Harsh 178-79; intro *Women on the Verge* 155). Thinking about their deaths, she weeps and lets out cries of anguish (vv. 835-925; vv. 1039-64), even wavering over her decision to kill them (vv. 1046-48; vv. 1056-58). Resolved in her decision and knowing that she is seeing them for the last time, however, she laments:

...My children, give  
oh give your mother your right hand to clasp and kiss!  
Oh dearest hand, and dearest of all lips to me,  
and dearest form and noble faces of my sons!  
May you be happy, both of you—not here, but there.

(vv. 1069-73)

Euripides’s Medea, therefore, is not the monster that is portrayed in Seneca’s *Medea* and in La Pérouse’s sixteenth-century *Médée*, but a loving mother whose poignant sense of betrayal has caused her to be controlled by anger and her passionate wish to be avenged. What makes her seem heinous, therefore, that is that her desire for revenge causes her to choose to obey her anger and disregard the compassion that she feels for her children. Despite herself, she chooses to reject any other, more reasonable alternative that would allow her to not lose her children who are dear to her, knowing that Jason’s destruction would remain incomplete if his entire

household were not completely wiped out. Sensing that she is faltering in her resolve, she angers at herself, saying:

But what's come over me? Do I want to incur  
laughter for leaving enemies unpunished? No!  
This must be dared. What cowardice it was in me,  
To let those soft words even come into my mind.

(vv. 1049-52)

Thus, instead of “letting” herself be moved by compassion, she lets herself be controlled by her anger. As Harsh states, “her wrath...has overcome her better judgment” (179). Thus, commenting on *Medea*’s central theme, he says, “[P]assion may so overwhelm reason as to lead one to a course of action inhumanly cruel and disastrous” (173), a theme which will serve as the locus for both Senecan tragedy as well as that of the sixteenth-century; the difference, however, is that in the latter two, the tragic heroes and heroines do not actively choose to allow their passions to control them. As shown in the passage above, however, Euripides’s *Medea*, consciously chooses to repress her motherly feelings in order to take her revenge, and, as Harsh explains, “This revenge must be of such a nature that it is final and complete; the price which *Medea* is willing to pay for such revenge may be great; but it must be freely paid and not exacted by her enemies, and she must survive her enemies. Such revenge is her purpose and her achievement” (173).

Although the tragic genre had all but disappeared from the theatrical scene during the Middle Ages, the sixteenth century would mark its rebirth in France thanks to the Pléiade and the humanist movement, which prized erudition and moral refinement<sup>3</sup>. Although some of the intellectual elite of sixteenth-century France such as Des Masures defended the worth of morality

plays, characteristic of the *théâtre sérieux* of Middle Ages, the general mentality at the time was that theater of the Middle Ages had degenerated and was lacking in moral instruction, regularity, and *goût* (Lazard 36-37; Du Bellay 126). Thus, in their desire to restore theater to its ancient glory, tragic authors and the poets of the Pléiade took a new interest in reviving the tragedy of antiquity, inspiring a renewed enthusiasm for the genre (Lazard 8-9; Forsyth 100). As recommended by Du Bellay in his *Défense et illustration de la langue française*, dramatists should try to imitate the plays of ancient Greece and Rome if they wished to “[les] restituer en leur ancienne dignité, qu’ont usurpée les farces & moralitez” (Du Bellay 126).

Given that the language of *scolarité* in France at the time was Latin, dramatists had little difficulty in finding models to imitate in roman tragedy, particularly that of Seneca<sup>4</sup>. Seneca’s plays were easier for them to understand than those written in Greek, but more importantly, they generally reflected sixteenth-century humanistic thought in terms of politics, morals, and aesthetics more than Greek tragedy did. As Forsyth explains, “[La] tragédie de Sénèque se recommandait encore et surtout aux Renaissants par son caractère particulier: sa forme et sa psychologie, sa pensée et sa rhétorique, plus compréhensibles que celles des Grecs pour des lecteurs chez qui le sens de la forme et de l’originalité n’est pas encore très développé, provoquaient leur admiration et leur paraissaient digne d’être imitées” (100). Some characteristics of his tragedy which will repeatedly appear in those of the Renaissance humanists include: eloquent rhetoric, the explicit portrayal of violence, the valorization of reason over emotion, the notion of fate, the hero’s or heroine’s lack of psychological conflict, the dangers of ambition, tyranny, and the belief in divine justice<sup>5</sup>.

Some critics have interpreted the highly elevated rhetorical style of humanist tragedies to mean that the primary purpose in writing tragedy at the time was merely an exercise in rhetoric

and, for those who wrote plays in Latin, to help them perfect their use of the language<sup>6</sup>. As Stone says, “To the humanists plot equaled lesson. The appropriateness of a subject emerged from its potential to instruct and every playwright attempted to ensure that the lesson became clear, using in particular the means outlined by the rhetoricians” (85). Despite the undeniable importance of the act of writing tragedy as a rhetorical exercise, humanists envisaged a second function of tragedy, which is to teach a lesson<sup>7</sup>. For this reason, many humanist tragedies raise moral questions concerning contemporary issues, especially during the Wars of Religion when tragic themes concentrated on politics and religion (Forsyth 167; Stone 87). Thus Stone describes the mentality of the humanist dramatists as being “didacticism which could be implemented by rhetorical exercises” (86).

Before beginning my discussion of death and gender in humanist tragedies, it is important to note one important esthetic difference that exists between ancient Greek tragedy as described above and humanist tragedy. As mentioned earlier, humanist tragedies resemble those of Seneca more than those of Euripides, Aeschylus, and Socrates. One major difference that can be seen immediately is that, like Seneca’s heroes, the heroes and heroines found in humanist tragedies usually do not evolve. They generally have one personality that remains constant or are resolutely fixed on a decision that they have already made from the very beginning of the play, even if that decision makes them miserable. Because of this, they rarely experience any internal, psychological conflict<sup>8</sup>. Renaissance dramatists replaced the internal battles, which were considered practically essential to the creation of *pathos* in Greek tragedy, with rhetorical study and moralization. The resulting heroes and heroines are thus simplified and, either by their complete goodness or their utterly contemptible character, provide the spectator with a model of behavior to either emulate or to despise (intro. *Reine d’Ecosse* 62).

One character whose focus has been narrowed in comparison with that of her Greek counterpart is La Péruse's Médée. As previously shown, Euripides's Medea is quite complex and even gains our sympathy through her pathetic cries over the idea of murdering her own children. As Forsyth states, "Euripide, en dessinant son portrait de Médée, exploitait toute une gamme d'émotions: le pathétique du début de la pièce éveille notre pitié avant que la colère vengeresse de l'héroïne ne vienne nous inspirer la terreur; la haine vindicative n'éclate que tardivement, cette haine qui est l'expression finale d'un être passionné écrasé par la souffrance" (103). Medea's suffering, therefore, makes the spectator see her as a human with weaknesses who has been wronged, thus feeling both compassion for her while simultaneously being outraged by her behavior. Though her situation and her reasons for killing Jason's new wife as well as his children may be identical to Euripides's Medea, La Péruse's heroine is quite different and is more odious as she has lost all sense of motherly love and shows no compassion whatsoever for her children.

Although throughout the play, Médée speaks of herself as a woman who has been wronged, she has been stripped of all traits that would make the spectator feel sympathetic to her cause. Whereas Euripides's Medea shows motherly love and anguish in the midst of her rage, the other expresses nothing for her children other than eagerness to use them to avenge herself as well as her brother. When the *nourrice* asks her if she truly wants to kill the children whom she gave birth to, Médée simply accuses her of cowardice and says, "Vrai est qu'ils sont mes fils, mais Jason y a part" (V.1159-61), thus, their loss means even less to her because of her utter hatred of their father. Likewise, when her brother's spirit appears seeking vengeance for his own murder, Médée slaughters one of her sons and declares, "Tiens-donc, frère, voici pour t'apaiser ton ire. / Je t'offre corps pour corps. Je t'en vais l'un occire" (V.1178-79). She expresses no

remorse or sense of guilt over killing her children as they are merely a tool for her vengeance. Thus, although the exact same crime was committed by both Euripides's and La Péruse's heroines, and for the same reason, the latter's is much more barbaric, not because of the act itself, but because of Médée's coldness toward her own offspring which renders her inhuman. This lack of maternal concern is a reflection of the single-mindedness of her character resulting from her inability to control her emotions concerning Jason. She is not divided between her sense of motherly love and her desire to avenge herself: her love for her children has simply been eliminated in order to allow her to become totally consumed with her desire for vengeance. She is thereby rendered more repulsive to the spectator and becomes undoubtedly an example of the dangers that can arise when passions are not kept under control. As Rohou says, "C'est l'avidité passionnelle qui provoque les fautes morales, les affrontements personnels, les troubles sociaux, la ruine des Etats, la tyrannie et des malheurs d'autant plus terribles qu'elle suscite le courroux céleste" (68).

Although La Péruse's Médée is a despicable woman, she still provides the spectators food for thought through her lamentations on the state of married women. Although a woman is not expected to remain as hidden from public view as she was in ancient Greece, she is still considered a lifelong minor and is given to a husband whom she cannot choose but must obey, and whose marriage serves a purely political function (Berriot-Salvadore 31; Maulde 36). Whereas Euripides's *Medea* makes the spectator pity women whose husbands are unfaithful, laying blame on the male (vv. 230-51), La Péruse's *Médée* focuses on the fault of the female who does not follow custom. Rather than accepting to be married to a man of her father's choosing, Médée chooses her own "husband", going against the will of her father (I.105-13). In disobeying him, she is guilty of creating her own problem. Without a proper union between her

and her husband, she is vulnerable to his infidelity, which will ultimately lead to her misery as well as the death of her children and Jason's entire household. As Maulde states in her *Les Femmes de la Renaissance*, "L'idée qu'une jeune fille doit se laisser passivement marier est à peu près la seule sur laquelle tout le monde se trouve d'accord. On est absolument d'avis qu'en agissant autrement la jeune fille ferait presque toujours une sottise dont elle se repentirait" (37).

As shown through *Alcestis*, Greek tragedy occasionally represented loyal wives as the central characters of their tragedies, showing their goodness and lauding them for their loyalty to their husbands. Renaissance tragedy, however, has very few "good wives" as the main focus of their tragedies, with perhaps the exception of Garnier's Porcie who shares the spotlight with the author's lesson on the pointlessness of civil war (intro. *Porcie* 17). Renaissance dramatists do present admirable wives on stage, and in significant roles, such as that of Grévin's Calpurnie (*César*), however, their loyalty is only of secondary interest to the tragedy. In some cases, humanist playwrights have even rewritten the storylines from Greek tragedy, such as Euripides's *Hippolytus*, so as to appeal to their public by changing its focus from demonstrating the honor gained through being a loyal wife to a didactic lesson to be learned from allowing passions to overwhelm reason and cause a wife to betray her husband. In Euripides's tragedy, for example, when Phaedra learns that the nurse has told her son-in-law of her love for him, she decides to kill herself in order to save her honor and that of her children. She says:

I have thought it over; there is only one solution to my problem, if I am to  
bequeath an honorable life to my children and turn this disaster to my own credit.  
Never will I disgrace my Cretan home, nor will I face Theseus on  
so vile a charge,--not for the sake of one little life.

(*Ten Plays* 82)

When the chorus leader asks for an explanation of what she is about to do, she says simply, “Die” (*Ten Plays* 82). This play, therefore, shows us the nobility of her decision to sacrifice her life for her honor, making her seem admirable although her passions have gotten the better of her. The idea of an admirable hero or heroine who is dominated by passion, however, would be a completely unacceptable notion to set on the Renaissance stage. Therefore, when Garnier rewrites the story, he presents Phaedra (*Hippolyte*) as an adulterous, incestuous woman who is resentful of her conjugal duty, has no sense of honor and, most importantly, has no control over her hormones. As she says of her love for her son-in-law, “...l’innocente amour s’exerce volontaire, / Sans pâlir sous les noms d’inceste et d’adultère” (II.531-32). Garnier, therefore, portrays Phèdre as being completely unashamed of her love for Hippolyte, which she considers “natural”. She claims to be able to justify her feelings for two primary reasons: First, man has imposed marriage on women, not allowing them to choose their partner, and second, her love is stronger than her ability to reason. Concerning her attitude toward marriage, she says,

Les hommes, nos tyrans, violant la Nature,  
 Nous contraignent porter cette ordonnance dure,  
 Ce misérable joug...

(II.523-25)

Thus, she sees marriage as a patriarchal invention that is contrary to nature; as such, love has no reason to respect the boundaries imposed by it. More importantly, she makes it obvious that she feels no sense of obligation to her marriage vows, affirming her right to love someone other than her husband by declaring, “L’amour ne se doit pas borner du mariage” (II.519). Since she believes that she is justified in betraying her husband, she offers little resistance to her passions but, as with Médée, her uncontrolled feelings will only lead to death and destruction. Thus,

Garnier presents not only the dangers of unbridled passions, but also a lesson in loyalty to marriage vows, directed toward women.

Medea's Jason is not the only example of a male whose betrayal of a female will ultimately lead to death. Both Hardy and Jodelle wrote versions of *Didon se sacrifiant* in which Enée, Didon's "husband", once hardly more than a refugee from fallen Troy, was taken in by her, allowed to share her throne, and leaves, commanded by the gods to reestablish a new Troy. As with Medea, Didon feels completely deceived and wants revenge. Didon is unusual, however, in that to avenge herself, she makes a sacrifice to the gods to punish Enée, but that sacrifice is herself.

Although Jodelle's *Didon se sacrifiant* first appeared on stage around 1560, it is a very modern play for its time (intro. Jodelle *Didon* 345). It is an exception to the ideas that humanist characters do not evolve, that they do not experience internal conflict or guilt, and, unlike most sixteenth-century heroes and heroines, Didon takes responsibility for her suffering (349, 355). From the beginning of the play, we learn that she has already been married to the king Sichée and that her brother, Pygmalion, killed him to rob him of his riches (31-33). She is now Sichée's widow and, since she has not married Enée, is still bound by her marriage vows to her late husband. Therefore, having given in to her love for Enée and betraying her vows to Sichée, she will find herself guilty of adultery and abandoned, and, after much soul-searching, ultimately realizing that the principal blame lies within herself and her own shame (intro. Hardy *Didon* 26-27). As Mariotti states in the introduction to Jodelle's *Didon*,

[Didon] progresse dans son évolution qui l'amènera à devenir la seule et unique héroïne, comme le montre le titre de la tragédie. [Elle] désormais n'accuse plus ni les Dieux, ni Enée, ni la Fortune; elle cherche en elle-même les causes de tous ses

malheurs...et, au cours de son introspection, Didon arrivait à se sentir coupable. De femme fidèle de Sychée et veuve chaste elle était devenue la femme en proie aux passions; l'abandon d'Enée pouvait donc être ressenti, en quelque sorte, comme justifié. (353)

Although Didon does take responsibility for her sin, this does not mean that she excuses Enée for having seduced her and then left her. It does imply, however, that she knows that she is at fault for letting him sway her from her conjugal duty, and she will make him pay for doing so. Feeling the shame of adultery and the desire to avenge and regain her lost chastity, she chooses to sacrifice herself to the gods and to her husband. After asking the gods to make the Trojans plans fail (V.i.2156-88), she prepares to kill herself saying:

C'est à ce coup qu'il faut que coupable je meure!  
Sur mon sang, dont je veux sur l'heure faire offrande,  
Qu'on paie à mon honneur tant offensé l'amende!  
[...]  
Pour t'appaiser Sichée, il faut laver mon crime  
Dans mon sang, me faisant et prêtresse et victime.  
Je te suis, je te suis, me fiant que la ruse  
La grâce et la beauté de ce traître m'excuse.  
La grand' pile qu'il faut qu'à ma mort on enflamme,  
Déteindra de son feu et ma honte et ma flamme.

(V.i.2214-16; 2223-28)

By sacrificing herself, therefore, she not only hopes to ensure the failure of her disloyal lover's plans, but also to purify herself, separating herself from her tainted body (Intro. Jodelle *Didon*

67). Hardy's *Didon* shows her desire to cleanse herself through death particularly well, while emphasizing the possibility of an afterlife that she may spend with her true husband, Sichée. She says:

Rassure-toy, mon âme, efforce ta constance

Tu ne porteras plus du corps la penitence;

Le chemin préparé d'un repos eternel,

Tu vas sortir d'avec cét hoste criminel;

De sa corruption je te rendray delivre;

Luy éteint, je te fais immortelle revivre.

Sichée, satisfait de sa punition,

Te promet du passé toute abolition...

(1455-60)

Thus, death for Didon is a means of liberation from her tainted physical body, purification of her soul, and the means to eternal happiness in the afterlife with her husband.

As the sixteenth century was a period marked by religious fervor, the influence of Christianity can be found throughout Renaissance tragedy. Not only did many playwrights choose to write tragedies based on biblical and Christian themes, but also, religion influenced secular tragedy as well. In *Didon se sacrifiant*, for example, the heroine hopes for an afterlife of happiness with her husband, a notion that would have been impossible to envision in Antiquity given that the Greek notion of "afterlife" was a rather ambiguous state of non-being in Hades, "a gloomy, sunless place of nonlife" (Segal 227). As Segal says, "What survives in Hades is the feeble shade, wandering in darkness, reduced to a minimal state of energy and consciousness, a zero degree of existence" (227). Thus, when Alcestis dies, to ease her husband's grief, she says,

“Time will soften your suffering; the dead are nothing” (381). For her, death is an end that erases any awareness that she had of her life, but for Didon, death does not negate her awareness of her existence. It is an act that will serve as the renewal of her matrimonial vows to her husband, allowing her to be reunited with him in a state of purity and happiness.

Although the theme of conjugal duty is appropriate for tragedies of any period, both Hardy’s and Jodelle’s *Didon* reflect one issue which was of particular concern at the time given the wars between Protestants and Catholics: national interest. Whereas most of the political tragedies of the Renaissance address the question of tyranny and rebellion against a tyrant, especially those written toward the end of the sixteenth-century during the reign of religious intolerance imposed by Charles IX and Catherine de Médicis, Hardy in particular puts the general question of obedience to one’s national duty in the forefront of his play.

As the current head of the remaining Trojans, Enée is obligated to do what is best for his countrymen. From the outset of the play, however, there is an atmosphere of tension as the soldiers are ready to leave Carthage to found a new Troy, but Enée himself is reluctant to do so because of his love for Dido. Although Jodelle’s Enée expresses only minor regrets for having to leave his beloved, Hardy’s is weak and looks for excuses to stay, citing, for example, the possibility of turbulent water (91-93), for which he gets criticized by his hot-blooded men. Knowing the orders that the gods have given him, that he is in love with Dido, and that without him, his men can do nothing, Palinure says,

...un héros indomté,  
Un qui sçait des destins la sacre volonté,  
Un qui doit rebastir dans le sein de l’Itale  
Notre seconde Troye, à la premiere égale,

Qui tient notre salut enchaîné dans le sien,  
Cedant aux passions, d'excusable n'a rien

(107-112)

Palinure, therefore, chastises him, accusing him of prioritizing his love for a woman over the good of his country as well as the will of the gods, which a good leader cannot rightly do. Thus, as Howe says, “Le dilemme du Troyen est présenté comme celui d'un chef prudent, soucieux de l'intérêt national, conscient de son devoir de choisir sagement dans une affaire...” (44). Enée knows that he must follow through with his orders, which he ultimately will do, but he has difficulty acting upon them since he knows that his decision to leave will result in Didon's death (139-41). Thus, like Jodelle, Hardy has chosen to present a hero who undergoes psychological conflict, trying to determine how to respond to his civic obligation, guilt, and love.

As mentioned earlier, because of the strict rule of the monarchy and their policy of religious intolerance during the second half of the sixteenth-century, many Renaissance playwrights depicted political themes centered on tyrants and tyrannicide. Whereas a good king is one who acts for the good of the state, a tyrant is a king who abuses his power for his own amusement, toying with his subjects by humiliating them at times while flattering them at others. Likewise, the tyrant uses the well being of the State as justification for committing a crime when it is opportune for him to do so (Mairet 28; Assaf 21, 56). In summary, as Mairet explains, “On voit que le bien de l'État est ce qu'il suffit au prince d'oublier pour devenir tyran” (28).

Garnier's *Les Juives* presents a horrifying example of the tyrant's possible abuse of power. Though kings are supposed to act for the good of the state, Nabuchodonosor is consumed by his love of power, and thus presents an example of a male who is dominated by his passions. Although he has already proven himself to be a dominant king, Nabuchodonosor

guards his power very jealously, thus, when Sédécie dares to revolt against him, he wants revenge. As noted earlier, when a female seeks to avenge herself, she is most likely to wreak havoc within her family, as this is the only locus in which she has any real power. A king, though, being the central political body, has no limits to his power, other than those that he imposes upon himself in light of the fact that he is to act for the good of the state, and therefore can use his power in any manner that he wishes to avenge himself. Because the king has such freedom in choosing how to punish someone, the dramatist has a wide opportunity for creating horrendous situations that will cause the spectator to feel terror and pity, as Garnier has done. He portrays Nabuchodonosor as a king who does not see compassion or leniency as being compatible with maintaining the state and is the epitome of tyranny whom the spectator is to despise. The way that Garnier does this is to show him as someone who would take innocent children away from their mothers and murder them before the eyes of the person who was to protect them, their former king. As shown by the play's title, the most important and most tragic characters in *Les Juives* is the mothers. For, not only do they have the predominant role in the play, they are the ones who handed their children over freely to be slaughtered, only to learn later what they had done. Because of their children's murder, their anger, and their sense of guilt in sending them to their deaths, they themselves wish nothing more than to die to escape their misery. Lamenting, they cry:

O meurtrier d'innocents! ô parjure, bourreau,

Qui au sein des enfants va tremper le couteau,

Egorge, égorge-nous, ne te feins homicide!

Viens amortir ta soif dans notr sang liquide.

(V.2033-36)

Thus, they are the key to the play's *pathos*. While Nabuchodonosor's cruelty inspires the spectator's sense of terror, it is the forlorn mothers whom the spectator pities the most.

While *Les Juives* gives us a portrait of a tyrant, in *Porcie*, Garnier addresses more specifically the question of tyrannicide. Its subject, the appropriateness of Cesar's assassination, is one that will repeatedly be treated by sixteenth-century dramatists as it lends itself to the didactic purpose of humanist tragedies and deals with an issue relating to the violence of their time. The reason that this is such a pertinent issue is that under the monarchy, it was assumed that the people, or more specifically, the men, were obligated by a "devoir de révolte" to dethrone a king who was a tyrant (Germa-Romann 204-05). While most tragedies written before the massacre at Saint-Barthélemy, such as *Porcie* and Grévin's *César*, demonstrate the negative outcomes of killing a tyrant, most Protestant tragedies that followed, with the exception of de la Taille's *Saül le furieux*, are in favor of it (Forsyth 175). In *Porcie* and *César*, Brutus and Cassius felt that it was their duty to assassinate Cesar, but they end by showing that "l'assassinat d'un tyran pour sauver la liberté ne provoque que vengeances et émeutes" (intro. Grévin 11).

Although *Porcie* shows tyrannicide as being a less than noble act, Garnier does portray the value in serving one's country and the honor that can be gained from doing so. For noblemen, fighting for the good of the country was a way of obtaining honor and glory for themselves as well as the state, thus they actively looked for opportunities to fight. As Hélène Germa-Romann states, "Pour pouvoir ainsi, et dès son plus jeune âge, récolter les lauriers de la gloire, le gentilhomme doit se trouver au milieu des conflits. Et tout au long de sa vie, il doit sans arrêt les rechercher" (78). Thus, men were willing to risk their lives in their quest for glory, hoping to obtain it if not through victory in combat, then through a noble death, especially before witnesses (60, 87). As the soldiers say:

Il n'est trépas plus glorieux  
Que de mourir audacieux  
Parmi les troupes combattantes,  
Que de mourir devant les yeux  
De tant de personnes vaillantes.

(III.iii.1377-81)

Unlike Greek tragedy, many French political plays of the sixteenth century contain an important female character who is intelligent and knowledgeable about politics. Porcie, for example, actively took part in the conspiracy to kill Cesar, although this is a decision that she will come to regret (IV.i.1742-45). Some Renaissance playwrights are even more daring in putting women right at the focus of political tragedy, as in Antoine de Montchrestien's *La Reine d'Ecosse* and Jodelle's *Cléopâtre Captive*. Even though the heroines die for political reasons, in both of these plays, the true function of politics is simply to provide a justification for staging their noble deaths. The primary difference in them, however, is that Montchrestien's heroine dies courageously because of her belief in God, but Jodelle's dies nobly, preserving her honor as royalty.

*La Reine d'Ecosse* is an excellent example of the influence of Christianity in Renaissance tragedy. Although superficially, the subject of the play is the execution of the queen of Scotland by Queen Elizabeth, it is above all a Christian tragedy, where the queen's beliefs in God and life after death help her to face death without fear (Germa-Romann 56). Before she goes to her execution, she prays to God, repeatedly referring to the afterlife. She says, for example:

C'est fort peu de mourir pour reuiure à iamais  
Au séjour éternel en éternelle paix.

(IV.1269-70)

Like Didon, she does not see her death as an end. Through her account of her past, though, we learn that she has led a difficult life that has now come to a halt with her in captivity (III.705-841). Having been imprisoned for several years, all she wants now is her freedom, but she realizes that the only way in which she will get it is by dying:

O chere liberté, mais en vain désirée!  
[...]  
Je ne dois plus sortir d'une prison si forte,  
Où si j'en doy sortir la mort en est la porte.

(III.839; 843-44)

Because of her faith and her desire to be free of captivity, she goes to her death calmly and unafraid.

Like Montchrestien's heroine, Jodelle's Cléopâtre is not afraid to die and uses death as a means to freedom. There are, however, many differences in their deaths. While the queen of Scotland is executed, Cléopâtre simply dies of her own will. Likewise, although we see Antoine's ghost calling to Cléopâtre, we have no indication that she is Christian, and she never mentions the idea of joining Antoine in the afterlife. Although honor is a quality that men usually aspire to, she dies to protect her honor. As captivity is a shameful state, especially for a member of a royal house, she would rather die than remain a prisoner, especially when she learns that Octavian intends to take her to Rome, thus displaying her as his sign of his victory (Germa-Romann 29). She cannot bare the idea of her humiliation or the shame that this would bring to

Antoine (IV.1309-10); thus, as a symbol of her status and her refusal to give up her honor in exchange for her life, she puts on her royal clothing and crown and dies (V.1483-84).

In summary, although women were allowed more freedoms in the sixteenth century France than they were in ancient Greece and Rome, the basic roles that men and women held in both societies were very similar. From one period to the next, men still dominated the political and military sector of life, the female was primarily in charge of bearing children and keeping her husband happy, and marriages were political arrangements. Despite this, changes in esthetics, religious beliefs as well as the function of tragedy are reflected in the ways in which men and women are portrayed and in the function of masculine and feminine death within the tragedy. Since Renaissance playwrights began using tragedy as a mode of instruction, their plays provide more examples of tragedies that concern political issues, such as tyrannicide, and show women in particular the dangers of letting their passions dominate their reason. Because their sense of esthetics was based more on rhetoric than on psychological conflict, characters were simplified so as to allow the plays to perform their didactic purpose more clearly. Treacherous women were just that, and tyrants could not be more cruel. Likewise, descriptions of murder and death could not have been more gruesome. The sixteenth century was one of extremes, and although some playwrights such as Hardy continued to write tragedies whose primary goal was to portray excessively gruesome descriptions of death in the early seventeenth century, as will be shown in the next chapter, the majority did not. Around the mid 1630's, as Corneille is making his début onto the tragic stage, tragic authors will begin to focus more on creating suspense, particularly by portraying psychological conflict, *coups de théâtre* and *reconnaisances* as prescribed by Aristotle, rather than shocking the spectators.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> intro to *Medea* 157; Syropoulos 2; Foley 4

<sup>2</sup> intro to *Medea* 157; Syropoulos 2, 6; Beachman 16; Foley 4

<sup>3</sup> Lazard 8-9; Rohou 57; Forsyth 10

<sup>4</sup> Lazard 84; Stone 85; Rohou 59; Forsyth 100

<sup>5</sup> Forsyth 101, 103; Lazard 84-85; Rohou 59

<sup>6</sup> Lazard 78; Rohou 59; Stone 85

<sup>7</sup> Rohou 57, Stone 87, Forsyth 167; Lazard 91

<sup>8</sup> Stone 88; intro to *Reine d'Ecosse* 62; Forsyth 100-01

## CHAPTER 3

### DEATH AND GENDER IN TRAGEDIES IN NON-CORNELIAN TRAGEDIES OF THE BAROQUE PERIOD, OR THOSE OF CORNEILLE'S CONTEMPORARIES

Although Corneille is often thought of as a classical dramatist whose works rivaled those of Racine, he produced the majority of his plays, especially his masterpieces such as *Le Cid* (1637), *Horace* (1641), and *Polyeucte* (1643), during the baroque period. He and his contemporaries, such as Jean Mairet, Jean Rotrou, and Tristan l'Hermite, were just beginning the evolution away from the irregular form, extreme situations and excessive or atrocious subjects that characterized humanist tragedies, exemplified by those of Robert Garnier, and began producing works which conformed to Malherbe's standards of the regular tragedy, obeying the rules of unity of time, place and action, and presenting fewer shocking scenes on stage in order not to offend the public's sensibilities (Morel 17). Some playwrights, however, such as Alexandre Hardy, would persist in producing tragedies characterized by Morel as having a "style *rude*, tantôt violemment imagé et hyperbolique à l'excès, tantôt familier jusqu'à la crudité," going beyond the limits of *vraisemblance*, and possibly offending the public by presenting murders, suicides, and rapes on stage (28).

Since Corneille truly belongs to the baroque period, in order to establish a ground for comparison of the association between death and gender in his plays and that of his contemporaries, in this chapter, I will present an analysis of the different ways in which death

and gender are related in a representative sample of tragedies by other baroque authors. In order to give a realistic impression of the kinds of plays that the public would have actually seen represented on stage during the time, I have chosen to study works from a wide variety of authors who were overall successful, such as Mairet, Théophile de Viau, and Tristan l'Hermite, and have included tragedies in which gender appears to be an important factor in the death of a character or his or her partner in some way. For this reason, although Rotrou's *Cosroès* was not as successful as his *Véritable Saint Genest*, I chose to use the former: The significant role that gender plays in the power struggle between the two princes, their father, and the power-hungry queen who manipulates her love-stricken husband, which ultimately leads to numerous deaths in *Cosroès*, is much greater than that of a single actor who is inspired by God's grace to embrace the Christian faith and allows himself to be martyred.

When discussing death in tragedies, one must first address the question of the political situation of the characters who die or who bring about the death of another individual. Pierre Delauidud d'Aigaliers clearly explains in his *Art Poétique* (1597) the Aristotelian notion that the heroes and subject matter of tragedies should be modeled after the events which surround the aristocracy: "L'on y traite de l'Etat, des affaires et Conseil. Les personnages de la Tragédie sont rois, princes, empereurs, capitaines, gentilshommes, dames, reines, princesses et damoiselles, et rarement hommes de bas état" (Livre V, chap iv). This description of the tragic subject is a fair representation of the characters and subject matters presented in baroque plays. Statistically, the vast majority of the leading characters discussed in this study, whether male or female, are royalty, and with royalty comes power.

D'Aigliers explains that within the general aristocratic context, tragedies should present "les commandements des rois, les batailles, meurtres, viollements de filles et de femmes,

trahisons, exils, plaintes, pleurs, cris, faussetés, et autres matières semblables...” (ibid). Ironically, it is often the kings themselves who are responsible for the unjust deaths of tragic heroes or heroines; for kings themselves should be, but rarely are, the epitome of goodness and generosity because of their divine nature and their duty in serving the people while simultaneously ruling over them. In his book *La Mort du Roi*, Francis Assaf explains the inherently complex nature of the king which results from his existence as both a physical, mortal human being subject to the laws of nature, or a *corps physique*, and as an all-powerful, divine and eternal being comprising the king’s *corps politique*:

...soumis à la loi [naturelle] dans son corps physique, le roi *est* la loi de par son corps politique, en même temps qu’il ne peut, ne doit légiférer contrairement à la Raison. On voit là la source de l’absolutisme, qui s’exprime souvent dans la formule du ‘bon plaisir’ du roi, laquelle dans l’esprit du public, en est venue à signifier l’arbitraire, même le caprice du souverain, dont le peuple a tout à redouter. Il importe de préciser que, dans les théories de la souveraineté, ‘bon’ ne signifie pas arbitraire, comme dans l’expression ‘Je fais ce que bon me semble’, c’est-à-dire ‘ce qui me procure le plus de plaisir corporel’, mais légitime, bienfaisant, par opposition au ‘mauvais’ plaisir, qui consisterait justement pour le roi à exercer le pouvoir à seule fin de satisfaire sa personne physique. (23)

Thus, as long as the king maintains his legitimacy by using his power to act for the good of the state, in his political life, his power is absolute. He has, for example, the ability to wage war or to kill a person simply by commanding that it be done, and for this reason, he is to be respected and feared (Ekstein 11). In his physical life, however, the king has no power beyond that of his subjects, but in tragedies, he often does not acknowledge this limitation on his power and acts as

a tyrant by choosing to use his *corps politique* to satisfy the desires of his physical self. In these plays, kings abuse their power by using violence in order to try to eliminate a male rival for a female's love or to punish the female in reaction to her rejection of him.

Although kings do not readily admit that they are abusing their rights when they use their power to satisfy their passions, on some level, they are aware that resorting to such means is indeed unjust and illegal because they attempt to avoid it. Prior to resorting to violence, kings attempt to win over the female through legitimate means by making an effort to appeal to her. In Tristan's *La Mariane*, for example, attempting to explain the extent to which he has tried to please Mariane in order to win her love and his lack of success at doing so, Hérode says,

En vain je l'ai traitée avec toute l'adresse  
Dont un parfait Amant oblige une Maîtresse;  
Car travaillant sans fruit dans le soin que j'ai pris,  
Mes faveurs ont toujours irrité ses mépris.  
Toutes mes passions n'ont fait que lui déplaire...

(II.v.669-73)

In addition to trying to earn her love through amorous discourse, the unmarried king may try to tempt her sense of greed and glory by offering her the chance to become queen and reinforcing upon her the fact that in doing so, not only would her social status be elevated, but also that she would acquire the material riches of the state that come with the title. These love-stricken kings who are driven by their uncontrollable passion and unable to forego the idea of possessing the female resort to violence only after they have determined that they have exhausted their legitimate means of acquiring her love. In Théophile's *Pyrame et Thisbé*, by the time the king first appears on stage, we can determine that he has already made every possible attempt to

win Thisbé's love by legitimate means, but because of her love for Pyrame, he has as of yet been unsuccessful. He declares,

C'est trop faire de vœux, c'est trop verser de larmes,  
Il faut avoir recours à de meilleures armes;  
Cette ingrate farouche, avecque ses mépris,  
A donné trop longtemps la gêne à mes esprits.  
La qualité de Roi, l'éclat de ma fortune,  
Au lieu de l'attirer, la choque et l'importune:  
Elle aime mieux, ignoble et honteuse qu'elle est,  
Un simple citoyen.

(I.iii.167-73)

When the king says that "Il faut avoir recours à de meilleures armes," we can see that despite her continual rejection, instead of renouncing his love for Thisbé, he is going to continue his pursuit through different means: he has decided to use his political power to facilitate his amorous conquest. Because of Thisbé's unshakeable love for Pyrame, the king sees him as a permanent obstacle to his love, which must be made "peu capable de plaire" (I.v.176) in order for him to succeed. When Syllar asks how he proposes to accomplish this, the king responds simply: "Je le ferai mourir" (I.iii.179). Syllar, aware of the fact that the king would be abusing his political power by killing Pyrame simply because Thisbé loves him, reminds him of this. The former, however, refuses to distinguish between the desires of his physical self and the duties of his political self and claims to have complete authority in doing so:

Et moi, je tiens du Ciel ma meilleure partie,  
Mon âme avec les Dieux a de la sympathie;

J'aime que tout me craigne, et crois que le trépas  
Toujours est juste à ceux qui ne me plaisent pas.  
Pyrame est en ce rang, sa mort est légitime,  
Car déplaire à son Roi, c'est avoir fait un crime.

(I.iii.203-08)

Although this abuse of his power is never acknowledged by his *ministre* and *domestique* as legitimate, because the king has the power to have them killed as well, they unsuccessfully attempt to carry out his order to assassinate Pyrame. Despite the fact that both Pyrame's and Thisbé's parents fervently disapprove of their relationship, it is this act of tyranny on the king's part which will be the catalyst provoking the lovers' death. As Saba explains, "Les deux amants décident donc de s'enfuir non pour échapper à l'interdiction des deux familles, mais pour se soustraire au pouvoir abusif du souverain...Son abus est la cause de la fuite des amants et donc de leur mort" (129). Thus, because the misunderstanding concerning the lion which causes them to commit suicide occurred while the two lovers were trying to flee the king's tyranny, he is responsible for their deaths.

If a king is dominated by passionate sentiments for a female, his power cannot be absolute (Ekstein 10), and in Du Ryer's *Lucrece* and Tristan's *La Mariane*, violence toward the female herself is the result of the king's anger when he realizes that his power is limited when it comes to obtaining true love. In these plays, the king wishes to possess not only the body of the female, but also her heart, and once he realizes that he can never dominate her emotionally, he avenges his broken ego through violence on her body, the only part of her that he can control. In *Lucrece*, Tarquin is aware that he is attempting to seduce a woman who is married and is known for her virtue. However, primarily because of his pride, he still refuses to abandon his efforts

when she rejects him. After she has repeatedly refused his advances, he draws a knife on her and says, “Ha c’est trop mespriser et ma flamme et mon rang, / Ou j’aurai votre amour, ou j’aurai votre sang” (III.ii.1141-42). Nevertheless, rather than show fear, she simply invites him to kill her as she would rather die than betray her husband (III.ii.1141-44). This merely irritates Tarquin who decides to rape her, thus physically gratifying himself while punishing her for offending him. Consequently, her ingratitude toward the fact that a person of such a high rank is showing her affection serves as an excuse for him to inflict violence upon her.

Although tragedies from the second half of the seventeenth century infrequently, if not never, contain instances of rape, it is still a fairly common occurrence in baroque plays because of the ease with which it evokes the tragic sentiments of terror and pity. Baroque tragedies, particularly the earlier ones, simply contained more violence and showed much more of it on stage than later ones because the idea respecting *bienséances* and not offending the public was not as important as using any means necessary to provoke the spectator to feel terror and pity. In Hardy’s *bourgeois* tragedy *Scédase* (1624), for example, two noblemen rape the two daughters of a *paysan* and kill them on stage by throwing them into a well. As stated earlier, late sixteenth-century ideals concerning tragic aesthetics such as d’Aigaliers statement that “plus les Tragédies sont cruelles, plus elles sont excellentes” (Livre V, chap iv) were just beginning to dissipate during the early seventeenth century, thus accounting for such horrific scenes as can be found in Hardy’s works.

Oftentimes, in tragedies in which a female is subject to violence such as rape or murder, the men who commit these acts hold her responsible for the crimes that are committed against her because of qualities that she possesses, primarily her beauty. In *Pyrame et Thisbé*, *Scédase*, and *Lucrèce*, for example, feminine beauty is the principal catalyst for the extreme passions

which drive males to use any means necessary to possess a female; thus she is to blame for her own misfortune. Speaking to his friend about Thisbé's beauty, Pyrame says that "elle a quelque chose à tenter un barbare" (II.i.294). His interpretation of the power of Thisbé's beauty will later be reaffirmed when the king, who has fallen passionately in love with her, attempts to have his rival assassinated in order to eliminate his competition. In *Scédase*, Charilas, one of the two noblemen who will rape and ultimately kill the *paysan*'s daughters, describes them as

Deux sœurs en qui le Ciel admire la nature,  
En qui chaque action dément la géniture,  
Digne de quelque sceptre à leur mérite offert  
(I.ii.52-55)

He continues his praise of their beauty, saying,

Ô Cieux! y repensant ce dédale me perd;  
Mon âme ne se peut retrouver égarée  
Dans leur double merveille à nulle comparée  
Et le cœur tout de flamme à coup se trouve épris,  
D'une, à qui céderait la beauté de Cypris.  
(I.ii.56-61)

Although in this initial passage, Charilas is praising the girls' beauty, later on, once he and his friend Euribade realize that they have very little chance of winning their love, they begin to express anger about their inaccessibility, referring to them as "ces farouches beautés" (III.627) and "ces belles Méduses" (II.ii.389). Reinforcing the idea that their rape and murder will be their own fault because of their desirability, Euribade says to his friend,

Nos amoureux desseins, libres, n'ont plus d'entraves;

[...]

Seuls, allons affronter ces farouches beautés,

Non pour en recueillir de froides privautés;

Passons au dernier point, la chose résolue,

...[même] s'il faut le ravir d'une force absolue...

(III.622; 627-30)

In *Lucrèce* also, as with Scédase's daughters, Collatin's wife's beauty is the primary catalyst for Tarquin's excessive passions that drive him to try to possess her at all cost. Tarquin declares to Brute:

J'ai veu, j'ai veu Lucrece, ou bien la beauté mesme,

Et c'est en dire assez pour t'apprendre que j'aime.

Ainsi sans y penser, un Ami sans raison

Croid chez lui me conduire, et me mene en prison.

(II.ii.407-10)

The rape that occurs in Du Ryer's play inspires less pity because it occurs off-stage, and *Lucrèce* is shown as being victorious. Although recognizing the physical dishonor of her situation, *Lucrèce* rejects the moral dishonor that Tarquin tries to impose on her as her punishment and proclaims her innocence because she did not voluntarily betray her husband. As she explains to her husband and father,

Mais quelques grands succez qui suivent ses efforts,

Le barbare qu'il est n'a vaincu que le corps.

Ce ne fut pas *Lucrèce*, à mourir toute preste,

Qui fut de ce Tyran la honteuse conquête;  
Mais ce ne fut qu'un corps sans ame et sans appas,  
Puisque l'ame n'est point où l'on ne consent pas.  
Ainsi ce bien me reste au tourment que j'endure,  
Que dans un corps souillé, je garde une ame pure...

(V.scène dernière.1345-52)

One of the most evident characteristics of this passage is that we can see that, as with the king's two bodies, Lucrece has a double self composed of her physical self and her soul, the two of which, even prior to death, exist independently of one another. She, like Mariane, will welcome death in order to separate the two.

Females encourage their own death when it can serve to free their soul from their body in order to escape an undesirable situation in which they find themselves physically. Lucrece, for example, stabs herself as a means of separating her pure, spiritual self from her tainted physical body. As she says,

Mon esprit, cher espoux, n'y peut estre qu'en guerre,  
Il deteste ce corps, comme une infame terre,  
Et pour estre à toi seul, il fuit un logement  
Qu'on ne peut plus vanter d'estre à toi seulement.

(V.scène dernière.1443-46)

As can be seen in this passage, for Lucrece, death is not only a means of separating her physical self from her spiritual self, but it is also a means by which she hopes to feel at peace with herself; for in her present situation, she feels as if her two halves are fighting one another. In order to put an end to her torment while simultaneously disposing of her impurity, she must abandon her

physical self. In doing so, she will once again become a virtuous and untainted wife, as she had always been before.

Mariane also makes a clear distinction between her physical self and her spiritual self and sees death as a means of liberating herself from Hérode. In the play's *avertissement*, Tristan explains that after conquering Judea, Hérode married Mariane against her will in order to reaffirm his power as she was the last surviving member of the former ruling family (264). Although Hérode falls deeply in love with Mariane, for her, there was never a question of whether or not she would ever love her husband because she simply refuses to consider the possibility of loving her family's murderer. She says to her confidante Dina who advises her to try to love him,

Mais quoi? veux-tu que j'aime un Monstre abominable,

Qui du trépas des miens me paraît tout sanglant?

(II.i.348-49)

Because of her hatred toward her husband and his power over her that he had gained through conquering her father's crown, she is trapped in a situation from which the only possible means of escape are either losing her rank as queen and becoming a slave of the state or dying. Given Hérode's extreme love for Mariane, he probably could not let Mariane live as a slave and not be his wife, and Mariane herself is too proud of her rank to allow this to happen as well. As she says,

Si mon corps est captif, mon âme ne l'est pas:

Je laisse la contrainte aux serviles personnes,

Je sors de trop d'aïeux qui portaient des Couronnes

Pour avoir la pensée et le front différents,

Et devenir Esclave en faveur des Tyrans.

(II.i.362-66)

And when Hérode threatens her life, believing that she is plotting to kill him, she responds:

Poursuis, poursuis, barbare, et sois inexorable,

Tu me rends un devoir qui m'est fort agréable,

Et ta main obstinée à me priver du jour

M'oblige beaucoup plus que n'a fait ton amour.

Ici ta passion répond à mon envie,

Tu flattes mon désir en menaçant ma vie,

Je dois bénir l'excès de ta sévérité,

Car je vais de la mort à l'immortalité,

Ma tête bondissant du coup que tu lui donnes,

S'en va dedans le Ciel se charger de Couronnes...

(III.ii.855-64)

If Mariane refuses the idea of losing her rank as well as that of returning Herod's love, her only recourse is to obtain liberty through her death and free her soul from her captive body. Although, as Beauchamp-Rank explains, Mariane is a Christian and, as such, is forbidden to commit suicide, by choosing death over servitude to Hérode, she refuses to be the victim of his tyranny and becomes as much the controller of her own destiny as was Lucrece through her suicide (127).

According to Ekstein's article, "Language, Power, and Gender in Tristan's *La Marianne* and *La Mort de Sénèque*," the way in which Mariane obtains her death is through language (10-11). Without suicide, Mariane has no way to fulfill her desire to die honorably unless she finds a

way to force Hérode to execute her. She will attempt to do this by continually provoking his anger as in the passage above when she negates his sexual desirability by stating that death is more desirable to her than he is.

Unlike kings, women, including queens, cannot possess true power, and because of this, feminine language plays a particularly important role when it comes to obtaining power in order to have their wishes fulfilled. As Ekstein explains,

For the tyrant, language is a substitute for power, a displacement that sets in motion more concrete manifestations of force. For women, language is an independent means of creating power...Women's access to power through language is indirect, however: the woman's wishes must be mediated through the will of the tyrant. Women's words may only be efficacious in these dramatic universes if the tyrant is persuaded or somehow moved by them and then acts through his own words. (11)

Typically, in order to encourage the king to act on her behalf, a female will invent a political reason for which he should follow her advice and accomplish her desires. In the case of Mariane, for example, not only does she herself aggravate Hérode's anger in an attempt to expedite her death, but her half-sister Salomé, who hates her, also tries to use the king's own insecurities to her advantage in order to have her killed. She invents the ruse that Mariane is supposedly plotting to kill him, and when Hérode wishes to forgive her, she accuses him of weakness, saying:

Quand pour votre malheur cette Erynne infernale [Mariane]

Aurait fait dans l'Etat une forte cabale,

Vous auriez du regret de voir que vous deviez

Prévenir ces dessins lorsque vous le pouviez,  
Vous vous repentiriez d'en avoir fait la faute,  
Mais ce serait trop tard.

(IV.i.1227-32)

She accuses him, therefore, of being imprudent and risking becoming a subject of mockery because of the love and clemency that he will have shown his wife, who only wants to see him dead. Thus, believing himself to be protecting not only the state but his reputation as well, he chooses to have Mariane executed.

As explained by Cardin Le Bret in his *De la souveraineté du Roi*, despite her marriage to the king, according to the *loi salique*, even the queen has no right to retain political power. No female can rule, and the fact that a female is married to the king should not give her any ability to influence the laws of the state (31, 42-3, 48). As Assaf states, between a king and queen “Mariage et pouvoir sont entièrement séparés,” and marriage is merely “une union de corps physiques à laquelle le corps politique n’a aucune part” (51). Nevertheless, as Le Bret acknowledges, queens often do not remain completely uninterested in their husband’s political life and instead influence him to accomplish their own personal desires (44). Tristan’s *La Mort de Chrispe* and Rotrou’s *Cosroès* both contain examples of a queen who is able to manipulate her husband in order to have her own will satisfied. Contrary to Salomé, though, neither Fauste nor Syra tries to influence the king specifically in order to bring about the death of another person; nevertheless, in *Cosroès*, the queen’s ambitious projects will result not only in her own death, but also in her son’s and her husband’s as well.

Being political in nature, ambition is primarily a masculine phenomenon that creates conflict between males who are often related. But females, like Syra, can be ambitious as well in

their aspirations for a favored male. The role that ambition plays in tragedies is rather ambiguous. When it is used to obtain legitimate glory, it is shown in a positive light; however, the term is often associated with illegitimate and dishonorable methods by which characters obtain power, and brings about their tragic death and/or the death of their loved ones. As Van Baelen states, “Elément positif ou négatif, l’ambition se définit en termes des personnages, de leurs buts, et des moyens dont ils se servent pour y arriver,” and, explaining its role in *Cosroès*, she says, “Dans le cas de chacun des personnages principaux, l’ambition les pousse à prendre les moyens les plus expéditifs pour obtenir le pouvoir: meurtre, dédain des lois....L’ambition ici implique la violence, la destruction d’un ordre ou de traditions ; elle s’oppose violemment à toute conception de récompense, de mérite” (193).

In *Cosroès*, the only character who has a legitimate right to be ambitious and aspire for the throne is Syroès, the king’s first-born son and legitimate heir from his first marriage; but the king’s second wife, Syra, is so obstinate in her desire to have her own son rule that she will use any means necessary to see it happen. As she says openly to her son’s rival in the very first scene of Act I, “je périrai traître, ou mon fils régnera” (v. 72). Impatient to see her own son be crowned king before Syroès could legitimately inherit the throne, the queen manipulates her husband into believing that it is in his own interest to relinquish it immediately, not to its legitimate heir, but to Mardesane. Taking advantage of both her husband’s love for her and the guilt that he feels and associates with Syroès for having become king through patricide, she suggests,

Tant que vous retiendrez les rênes de l’Etat,  
Vous y verrez l’objet qui fit votre attentat;  
Et vous ne pouvez voir ni sceptre ni couronne

Sans vous ressouvenir qu'un crime vous les donne.

[...]

Déchargez votre esprit de ce qui le traverse;

Cosroès m'est plus cher qu'un monarque de Perse;

Sans lui, je ne puis vivre, et vivant avec lui,

Je puis être encor reine et régner en autrui;

[...]

Et nous ne perdons rien, lorsque le même rang,

Quoique sous d'autres noms, demeure à notre sang.

(II.i.415-32)

Thus, as Morello states,

For reasons which are not fully exposed, [Cosroès] associates the guilt of his crime with Syroès...while seeing Mardesane as a purer extension of himself. He believes that he can be reborn by placing the latter on the throne...In Syra and Mardesane, Cosroès has sought a regeneration of himself, hoping that he can, through the rule of his second son, atone for his own crime. Of course, he is tragically unaware that his wife is shamelessly using his love for her to manipulate him. (147)

One could say, therefore, that she flatters his sense of guilt for wearing a crown obtained at the price of his father's head and encourages him to rid himself of that burden by turning the throne over to Mardesane, thus keeping the same royal blood, hers and his, in control. And although this speech in itself is enough to convince her husband that she is right, Syra also assures her

position by accusing Syroès of attempting to assassinate her in order to have him arrested, which she and Cosroès hope will make their decision seem legitimate in the public eye (II.i.441-42).

Despite the measures taken by Syra to assure her son's position, the people are against Mardesane as Syroès is the legitimate heir to the throne. They are aware of the queen's ability to control the king; consequentially, they impose his rebellion against his father's and Syra's actions. Palmyras, trying to get Syroès to defend his rights because the people are already prepared to help him, says to him,

La Reine qui vous craint a trop de politique  
Pour laisser un appât à la haine publique,  
Et vous chassant du trône oser vous épargner;  
Il faut absolument ou périr ou régner.  
Avouez seulement les bras qu'on vous veut tendre,  
Quand on peut prévenir c'est faiblesse d'attendre

(I.iii.245-50)

This puts Syroès in a difficult position because, although he acknowledges the justness of the cause of the people who wish him to fight for his rights, he says, "Laisser ravir un trône est une lâcheté, / mais en chasser un père est une impiété" (vv. 259-60). His dual dilemma, therefore, is that he must choose between two courses of action, both of which are just: being subservient to his father's wishes and allowing Mardesane to rule, or proclaiming his legitimate right to the throne. In other words, he must choose between his *devoir de sang* and his divine right, a position which he would not be in were it not for both the queen's ambitiousness and the king's weakness; for if Cosroès were not as easily manipulated by his wife, he would have insisted on

the legitimacy of Syroès's right to become the next king. As Syroès says about his unfortunate situation,

Du sceptre de mon père héritier légitime,  
Je n'y puis aspirer sans un énorme crime:  
Couable je le souille, innocent je le perds.  
Si mon droit me couronne il met mon père aux fers

(I.iii.277-80)

Thus, by following his *devoir du sang* and doing nothing, Mardesane will rule, the people may revolt, and he himself will be imprisoned for his supposed attempt on Syra's life, but by choosing to defend his right to the throne, which he will ultimately do, he will be responsible for bringing to justice his half-brother, his step-mother, and finally his own father; and for a crime as serious as attempting to usurp the crown from its legitimate possessor, the punishment must be death.

Needless to say, like Syroès, Mardesane also is bound to a *devoir du sang* toward his half-brother, mother and father. However, Mardesane is initially shown as being the least ambitious member of the family and doesn't wish to have any part in his mother's plan to have him rule. Unlike his parents, he understands the implications of bypassing his half-brother in order to have him rule and reassures Syroès of his lack of interest in such infamy by saying,

Non que je ne me sente, et d'âme et de naissance,  
Capable d'exercer cette illustre puissance;  
Mais quelque doux éclat qu'ait un bandeau royal,  
Il ne me plairait pas sur un front déloyal.

(I.ii.129-32)

Nevertheless, he gets entangled in his mother's plan simply because eager to satisfy his wife, Cosroès ignores his favored son's warnings that by crowning him, he would be condemning him to death. Fruitlessly attempting to refuse, Mardesane says to his father,

En m'honorant, Seigneur, craignez de m'immoler;  
Qui veut faire usurper un droit illégitime,  
Souvent, au lieu d'un roi, couronne une victime  
Et l'Etat est le temple, et le trône l'autel,  
Où cette malheureuse attend le coup mortel.

(II.ii.632-36)

But Cosroès, unaware that what he sees as a reward for Mardesane will lead to his death, simply orders him to take the crown (Morello 148). He exhorts, "Je puis sur qui me plaît reposer ma couronne; / et pour toute raison, portez-la, je l'ordonne" (II.ii.645-66). Mardesane, then, knowing that his mother's ambition has condemned him to death, turns to her and says, "Ha, Madame! quel fruit me produit votre amour!" (II.ii.651). Through this sarcastic remark, he shows that he now understands that she had him crowned not for his glory, but to satisfy her own ego.

Mardesane is not entirely invincible to the charms of the crown, because once he has worn it and has experienced the power of ruling over a whole people, he does not wish to relinquish it to its rightful owner. Even in the face of death, when Syroès is sentencing him, he shows the same degree of firmness about maintaining his power as he did in his initial refusal to occupy the throne. As Morello says, "He [Mardesane] confesses that the few moments for which he was king were sufficient to convince him that he could not live and not reign and that, if Syroès were to spare him, he would do all in his power to depose him and avenge his father

and mother” (148). Ironically, Mardesane, who began the play as the least ambitious character, ends it with the same degree of resolve to possess the throne as his mother had had for him, thus reinforcing the link that exists between mother and son and making his death as unregrettable as hers.

Once Syroès has decided to defend his legitimate right to be king, he has very little trouble condemning his stepmother and half-brother, but he is unable to bring himself to condemn his own father. As Cosroès stands angrily before him saying, “Immole donc, tyran, mes jours à tes maximes...Ne donne rien au sang, rien à la pitié,” he immediately falls to his knees, begging his father for pity and offering to return the empire to him (V.v.1635-38, 1641-62). Not only does his father show no gratitude for his son’s generosity, he unsuccessfully tries to stop Syra’s and Mardesane’s executions, which will drive him to commit suicide.

By comparison of Syroès’s and Mardesane’s behavior during the judgment, ambition is actually shown in a positive light. On the one hand, Syroès is so obedient to his *devoir du sang* that, even though his father’s crime is extremely serious and he appears to feel no remorse for it, he is unable to fulfill the sovereign’s duty of delivering justice because of his weakness toward him. And on the other hand, Mardesane, who firmly states that he would ignore all brotherly sentiments in order to take the throne from Syroès, knowing that this would surely guarantee his execution, is shown as being very strong. Thus, as Morello says, the resolution with which the latter accepts his death sentence shows that “he might have made a better king than Syroès” (148).

The *devoir du sang*, or the sense of duty that family members feel toward one another which causes them to look out for one another’s interests, is a theme that reappears frequently throughout seventeenth-century tragedies, and it is often linked to tragic ambition. In addition to

Syra's passion for her son's reign in *Cosroès*, Rotrou's *Antigone* shows brothers fighting one another for their father's empire, and, in La Calprenède's *La Mort de Mithridate*, a son fights his father in order to obtain the throne sooner while simultaneously protecting himself from the threat of Rome.

While ambition is primarily a masculine sentiment that creates opposition between male rivals, with females, the *devoir du sang* is normally a unifying ideal for which they are willing to die. One of the best-known examples of this is Antigone. Although the vengeful tyrant Créon, who lost his son in battle in support of her brother Polynice, had ordered that anyone who attempted to bury his body be executed, she feels such a strong sense of love and duty toward him that she is willing to lose her own life in order to give him a proper, honorable burial.

Though not as well known as *Antigone*, *La Mort de Mithridate* also superbly shows death as the result of both masculine ambition and feminine loyalty to the family. Claiming to act for the well-being of the people, Pharnace, Mithridate's son, allies himself with Rome, his father's enemy, in order to take the crown for himself. As he explains,

Si le devoir du sang m'oblige à Mithridate,  
Si je passe chez lui pour fils dénaturé,  
Le règne d'un tyran a déjà trop duré,  
Le sang qu'il a versé désire qu'on le venge,  
Et ses sujets foulés autorisent ce change.

(I.i.66-71)

Despite Pharnace's declaration that his father is a tyrant, we learn later in the play that this is simply not true. Mithridate is depicted as being a courageous king under whose rule many people *have* died, but only because he has consistently and successfully resisted Rome's attacks

(I.ii.121-40). Pharnace's treason is merely an act of cowardice that he commits because he does not feel confident in his ability to defend himself from Rome as his father has done. In order to protect his own interests and not risk having the throne taken from him by the Romans, he simply uses the number of deaths that his father has caused by opposing Rome as an excuse for becoming their ally. Revealing his true reasons for his actions, he says to his wife Bérénice, who believes that he is wrong in opposing his father,

Mais si je veux trahir de plus puissants que moi,  
Qui me détournera la mort et l'infamie,  
Et que pourrai-je faire ayant Rome ennemie?

(III.iii.968-71)

Because of his eagerness to protect the crown, which he has yet to inherit, he betrays his family and everything that his father has stood for by resisting Rome in the past. Hoping that his father will simply give in, Pharnace shows his complete lack of comprehension of his father's sentiments toward Rome by offering to use his influence on his behalf. Mithridate replies,

Si tu connais ton père il est trop résolu,  
Le plus affreux tombeau me plaira davantage  
Que de rendre aux Romains un si honteux hommage  
[...]  
J'ai versé trop souvent le sang de cette ville,  
Et celles de l'Asie en ont assez reçu  
Pour étouffer l'espoir que j'en aurais conçu.

(IV.iii.1193-1201).

In this way, Mithridate tells his son that he does not understand him if he thinks that he would be willing to accept such a service, and this will be reinforced by the shock of disbelief that the latter receives when he finds that his father and the rest of his family has indeed killed themselves rather than submit. It is only because of their deaths that Pharnace realizes the grave consequences of his own ambition, which caused him to defy his *devoir du sang*. Thus, overcome with guilt, he describes himself as

... un tigre, un inhumain,  
Qui vous a pu trahir pour l'Empire Romain,  
Qui préféra l'éclat d'une simple Couronne  
A ce que le devoir et le sang nous ordonne

(V. iv.1729-32)

Contrary to their brother Pharnace, Mithridate's daughters will do anything to remain loyal to their father and his interests, including die. They choose to imitate their parents who see their suicide as a means of denying the Romans victory and drink the poison that Mithridate had prepared for himself in the event of an inevitable loss against Rome. As his daughter Mithridatie says,

Puisque rien maintenant ne nous peut secourir,  
J'approuve comme vous le dessein de mourir.  
Dans un autre climat je vous suivrai contente  
J'aurais vécu captive, et je meurs triomphante

(V.i.1412-16)

As demonstrated in the passage above, with the exception of Pharnace, Mithridate and his entire family use suicide as a means to escape a situation. Although for kings, a glorious death

usually entails dying in battle, since Mithridate is aware that his son is rebelling against him only in order to acquire the throne and not to kill him, he knows that Pharnace would most likely have him and his family merely taken captive. This would deprive Mithridate of an honorable death in fighting as king to resist the Romans, and given his convictions against Roman domination, this is simply not an option for him. And, since his entire family shares in his determination to die honorably as nobility, their suicides prevent Rome's victory over them because they do not allow themselves to be dethroned. They all, therefore, die gloriously as royalty rather than live as Rome's captives, demonstrating that for both male and female royalty, death is a means by which they preserve their rank.

In addition to the *devoir du sang* which obligates family members to be loyal to one another, married women are subjugate to a second *devoir*: the *devoir de la femme*. Pharnace clearly explains his wife's obligations to him when he reminds her that she should support him in every action that he chooses to take:

Si de sa passion ton esprit n'est guéri,  
Tu suivras à clos yeux l'intérêt d'un mari.  
Notre condition sera toujours commune,  
Tu dois aveuglément embrasser ma fortune,  
Aimer tous mes amis, haïr ceux que je hais,  
Et pour ne point faillir, faire ce que je fais.

(III.iii.831-36)

Generally, women's adherence to that *devoir* is unconditional. For example, in *Antigone*, Argie did not approve of the fact that her husband was waging war on his own brother; nevertheless, she remained loyal to him. As Morello states,

There is no question that he has been wronged by his brother and that he has a legitimate right to seek the throne...Yet the means by which he proposes to recoup the throne, the fratricidal duel, is condemned by all, including Argie and her father, as against the laws of nature. Whatever the political legitimacy of what he is doing, Polynice infringes on the laws of a transcendent morality, the natural law of blood, in seeking to kill his brother. (100-01)

Though Argie disapproves of Polynice's actions, like Antigone, who wants to bury her brother because of her own sense of duty toward him, she will risk her life in order to bury her husband and disobey Créon's orders because she feels that it is her duty to do so (III.vi.924-25).

One of the more astonishing examples of a wife's loyalty and devotion to her husband is that of Hypsiratée, Mithridate's wife. Not only does she support her husband on an emotional level, she supports him through her actions by actually fighting by his side. Preparing for battle against Pharnace, both Mithridate and Hypsiratée arm themselves, and when the king tries to discourage her from fighting, she says,

Sachez que les malheurs augment mon courage,  
Et que dans un combat, où mon amour m'engage,  
Contre tous les efforts de l'Empire Romain,  
Votre meilleur secours est celui de ma main.

(II.i.325-28)

Even though we learn shortly afterward that she has fought many times before and won, we see that her description of this particular fight is one in which her love obliges her to participate. By this, she shows that her resolution and courage to arm herself and fight against her own son are driven by both her love for her husband and the sense of duty that she feels toward him.

In Le Bret's book, we see that historically, there is a connection between love and combat. Love is seen as the driving force which inspires men to fight more enthusiastically; thus, for the Lacedemoniens, the goddess Venus was the protector of the city: "Le sang qui les [les hommes] échauffe à la guerre est le même qui les excite à l'amour; et pour ce sujet ce même peuple [les Lacedemoniens] adorait une Venus armée pour la Deesse tutélaire de leur ville" (32). Similarly, despite the fact that Mithridate tries to discourage his wife from participating in the combat, her courage inspires him to fight, even if he must die doing so. He says,

Un cœur si généreux me fait rougir de honte.  
Allons, et que Pompée trébuche, ou surmonte,  
Que Mithridate meure, ou qu'il ne meure pas,  
Je tiens indifférents la vie ou le trépas.

(II.1.353-56)

The description of Hypsycratée as an "invincible Amazone" fighting out of love for her husband echoes the image of Venus armed for battle (v. 341); thus her devotion to him and to her *devoir* encourages him to fight more courageously and to risk dying for his cause.

Although the majority of wives display complete loyalty to their husbands even if their husbands betray them, as Lucrèce momentarily believes, occasionally, they choose to reject him. In the case of Mariane, this is only logical as Hérode married her against her will, but Pharnace's wife Bérénice makes the conscious decision to forgo her *devoir conjugal* and to stay with Mithridate's family, knowing that she will die.

Mithridate and his family feel no sense of animosity toward Bérénice because of her husband's actions and even encourage her to join him in support of his cause as it is her duty to do so:

Vous regrettez Pharnace, et non pas Mithridate,  
Et puisqu'il est ingrat, vous devez être ingrate,  
D'une telle douleur le remède est en vous,  
Je ne vous retiens point, revoyez votre époux.

(I.iii.225-28)

The fact that Mithridate gives her permission to leave rather than take advantage of the situation to use her against his son once again proves that Mithridate is in no way a tyrant, but when he offers to allow her to go, she refuses to do so. Bérénice has such high regards for *devoir du sang* that Pharnace's betrayal of his family is unforgivable and renders him no longer worthy of her love. Refusing to join her husband, she declares:

J'estimais sa vertu, mais non pas sa couronne,  
Et fondant mon amour sur la seule raison,  
Je ne le puis aimer après sa trahison:  
Je quitte un déloyal, puisqu'il quitte son père,  
Et mourant avec vous, je fais ce qu'il dût faire.

(I.iii.250-54)

Through this passage, we can see that Bérénice is aware of the sacrifices that she is making by abandoning Pharnace: Not only does she lose her husband, she also loses the chance to rule as queen, and she will lose her life. Nevertheless, she repeatedly states that she has no interest in wearing a crown that was shamefully won and equally little interest in living just to follow a traitor's capricious desires. Thus, after Pharnace reminds her of her obligations to him as his wife, she says,

...si tu ne me vois compagne de tes pas,  
Publie hardiment que je ne t'aime pas.  
Mais servir les Romains contre ton propre père,  
Usurper pas sa mort un trône héréditaire,  
Tenir le jour de lui, le lui vouloir ôter,  
Juges-tu qu'en cela je te doive imiter?  
Sache que je croirais une honte de vivre,  
Ayant eu seulement le penser de te suivre.

(III.iii.847-54)

Thus, rather than choose to follow her husband and live in infamy, she decides to protect her honor and to die with Mithridate's family in support of their noble cause.

Because women are usually shown as weak, with the exception of Hypsycratée, they usually do not participate in physical combat. Thus when their lives are in danger, they attempt to use discourse as their means of defense. They try to deter violence or captivity through speech, and, if they are not Christian, this being ineffective, they kill themselves. After Syphax's death, for example, Sophonisbe debates on whether she should immediately kill herself or first attempt to make Massinisse fall in love with her, in which case she would not have to lose her freedom or rank. Phénice, not wanting her to die, says to her, "Pour moi je suis d'avis qu'oubliant le trépas / Vous tiriez du secours de vos propres appas" (II.iii.585-86). Following this advice, she charms Massinisse into marrying her and promising to protect her interests, thus delaying, at least momentarily, the need for her to kill herself.

In *La Mort de Mithridate*, feminine discourse is not as effective. Pharnace's parents had attempted to triumph over him through combat; however, the daughters and Bérénice took no

part in this because of their physical weakness. As Mithriditie, one of the daughters, says, “...si ma foible main ne peut vous secourir, / Etant de votre sang je saurai bien mourir” which summarizes clearly her intent to, if nothing else, kill herself if her brother cannot be stopped (II.ii.359-60). After the initial attempt at making Pharnace submit through fighting, his loved ones take turns trying to make him abandon his ambitious project by speaking to him and reminding him of his duties as husband and son, and this act of defense is one that the weaker females can participate in. After having said all that she possibly could to convince her husband to submit, Bérénice herself gives up and says to the king and queen, “Pour le salut commun j’ai fait ce que j’ai pu” (IV.i.1035). In reality, all that this amounts to is that she, like Pharnace’s sisters, spoke to him. With the exception of Hypsiratée, no other action is taken on the females’ part in their defense prior to killing themselves. Thus, as demonstrated here and in *La Sophonisbe*, for many females, speech is a substitute for a negative action, or an action taken in their own defense, but suicide is a positive action taken to obtain final victory through self-determination.

When choosing to kill themselves, females usually resort to poisoning and males to a more violent method, such as stabbing. Syra, Sophonisbe, Mithridate’s wife, daughters and daughter-in-law, for example, all die by poisoning themselves, whereas Mardesane, Massinisse, Hémon all stab themselves; and even though Mithridate attempts to poison himself, he must resort to more violent means to commit suicide because, unlike with the rest of his family, the poison is ineffective in killing him.

Contrary to most females, in *Pyrame and Thisbé*, Thisbé must resort to stabbing herself with Pyrame’s knife as there is no other means available for her to end her life. Her suicide has two effects. Because she dies in the same way and with the same knife as Pyrame, the two

lovers die a common death, which reinforces their unity. But this act of desperation on her part also renders Thisbé more admirable and more pitiable to the spectators. Her courage in killing herself in such a violent way because of her loss of Pyrame demonstrates the extent of her love and devotion to him; thus, her violent death serves to emphasize her profound emotional strength and to make the spectators esteem and pity her even more.

Cosroès and Syra also share a common death; however, Cosroès's suicide by poisoning himself after his wife has a very different effect than that of Thisbé's suicide. As stated earlier, Syra does not truly love Cosroès; contrarily, the latter cannot bear the idea of living without her. Thus, when Syra, condemned to death by Syroès, drinks some of the poison in order to carry out her sentence, Cosroès grabs the cup from her and finishes the rest himself. In this way, he imposes a common death on her, no matter how she feels toward him. But because poisoning is a conventionally feminine means of suicide which requires little courage in comparison to the typical masculine death of other kings who, for example, die in battle, it reinforces his feebleness and true ineffectiveness as a king in the face of his love for Syra: he chooses to die an unimpressive and traditionally feminine death in order to be with his wife rather than to live as king and occupy the throne that Syroès returned to him.

Contrary to Cosroès, whose weakness is emphasized through a typically feminine death, Fauste's masculine suicide by boiling in *La Mort de Chrispe* stresses her masculine qualities. Though she is a queen, the people see Fauste as the acting king since they attribute all of the state's actions to her will and not to that of her husband. As her son-in-law says to her,

Vous pouuez tout, Madame, & vous le sçavez bien,

C'est par vous seulement que l'Empereur respire.

Vous estes le bon Ange & l'Ame de l'Empire. [...]

Vous pouvez dispenser la rigueur ou la grace,  
Exciter la tempeste, ou causer la bonace.

(I.iii.240-243; 245-46)

As seen here, she obtains power through maintaining control over her husband, who merely enforces her will. In this way, she refuses to conform to the passive role that her gender requires of her and plays an active, masculine role by essentially ruling from behind the scenes. Not only does her active political role contradict the demands of her gender, but her death also reflects her desire to not be a typical, passive female as she chooses to die violently rather than to simply poison herself.

Although females are shown as being the physically weaker sex, they generally approach death with as much, if not more, resolution than men do. In *Sophonisbe*, once the heroine has received her beloved Massinisse's promise that he will kill himself later, thus joining her in death, without much hesitation or regret, she kills herself, claiming victory over Rome, who fears her heritage and wants to see her captive. Just prior to the drinking the poison, she says, "Délivrons les Romains de la peur et du mal / Que leur pourrait causer la fille d'Asdrubal" (V.v.1675-76). In comparison, however, Massinisse is much more hesitant and regretful than she prior to his suicide: In the final scene of the play, just before killing himself, he laments over Sophonisbe's death and the cruelty of Rome in a long monologue, evoking the spectators' pity for his loss and disillusionment.

In *La Mort de Mithridate* and *Antigone* also, we see feminine courage before death. The same daughter who had earlier expressed her disappointment in being unable to help her parents fight against her brother shows her courage in the face of death, saying to her sister, "Ne fuyons point l'honneur que la mort nous prépare. / Montrons que notre sexe a du cœur à son tour" (V.i.

1480-81). Bérénice also shows her resolve to die despite the fact that everyone discourages her from doing so. Mithridate's family reminds her of Pharnace's love for her and that she would become queen once they are dead; however, given the fact that she would still be obtaining the crown through infamy, she tells the king that if he does not allow her to partake in the poison, she will stab herself:

Que le fer, et le feu, m'en feront la raison,

Si vous me refusez la grâce du poison

Once he hands the poison to her, she says cheerfully,

Ah! que je suis heureuse!

Que ma perte rendra les Romains envieux,

Et que j'expirerai d'un trépas glorieux!

(V.ii. 1529-30; 1553-55)

stressing once again her lack of fear when confronting death. As for Mithridate himself, he is the first to drink the poison because he does not want to have to see the rest of his family die, however, the poison is not strong enough for him. Thus, despite the precaution he had taken to make the deaths of his family members more bearable by not having to see it, while waiting for the poison to take effect, he witnesses his wife, daughters, and Bérénice all die before him. As he says after Bérénice's death:

Elle a perdu le jour et je le vois encore!

Lâcheté manifeste, et qui me déshonore!

J'emprunte du secours par de foibles moyens,

Et je vois sans mourir la mort de tous les miens.

(V.ii.1630-33)

Although he will ultimately stab himself, the spectators feel more pity for him than the females because he has seen all of his family members pass away. After each person dies, he laments their loss and his continuing to live, displaying much more sorrow than the females do.

In *Antigone*, the heroine so jealously protects her right to die for her cause that little comparison can be made between her death and that of her fiancé who is very sorrowful. When Antigone's sister tries to protect her by claiming that she was the one responsible for the crime of burying Polynice, for example, Antigone lashes back at her, saying, "Non, non, ne prenez part à rien qui m'appartienne, / L'ouvrage fut tout mien, la mort est toute mienne" (IV.iv.1281-82). Thus, she not only accepts her condemnation, but seems to welcome it. Contrary to her, however, in the final scene, her fiancé, who is Créon's son, kills himself, regretting her death and cursing his father's cruelty. Thus this play, once again, reflects the fact that there are numerous baroque tragedies in which women approach death with very little remorse, yet many in which men are shown expressing sorrow and anger for the events that have led them to take their own life.

Not only are women stronger in their resolve than men are when facing death, but also, when both males and females die in a single tragedy, women usually die first. There are many possible explanations why women usually die before males in tragedies, but one of the primary reasons is the impact that it has on male tragic heroes. Female death has the effect of causing the male to become disillusioned about his own situation, which, along with her loss, will usually bring about his suicide. Consequently, feminine death is the primary motivating force for both the pathetic and the tragic in the final scenes of these plays: for it is because of female death that we see males lamenting loss and realizing that the political system and/or divine justice that they

believed in is cruel, often realizing that they have wasted their lives supporting a cause which was not worthy of fighting for, and that as such, there is no future for them.

In order for females to die first and bring about this disillusionment, they must die for reasons other than the loss of their lover, and interestingly enough, in the plays that I studied, more tragic heroines died for purely political reasons than heroes. Had Antigone been pardoned for the crime of burying her brother, she would not have been executed by Créon; therefore Hémon would not have killed himself. Her death is the last straw that makes him realize the fatality of his bloodline, the enormous state of disorder that the empire is in, and that his father is a tyrant who was not willing to save Antigone, even out of love for his son. Therefore seeing no point in continuing to live, he declares:

La Nature, aujourd'hui, se détruit d'elle-même,

Les plus proches parents sont les plus ennemis,

Le frère hait le frère, et le père le fils;

L'oncle au sang de sa nièce avec plaisir se noie

(V.viii.1742-46)

In addition to Hémon's disillusionment, had Sophonisbe not been obliged to save her honor through suicide, Massinisse would not have lost her, and he would not have come to realize the lack of gratitude that Rome feels for his services; therefore, he would not have committed suicide. And had Hérode not had Mariane executed to protect his reputation before the people, he would not have gone insane. Thus, in these particular examples, had the female not died first, there simply would have been no tragic ending to the plays.

In summary, gender is a primary factor in determining the reasons for which a character dies or kills someone, the means by which he or she dies, and the measures that he or she takes to

obtain or avoid death. The principal reason why there are significant differences in the way death is affected by gender is because males are shown as lacking control over their physical desires, females are generally portrayed as being physically unable to fight to defend themselves or their causes, and, contrary to males, females can have no political power.

Kings in baroque plays, such as *La Mariane*'s Hérode, are often portrayed as egotistical tyrants who attempt to use their political power to satisfy their amorous desires, and this failing, they resort to violence to either eliminate a rival or avenge their abused egos. Other males, such as the nobles in *Scédase* simply overpower and kill females who reject their love, but the males usually justify their actions by blaming the females' excessive beauty or virtue for making them fall in love with them.

Whereas males use either their political power or their physical strength to bring about someone's death directly, women are limited to using discourse to obtain death indirectly, whether it be that of another person or their own. A queen, for example, may try to talk her husband into having someone killed for supposedly legitimate reasons, or a woman may try to provoke a king into having her executed if she wishes to commit suicide.

Feminine suicide is often a way of escaping a situation in which a female physically finds herself, thus being a form of liberation. Suicide for males, however, is most often the result of the loss of a female and the ensuing sense of disillusionment that they experience concerning the true, corrupt nature of the political system that they have spent their lives defending. For this reason, in plays in which a couple dies, the female must die before the male, and she usually dies for purely political reasons which are the result of her refusal to abandon her values to save her own life.

Women generally hold true to values that are unifying, such as their sense of obligation toward either familial duty or conjugal duty, and their loyalty to these values results in their death. Men, however, tend to prize ambition, legitimate or otherwise, over loyalty, and their sense of ambition creates division between family members, especially father and son or brothers vying for the throne, resulting in one or more family members being killed.

The methods by which males and females die also vary by gender. While females usually die by poisoning, males usually die a violent death. When dramatists vary from this, making a female die a violent death or a male die by poisoning, throughout the plays these characters will have manifested traits that are normally attributed of the opposite sex. Their atypical deaths serve to reinforce the fact they do not conform to their gender roles and are almost always shown negatively.

Like his contemporaries, Corneille also portrays negative consequences of not conforming to seventeenth-century socio-political norms; however, as will be shown in the upcoming chapters, his representation of masculine and feminine death does vary greatly from that of other baroque authors. He uses death and gender to provide models and anti-models of behavior for spectators to imitate or scorn; yet he also uses masculine and feminine death to demonstrate clearly male dominance over the female within the patriarchal society.

## PART II

### GENDER AND DEATH IN CORNEILLE'S TRAGEDIES

## CHAPTER 4

### POLITICS

Although most seventeenth-century dramatists faithfully followed the Aristotelian rule of portraying only the actions of kings or other nobility in their tragedies, it is Corneille who has become known by far as the political dramatist *par excellence* of his time. He and his contemporaries both used aristocratic characters in their plays; however, while most playwrights chose to make the primary focus of their plays center on their characters' personal lives, such as their love interest, Corneille put more emphasis on presenting the conflicts which arise as a result of the incompatibility of his characters' socio-political duty and their personal desires in order to add to the play's dramatic interest. For, as Corneille himself explains in his *Discours du poème dramatique*:

Lorsqu'on met sur la scène un simple intrigue [*sic*] d'amour entre des rois, et qu'il ne courent aucun péril, ni de leur vie ni de leur État, je ne crois pas que bien que les personnes soient très illustres, l'action le soit assez pour s'élever jusqu'à la tragédie. Sa dignité demande quelque grand intérêt d'État, ou quelque passion plus noble et plus mâle que l'amour, telles que sont l'ambition ou la vengeance; et veut donner à craindre des malheurs plus grands, que la perte d'une maîtresse.

(124)

This is not to imply that love is not an important theme in Cornelian drama. As will be shown in chapter 6, Corneille considers it extremely significant and even necessary, but he favors politics and other themes, which he considers “plus noble et plus mâle,” over love. However, as Lasserre states, in Cornelian tragedy, “Les passions suscitées par l’oppression politique poussent le cri élémentaire du tragique” (179).

Corneille’s use of the word “mâle” here, and his statement that he prefers themes that are more important than “la perte d’une maîtresse,” draw our attention to the fact that his works reflect the primacy of masculine values characteristic of a patriarchal society. No play illustrates this more clearly than *Horace* in which a female gets killed for speaking her mind, as does the man who sympathizes with the feminine mentality, the man who kills them both becomes a hero for saving his country, and the woman who basically keeps her opinions to herself simply is allowed to live. Because this play contains the most distinct examples of masculine and feminine gender roles as they relate to death, most of this chapter will be devoted to a detailed analysis of it.

According to Michel Prigent, theater of the first half of the seventeenth century depicted heroes who embodied “les modèles ou les anti-modèles de la philosophie politique” (3). The character Horace, however, is a combination of the two in that he is the ideal servant of the state, but his flaw is that he becomes so devoted to his cause that he becomes barbaric by killing his sister in the name of Rome. Her murder is so significant that Corneille himself explains that it is the principal action in the play, and that the three acts which precede it are intended to raise the hero to a level of grandeur that he might fall due to his over-zealousness in defending Rome (*Œuvres Complètes* 1 840).

As in pre-Cornelian tragedy, male subjects value above all else glory and honor, where glory implies public recognition for oneself and /or for one's State, and honor, which is merit of others' respect. The way in which men may most readily acquire *gloire* is by fighting for their country since this provides the best opportunity to perform great deeds in public. If a man loses his life in battle, his glory is often greater because of the high cost that he was willing to pay to fight bravely for his country<sup>1</sup>. Thus, as Horace says after learning that he has been chosen to defend Rome:

Mais quoique ce combat me promette un cercueil,  
La gloire de ce choix m'enfle d'un juste orgueil,  
[...]  
Rome a trop cru de moi, mais mon âme ravie  
Remplira son attente, ou quittera la vie.

(II.i.377-78; 383-84)

As Greenberg explains, men who value country and heroic virtue above all else, often referred to as *généreux*, do not see death in battle *as* death, as the end of corporal existence. They see it as a means to obtain glory and to become immortalized in the eyes of their country. Death in battle, therefore, is a masculine death, for only men can die fighting for their country since only they have this opportunity to use their physical force to defend the state, thereby validating their virility. Thus, when these men talk of death, they do not refer to it as the possibility of a loss, but as a metaphor for an opportunity to gain personal honor while simultaneously glorifying their state (Corneille 70; Carlin 107). Horace even reproaches Curiace for pitying him for having to risk his life, saying:

Quoi! vous me pleureriez mourant pour mon pays!

Pour un cœur généreux ce trépas a des charmes,

La gloire qui le suit ne souffre point de larmes,

Et je le recevrais en bénissant mon sort,

Si Rome et tout l'État perdrait moins en ma mort.

(II.i.397-402)

As Greenberg states, "It is a sign of their masculinity that Death surfaces in their discourse always as a metaphor...These images equate death to a spectacular passage...The passage functions as an apotheosis. A man is changed into an ideal—duty, glory, honor—which, in turn, is recuperated as the reflection of the dominant ideology of the State" (Corneille 70). Thus, Horace does not consider that the loss of his physical self would be a true loss if his reputation after his death would be heightened. This same notion is repeated by Le Vieil Horace, who, believing that two of his three sons have been killed in the fight against Albe's Curiatti, declares:

Deux jouissent d'un sort dont leur père est jaloux.

Que des plus nobles fleurs leur tombe soit couverte,

La gloire de leur mort m'a payé de leur perte:...

(III.vi.1010-13)

Thus, dying for one's country in battle not only is not to be mourned, but is to be celebrated and envied. For, the *généreux* seek this kind of death as it is much more noble than a natural death. As Germa-Romann says, though, this can be quite a problem for patriotic males in times of peace (174).

The greater danger for males than dying is dishonoring themselves through an act of cowardice. While a male may obtain personal glory and glory for his country by dying in battle, his dishonor will taint his entire lineage, including his father, his brothers and sisters, as well as his children. When *Le Vieil Horace* is explaining that his two sons who died in battle have died nobly, he likewise states that the other, who he mistakenly believes has run away from the battle to save himself, has shamed him and that he is indeed the only son to be mourned:

Pleurez l'autre, pleurez l'irréparable affront  
Que sa fuite honteuse imprime à notre front,  
Pleurez le déshonneur de toute notre race,  
Et l'opprobre éternel qu'il laisse au nom d'Horace.

(III.vi.1017-20)

One of the most often cited quotes from *Horace* concerning this passage is Horace's father's reaction when he is asked what he should have done since he was the only one of the three still alive, fighting against all three Curiatti. His response is unambiguous: "Qu'il mourût!" (v. 1021); and as Germa-Romann says, "On n'ose imaginer le fils reparaissant devant le père après une fuite qui l'aurait déshonoré lui, mais aussi tous ses ancêtres" (66). She is completely justified in her apprehensiveness of the outcome of this type of situation since *Le Vieil Horace*'s main objective becomes killing his son himself for such an outrage (vv. 1048-50). Fortunately, this will not be necessary since Horace only momentarily ran away as a part of his combat strategy, but it does allude to the theme of infanticide, a theme that will appear again in metaphorical terms in act IV (vv. 1326-34), which I will be discussing later, and also in *Rodogune*, *Médée*, and *Nicomède*.

One of the most important aspects of battle that makes it such an opportune occasion for gaining glory is its public nature. A man can gain the most recognition and honor through his victory *or his death* when it is witnessed by others, for it is public impression of him and his accomplishment which is of the utmost importance in establishing his *renommée*. As Carlin says of Corneille's heroes, "They want to capture the wider recognition of society and bask in its power to declare the individual exceptional" (107; Germa-Romann 60). Horace wholeheartedly embraces this desire for public recognition and will do so at all costs, but Curiace, who is less virile, is not able to engage in the fight with the same degree of conviction (Stegmann 582; Carlin 61).

In order for Horace to internalize this desire for public recognition, he must be willing to make a sacrifice. For the only way for him to be able to kill Curiace with no regrets is for him to be able to detach himself from any emotions that he has which may make him feel compassion for his opponent. Whereas normally sentimental attachment to one's enemy is not an issue, it is for Horace and Curiace as Horace's wife is Curiace's sister, and Curiace's fiancée is Horace's sister. Nevertheless, Horace becomes so obsessed with the desire to claim personal glory that he is able to sever his emotional ties to Curiace with little difficulty, and not only does he feel no regret at having to fight against someone whom he cares for, he revels in the idea. For him, since the public is aware that the extent to which he desires to serve his country requires him to commit such a deed as fratricide, he believes that the greater the sacrifice, the greater the glory (Doubrovsky 149):

Mais vouloir au Public immoler ce qu'on aime,  
S'attacher au combat contre un autre soi-même,  
Attaquer un parti qui prend pour défenseur

Le frère d'une femme et l'Amant d'une sœur,  
Et, rompant tous ces nœuds s'armer pour la Patrie  
Contre un sang qu'on voudrait racheter de sa vie,  
Une telle vertu n'appartenait qu'à nous...

(II.iii.443-49)

Curiace, however, cannot subscribe to Horace's ideology even though they are to fight against one another and realizes that what Horace is sacrificing for Rome is, in reality, his humanity:

Ce triste et fier honneur m'émeut sans m'ébranler.  
J'aime ce qu'il me donne, et je plains ce qu'il m'ôte;  
Et si Rome demande une vertu plus haute,  
Je rends grâces aux Dieux de n'être pas Romain,  
Pour conserver encor quelque chose d'humain.

(II.iv.478-42)

Therefore, while Curiace keeps his humanity by refusing to abandon his sense of fraternal love for Horace and regrets the idea of losing him in battle, Horace rejects his human sentimentality and feels no remorse over the idea of fighting Curiace. Just as a king must act for the good of the state, serving his country's political needs even if they conflict with his own personal desires, or the desires of his *corps physique*, it is Horace's and Curiace's duty as well to fight for their respective states, even if they must neglect their personal desires in order to do so. Unlike Curiace, though, Horace has no conflict between his obligation to the state and his personal desires. Having sacrificed his humanity to serve Rome, he feels no regret over having to fight Curiace. He, in effect, becomes the physical representation of Rome's *corps politique*, or, as Prigent says, he *becomes* Rome. He is motivated purely by his desire to fight for Rome in order

to heighten the State's glory, which is now inseparable from his own personal glory since he *is* Rome in this battle (47). Curiace, however, is more closely identifiable with the State's *corps physique* since his personal desire not to fight Horace is in direct conflict with his obligation to fight for Albe, but because of patriotic duty, he must repress his own personal feelings and fight. Thus, while Horace's renouncement of any sense of compassion in the name of Rome will allow him to show no mercy to his brother-in-law, whom he sees only now as his enemy, the latter's desire to perform his civic duty while keeping his humanity prevents him from adapting totally to the needs of his country, leaving him with a weakness which will cause his defeat (Rohou 166-67). Thus, the reason for Curiace's defeat can be summarized by the fact that when Horace says, "Albe vous a nommé, je ne vous connais plus" (v. 502), Curiace responds, "Je vous connais encore, et c'est ce qui me tue" (v. 503), and this is literally what happens.

While both Couton and Rohou see Curiace's defeat as a lesson in the danger of letting one's personal feelings interfere with service to one's country, which is certainly true, the "heroic" portrait which Corneille paints of Horace is certainly not flattering, especially since it is formed within the context of fratricide (Couton 28; Rohou 166-67). Since Horace indeed becomes inhuman in order to *become* Rome, he loses his ability to have compassion or sympathy for sentimental concerns (Prigent 47). He wants nothing but praise for his achievements since he has sacrificed his own humanity in order to kill Curiace and receive glory, trading his own personal identity for that of the State, after which he identifies himself as such. When he sees Camille and asks her for commendation for his victory and she tells him that she would rather give him tears since he killed her fiancé, he replies, "*Rome* n'en veut point voir après de tels exploits..." (my emphasis; vv. 1257-58). Horace, therefore, is unable to separate his private self from his political identity, which was the Horace that represented Rome in battle. As Prigent

explains, since Horace literally gave up everything for the state, killing his “self” for the state, he refuses to give up this identity, since it is the only identity which he has left (47; Abraham 66). Likewise, were he to abandon his political identity, he would be forced to accept his humanity, and to become once again a feeling, sensing individual. As such, he would be forced to face the fact that he had killed his brother-in-law whom he had loved, possibly regretting his loss, which, in return, would taint the glory that he had gained for himself and Rome through his victory.

As a result of Horace’s transformation into Rome, he becomes the essence and guardian of masculinity and masculine values. As a member of a patriarchal society, by taking on a political identity through becoming the State, he must reject feminine values and think, speak and act only according to patriarchal ideology, which excludes all forms of compromise. As Moi states, the foundation of this ideology is “is the seamlessly unified self...which is commonly called ‘Man’.” She further explains, “As Luce Irigaray or Hélène Cixous would argue, this integrated self is in fact a phallic self, constructed on the model of the self-contained, powerful phallus. Gloriously autonomous, it banishes from itself all conflict, contradiction, and ambiguity” (8). Thus, as opposed to Curiace, whose conflict between duty and desire requires that he stifle his emotions to be able to fulfill his civic duty, Horace does not experience any such conflict. He is purely the voice of the patriarchal State, which is reflected through his discourse as well as his actions. As demonstrated earlier, for example, he values glory and honor above all else and is joyful about the opportunity that this fratricidal battle has given him to heighten his reputation. And though he unhesitantly accepts the idea that he and his brother-in-law must try to kill each other, he wants it to be understood that no one should harbor resentment against the victor as he was only doing his (masculine) duty in serving his state. As he explains to Camille:

...si par mon trépas il [Curiace] retourne vainqueur,  
 Ne le recevez point en meurtrier d'un frère,  
 Mais en homme d'honneur qui fait ce qu'il doit faire,  
 Qui sert bien son pays, et sait montrer à tous  
 Par sa haute vertu qu'il est digne de vous...  
 Mais si ce fer aussi tranche sa Destinée,  
 Faites à ma victoire un pareil traitement,  
 Ne me reprochez point la mort de votre Amant.  
 Consume avec lui toute cette foiblesse,  
 [...]

Querellez Ciel et Terre, et maudissez le Sort,  
 Mais après le combat ne pensez plus au mort.

(II.iv.518-22; 524-27; 528-30)

Horace's speech is quite noble and *généreux*, reflecting the values of glory, honor, virtue, and civic duty. But two aspects of this speech are most outstanding. First, Horace expresses the necessity to separate civic duty from private interests. This is a theme of utmost importance, which I will discuss in greater detail in association with Sabine and Camille as it primarily concerns the females' right to express their emotions. Secondly, along the same lines, ending his speech, Horace gives Camille a warning which is specifically intended to indicate that she must control the expression of her grief, especially her tears, a conventionally feminine sign of weakness, if he wins (Schmidt 46). For if she mourns his loss, this would—and will, as will be seen in act IV—lessen his enjoyment of his glory and dishonor his victory and dishonor Rome (IV.v.1276; 1297), a crime for which she must be punished by death.

As Schmidt and Goodkin each demonstrate, in the seventeenth century, as in previous centuries, there were very clear distinctions separating that which was “public” from that which was “private,” corresponding to masculine and feminine gender roles. The public domain revolved around politics and the State, both of which were exclusively masculine concerns (*If There Are No More Heroes*; Goodkin 70-71). The fact that the females were excluded from the political realm was largely due to the stereotype that society had of women at the time: They were thought to be both mentally and physically inferior to men, and they lacked the “agressivité masculine” which was essential for the defense of their country (Assaf 50). Because of the inseparability between physical force and public service, the public domain represented the masculine ethics of strength, glory, honor, and civic duty, which Horace embodies (Carlin 49), and public expression was limited to that which was compatible with these values. Likewise, sentimentality and emotional weakness were considered private and typically feminine. Thus, as Horace, the voice of the State, makes clear, these emotions are to be kept under control in public (II.iv.517-30) since they are offensive to the masculine ethic. For this reason, Horace systematically counters any attempt to express values contrary to those embodied by the patriarchal State using any means that he deems necessary.

While Horace is single-minded and sincere in his desire to fight and obtain glory, Curiace does not want to have to fight against his brother-in-law, but his sense of civic duty and his desire to gain public recognition for himself oblige him to face the challenge. Consequently, though Curiace agrees to fight for Albe, his interests are divided, creating an internal conflict. Using Cixou’s logic of “binary thought,” if lack of conflict is representative of masculine values, then, the reverse is necessarily feminine (Moi 104). Though Curiace is a male who performs masculine duties, he represents the feminine in that he expresses conflict by his split between

duty and desire. He is the male personification of the feminine ethic, and Horace will treat him as such by asking him not to show his reluctance at having to fight, just as he asks Camille to limit her expression of grief if and when he kills Curiace. Thus, when Curiace says that he would rather be himself and keep his humanity than Roman and more devoted to the state, Horace responds, “Si vous n’êtes Romain, soyez digne de l’être, / Et si vous m’égalez, faites-le mieux paraître” (II.iii.483-84). Thus, his request that Curiace hide his weakness is one way in which he attempts to silence the feminine voice when it opposes patriarchal values. His other method is literally to kill it.

Although Curiace reflects the feminine by the fact that he has a conflict between his sense of duty and his desire not to fight against Horace, he still makes it clear that he places duty above his personal interests, such as love. He says to Camille, for example, “Avant que d’être à vous je suis à mon pays” (v. 562), and when she suggests that he decline to fight, he summarily rejects the idea of watching another person claim the “immortal” glory that he could have had while he himself would be dishonored (II.v.551-556). Thus, although Curiace reflects the feminine by his contrasting interests, Sabine and Camille, the only females within the play, are the primary characters who show that they value love and the lives of their loved ones above all else, including the State (Schmidt 44). As Sweetser says, “[La recherche de la grandeur] se trouve placée en antithèse avec les valeurs de sentiment, représentées par les personnages féminins, Sabine et Camille” (21). Even these two, however, face the loss of their loved one(s) in very different manners. Sabine will keep her expression of grief within the limits that are acceptable to the patriarchy, but Camille will exceed them and will be killed for it.

Camille and Sabine are both upset about the battle since it requires their loved ones to fight one another, and they can see nothing but its negative outcome. While the men are able to

see the possibility of their death as a metaphorical transformation into glory, thus in a positive light, as Greenberg explains, “For them, Death is never spoken of as anything other than the physical horror of bodily rot” (71). Thus, while both Horace and Curiace talk of the glory, honor, and virtue that they will receive through fighting, Sabine, who is alone and in a private setting, where it is permissible to express opinions that were contrary to patriarchal values, reveals her inability to separate the greatness of victory from the loss of her loved one:

Quand je songe à leur mort, quoi que je me propose,  
Je songe par quels bras, et non pour quelle cause,  
Et ne vois les vainqueurs en leur illustre rang,  
Que pour considérer aux dépens de quel sang.

(III.i.751-54)

Her words reflect a difference in the female attitude toward death in war and the dominant male attitude. As females who stereotypically value love over politics, both Sabine and Camille care more about the effect that the battle will have on their private lives than on the State.

Greenberg speculates that the females’ inability to think beyond the physical reality of death, as demonstrated by Sabine’s words, is a factor which, in addition to the seventeenth-century belief in women’s inferiority, contributes to their exclusion from public service: “[T]heir inability to understand war as anything other than a sickening carnage...affects their place in society. Effectively this inability determines their powerlessness in the State, since they can never subscribe entirely to the ideology that founds the polis” (71). Camille most plainly demonstrates women’s lack of understanding of the importance of honor and the detrimental effect that a cowardly act would have on a man’s reputation when she asks Curiace to have someone fight in his place. She clearly values love, a private interest, over patriotism and gets

hostile when he refuses, not being able to accept the fact that Curiace does not feel the same way. Shocked, she says,

Quoi, tu ne veux pas voir qu'ainsi tu me trahis!

[...]

Mais te priver pour lui [Albe] d'un beau frère,

Ta sœur de son mari!

(II.iv.561; 563-64)

The female who understands her place within the patriarchal society and the dominance of the male ethic, like Sabine, would cope fairly calmly with her situation, understanding that males value public interests, thus, the State, over private ones, such as love (Schmidt 69). Camille, however, does not react this way. Using every means possible, especially crying, she futilely attempts to convince Curiace to reject his masculine dominated system of priorities and to stay with her and not fight.

Recent critics have noted a recurrent theme in Cornelian tragedy, which is the notion of the feminine threat to the patriarchy and to masculinity in general, although Irigaray sees this as a global phenomenon not limited to the realm of Cornelian tragedy. The greatest point of debate among these critics, however, is the actual source of the threat. Carlin sees that Sabine's *strength* when she offers herself as a sacrifice to spur on the brothers is so moving that it compels Horace to have her kept inside and away from his view for fear that it would affect his performance; and, while Greenberg agrees with Irigaray's theory that the feminine is masculine's "Other" and that the only true "Other", which is outside of existence, is death, thereby equating the female with death, he postulates that the most powerful weapon that Corneille's women have at their disposal to combat the masculine ethic is their tears<sup>2</sup>. I would have to agree with

Greenberg in that Corneille's men flee women's tears in order to perform their task, and Horace and Curiace are no exception. Though they are willing to face death, they cannot bear the pressure of being exposed to tears as they may literally *dilute* their resolve. As Greenberg says,

It is these tears that men must flee lest they become contaminated, lest they melt away...In the face of feminine emotion *men cannot remain men*. They lose their sense of self, lose their tautness...If allowed to remain in the presence of excess, the men become flaccid. It is to protect their virility, *to protect the State*, that men must flee women and remain among themselves. (my emphasis 72-3)

Thus, although Horace and Curiace are willing to fight each other to the death and to commit fratricide for the good of the State, they must also separate themselves from the threatening female for the same reason. For, just as the *loi salique* forbids women access to the throne because of the “nécessité de l’agressivité masculine pour préserver le royaume des convoitises ennemies”, as Assaf explains, Sabine and Camille must be kept away from the battlefield in order to not prevent Horace and Curiace from losing their conviction (50). To “protect themselves”, therefore, Horace takes the manly initiative to insure that the women's tears and cries do not cause their virility to be compromised by having them confined to the house, the private domain, where they cannot hinder the males' ability to serve the public cause (II.viii.695-700).

While tears moisten the eyes of both men and women throughout the first four acts of *Horace*, including those of Le Vieil Horace (v. 709) and Curiace (v. 396), they are most often associated with the females, and especially Camille. As Susan Tiefenbrun explains in her article, “Blood and Water in *Horace*: A Feminist Reading,” while blood is a masculine metaphor often representative of violence, pain, death, passion and man, tears are a baroque metaphor which

most often corresponds to inconsistency, emotion and weakness, all of which are associated with the feminine and thus belong to the private domain (620-21). By confining Sabine and Camille to their home when they are crying and trying to stop the brothers from fighting one another, he is forcing them to keep their expression of their emotions where it belongs: in private. As such, not only does Horace protect himself and Curiace from their cries, he also keeps the public domain of the patriarchal society from being violated by their sentimentality. Nevertheless, once Sabine realizes that her tears are not going to stop the battle from occurring, she ceases to cry and will not start again, even when her brother is killed. Thus, before the real battle even begins, she has been conquered by the male ethic. As she says to Camille, “Allons, ma sœur, ne perdons plus de larmes, / Contre tant de vertus ce sont de faibles armes...” (II.vii.691-92). Camille, however, will not give up her sentimentality, and Sabine, now representing the proper way in which women are to face despair and grief, echoes Horace’s morality, reproaching her for her excessive emotion: “Parmi nos déplaisirs souffrez que je vous blâme, / Je ne puis approuver tant de trouble en votre âme...” (III.iv.871-72).

Sabine ultimately conforms to and even internalizes society’s expectations of her as a female, or, as Simone de Beauvoir might say, she has *become* a woman. However, Camille is not that submissive. While the former represents the patriarchal society’s model of the good woman who accepts her inferior, repressed status and controls her emotions, even when she learns of Curiace’s death, Camille turns into a rebellious “monster”, as Horace calls her since she rejects the boundaries which masculine society tries to impose on her (v. 1334), which is ironic considering that he rejected his humanity to serve the state. Her refusal to accept the rules of the patriarchal society and the dominance of the male ethic will cost her her life once she rebels against the masculine order after she loses Curiace to its values. Thus, as Schmidt says:

[Many of Corneille's females] reject the dominant male ethic and the public/private split in their lives as a result of unbearable wrongs suffered by them. Their position is one of forced dependency in a patriarchal world, where men and women are in strong opposition to each other. This opposition is centered on male ethics, which are usually defended by the males in the play, and opposed by the females. Cornelian heroines refuse to remain silent and they choose to combat the inhumanity present in a male ethic *that is directly responsible for the loss of their loved ones*. (my emphasis, 33)

Thus, in Camille's mind, had Curiace rejected the masculine values of his society, which made him feel the need to prove himself, gain honor, and serve the state, he would have followed her suggestion and allowed someone else to fight for Albe. Likewise, he would not have gotten himself killed, and he and Camille would have been able to be married and would have theoretically lived happily ever after; so, after Horace kills him, Camille sees her world crumble around her and her future happiness destroyed. Although Le Vieil Horace tries to console Camille, saying "On pleure injustement des pertes domestiques / Quand on en voit sortir des victoires publiques" (IV.iii.1175-76), thereby reminding her of the service that Curiace performed for the State, she sees that she has nothing else to lose. She only wants vengeance, and the best way for her to get it is to cause Horace to taint the glory that he bought at the cost of Curiace's life, even if she has to die to do it:

Dégénérons, mon cœur, d'un si vertueux père,  
Soyons indigne sœur d'un si généreux frère,  
C'est gloire de passer pour un cœur abattu  
Quand la brutalité fait la haute vertu.

Éclatez, mes douleurs, à quoi bon vous contraindre?

Quand on a tout perdu que saurait-on plus craindre?

[...]

Offensez sa victoire, irritez sa colère,

Et prenez, s'il se peut, plaisir à lui déplaire.

(IV.iv.1239-44; 1247-48)

Thus, while Curiace becomes a martyr to the masculine ethic, Camille will sacrifice herself to corrupt the glory that Horace gains through upholding that ethic. While Curiace will die in the name of public service, Camille will martyr herself for her private vengeance through her unrestrained emotional explosion in the face of her fiancé's killer, through which she intends to derive her own, personal form of glory and pleasure (Greenberg 83). As Greenberg says, Camille becomes "the parricidal, anti-political force that, in moments of utter dispossession, moments in which the hidden flaws in the totality of patriarchal order are revealed, comes rushing forth in a stream of orgasmic invective" (143; Schmidt 46-47).

With the goal of infuriating her brother, Camille attacks him with the only weapon that she has: language. Just as Tristan l'Hermite's Marianne uses language to manipulate Hérode into executing her, as shown in Chapter 3, Camille will talk Horace into killing her as well<sup>3</sup>. The primary difference between Camille and Marianne, though, is their intent in dying. While the former intends for her death to be an offensive move to avenge her loss, with the consequence of spoiling the Horace's honor, the latter sees death as her only defense against Hérode and a means by which she will gain her freedom from him (Eckstein 11). Marianne does not consider the outcome of her death for those she leaves behind, but Camille's primary concern is the detrimental effect that she can have on her brother's honor (Abraham 63). As she says:

Tigre altéré de sang, qui me défends les larmes,

[...]

Puissent tant de malheurs accompagner ta vie

Que tu tombes au point de me porter envie,

Et toi, bientôt souiller par quelque lâcheté

Cette gloire si chère à ta brutalité.

(IV.v.1287; 1291-94)

Thus, she begins provoking him by cursing him and refusing his demand that she restrain her sorrow and will progressively advance to attacking the very entity with which he has come to identify himself: Rome. She exclaims:

Rome, l'unique objet de mon ressentiment!

Rome, à qui vient ton bras d'immoler mon Amant!

Rome, qui t'a vu naître et que ton cœur adore!

Rome, enfin que je hais parce qu'elle t'honore!

(IV.v.1301-4)

While showing that she knows the extent to which he values Rome, she curses Rome, hoping for its destruction:

Que le courroux du Ciel allumé par mes vœux

Fasse pleuvoir sur elle un déluge de feux.

Puissé-je de mes yeux y voir tomber ce foudre,

Voir ses maisons en cendre, et tes lauriers en poudre:

Voir le dernier Romain à son dernier soupir,

Moi seule en être cause, et mourir de plaisir.

(IV.v.1313-18)

By slandering Rome, therefore, Camille attacks Horace himself since he cannot separate his own identity from that of the State. Her words also violate the masculine ethic by devaluing country and honor while exposing her femininity before the nation's hero, and by belittling his accomplishments, she tells him that his honor is meaningless to her since it has cost her the man she loved. Besides the fact that her desire to see Rome destroyed lets Horace know how little she values patriotism, it also expresses the fact that she wants to see the ruin of the masculine ethic and the dominance of that of the feminine. The values of the patriarchy, as symbolized by the State, were the cause of Curiace's death, and Camille wishes to see chaos and death overcome the State. Looking back to Irigaray's theory that the female is the embodiment of death as it is "outside" the masculine, where there is only nothingness, Rome's ruin would leave nothing but the feminine (Irigaray 27; Greenberg 11). Likewise, since, as stated earlier, the masculine defies conflict, contradiction and ambiguity, as Kristeva concludes, the feminine is represented by chaos and disorder (Moi 8, 10), which is what Camille desires for Rome.

Horace cannot tolerate Camille's anti-Roman speech and, supposedly as "un acte de justice," kills her (IV.vi.1323). When returning to the stage, therefore, he says, "Ainsi reçoive un châtiment soudain / Quiconque ose pleurer un ennemi romain!" (IV.v.1321-22). While Horace may believe that he is defending Rome, his action would more accurately be described as a defense of the male ethic against the feminine word. His attempts at silencing Camille through "legitimate" means, such as telling her to abandon her suffering and bask in Rome's glory, have been ineffective. Unable to stop Camille's attack on patriarchal values with his own discourse, he resorts to physical violence. Just as Horace had become the embodiment of the male ethic,

through Curiace's death, Camille herself transformed into the physical representation of the unbridled feminine word, which Horace must silence by killing her.

Because of the brutality of Horace's action, he soils his honor, in effect, making Camille the victor of her own *personal* battle since this was the outcome that she desired. Even though she wins this small victory, Horace does not regret killing her: for in his eyes, he needed to kill her even though it would cause his honor to diminish (Carlin 62). As he tells their father, "Ma main n'a pu souffrir de crime en votre race" (V.i.1427). Thus, he saw Camille as a criminal and a threat to society, which needed to be exterminated. By taking on the task himself, Horace becomes a messiah for the patriarchy who was willing to risk his honor, and possibly his life, in order to save the State from contamination by the feminine voice.

The primary reason for which Sabine is not at risk is that, although she tells Horace that she, like Camille, is guilty of grieving for her brothers, she does not actually cry, and more importantly, she does not wish harm on the State. Though she condemns "Roman virtue" because of its barbarism, she does consider herself Roman (vv. 1367-1370; v. 25). As Lasserre says, Sabine "n'ira jamais jusqu'aux sentiments anti-patriotiques de Camille. Ses paroles...réserveront tout de même les droits de Rome...Elle ne condamnerait pas le patriotisme, elle refuse la barbarie" (72). Additionally, Sabine demonstrates her recognition of the dominance of public over private interests, proving her espousal of the masculine ethic. As she says, "Prenons part en public aux victoires publiques, / Pleurons dans la maison nos malheurs domestiques" (IV.vii.1371-72). Because of Sabine's acceptance of the patriarchal order, Horace does not consider her a threat, whereas Camille was.

When Procule implies that Horace should not have acted so hastily in killing his sister, the latter justifies his actions, saying:

Ne me dit point qu'elle est, et mon sang, et ma sœur.

Mon père ne peut plus l'avouer pour sa fille,

Qui maudit son pays renonce à sa famille,

[...]

La plus prompte vengeance en est plus légitime

(IV.vi.1326-28; 1332)

As his words indicate, in a patriarchal society, devotion to the State and its value system is in direct conjunction with a person's status within the family. For the family unit itself is a *mise en abyme* of the State in which the father is king, and as a male, he is expected to uphold the values of the State. Likewise, seventeenth-century thought considered the State as an extension of the family, where the king was the Father of the people he ruled (Volkoff 55; Greenberg 5; 73-4). Thus, as Greenberg says, "In Corneille's theater it is impossible to separate the family from the State. Corneille's tragic universe is inherently a political world where the family is constantly called upon to mirror the State. In this theater...all existence is invariably political" (6). Consequently, when Camille offends the State, she is no longer worthy of her position within the family. Horace no longer considers her to be his sister but an enemy of Rome, and since, as demonstrated earlier, he identifies himself as Rome, he feels that it is his right to dispense judgment upon her. He is mistaken, however, as only the king has a right to punish someone for a crime committed in the name of the State, and he himself will be put on trial for murder<sup>4</sup>. As Le Vieil Horace says, "Son crime, quoique énorme et digne du trépas, / Était mieux impuni, que puni par ton bras" (V.i.1417-18).

Rather than admit that he was wrong, Horace implies that he *did* indeed have a right to kill Camille. In his own words, he declares: "J'ai cru devoir le sien [her blood] aux lieux qui

m'ont vu naître" (v. 1420). One possible interpretation of this statement is that he felt obligated to punish her for insulting the country where he was *physically* born into citizenship. A more metaphysical reading, which is supported by Tiefenbrun's statement that blood was one metaphor for the male ethic (620), is that he considered it necessary to sacrifice Camille to the place where he sacrificed his humanity to *become* Rome. With this second interpretation, Horace literally offered his sister, the threatening female, as a sacrifice to the patriarchal order.

As mentioned earlier, in seventeenth-century literature, while tears are a feminine metaphor for inconsistency and weakness, blood could symbolize many different ideas in addition to masculinity, including passion, love, and death. One of the most common functions of references to blood, though, was to show lineage, especially for males (621). As Greenberg explains, sons get their blood from their fathers, but the fathers still have ownership of it. Likewise, since the king is the Father above all of his subjects, the State is its final owner. Consequently, a male's father or his king can, for example, "take back" his blood, demand that the male risk spilling his blood, or generally tell the male to do whatever he (the owner) wishes with it (Greenberg 73-4). Thus, when Horace is speaking to his father and the king about his punishment, he makes many references to the ownership of his blood. As he says to his father, "Disposez de mon sang, les lois vous en font maître" and "Reprenez tout ce sang..." (V.i.1419; 1425). Similarly, he says that, in the event that the king finds him guilty, "Notre sang est son bien, il en peut disposer" (V.ii.1542). His final reference to the ownership of his blood, though, demonstrates that he does not want his life to be spared:

...pour mon honneur j'ai déjà trop vécu.

Un homme tel que moi voit sa gloire ternie

Quand il tombe en péril de quelque ignominie,

Et ma main aurait su déjà m'en garantir,  
Mais sans votre congé mon sang n'ose sortir,  
Comme il vous appartient, votre aveu doit se prendre,  
C'est vous le dérober qu'autrement le répandre.

(V.ii.1582-88)

While normally a person could simply kill himself if he wanted to end his life, this is not an option for Horace, since his blood does not belong to him. Committing suicide would in effect be “stealing” the king’s blood, which would be dishonorable. While one of the greatest means for a man to gain glory and immortality, which noblemen valued more than life itself, was through an honorable death, an ignoble death would destroy his reputation. Since Horace values his honor, he must wait to see if the king will grant him permission to kill himself.

As shown in the passage above, Horace wants to be sentenced to death, and the reason for this is that he is at the height of his glory at this moment, since he alone is responsible for Rome’s victory over Albe and does not want his reputation to fade. He believes that the people’s opinion of him is at the highest that it will ever be and that any of his future accomplishments will only disappoint them since it is likely that they will not equal the “miracle” that he has just performed (Carlin 59). Explaining that death is his only possible means of immortalizing his present glory, he says, “...pour laisser une illustre mémoire, / La mort seule aujourd’hui peut conserver ma gloire...” (V.ii.1579-80). Since Valère wishes for Horace to be executed for murdering Camille and he himself wants to die for his glory, he says:

...si ce que j’ai fait vaut quelque récompense,  
Permettez, ô grand Roi, que de ce bras vainqueur

Je m'immoie à ma gloire, et non pas à ma sœur.

(V.ii.1592-94)

Thus, hoping that he can influence the king to feel obliged to reward him for saving Rome and conquering Albe, he asks the king to allow him to kill himself while summarily denying any guilt over killing his sister.

Though Tulle knows the exact magnitude of the service that Horace has performed for him, he cannot simply do him the favor of allowing him to kill himself to show his gratitude to him. For, although the king has complete authority over the law and performs the supreme judiciary function of the State (Assaf 21; 45-47), he cannot arbitrarily change or apply the law to satisfy his own private needs or desires or those of an individual such as Horace, even though the latter has served him well (21; 23). For not only is the king responsible for dispensing justice, but he also has complete control over the State's actions during times of both war and peace (47). When making judicial decisions, therefore, he must use his discretion and act only in the best interest of the State, even if he feels compelled to do otherwise (23, 47). As Assaf explains in his clarification of the Roman proverb that says "Volonté de roi fait loi," the good king will act "non pas en référence à la volonté privée, arbitraire, d'un individu, mais à ce que le roi *doit* vouloir en tant que *personne publique*" (21). Horace, for example, has proven himself to be an invaluable asset in Rome's defense. Though he has committed a heinous crime by killing his sister, it is in Rome's best interest to keep him alive so that he may continue to fight for Rome. As Tulle explains:

Cette énorme action faite presque à nos yeux

Outrage la Nature, et Blesse jusqu'aux Dieux.

Un premier mouvement qui produit un tel crime

Ne saurait lui servir d'excuse légitime,  
Les moins sévères lois en ce point sont d'accord,  
Et si nous les suivons, il est digne de mort.  
Ce crime, quoique grand, énorme, inexcusable,  
Vient de la même épée, et part du même bras  
Qui me fait aujourd'hui maître de deux États.  
[...]  
Vis donc, Horace, vis, guerrier trop magnanime,  
[...]  
Vis pour servir l'État...

(V.iii.1733-1742; 1759, 1763)

Horace's "punishment," therefore, is that he may not kill himself. He is condemned to live because he performed his civic duty so well, and ironically, this is the very same reason why his glory grew to such a level that he wished to die.

In addition to punishing Horace, the king's decision not to allow him to die serves a second purpose: it forces Horace to acknowledge that he is indeed *not* Rome and that he is still a subject whose job is to *serve* Rome. If Horace were to die the hero that he is now, having won *by himself* Albe's crown, and, as such, legitimately having the right to claim the crown for himself, his own glory would permanently be preserved at such a high level that it could overshadow Tulle's. Tulle would simply be seen as owing his crown to Horace, which cannot happen in an absolute monarchy, since a king does not owe his subjects anything, no matter how well any one individual has served him. If the people believed that Tulle owed his crown to Horace, his authority and the respect that the people have for him would diminish. Horace's

living to serve Rome allows him to model obedience and deference to the king whom he had served while fighting for Rome. Simultaneously, as Horace knows, his personal glory will fade over time, guaranteeing that Tulle will continue to receive the glory and recognition for Rome's victories that he wants as Rome's king.

The ultimate outcome of the battle between Albe and Rome once again reflects the dominance of the masculine ethic. In the play, Sabine refers to Albe as Rome's "mother", a metaphor for femininity. Blaming Rome for attacking Albe, she says, "Albe est ton origine, arrête, et considère / Que tu portes le fer dans le sein de ta mère" (vv. 55-56). As already demonstrated, Rome itself symbolizes patriarchal values, and since Rome is attacking its mother city, as Doubrovsky says, Rome's victory over Albe is a "matricide déguisé" (152; Schmidt 43). Not only does Rome's triumph show the dominance of the male, so does the fact that two cities, which were comprised of "un peuple en deux villes" (v. 291), become unified into one. Again, using the singularity of the phallus as the foundation of the masculine ethic as well as Irigaray's notion of the plurality of the feminine (Moi 8; "Ce Sexe")— which is particularly applicable in this case as the two cities which actually form one entity mimic the female genitalia— the destruction of the plurality of the Rome-Alban agglomeration becomes a symbol in itself of the eradication of the feminine. The only public entity left, therefore, is the singular, masculine city of Rome. The feminine element of Albe has merely been absorbed into it, into the non-visible, therefore private realm, along with the bodies of the enemies of Rome and the masculine ethic, Camille and Curiace, who are united in a posthumous marriage through their common burial (Couton 27; Carlin 58).

While the outcome of the actual battle between Rome and Albe ended with Horace becoming a hero of the State, his description of the grandeur of dying in battle in the service of

one's country in act II showed that Curiace too earned glory with his loss as he died a noble death. Since only men can participate in the battle and earn this type of noble death, females who wish to die nobly must find other means of doing so, and the *gloire* that they are able to claim for themselves is never that of a public nature. Their victory is always private. While Camille earned personal "glory" by causing Horace to defile his honor (v. 1241), for example, in Corneille's *Sophonisbe*, as in Jodelle's *Cléopâtre Captive*, the heroine will do so by obtaining her freedom through death.

Sophonisbe is basically a female version of Horace. Her identity is inextricably linked to that of her country, Carthage, and she values country and honor as much as Horace does, but she also values her freedom. Interestingly, while she attaches importance to these masculine values, the two principal male characters, Massinisse and Syphax, are dominated by their love for her and are willing to sacrifice their country, honor, and pride because of it and are thus portrayed as being weak, effeminate, and anti-heroic. Sophonisbe, however, is an example of *masculine* heroism in that she is willing to make any sacrifice to uphold the values represented by the male ethic. Nevertheless, as a female, her options are limited as to how she may do this.

In this play, as in *Horace* and *Nicomède*, Corneille presents the notion of Roman imperialism, in which Sophonisbe's country is on the verge of being taken over (Rohou 219). Because of Sophonisbe's extreme patriotism, she will do everything that she can in order to try to save Carthage. Since according to the *loi salique* females have no political power of their own and are subordinate to males, Sophonisbe's primary technique for helping her country is to marry whoever she believes will help Carthage the most, even though she may have to abandon the person she loves in order to do so (Prigent 407; 414). Explaining to Herminie how she managed to convert Syphax, one of Rome's most powerful generals, to her cause, she says:

J'immolai ma tendresse au bien de ma Patrie,  
Pour lui gagner Syphax j'eusse immolé ma vie;  
Il était aux Romains, et je l'en détachai,  
J'étais à Massinisse, et je m'en arrachai,  
J'en eus de la douleur, j'en sentais de la gêne,  
Mais je servais Carthage, et m'en revoyais Reine...

(I.ii.43-48)

In this passage, it is evident that Sophonisbe's sacrifice of Massinisse in order to help Carthage was not without difficulty. Nevertheless, this shows her strength in trying to serve her country, even at the cost of her love, which likewise reflects her adhesion to the masculine ethic. For, as stated earlier, Corneille himself says that he considers political issues, such as those that concern Sophonisbe, to be "plus noble et plus mâle que l'amour" (Corneille 124).

Gender reversal is a primary theme in *Sophonisbe*, largely to show the personal sacrifices that one should be willing to make for the State. The heroine herself had valued her love for Massinisse and, as a female, she was expected to value love over country. Even she, a mere female, was able to sacrifice her personal happiness for the good of her country, implying that males should certainly be able to do the same, especially since it is their patriotic duty to do so.

Throughout the play, Sophonisbe is shown as being dominant, patriotic, and proud, and Abraham even describes her as "one of the most selfish creatures in all Corneille" (124), which is certainly true: She uses men for their political stature and readily changes husbands in order to satisfy her political needs, though she leads them to believe that she loves them in order to manipulate them (Carlin 118). When her husband Syphax asks her what she will do if he dies in battle, she replies, "Je vous répondrais bien qu'après votre trépas / Ce que je deviendrai ne vous

regarde pas...” (I.iv.381-82). Thus, she simply plans to find herself another husband who can help her protect Carthage against Rome if need be, but she will not tell him this since he is serving her out of his belief in their mutual love. Likewise, when she gets captured, her rival Éryxe states the truth when she sees that Sophonisbe is using her femininity to gain her former lover Massinisse’s favor, saying, “Sophonisbe en un mot, et captive, et pleurante, / L’emporte sur Éryxe, et Reine et triomphante...” (II.i.427-28). Thus, though Sophonisbe has many masculine characteristics, she is able to utilize her femininity when she needs to do so, showing that she has complete control over the more vulnerable side of her personality (Corneille 382). Sophonisbe, therefore, shows true “feminine heroism” as she tries to use her femininity to perform heroic acts for the good of her country.

Contrary to Sophonisbe, Massinisse and Syphax are shown as being weak and effeminate, mainly because of their excessive love for her and their overt sentimentality (Doubrovsky 354). Though she takes pride in the power that she has over them, she is equally disgusted with them for their complete and self-sacrificing devotion to her. Neither ever speaks of honor or wanting to serve the state, as a man should, and they both talk mainly of love. Massinisse even becomes so obsessed with love that he embarrasses the lieutenant. As Lélius says, “Vous parlez tant d’amour qu’il faut que je confesse / Que j’ai honte pour vous de voir tant de foiblesse” (IV.iii.1361-62). Love is not a concern of Sophonisbe’s since her primary goal is to be Carthage’s hero and save it from Rome. She wishes to identify herself with patriotic heroes more than love-stricken heroines who suffer or die for sentimental causes; therefore, she pours all her energies into defending her State and merely uses her feminine desirability to help her do it. If she is to protect Carthage, she needs a husband who is willing to defend it against Rome for her rather than one who will hand it over to Rome in exchange for her as Syphax was willing

to do. Thus, when he happily tells her of the arrangements that he had made, she cries, “Ah! cessez je vous prie / De faire en ma faveur outrage à ma Patrie” (I.iv.287-88). Likewise, when faced with Massinisse’s outpouring of sentimentality, she says to him, “Mais laissez-moi de grâce ignorer vos foiblesses” (v. 1462). As Horace demanded that Camille control her emotions, Sophonisbe plays the masculine role of reminding her lover of the impropriety of expressing such weakness in public.

When Sophonisbe and Syphax are in captivity, she reveals to him that she has just married Massinisse in order to be freed. As she says, “Ma gloire est d’éviter les fers que vous portez” (v. 1015). As stated earlier, Syphax truly believed that his marriage to Sophonisbe was based on love and is horrified at this news. Rather than get sympathy, though, he gets criticized by Sophonisbe for allowing himself to remain captive rather than kill himself. For as Muratore says, captivity is seen as “the most shameful of misfortunes” (57), and his refusal to commit suicide shows his weakness and lack of masculinity. Thus, Sophonisbe says to her ex-husband, “Un Roi né pour la gloire et digne de son sort / À la honte des fers sait préférer la mort” (III.vi.1039-40). Further insulting him, she declares, “Pour mettre en sûreté quelques restes de vie, / Vous avez du Triomphe accepté l’infamie”(III.vi.1081-82). By her statements, therefore, she tells him that he is not worthy of the title that he held with her since he is too cowardly to commit suicide in order to retain it. As for herself, she says, “Je vis encore en Reine, et je mourrai de même” (IV.vi.1045), thus foreshadowing her ultimate suicide.

As with Jodelle’s Cléopâtre, Sophonisbe prizes both her title and her honor, but unlike Cléopâtre, Sophonisbe always acts heroically, with the intent of doing what is best for the State. Soon after she is first captured, for example, she contemplates killing herself, but since Massinisse offered to marry her in order to free her, she convinces herself that she should remain

alive in order to use him for Carthage's benefit. Though she would technically be Roman, she says:

L'esclavage aux grands cœurs n'est point à redouter,  
Alors qu'on sait mourir on sait tout éviter:  
Mais comme enfin la vie est bonne à quelque chose,  
Ma Patrie elle-même à ce trépas s'oppose,  
Et m'en désavouerait, si j'osais me ravir  
Les moyens que l'amour m'offre de la servir.

(II.v.721-26)

Ultimately, though, when the news has spread that Carthage has lost, Sophonisbe realizes that Massinisse is useless to her, and that she is to be taken to Rome, as was Jodelle's heroine. Massinisse and Syphax have proven themselves unworthy of her: Syphax lost his dignity through his captivity, and though Massinisse was also a king, he was unable to help her acquire her freedom, thus proving his true lack of power. The only help that the latter was able to offer her was to send her poison that she could use to kill herself, which she refuses, since she wants now to owe nothing to either him or Syphax. Both, in effect, have been castrated by Rome. They both have become impotent and weak, and neither has the courage that she does to commit suicide to free themselves from Rome. Thus, to avoid the infamy of being taken to Rome, she poisons herself in the only "suicide généreux" of Cornelian tragedy and the only one which is done in the name of patriotism and honor (Soare 314-15; Prigent 414). As she says "...n'étant plus qu'à moi je meurs toute à Carthage" (V.vii.1791-92). Although the physical state of Carthage has succumbed to Rome, since Sophonisbe's identity is inseparable from that of her

country, the fact that she dies for Carthage of her own free will is her symbolic way of gaining a heroic victory and simultaneously liberating her state and herself from their captor<sup>5</sup>.

In this play, the fact that the heroine commits suicide shows her strength and positive qualities. The men's survival, however, is a reflection of their cowardliness and their misplaced priorities. In this case, therefore, feminine death is used to reaffirm the masculine values of strength, courage, honor, and public service, whereas non-death on the part of the males is a criticism of those who do not maintain these values.

While death in both *Horace* and *Sophonisbe* centered on the values held by the patriarchal society, Corneille's political tragedies covered other themes, namely the nature of the king and the evils of Machiavellian-like politics<sup>6</sup>. It is well known that Corneille was a loyal supporter of the absolutist régime, as demonstrated in many of his *dédicaces* to his tragedies, and he often showed his admiration of the king and his government through his works. In order to do so, though, more often than not, he presented the public with, to borrow Prigent's terminology, "anti-modèles de la philosophie politique" (3). Rather than always portraying "good" kings who properly fulfilled their duty of acting in accordance with the best interests of the State, such as *Horace*'s Tulle or *Cinna*'s Auguste, which I will be discussing in chapter 5, he usually depicted kings whose behavior was much less noble and contrasted them with a model king based on Louis XIV<sup>7</sup>. These anti-heroic kings include, for example, *La Mort de Pompée*'s Ptolomée, *Othon*'s Galba, and Attila.

Given that the principal characters in these plays are acting within the State's political system, these works are primarily male dominated, as are the deaths that occur within them. Females can play a political role in them, though, in that they often become the voice of masculine and absolutist ideology, even if for only selfish reasons (Dragucci-Paulsen 106).

*Attila*'s Honorie, for example, tells her suitor, who is one of two kings whose title holds no real power, that *true* Monarchs do not have to obey anyone else's laws and that she will not lower herself to marry him if he does not act like a real king (II.ii.485-94). Likewise, throughout *La Mort de Pompée*, Cléopâtre speaks of the virtues of Roman politics, which Corneille often used as the archetype of absolutism, as well as the vices of Photin's brutal politics, which the latter explains in great detail in Act I, scene 1 (Carlin 84; Couton 52). She also talks of the innate goodness of kings, and the negative effect that *les mauvais conseillers* can have on them:

Leur générosité soumet tout à leur gloire,  
Tout est illustre en eux quand ils daignent se croire,  
Et si le Peuple y voit quelques dérèglements,  
C'est quand l'avis d'autrui corrompt leurs sentiments.

(II.i.373-76)

Though kings are inherently good by nature, counselors who advise them to utilize brutality to maintain or gain power can cause them to lose their goodness, in which case they also lose their sovereignty and become tyrants (Assaf 56). In *La Mort de Pompée*, Ptolomée is an example of a king who does not trust his own instincts and is influenced by his counselors Photin and Septime to kill Pompée, who has merely come to Egypt to seek exile from Rome. In *Othon*, though, the king is simply too weak and allows his counselors to control him. Ultimately, the many deaths that occur within the play will be the result of a conflict over the question of Galba's successor, since none of the king's counselors want to lose their own ability to control power.

In *La Mort de Pompée*, those who want to use violence to secure their power are shown as acting out of *fear* more than any sense of gaining honor and glory, as is normally associated

with the male ethic of Corneille's time. Ptolomée's counselors tell him that no options are available which will guarantee his power and Egypt's safety other than killing Pompée: By allowing Pompée to come into their country, Rome would see Egypt as their enemy (vv. 87-89), Pompée would want to take away his power (v. 145), and finally, if they turn him over to César or turn him away, he will later come back to take vengeance on them (vv. 167-84). In summary, to save their own necks, they chop off Pompée's head, and though this is a crime, according to Photin's politics, the ends justify the means: "Le droit des Rois consiste à ne rien épargner / La timide équité détruit l'art de régner" (I.i.107-8) (Doubrovsky 275). Thus, Ptolomée's counselors reject the value of honor and place all their emphasis on their physical capacity to eliminate what they feel is a source of threat. As such, Photin's political strategy gives men a legal reason to perform cowardly acts such as Pompée's assassination while claiming to be heroic and serve the State.

The irony in Ptolomée's action is that rather than saving himself from César's wrath by helping his enemy, his assassination is what actually brought it on. There are two reasons for this. First, though Pompée had been César's rival, the Roman dictator remembered that Pompée had used his influence to help Ptolomée gain his position before the civil war. By taking Ptolomée into his protection, he had acted as a father figure for him, thus making his assassination a parricide (Doubrovsky 273). As will be discussed in chapter 5, parricide is a recurrent theme in Cornelian tragedy, and this particular play is riddled with references to it, beginning with Act I, scene 1. Secondly, César considered Pompée to be a worthy and noble hero, and had even hoped to unite with him one day (vv. 909-24). Ptolomée's action has denied him the opportunity to do this. Thus, for these two reasons, Ptolomée would pay, as would his

counselors. As Abraham says, “He [Ptolomée] is the clearest incarnation to date of self-defeating Machiavellianism” (79).

Finally, although Corneille did not promote tyrannicide, he did not like to see unjust acts go unpunished. In both *La Mort de Pompée* and *Attila*, therefore, divine justice intervenes in the form of a *deus ex machina* (Carlin 129; Abraham 132), causing the criminals to die in a way that echoed their crimes. Attila dies a gruesome death, which is typical for Corneille’s kings, when his rage, which had caused him to be barbaric and cruel, causes him almost literally to explode with torrents of blood rushing forth from him, reminiscent of God’s punishment of man by flooding the Earth and the apocalypse, as foreshadowed in act V, scene 3, vv. 1573-82. Likewise, Ptolomée died, with his accomplices, when his boat sank while running away from the battle against César’s army. His death was an ignoble one which reflected his cowardly attack on an unarmed Pompée, inspired by his incompetent counselors, and which likewise occurred at sea. As Doubrovsky says, “On a la mort qu’on mérite, et jusqu’au bout se trahit la *passivité* du roi dégénéré, puisque Ptolomée disparaît *noyé*, alors qu’il tentait de s’enfuir à bord d’une barque. Il retombe dans la ‘foule’, dans la condition humaine, à laquelle le héros, depuis Horace, sait que sa vocation est d’échapper;..” (277).

In conclusion, Corneille uses death as well as non-death in political tragedies to illustrate values of seventeenth-century society. Most of the actual deaths that do occur are masculine because the political domain is dominated by males, and only males pose a true threat to one another on this level. As such, feminine death in Corneille’s political tragedies is fairly rare and serves a symbolic function. Although Sophonisbe is a female, her death represented the courage, honor, strength and patriotism of the masculine ethic, whereas Massinisse and Syphax were anti-heroes who allowed their sentimentality to dominate them, rendering them weak and effeminate

and vulnerable to manipulation by others. Camille's death served the double purpose of showing the dominance of the masculine ethic, as well as the danger of completely abandoning oneself to patriotism and desire for glory to the extent of becoming inhumane and heartless, as did Horace. Nevertheless, Horace did present a clear image of masculine heroism through his devotion to his country and his esteem for honor and glory. Although he wanted to commit suicide in order to preserve his glory at its present level, the king's refusal to allow the hero to do so after his tremendous victory showed that kings must do what is in the best interest of the State, which, in Horace's case, was to have him live to serve Rome and to have him model deference to the king. It also demonstrated that kings do not owe their subjects any favors, even when they have served them well. Just as kings are expected to rule with the State's well-being in mind, the subject is expected to serve his State to the best of his ability. Through his victory was honorable, he only did what the State expected of him, and therefore, the king owed him nothing. Finally, while *Horace* presented a king whose sense of justice demonstrated the sovereign's commitment to the good of the State, *Othon's* king Galba was simply too passive to maintain his own power, which he basically handed over to his counselors who used it for their own benefit, and *La Mort de Pompée* showed a king who was controlled by counselors whose decisions were based on fear. Likewise, through Pompée's death, Corneille showed the fundamental cowardliness of brutality in politics as well as its self-defeating consequences, as demonstrated by César's reaction to it. Finally, *Attila* presented a king whose cruelty and deadly rage, the ultimate cause of his death, was motivated by his sense of *amour propre*, or self-love and egotism, and its manifestation through his desire to see himself dominate.

Though political tragedies normally center on male characters, in both *Rodogune* and *Nicomède*, the primary action is based on females who try to gain or maintain political power. In

the next chapter, we will see that these “ambitious women” wish to see someone who is hindering their ability to access power die, as do women who want vengeance because of a personal harm that has been done to them.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Germa-Romann 67; Rohou 159; Doubrovsky 149; Carlin 107; Greenberg, Corneille 70

<sup>2</sup> Irigaray 27; Greenberg 11, 72-73; Carlin 58

<sup>3</sup> Schmidt 157; Doubrovsky 156; Dragacci-Paulsen 99; Goodkin 68

<sup>4</sup> Abraham 63; Prigent 47; Carlin 60; Lyons 55; Volkoff 55

<sup>5</sup> Carlin 119; Muratore 58-9; Prigent 414

<sup>6</sup> Abraham 132; Rohou 180; Merlin (1998) 46

<sup>7</sup> Carlin 120; Corneille vol. 3 1493-95; Guichemerre 49-50

## CHAPTER 5

### FEMININE AMBITION AND VENGEANCE

Although seventeenth-century society generally considered women to be frail, sentimental, and lacking in physical as well as intellectual strength, Corneille's tragedies frequently portrayed them otherwise (Stamato 333). Though they may become victims of the male-oriented society, as was Camille, his *femmes fortes* are generally intelligent, emotionally charged individuals who, rather than being crippled and overwhelmed by their sentimentality, redirect their feelings outward to serve a personal cause. Their goals are usually to avenge themselves of a wrongdoing or to gain or maintain power, and both often entail using deadly force. For this reason, Corneille's female characters, especially his mothers, have earned quite the reputation for being a threat either to individual male characters or to the patriarchal order<sup>1</sup>.

Although women did not have any political authority under the monarchy, in Cornelian tragedy, they frequently tried to find ways to maneuver around this obstacle in order to gain or maintain power. One possible way for a queen to do this is to manipulate her husband or another male into acting on her behalf, which is what *Nicomède's* Arsinoé will do. Otherwise, the queen can profit from the absence or death of her husband in order to gain legal control over the State, as with *Rodogune's* Cléopâtre. As Gibson explains, "...it was in the absence or incapacity of her husband that she really comes into her own, for it was then that the powers of regent could legally be conferred upon her" (142; Dragucci-Paulsen 107). The difficulty in this arrangement,

though, is that the people did not always like to be ruled by a female, since they believed that the queen's feminine weakness made their country more vulnerable than it would be if it were under the control of a male (Assaf 50). If the king died, therefore, the queen was obligated either to find a new husband or to relinquish control of the state once the *dauphin* came of age. Thus, as Cléopâtre's *confidante* explains concerning the queen's marriage to the king's brother Antiochus when her husband was believed to have been killed in battle:

Le peuple, épouvanté, qui déjà dans son âme  
Ne suivait qu'à regret les ordres d'une femme,  
Voulut forcer la Reine à choisir un époux.

(I.i.47-49)

Queens did not always readily give up their power either to a new husband or to their sons. As Gibson explains, both Marie de Médicis and Anne d'Autriche were themselves accused of keeping their sons in ignorance of the political workings of the State "in order not to have to relinquish control over affairs," though the latter's innocence has since been determined (143). While Arsinoé is fortunate enough to be able to manipulate her husband Prusias into helping her put her son Attale on the throne instead of Nicomède, the legitimate heir from the king's first marriage, Cléopâtre, will find herself in the position of being forced by the people to give up her throne to the eldest of her two sons. Both of these "ambitious mothers", as Corneille calls each of them, (*Œuvres Complètes* 2 202, 640) though, are willing to resort to murder in order to remove the obstacle to their power.

In both *Rodogune* and *Nicomède*, a principal theme, and a serious problem for Arsinoé, is that of primogeniture. While Arsinoé wants the son that she had with Prusias to inherit the throne, Nicomède is the legal heir, as he was the first of Prusias's sons to be born. As Assaf

explains, “En France, ce qui fait le roi est le droit de succession, déterminé par primogéniture mâle, entériné par la loi. Le sacre n’est qu’une confirmation extérieure, visible de ce fait” (28). As explained in Chapter 3, the king exists as both a *corps physique*, which is the mortal, physical person of the king, and as a *corps politique*, which is immortal and is the sole source of the king’s power (Assaf 23). The legal heir *becomes* the new king, or the physical receptacle of the king’s *corps politique* at the moment at which the previous ruler dies, therefore, the naming of the successor is simply the act of publicly conferring upon the new king the legal rights which he already possessed (28).

Arsinoé tries to bypass the legal and *legitimate* order of succession and transfer it onto her son to see him rule and possibly with the intent of one day being able to control him as Nicomède implies, saying to his father:

Vous pouvez déjà voir comme elle m’appréhende,  
Combien en me perdant elle espère gagner,  
Parce qu’elle prévoit que je saurai régner.

(IV.iii.1324-25)

Likewise, whereas Nicomède is shown throughout the play as being a successful, strong, and valiant hero of his State (vv. 1-6), Attale, who was raised as a hostage of Rome, is initially depicted as lacking courage, and thus easily controllable, thanks to the Romans who molded him to serve their needs “sans lui rien mettre au cœur qu’une crainte servile” (I.i.51). If Attale were to rule, not only would she have the pleasure of seeing her own son on the throne, she might still be able to use him as she has done with Prusius (Muratore 87). Nevertheless, the only way to make his rule legitimate is to eliminate his competition (Sweetser 175; Abraham 103), for society’s belief in primogeniture was so strong that, as Nicomède says, “...ce vieux droit

d'aînesse est souvent si puissant, / Que pour remplir un trône, il rappelle un absent" (IV.iii.1357-58).

Although Cléopâtre is being asked to relinquish the throne because her sons are of legal age to rule, she has found a way to use the legalities of primogeniture to her advantage. She has refused to reveal the name of the son who was born first. By doing so, she has prevented the public from being able to acknowledge their rightful king, and thus has been able to maintain the right to reign. As Merlin says, "Cléopâtre joue en effet du secret de la naissance des princes comme d'un secret d'Etat, une façon d'outrepasser la loi dans la forme même de la loi...Comme mère Cléopâtre sait qui est le premier né, et de ce savoir elle fait un secret: avec le secret, la loi cesse d'être publique, elle échappe en quelque sorte à sa propre légalité" (49). Thus, by keeping her sons' birth order a secret, she has found a way to use the law's requirement of an established birth order in order to avoid fulfilling the legal obligation that she has to hand control of the state over to the elder of the two. Only when one of her sons decides not to vie for the throne does Cléopâtre truly become vulnerable. Because Séleucus denies the possibility of his right to rule by primogeniture, he leaves Antiochus as the only heir to the throne. Consequently, Cléopâtre loses the only means by which she had kept her powers of regent, which was by keeping the public from being able to acknowledge their king. Threatened with having to give up her control over the State by Séleucus's action, in an act of desperation, she will resort to violence in order not to let this happen.

The problem, or tragic flaw, of both Cléopâtre and Arsinoé is that each has an overly developed sense of *amour-propre*, which, in their case manifests itself as an ambitious aspiration for personal power. As mentioned in chapter 3, while ambition is considered a positive attribute when it is associated with the desire to serve the public and gain not only personal glory but also

that of the State, ambition that only serves a person's private interests is presented as a negative, destructive force (Carlin 130; Stamato 535). Cornelian tragedies show excessive *amour-propre* as being potentially detrimental to the individual, causing him or her to self-destruct, as with Attila, *Théodore's* Marcelle, *Clitandre ou l'Innocence délivrée's* Pymante and *Rodogune's* Cléopâtre, and to society, when people act in a way which is harmful to the State in order to serve their own desires, as with *Othon's* Vinus, Lacus and Martian, *Suréna's* Orode and Pacorus, and Arsinoé. Both males and females demonstrate this destructive degree of *amour-propre*, which Rohou refers to as "tyrannie égoïste" (182). Its negative consequences are usually the result of an inability to accept a situation which the characters cannot change, and their incapacity to change it *always* occurs because of the presence of at least one other individual who is either consciously or unconsciously creating an obstacle to their happiness. With both Cléopâtre and Arsinoé, the mere existence of males is a threat to their thirst for political power. In Cléopâtre's case, males are threatening her political status, including her title, and for Arsinoé, one is hindering her ability to see her son rule. These obstacles will need to be circumvented or eliminated using any means necessary. Cléopâtre initially tries to avoid killing her sons before resorting to such violence, but ultimately, there will be no possible way for her to maintain power as long as either of her sons is living.

Cléopâtre has risked losing her throne once before. After she married Nicanor's brother in deference to the demand of her subjects, who thought that the king had been killed in battle, he returned alive and well, to everyone's surprise. He was furious at Cléopâtre for supposedly betraying him, though hers was an honest mistake, and wanted to take revenge on her by marrying Rodogune, the Princess of Parthes, in a gesture which would both dethrone and humiliate the proud queen:

Son erreur est un crime, et pour l'en punir mieux,  
Il veut même épouser Rodogune à ses yeux.  
Arracher de son front le sacré Diadème,  
Pour ceindre une autre tête en sa présence même;  
Soit qu'ainsi sa vengeance eût plus d'indignité...

(I.iv.241-45)

He had even planned on having children with his new bride and declaring them, not Cléopâtre's children, his legal heirs. Unable to bear the thought of losing her throne, especially in such an ignoble fashion, she and her accomplices killed him before he could go through with the wedding:

Elle-même leur [Nicanor and Rodogune] dresse une embuche au passage,  
Se mêle dans les coups, porte partout sa rage,  
En pousse jusqu'au bout les furieux effets.  
...les Parthes sont défaits,  
Le Roi meurt, et dit-on, par la main de la Reine.

(I.iv.259-63)

Nicanor's planned wedding and Cléopâtre's murder of her husband played a fundamental role in turning her into what critics often refer to as a monster. Although critics tend to focus on Cléopâtre's actions, Nicanor's cannot be understated: For the queen was innocent in that she had not wanted to marry anyone, but the people insisted that she do so simply because she was a female. Therefore, her first crime, adultery, was due to society's inability to see beyond her gender, as all of her subsequent crimes will be as well. As Stamato says:

Cléopâtre reste une femme dans un monde masculin. Le problème de Cléopâtre est le contraire de la célèbre phrase du *Deuxième Sexe* de Simone de Beauvoir...‘On ne naît pas femme, on la devient.’ Cléopâtre est née femme, la société la voit comme telle, mais elle n’est jamais devenue femme...C’est la dialectique entre son apparence physique (celle d’une femme) et son fort intérieur (celui d’un homme) qui explique sa chute...

(536-37)

Despite the lack of acceptance that society had of her because of the body to which s/he was confined, she refused to allow herself to become a victim of the patriarchal order. In a gesture that reaffirmed her masculine identity and guaranteed her own security, she killed her husband by her own hand, thus committing regicide. Cléopâtre truly is the most masculine of all of Corneille’s females in that none of his other female characters are able to kill an adult male by her own hand, other than *Théodore*’s Marcelle, whose male victim, Didyme, was eager to die in order to become a martyr to his faith.

Rodogune, who is taken as Cléopâtre’s captive, becomes the object of the queen’s rancor. In addition to Cléopâtre’s resentment of the fact that Rodogune was to replace her on the throne, Rodogune is the physical representation of her own loss of power, which would force her back into the realm of feminine submissiveness. Nothing about the description of the plan for the wedding leads one to believe that Nicanor’s primary intent in marrying Rodogune had anything to do with love. Although he did love her, her role in the wedding ceremony was that of the tool that he intended to use to strip Cléopâtre of the crown that had allowed her political role to conform to her interior masculinity. Cléopâtre’s hatred of Rodogune, therefore, is because the latter threatened her power and had nothing to do with Nicanor’s preference for her. For the

queen herself says that she would have been perfectly happy to see Rodogune marry Nicanor, if she had been allowed to continue to rule over Syria (II.ii.463-68). As Stamato explains, “L’histoire intime de Nicanor et de Rodogune n’intéresse pas Cléopâtre, hormis lorsqu’elle entraîne un envahissement de son territoire (c’est à dire de son pouvoir)” (535).

As part of the peace treaty between Syria and the Parthians, Rodogune is to be married to whichever of Cléopâtre’s sons is named king. Once again, Rodogune is designated as the instrument by which the queen is to be dethroned and metamorphosed into a mere subject and thus castrated. As the phallus is the symbol of masculine power, Cléopâtre’s loss of the crown would be her symbolic castration in that she would lose the external representation of her power as well as the actual power that it gives her. Likewise, as a mere female with no *corps politique*, which is all that she values, she would see herself, in effect, as less than an ordinary subject. She would become nothing. To avoid such infamy, she attempts to determine if she can rule through her sons by trying to convince one or both to eliminate her rival. Taking advantage again of their ignorance of their birth order, she tells them that whichever kills Rodogune will be declared the elder. For Cléopâtre, the son who would be willing to do this would prove himself to be his mother’s puppet, thus reaffirming her control over him. Likewise, Rodogune’s death would immortalize Cléopâtre’s power by eliminating the symbol of its loss and by making her son into a second version of herself, since he would have acquired the throne through a crime, just as she had maintained it. Explaining her sentiments to her *confidante*, she says:

On ne montera point au rang dont je dévale,  
Qu’en épousant ma haine, au lieu de ma rivale,  
Ce n’est qu’en me vengeant qu’on me le peut ravir,

Et je ferai régner qui me voudrait servir.

(II.ii.499-502)

Thus, she gives her sons the opportunity to live and reign if one of them is willing to submit to her request to kill the symbol of her own vulnerability. As such, she tries to create a new, feminine type of primogeniture whereby succession is established by identification with the mother's essence, not the birth order of the father's children. To render this connection legitimate, Rodogune's murder is necessary:

Entre deux fils que j'aime avec même tendresse

Embrasser ma querelle est le seul droit d'aînesse,

La mort de Rodogune en nommera l'aîné.

(II.iii.642-45)

Attempting to appeal to their belief in her motherly love, she tries to convince them to kill Rodogune by stating that she loves them "avec même tendresse." However, her sons are unaware that the only feelings that she has for them range from indifference to hatred since their existence is the reason for which she must relinquish the throne.

While Cléopâtre is in danger of losing power because of her gender, Arsinoé takes advantage of her femininity and her status as the king's wife in order to maintain control over him and the State. Explaining this to Nicomède, Laodice says:

Votre marâtre y règne, et le Roi votre père

Ne voit que par ses yeux, seule la considère,

Pour souveraine loi, n'a que sa volonté

(I.i.10-13)

His love for her makes him easy to manipulate, and as Greenberg explains, Prusius is impotent with his submission to the queen (150). Her primary tactic for getting him to eliminate Nicomède, though, is by deceiving him into believing that his son is dangerous to him and the State. By tricking her stepson into leaving the battlefield without his father's orders, she convinces both Prusius and the Roman ambassador Flaminius that Nicomède is surpassing his rights and thus becoming a threat. She also uses his engagement with the princess Laodice to reinforce the idea that he would be a tremendous threat to Rome if he were to be crowned and gain Armenia as an ally. Thus, thinking upon her plan to get Nicomède killed, she says to her *confidente* Cléone, "Mon entreprise est sûre, et sa perte infaillible" (I.v.360). Echoing Ptolomée's counselors' Machiavellian *art de régner* from *La Mort de Pompée*, though, she justifies her actions, saying, "... il n'est fourbe, ni crime, / Qu'un trône acquis par là ne rende légitime" (I.v.291-92). Thus, she feels that once Attale is crowned king, her scheming, though possibly resulting in the death of the legitimate heir to the throne, will be excusable, and she is not alone in her belief that the ends can justify the means. As explained in Jean Bodin's *Les Six Livres de la République*, which was published numerous times between 1576 and 1641, even a king who acquires a throne through illegitimate means may become legitimate if he rules equitably and for the good of the state. Thus, Arisnoé trusts the belief that even if Nicomède is killed, Attale will be accepted as the legitimate king once he proves his ability to rule.

With the exception of *Andromède's* Cassiope, Corneille's mothers all attempt to use deceit to bring about someone's death, and as Stamato and Carlin say, they put on a "mask" in order to do so (Stamato 533; Carlin 121-22). While both males and females wear masks, sometimes literally, as in *Clitandre ou l'innocence délivrée*, males usually wear a mask in association with an identity shift. They may not be aware of their mask, as with Œdipe and

*Héraclius*'s Martian, or they may consciously put on a heroic mask and subsequently become a hero, as with Rodrigue's transformation into *Le Cid* or Horace's change into Rome. While young females generally are required to put on a stoic mask to hide their sentiments, as was Sabine when her brother was killed or *Polyeucte*'s Pauline when facing Sévère, mothers tend to put on a mask in order to help them become more efficient predators. Médée pretends graciously to hand over her robe to Créuse, before which she poisons it; Arsinoé acts as the concerned wife who is just trying to help her husband, when she is actually trying to get her stepson killed; and finally, Cléopâtre plays the role of the loving mother whose every action has been in her sons' best interests, which turns out to be anything but true (Muratore 87). When their true intent is revealed, the mask falls, letting others see them as the terrifying "monsters" that they really are<sup>2</sup>. As Greenberg says, "The Mother returns [again after *Médée*] as a ghoulish devourer, a perverted 'unnatural' Mother who castrates her males and cannibalizes her offspring. The Mother re-emerges on the Cornelian stage as a figure/fantasy of dispersion and Death" (149).

When Cléopâtre is preparing to announce to her sons her decision to give the throne to whichever one kills Rodogune, she knows that her mask is going to fall, and she revels in the idea of being able to reveal her hatred to them. She says to herself and her multitude of sentiments:

Heureux déguisements d'un immortel courroux,

Vains fantômes d'Etat, évanouissez-vous.

[...]

Et vous qu'avec tant d'art cette feinte a voilée,

Recours des impuissants, haine dissimulée

Digne vertu des Rois, noble secret de Cour,

Éclatez, il est temps, et voici notre jour.

Montrons-nous toutes deux...

(II.i.397-98; 403-07)

When she tells them of her desire to see Rodogune dead, she will finally be able remove the mask that has been hiding her internal hatred of Rodogune. She will finally be able to dismiss her feminine guise and passive demeanor toward Rodogune to expose herself as an all-powerful, ruthless, and politically driven masculine One. For she will reveal her true lack of maternal instincts and show that she is a purely political being, a political body whose needs can be met only by satisfying her desire to maintain power, even at the cost of her sons' happiness. For the moment, though, she knows that she has to appeal to her sons' sense of filial duty to her in order to have any hope that she may mold them to serve her. Therefore, she puts on her mask of motherly love and tries to manipulate them into feeling obligated to adopt her hatred as their own. Speaking of her ultimate decision to kill their father, she begins gently, saying:

Mais soit crime, ou Justice, il est certain, mes fils,

Que mon amour pour vous fit tout ce que fis.

[...]

Je me crus tout permis pour garder votre bien.

Recevez donc, mes fils, de la main d'une mère

Un trône racheté par le malheur d'un père...

(II.iii.561-62; 574-76)

She begins by insisting repeatedly on her love for her sons and that her crimes were "for them", even saying that their father would be alive if Rodogune had not seduced him (vv. 627-28). Ultimately, she removes her mask, telling them that she will only step down from the throne at

the price of Rodogune's head. Through her revelation, they see the hate-filled queen that she really is. As Séleucus says:

Elle fait bien sonner ce grand amour de mère,  
Mais elle seule enfin s'aime, et se considère,  
Et quoi que nous étale un langage si doux,  
Elle a tout fait pour elle, et n'a rien fait pour nous.

(II.iv.735-38)

Thus, the audacity of her demand for her rival's death revealed the selfish motives behind all her actions and the hollowness of all her claims to motherly love, and what makes it doubly heinous for the sons is that they are both in love with Rodogune.

While most works present women in Corneille's time as weak, Pierre Darmon's book *Mythologie de la femme dans l'ancienne France: XVI<sup>e</sup> – XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* presents a common seventeenth-century view of the female and her inhumanity, which was based on her association with Original Sin and the fall of Man, a notion that Kristeva refers to when relating the feminine to Death (Moi 34; Darmon 26). As Darmon says, "Elle [The female] a été conçue pour la perte de l'homme, et les menées subversives qui la rendent si redoutable ici-bas s'inscrivent dans le prolongement direct de cette malice dont elle usa pour troubler jadis la béatitude de l'homme." Consequently, those who shared this view of her as the source of man's troubles considered her as the "public enemy" (27). She was described as "naturellement jalouse, bête, curieuse, [and] vaniteuse" (Darmon 30). Finally, she was noted for her "violence incurable": "La femme est cruelle, sanguinaire, et dépouillée de toute humanité" (28). Although Corneille believed that the primary function of tragedy was to please the spectator rather than to instruct, he admits to having had the intention of teaching women, their husbands, mothers, and people in general a

lesson through his portrayal of females who conformed to this misogynistic stereotype and the males who were dominated by them. He wanted to frighten them into avoiding the dangers of egotism and selfishness, which are founded on excessive *amour-propre*, by illustrating their possible, if extreme, negative outcome. With *Rodogune* and *Nicomède*, for example, Corneille explains “...la crainte...peut purger en une mère l’opiniâtreté à ne se point dessaisir du bien de ses enfants, en un mari le trop de déférence à une seconde femme au préjudice de ceux de son premier lit, en tout le monde l’avidité d’usurper le bien ou la dignité d’autrui par violence” (*Œuvres Complètes* 3 148). Thus, he took advantage of the “terror” evoked through this familiar stereotype in order to bring about the *catharsis* that would deter the spectators from these dangerous and destructive types of behavior. The final impression of Corneille’s egotistical characters that the spectator is left with is that, as Greenberg says, “The men are whimpering castrati and the women virilized harpies” (151).

By showing males as love-stricken pawns whom females use to gain or maintain power, Corneille is exploiting gender “inversion”, a popular dramatic technique used from the 1630’s through the 1650’s in which men were portrayed with characteristics which were normally associated with the female, such as weakness, sentimentality, and obsession with issues of the heart, and women were shown as being strong, intellectually-motivated, and generally masculine (Schmidt 99; Doubrovsky 292). Likewise, the male and female characters in these plays have opposing personalities: While Antiochus is shown as being effeminate through his obsession with love, Cleopatre is completely motivated by power (Sweetser 148-49; Stamato 530), and Prusius is dominated by his love for Arsinoé, whereas her only concern is seeing her son as king. Corneille’s use of gender inversion in these plays is the primary factor which renders his characters contemptible. Because of their misplaced priorities, they do not conform to their

gender role within the socio-economic structure of the patriarchy, and they are often shown as being *dénaturé*, or having no sense of familial obligation or love.

*Nature* is a dominant theme in Cornelian tragedy. In both *Nicomède* and *Rodogune*, characters must choose between *nature* and their desire to satisfy their *amour-propre* (Doubrovsky 290). Ironically, though Cléopâtre has proven herself to be a less than loving mother, when Antiochus tells her that he and Séleucus cannot kill Rodogune because they both love her, feeling horrified and betrayed, she exclaims, “L’amour étouffe en vous la voix de la Nature, / Et je pourrais aimer des fils dénaturés!” (IV.iii.1324-25). While she herself is *dénaturée* because she values political power over her love for her sons, she accuses them of being *dénaturés* because they will not commit murder for her and because they have betrayed her for Rodogune, just as their father did (Sweetser 149). Also, while Cléopâtre herself is dominated purely by her political interests and believes that it is necessary to sacrifice everything for power, she is not able to understand how her sons can desire love over power. Since she does not comprehend their value system, she considers her sons perverted, and when they choose carnal love over their duty to serve their mother and their desire for power, she is only further angered. Imprudently, she says, “Périssiez, périssiez. Votre rebellion / Mérite plus d’horreur que de compassion” (IV.iii.1333-34). Unfortunately, though, Antiochus is too naïve, and has too much faith in *nature* to heed this warning, so Cléopâtre easily convinces him that she will agree to let him marry her rival, although her primary purpose in doing this is to allow her to gain time to figure out how to avenge herself for her sons’ betrayal. Unlike her sons, though, Cléopâtre will always reject *nature* in order to suit her needs. So when Antiochus tells his mother that he and his brother both love Rodogune, she sees that they have become her enemy’s accomplice and tries to find a way to eliminate them as well. Trying to provoke Séleucus’s anger at his brother,

she tells him that he was the first-born son, but that she gave the throne to his brother. Thus, Cléopâtre has very little sense of maternal attachment to her children, and the little that she has, she wants to suppress because of her anger. She says: “Sors de mon cœur, Nature, ou fais qu’ils m’obéissent, / Fais-les servir ma haine, ou consens qu’ils périssent” (IV.vii.1491-92). She is the true representation of a *mère dénaturée*: Not only does she place her self-interests and desire for power over *nature*, but also, she is unwilling to allow herself to feel any sort of sentimental attachment to her sons which may preserve their lives. Similarly, because of her egotism, she is willing to sacrifice her offspring to her hatred for Rodogune. Thus, to Cléopâtre, her sons’ lives are worth less than her vengeance, and she would be willing to see them die if it meant that she could satisfy her sense of *amour-propre* by seeing Rodogune die as well.

In *Nicomède*, Prusias must choose between his son and his wife, thus between *nature* and carnal love also. Though it is clear that he loves his son, like Antiochus and Séleucus, he sides with his beloved, who convinces him that Nicomède has falsely accused her of trying to have her stepson killed. Nicomède had predicted this outcome, though, saying to Arsinoé, “Son amour conjugal chassant le paternel / Vous fera l’innocente, et moi le criminel” (III.vii.1061-62). While in *Rodogune*, by going against nature, the sons prevent the princess from losing her life, Prusias puts his son’s life at risk. Ultimately, though, both Antiochus and Prusias are so blinded by their love and their belief that love can surmount any obstacle that they cannot see that they are being manipulated, and they allow themselves to become submissive, effeminate pawns of a domineering and deceitful Mother. As Greenberg says, “In the universe of *Rodogune* and *Nicomède* the ‘natural’ order of the world has been turned on its head. Male hierarchy has been usurped and in the place of the Father/King now stands the frightening image of a deranged queen” (149). She is the one in control. As Nicomède said, his father always sides with his

wife, and Cléopâtre's son Antiochus was so eager to see his mother accept his love for Rodogune that she easily convinced him that she would agree to letting him marry her rival, though she had threatened to kill him and his brother for loving her just moments before. Acknowledging her son's error, Cléopâtre says to herself, "...c'est mal démêler le cœur d'avec le front, / Que prendre pour sincère un changement si prompt" (IV. v.1401-02). Thus, Prusius's and Antiochus's devotion to their love and their unrealistic desire to see love vanquish renders them vulnerable and causes them to lose their ability to judge wisely—to see through the ruse—which ultimately puts someone they love in danger of being killed.

When Cléopâtre tells Antiochus and Séleucus that they must kill Rodogune, instead of turning against their mother, they go to the Princess to ask *her* to choose which of them she would like to marry and have as her king, but she refuses. Having heard of Cléopâtre's desire to have her killed, she decides that it is time to avenge their father, which was her duty to do, and which she had neglected because of the peace treaty. She tells them, therefore, that she will marry whichever one of them kills their mother. Rodogune legally has the right to ask that Nicanor be avenged since Cléopâtre has retained control of the throne only by killing the legitimate king, and, not only this, Cléopâtre is not, by definition, a good ruler. She does not act in the good of the state, but instead is driven by her own personal desire for power. If she truly wanted to serve the state, she would give her crown to her eldest son and allow him to marry Rodogune in order to keep the peace between Syria and Parthes, as agreed in the treaty between the two countries. Since she is unwilling to do this because of her own hatred of Rodogune, she is technically no longer sovereign and is a tyrant. Although, as will be discussed later in this chapter, tyrannicide was not a crime, especially if it would return the throne to its legitimate heir (Couton 98; *Œuvres Complètes* 3 160), the idea that Antiochus and Séleucus would have to kill

their own mother evokes the notion of *parricide*, a theme that Corneille frequently uses. Although one empathize with a tyrant in danger of assassination, the superimposition of the crime of parricide is particularly suitable for the arousal of terror and pity (Doubrovsky 151). In the seventeenth century, parricide referred either to killing within one's own family or a murder of any other person who should be respected. Thus, Cléopâtre's unsuccessful attempt to get Séleucus to kill his brother was an invitation to parricide as well. Parricide easily inspires the tragic sentiments of terror and pity since, as explained in chapter 2, Aristotle suggests that in order to incite these emotions, the characters acting against one another should either have very close ties or be within the same family: "le surgissement de violences au cœur des alliances—comme un meurtre ou un autre acte de ce genre accompli ou projeté par le frère contre le frère, par le fils contre le père, par la mère contre le fils ou le fils contre la mère--, voilà ce qu'il faut rechercher." (ch 14, p. 81, 53b14). Thus, since Cléopâtre tries to get her sons to kill the woman they love to win the throne and this woman in return tells them that they will have to do the same to their mother in order to win her hand, the spectator cannot help but feel both terror and pity: for, he or she would be horrified at the idea that they would have to kill someone they loved and pity them because they are helplessly caught between the two women. Nevertheless, as Corneille explains in his *Examen* of the play, Rodogune knew that Antiochus and Séleucus would not agree to this. She was using this as a means of protecting herself and them from Cléopâtre's hatred since her choice may have provoked their animosity toward one another (*Œuvres Complètes* 2 202; Muratore 44). Although it was Rodogune's duty to ask that they avenge their father, she ultimately admits to Antiochus that she did not actually want them to oblige her since they would have to commit parricide in order to do so (IV.i.1223-24).

Parricide, tyrannicide, and *nature* are also dominant themes in *Héraclius* that make the spectator feel both terror and pity for Martian, the son of the tyrant Phocas, as well as pity for Phocas himself. The governess, Léontine, who had sacrificed her son Léonce “au loyalisme monarchique”, as Doubrovsky says (304), is raising Martian under a false identity, that of her son. Martian is unaware that he is Phocas’s son, and Léontine tricks him into trying to kill the tyrant. Phocas had killed the legitimate king in order to usurp the throne, and Léontine wants to avenge his murder by having his own son kill him. Revealing her intentions to her daughter, she says:

Ce fut sur l’espérance seul qu’un jour pour s’agrandir  
A ma pleine vengeance il pourrait s’enhardir,  
Je ne l’ai conservé que pour ce parricide.

(II.iii.555-57)

Saying “C’est par là qu’un Tyran est digne de périr”, she justifies her actions. She also sees that Martian himself deserves to be punished because of his father’s crime, though he is unaware of his connection to the tyrant, so she believes that even if Martian’s father kills him, her vengeance would be complete. Referring to the son whom she sacrificed to save Héraclius, she tells her daughter, “...nous immolerons au sang de votre frère / Le père par le fils ou le fils par le père” (II.iii.565-66). To Léontine, therefore, guilt is passed down from tyrant to son as an original sin that taints his entire race (Doubrovsky 305):

Dans le fils d’un Tyran l’odieuse naissance  
Mérite que l’erreur arrache l’innocence,  
Et que, de quelque éclat qu’il se soit revêtu,

Un crime qu'il ignore en souille la vertu.

(II.iii.573-76)

If Léontine's plan works, the original king's only living son Héraclius will inherit the throne after Phocas dies. Thus, as Sweetser says, Léontine's original intent is virtuous in that she wishes to punish Phocas for his crimes and give the throne back to its rightful heir (187), but the way in which she wishes to do it is horrifying. The spectator is not only horrified at the very idea of parricide, but also, he or she cannot help but pity the poor, unsuspecting Martian who is completely unaware of his true identity, his father's crime, and the crime which he is about to try to commit. Ultimately, Léontine's desire for vengeance in this manner makes her seem as odious as Corneille's other monstrous mothers, but Corneille does not actually allow the parricide to take place. The primary reason for which neither Phocas nor Martian actually try to kill each other is a question of *nature*. Although Martian initially is ready to assassinate Phocas believing that he killed his father, he hesitates, saying "Peut-être il m'est honteux, de reprendre l'Etat / Par l'infâme succès d'un lâche assassinat" (II.vi.729-30). After seeing his reluctance, Léontine says to her daughter:

Mais comme il a levé le bras en qui j'espère,  
Sur le point de frapper, je vois avec regret  
Que la Nature y forme un obstacle secret.

(II.vii.752-54)

Likewise, when both Martian and Héraclius are telling Phocas that they *are not* his son and that they both want to kill him, as Doubrovsky explains, Phocas has a strong enough sense of fatherly love to not be able to kill either of them (305). Desperately, he says to Héraclius, the former king's son whom he has raised as his own:

Laisse-moi mon erreur, puisqu'elle m'est si chère,  
Je t'adopte pour fils, accepte-moi pour père,  
Fais vivre Héraclius sous l'un, ou l'autre sort,  
Pour moi, pour toi, pour lui fais-toi ce peu d'effort.

(V.iii.1675-78)

Thus, Nature poses an obstacle to both Martian's and Phocas's intentions to avenge themselves.

Since Phocas is a tyrant, killing him would not be a crime. As Couton explains, it is legal to commit tyrannicide to return the throne to the legitimate heir (98; *Œuvres Complètes* 3 160). Nevertheless, one cannot help but pity the tyrant in his desperation to find his son and reclaim his rights as a father, but Phocas's evil deeds and his Machiavellian tendencies overshadow any compassion that either Martian, Héraclius, or Léontine could have had for him. Although tyrants may become legitimate kings by doing good acts, like Hérode in *La Marianne*, Phocas continues to be a tyrant by trying to exercise his power to satisfy his personal needs, particularly by threatening to kill Pulchérie, Martian's daughter, if she is unwilling to marry his son and give him an heir to the throne. As he says:

Le besoin de l'État défend de plus attendre,  
Il lui faut des Césars, et je me suis promis  
D'en voir naître bientôt de vous, et de mon fils.  
[...]  
Mais apprenez aussi que je n'en [de refus] souffre plus,  
Que de force, ou de gré, je me veux satisfaire

(I.ii.94-96; 104-5)

Thus, Phocas has made himself be undeserving of pity since he himself has shown no compassion or pity to others, and he will be killed for his tyranny. Nevertheless, Corneille will not have Martian be the one to kill him. As Rathé says, the *bienséances* of the time would have prevented Corneille from allowing Martian to kill his father since parricide was considered the most heinous of all crimes other than regicide, and Corneille did not like to have his heroes or heroines commit offensive acts (328; Sweetser 187). This is the same reason why he will have Nicomède pardon his father and stepmother rather than kill them, as happened in the original story. As Corneille himself says, “C’est un soin que nous devons prendre de préserver nos héros du crime tant qu’il se peut” (*Œuvres Complètes* 3 160). Nevertheless, despite Héraclius and Martian’s lack of involvement in Phocas’s death, his last-minute assassination by Exupère and his accomplices during a coup d’état is very important. For, it reestablishes social order by returning the throne to its rightful owner, the only living son of Maurice, reaffirming the importance of father-son lineage (Doubrovsky 304; Carlin 87).

When Rodogune demands that Antiochus and Séleucus kill their mother, the latter decides to forgo both the throne and Rodogune, an unprecedented move of independence on his part, since both his mother and the Princess demand murder to win their approval. Up until this point, the two brothers had chosen to remain united in their decisions, as well as their passive-aggressive submission to the females. Neither was initially willing to give up Rodogune, although they both were ready to relinquish the throne for her, and both were hoping that either their mother or Rodogune would choose the heir to the throne, thus freeing themselves from the need to compete with each other for it. If neither of the brothers took the initiative to either claim or deny his right to the crown, they both would have been trapped in a perpetual cycle of dependence, oscillating between their mother’s desire to keep them away from the throne and

Rodogune's attempts to protect them through her refusal to choose one over the other. Although allowing this to continue would have kept them from becoming a real threat to Cléopâtre, it turned them into effeminate pawns in a game of power between Rodogune and the Queen. Realizing that by attaching himself to either the throne or the Princess would mean permanently sacrificing his freedom, Séleucus decides to declare his independence by refusing to participate in the feminine power games:

Je vois ce qu'est un Trône, et ce qu'est une femme,

Et jugeant par leur prix de leur possession,

J'éteins enfin ma flamme, et mon ambition.

[...]

...Ni Maîtresse ni mère,

N'ont plus de choix ici, ni de lois à nous faire.

(III.v.1084-86; 1107-08)

By Séleucus's voluntary rejection of the crown and of Rodogune, he frees himself from the control of the dominant female, regains his own autonomy, and exorcises his own feminine weakness. Just as Cléopâtre exposes her masculinity to her sons by removing her motherly mask to reveal her hatred of Rodogune, Séleucus recovers his by separating from his brother, his submissive Other, which turns them both into a source of threat to Cléopâtre's power. For, once Séleucus allows his brother to have Rodogune and the crown, Cléopâtre's secret knowledge of their birth order cannot keep Antiochus from having the right to claim the throne and marrying Rodogune, since the treaty stipulates that she is to be queen. Since Séleucus's resignation leaves Cléopâtre with no other means to protect herself from losing her power and from becoming Rodogune's subject, in a move of desperation, she decides to kill them all, beginning with

Séleucus, even if she herself has to die in order to do it, which she will (*Œuvres Complètes* 203; Stamato 534). Thus, Cléopâtre's refusal to see herself in any position other than queen, founded on the fact that she has abandoned all personal values and adopted a purely political identity, drives her to attempt to murder Rodogune and to commit *parricide*, one of the most offensive crimes possible, and to lose her own life as well. Revealing her egotism and the political motivation behind her crimes, she says of Antiochus, "...te faisant mon Roi, C'est trop me négliger" and of her status, "Trône, à t'abandonner, je ne puis consentir." Finally, showing her preference for death over her loss of power to Rodogune and her son, she declares, "Je perds moins à mourir, qu'à vivre leur Sujette" (V.i.1521, 1529, 1536). Thus, as Stamato says, "Comme Cléopâtre s'identifie au trône, ce qu'elle ne peut pas avoir, la mort sera son seul choix" (536). After she kills Séleucus, therefore, she puts her motherly mask back on, and feigns going through with the transfer of power and marriage, during which she hands to the happy couple the ceremonial *coupe Nuptiale*, which she has poisoned. As Soare suggests, her willingness to go to such extremes to satisfy her rage horrifies the spectator and demonstrates the dangers of allowing egotism to dominate reason and love (313).

Despite her careful planning, Séleucus is discovered dying during the ceremony. To prove her innocence and to convince the couple to drink from the cup, she decides to publicly give up her own life and drink from it first. Unfortunately for Cléopâtre, though, the poison acts too quickly, before Rodogune and Antiochus could drink, revealing that she had intended to kill them. As Stamato explains, though, this act represents her failure to conquer a society which refuses to see the female's capacity to independently maintain the State: "Le suicide de Cléopâtre représente sa soumission à une société politiquement patriarcale qu'elle ne peut pas

pénétrer par manque d'un phallus" (537). Thus, her death will put an end to the matriarchal rule and will bring about the instatement of a new government based on the patriarchal order.

Cléopâtre's attempt at killing the royal couple and her own death reflect her reassimilation into the feminine. Whereas earlier, she had had the masculine force to stab her husband and son with her own hand, she resorted to the more feminine tactic of poison to try to kill Antiochus and Rodogune. Likewise, though she dies revealing her true sentiments, her death itself is feminine. As shown in chapter 3, seventeenth-century tragedy typically showed females as dying of poison, whereas males died violent deaths. Thus, by poisoning herself, she symbolically admits her defeat by the patriarchal society, and the effects of the poison cause her physically to weaken, thus outwardly manifesting her femininity, which causes her downfall, before those who shall take her place. Refusing to submit completely to her weakness before them, she says to her *confidente*, "Sauve-moi de l'affront de tomber à leur pieds," after which she is led off-stage (V.iv.1830).

Even though Cléopâtre does die, her death is not without its own rewards. It allows her to reaffirm her independence, die as queen, and stop the ceremony, which was to cause her to lose her power. By preserving her title, therefore, she is able to immortalize her glory (Carlin 93; Stamato 537). As she says while dying, "Mais j'ai cette douceur dedans cette disgrâce, / De ne voir point régner ma rivale en ma place" (V.iv.1815-16), thus, her death is a triumph in itself (Sweetser 21).

Although Sweetser claims that Cléopâtre's death marks a return to patriarchal order, which superficially it does, there are strong indications that traditional order may not be restored (146; Carlin 93; Greenberg 152-3). Not only is the temple redecorated for a funeral rather than a wedding, Antiochus's weak personality and excessive love for Rodogune indicates that their

marriage may turn out to resemble that of Prusius and Arsinoé. As Greenberg says, “It is as if this marriage were a sacrifice in which the new Cornelian couple, a weak, ambivalent king and a strong determined queen, offer their negativity on the altar of a patriarchal system that has been perverted” (152). Finally, Cléopâtre’s death wish foreshadows the ominous future of the new, depraved couple.

Puissiez-vous ne trouver dans votre union  
Qu’horreur, que jalousie, et que confusion,  
Et pour vous souhaiter tous les malheurs ensemble,  
Puisse naître de vous un fils qui me ressemble.

(V.iv.1821-24)

As Greenberg states, her curse predicts that the couple will only be able to produce “new and more ominous monsters” (153), but it also reflects Cléopâtre’s desire to see Rodogune and Antiochus one day engender a son who will, like her, be sufficiently power-hungry to commit a parricidal act which will not only remove them from the throne, but avenge her as well.

Though this ending seems very negative, it is a warning to those males who, like Antiochus, value love over the desire to serve the state. As will be demonstrated in greater detail later in this chapter and in chapter 6, males who value love over their obligation to serve the needs of the state are shown negatively. As discussed in chapter 4, for example, in *Sophonisbe*, Massinisse and Syphax had both allowed themselves to become slaves to Rome because of their love for Sophonisbe. Just as they were both shown as weak and unworthy because they sacrificed power and honor for love, before Antiochus became king, he had been willing to forego the throne and its power if he could have Rodogune, proving him to be equally weak.

Consequently, if Antiochus continues to defy patriarchal values and value love over country as Massinisse and Syphax had done, he too will ultimately suffer, just as Cléopâtre wishes.

While Cléopâtre's death leads only to a superficial appearance of political reform, in both *Nicomède* and *Cinna*, true reform does occur, but rather than this happening through death, it occurs because the hero *refrains* from punishing others by death<sup>3</sup>. As such, political transformation occurs through non-death, which Corneille used to evoke a new tragic sentiment of "admiration" (Carlin 96). He says of Nicomède, "Dans l'admiration qu'on a pour sa vertu, je trouve une manière de purger les passions, dont n'a point parlé Aristote, et qui est peut-être plus sûre que celle qu'il a prescrit à la tragédie par le moyen de la pitié et de la crainte. L'amour qu'elle nous donne pour cette vertu que nous admirons, nous imprime de la haine pour le vice contraire..." (*Œuvres Complètes* 2 643). Thus, rather than intending to provoke the spectator to detest the principal character because of his or her actions, as in *Rodogune*, with *Nicomède* as well as *Cinna*, whose heroes become paragons of virtue, he wished to inspire his audience to want to imitate their goodness.

Whereas *Nicomède*'s plot centers on Arsinoé's personal ambition, *Cinna*'s, like *Héraclius*'s, is based on vengeance, and the outcome of all of these tragedies has significant political implications. As explained earlier, *Héraclius* shows the value placed on father-son lineage, and both *Cinna* and *Nicomède* address the question of the nature of the sovereign, as did *La Mort de Pompée*, *Othon*, and *Attila*. However *Cinna* and *Nicomède* show positive models of sovereignty, whereas the other three did not. In these two plays, however, it is a *female*'s desire to obtain the hero's death that gives *him* the opportunity to manifest his goodness and virtue. This in turn, brings about the conversion of hatred into admiration on the part of the other characters in the play and of the spectator as well.

In *Nicomède*, Arsinoé not only attempts to convince her husband that his son is a danger, but she also persuades the Roman ambassador Flaminius that he would be a danger to Rome, especially if he were allowed to inherit the throne and marry Armenia's princess Laodice. Nicomède is the ideal loyal subject who fights for his king, his father, and who has been the dominating force in winning battles against Bithynie's enemies. He has become so much of a hero to the State that Prusias himself feels insecure about the control that he has over his son: "Il n'est plus mon Sujet, qu'autant qu'il le veut être / Et qui me fait régner est en effet mon maître" (II.i.415-16). Arsinoé encourages his fear by implying that Nicomède wishes to harm her, but she also takes advantage of Rome's belief that a subject who becomes too powerful must be kept in check, as prescribed by the rules of Machiavellian politics (Sweetser 176; Merlin (1998) 46-47): As Prusias's counselor Araspe explains, "Aussitôt qu'un Sujet s'est rendu trop puissant, / Encor qu'il soit sans crime, il n'est pas innocent" (II.i.433-34). By showing how Arsinoé encourages the Roman ambassador to intervene to limit Nicomède's power, Corneille illustrates his primary goal with this play, which was to show the workings of Roman imperialism (*Œuvres Complètes* 2 641; I.v.315-18).

Although Nicomède's virtue should exempt him from the need to take any measures against him, Arsinoé's ambition drives her to try to use Rome's *politique* to fulfill her private goal of seeing her son as king. As such, she tries to satisfy her private needs by choosing to act within the public domain, as will *Cinna's* Émilie (Schmidt 70). Émilie's motives are more noble than Arsinoé's in that she is not acting out of personal ambition but out of a desire to avenge her father's murder. In order to gain his power, Octave, who is now the emperor Auguste, killed Émilie's father, who was the legitimate ruler, and adopted her as his own daughter. Though Auguste is a good ruler, Émilie is only able to see him as the ruthless tyrant, Octave, who killed

her real father (Tastevin 70; Schmidt 48-49). While Arsinoé encourages her husband and Flaminius to adhere to the laws of “la vraie, et saine Politique” (v. 432) in order to eliminate her son’s rival, Emilie uses the fact that Auguste obtained his throne through violence and crime as the motivation behind a conspiracy to assassinate him. This conspiracy, which she initiates through her lover Cinna, serves as the public cause to which she joins her private duty of avenging her father (Schmidt 91; Couton 30). Nevertheless, her desire to serve Rome while getting her revenge is sincere. As she states:

Joignons à la douceur de venger nos parents

La gloire qu’on remporte à punir les Tyrans,

Et faisons publier par toute l’Italie,

‘La liberté de Rome est l’œuvre d’Émilie...’

(I.ii.107-10)

As with *Horace*’s Camille, therefore, Emilie’s anger is due to a personal wrong that has been done to her and which has cost her a loved one, and this wrong can be attributed to “the male ethic of ‘la loi du plus fort’” (Schmidt 49, 33).

Though Emilie is a female, she cannot sit passively by and accept August as either her ruler or her father, for he is a criminal to her and has cost her dearly. Like *Le Cid*’s Chimène, however, Emilie will not try to kill her offender herself. Most Cornelian females, including Chimène, Emilie, and Arsinoé, try to take vengeance on their enemies by getting another individual, a male, to kill them. Even Cléopâtre unsuccessfully tried to provoke Séleucus into trying to kill his brother before she resorted to trying to poison him herself. Despite the fact that these women try to convince a male to commit the actual murder, they refuse to let themselves be the passive victims of a masculine ethic. Thus, as Schmidt explains, many of Corneille’s

females “choose to act after they have been provoked by some murderous act or some violation of their natural feelings. Their choice to act for themselves, even though a male character will perform the physical act for them, is self-imposed” (33). Since the only power that females have within society is through the private domain, limiting their control over men to that which they are able to obtain through sex, marriage, and their ability to produce children, they often offer themselves as the reward for a murder, as do both Emilie and Chimène. Although Émilie claims to love Cinna, she herself has asserted that she will not marry him until he kills Auguste, if he is not killed himself:

Quoi qu’il en soit, qu’Auguste ou que Cinna périsse,  
 Aux Mânes paternels je dois ce sacrifice,  
 Cinna me l’a promis en recevant ma foi,  
 Et ce coup seul aussi le rend digne de moi.

(I.ii.133-36)

Thus, in this play, sexuality, politics, and death are inextricably linked, as Émilie’s payment for Auguste’s death and the “salvation of Rome” is to be herself—her physical self. Every reference that she makes to her marriage with Cinna as payment for his services refers to her physical body: As she says, “...Quoique mon cœur l’adore, / S’il veut me posséder, Auguste doit mourir” (I.ii.54-55), and reminding him of his reward, she says, “mes faveurs t’attendent” (I.iii.277). Likewise, even Cinna himself speaks of their marriage in terms of sexual payment for Auguste’s assassination: “Pour jouir de ses dons faut-il l’assassiner?” (III.iii.591). Thus, Émilie’s demand is truly a form of prostitution of her body in return for death.

As Greenberg implies, Émilie herself is inseparable from death, specifically masculine death (96-97). Even prior to the play’s beginning, the pact that she has with Cinna is based on a

contract that can only be fulfilled through Auguste's death, and which was brought about by her own father's murder. Thus, every male connected to Émilie is associated to her by death: her real father, who was killed by Auguste, her adopted father, who is to be killed by Cinna, her lover (96). Also, when Maxime, Cinna's rival for Émilie, tries to convince her to abandon her lover and flee Auguste's wrath with him, disgustedly, she cries, "Tu m'oses aimer, et tu n'oses mourir!" (IV.v.1352), and more calmly, "Viens mourir avec moi pour te justifier" (IV.v.1388). Because Maxime excludes himself from death, he does not deserve Émilie, but the fact that Cinna is willing to die to satisfy her vengeance renders him worthy of her. And though Émilie debases herself by prostituting her body as payment for death, she elevates her ego by declaring that only those who are willing to kill Auguste, or die trying, deserve this recompense: As stated in the passage above, "...ce coup seul le rend digne de moi" (v. 136). Thus, Cinna must earn Émilie's body by proving his worth as a male by demonstrating his virility through an act of violence, which will either give her to him or kill him.

Although some critics say that Émilie truly does love Cinna, there is sufficient evidence to indicate that she does not, even though she does fear for his life and *believes* that she loves him<sup>4</sup>. Cinna himself even doubts her love, saying to her, "...si nos cœurs avaient mêmes désirs, / Je n'aurais pas besoin d'expliquer mes soupirs" (III.iv.919-20). From the outset of the play, Émilie's investment in their relationship is based on hate, and Cinna's willingness to serve her hatred makes her "love" him. Until she is able to pardon Auguste, though, her love for him will remain inseparable from her hatred of her stepfather and her desire to see him punished. Because she is unable to separate hate from love, and therefore cannot love Cinna while Auguste remains unpunished, she is willing to allow herself to become *inhumaine* to push him to serve her needs (Bertaud 9). When Cinna tries to convince her of Auguste's goodness, she makes him

feel unworthy of her, unworthy of his ancestry, guilty for causing her future death, and even hints at “selling herself” to anyone else who would assassinate Auguste for her:

Pardonnez-moi, grands Dieux, si je me suis trompée

Quand j’ai pensé chérir un neveu de Pompée,

[...]

Et si pour me gagner il faut trahir ton Maître,

Milles autres à l’envie recevraient cette loi,

S’ils pouvaient m’acquérir à même prix que toi.

Mais n’appréhende pas qu’un autre ainsi m’obtienne,

Vis pour ton cher Tyran tandis que je meurs tienne,

Mes jours avec les siens se vont précipiter,

Puisque ta lâcheté n’ose me mériter.

(III.iv.1029-30; 1034-40)

Through this invective, Émilie launches a direct attack on Cinna’s masculinity. Since noble lineage is a source of manly pride, by declaring that she was wrong when she thought Cinna was one of Pompée’s nephews, she verbally emasculates him by cutting him off the body that is Pompée’s ancestry. Likewise, since she claims that his cowardliness renders him unworthy of her, she implies that he is weak and effeminate, for, the only way that he would have been able to earn her was to prove his masculinity to her by killing Auguste. And taunting him, she implies that there are many other *real men* whom she could have if she wanted them if all they had to do was assassinate Auguste. Cinna can only prove his virility to Émilie through murder, and likewise, she can only love him through hate. Her inhumanity, thus, serves her love while expressing her hatred, yet it also places her in league with Corneille’s monstrous mothers. Like

them, she is willing to harm someone whom she professes to love in order to obtain death, which is the central focus of the tragedy.

Although Émilie has the noble motive of avenging her father's death, while simultaneously liberating Rome from a "Tyrant", like Cléopâtre and Arsinoé, she is driven by a strong sense of *amour-propre*. Her desire for personal vengeance for a past wrong dominates her to the extent that she is willing to sacrifice Cinna's life if necessary in order to satisfy her own, selfish goal, and she is unwilling to listen to any suggestion that Auguste is no longer a tyrant, as Cinna tries to explain. Nevertheless, Cinna is willing to obey her out of his true love for her. As Bertaud says, "Bien que Cinna n'ait pas le cœur républicain...il est prêt à aller jusqu'au bout de l'engagement que l'amour lui a fait contracter" (8). Thus, Émilie is willing to allow her lover to sacrifice himself to her cause, even though he may die in doing so. As Greenberg states:

Although Emilie thinks of herself as an avenger, as the appointed retaliator for Auguste's crimes, she has chosen to accomplish this through delegation. Revenge for Emilie must pass through a man, and because of this mediation the man becomes at the same time avenger and victim. Cinna's life is the price Emilie must pay for her vendetta... (98)

Émilie is not only willing to sacrifice his life to her cause, but also his soul, his very essence. Ironically, this means that in order to prove himself to her, he must be willing to sacrifice that which society values in the noble male: his honor and his commitment to serving the State. As he says:

Vous me faites priser ce qui me déshonore,  
Vous me faites haïr ce que mon âme adore,  
Vous me faites répandre un sang pour qui je dois

Exposer tout le mien, et mille, et mille fois;

(III.iv.1057-60)

Since Cinna actually does love her, he says that he will do as she asks, but he also states that he will kill himself afterwards to save his honor. Her reaction, though, once again reveals her egotism: “Qu’il achève, et dégage sa foi, / Et qu’il choisisse après, de la mort, ou de moi.” (III.iv.1076-77).

Both Cinna and Émilie grew up under the same circumstances, their parents having been killed when Auguste, who at the time was referred to as Octave, took over the throne. Though Auguste was a tyrant whose *politique* was based on violence and ambition, he took both Émilie and Cinna into his protection, raising her as his daughter and him as captive, but he cared for both as a father. Cinna is well aware of all that Auguste has done for him as well as the State, despite the horrid manner in which he obtained his power. Because of his generosity toward him and his overall goodness, he only sees killing Auguste as a crime, and more specifically, a parricide. Reprimanding himself for his ingratitude, therefore, he says, “Je sens au fond du cœur mille remords cuisants / Qui rendent à mes yeux tous ses bienfaits présents...” (III.ii.803-04). Unlike Émilie, Cinna has been able to move beyond the past, accept the present, and even see the good in the new ruler. Émilie’s hatred, however, is a vestige of the past which symbolizes the residual resentment which a society may maintain toward an *usurpateur* who has not yet attained sovereignty, since sovereignty is based on willing acceptance of a ruler by its people (Greenberg 95, 179; Maistre 92), and a people only recognize an *usurpateur* as Sovereign once he has become legitimate through good acts (Assaf 45; Doubrovsky 275). Thus, Corneille paints two different portraits of sovereignty through the character of Octave/Auguste. He shows Auguste’s transformation from the Machiavellian tyrant Octave, Émilie’s father’s murderer, into the

legitimate Sovereign, the Father of the State, who is likewise a new father whom Émilie can accept, through his act of clemency, or non-death.

When Cinna's rival Maxime reveals the conspiracy, Auguste has a choice: punish or pardon. Even before Livie steps in to express the advantages of forgiving Cinna and his accomplices, Auguste expresses his fatigue with killing as well as his understanding that this is not the ultimate solution. Arguing with his alter ego Octave, he says:

Mais quoi! toujours du sang, et toujours des supplices!

[...]

Rome a pour ma ruine une Hydre trop fertile.

Une tête coupée en fait renaître mille...

(IV.ii. 1162; 1165-66)

In order to end this cycle, Octave must die, which is what will happen, leaving only Auguste to rule. As he says, "Octave, n'attends plus le coup d'un nouveau Brute, / Meurs, et dérobe-lui la gloire de ta chute..." (IV.ii.1169-70).

Auguste himself does not understand completely understand why he wants to pardon Cinna. Though he realizes that violence does not always work, his own voice proclaims that Cinna and his accomplices had a right to revolt in response to the violence he had caused. Not comprehending his remorse, he is confused by his own words: "Quelle fureur, Cinna, m'accuse et te pardonne?" (IV.ii.1150). Since this "fureur" does not come from within himself, it must be God's grace which is beginning to transform him into a true, legitimate ruler, thus proving the divine nature of the Sovereign (Carlin 64). Though he does not understand the role that grace is playing for him initially, he will recall his dependence on God, saying to Livie, "Le Ciel

m'inspirera ce qu'ici je dois faire." (IV.iii.1258). By saying this, Auguste invites grace to take full control of his actions, and thus, grace will allow him to forgive (Bouvier 223).

Though Livie explains the political advantages that Auguste will gain by forgiving his enemies, this was probably for the benefit of the audience more than to inspire Auguste. Already he has asked God to show him the correct course of action that he is to take, and His grace should be "sufficient". By having Livie verbalize the advantages that a ruler gains through choosing clemency over violence, Corneille allows the spectators, including France's king, to understand clearly the reasons why it is preferable for him to do so:

Son pardon peut servir à votre Renommée,  
Et ceux que vos rigueurs ne font qu'effaroucher  
Peut-être à vos bontés se laisseront toucher.

(IV.iii.1214-16)

Thus, grace will inspire Auguste to pardon, and this will produce the effect that Livie had anticipated, even causing Émilie to accept him. As Bouvier says, "...un cœur magnanime s'accorde naturellement avec le Ciel,...[et] il ne reçoit d'inspirations que célestes" (227).

Thus, as with Nicomède, who pardons his stepmother and his father, through Auguste's pardon, Corneille shows the virtue of the sovereign who chooses not to kill rather than allowing his anger to cause him to resort to violence. In *Nicomède*, Arsinoé's plan backfires since her son Attale realizes his half-brother's virtue and the fact that he was only being used by Rome to prevent Nicomède from gaining power. Like Auguste, though, once Nicomède is in power, he does not punish his stepmother and his father, but pardons them instead. Thus they realize their mistake in trying to deny him the throne and gain admiration for their new king. Likewise, in *Cinna*, because Auguste chooses not to kill, Émilie is able to see that he no longer subscribes to

the Machiavellian *politique* which caused him to kill her father. Realizing his goodness, she sees that he is a worthy Sovereign and Father to the State, therefore, she is willing to abandon her personal vengeance for the public good:

Ma haine va mourir, que j'ai crue immortelle,  
Elle est morte, et ce cœur devient Sujet fidèle,  
Et prenant désormais cette haine en horreur,  
L'ardeur de vous servir succède à sa fureur.

(V.iii.1725-28)

Her acceptance of Auguste eliminates the hate that prevented her from being able to truly love Cinna, and it is symbolic of the entire state's approval of him and their recognition of the legitimacy of his power. This is a complete victory for Auguste since he has won the support and admiration of his former enemies. Social order has been reestablished since the people now wish to serve their ruler, which renders him truly sovereign<sup>5</sup>.

In summary, in all of these plays, females are willing to harm one or more males whom they *claim* to care for in order to satisfy their own personal desires, be it their desire to gain or maintain power, as in *Nicomède* and *Rodogune*, or their desire to avenge another's death, as in *Cinna* and *Héraclius*. Although their lack of physical strength causes them to attempt to convince a male to kill another for them, not only the intended murder victim is harmed, but also the male being controlled. In *Rodogune* and *Cinna*, the person being asked to kill is mentally tortured by the female since she will only give him what he desires as a payment for death: Cléopâtre will not give either of her sons the crown until one of them kills Rodogune; Rodogune will not choose a husband, but will marry whoever kills his mother; and Émilie will not marry Cinna until he has assassinated Auguste. Likewise, in *Nicomède*, Arsinoé is willing to allow her

husband to have her own son assassinated, and in *Héraclius*, Léontine wants to have Martian, whom she has raised as her own son, commit parricide, which would destroy him. Thus, while the ambitious mothers merely attempt to use a man to eliminate a male who is standing in the way of their power, the vengeful women are willing to abuse mentally a man specifically with the final goal of obtaining the death of another male.

Though these women are driven by selfish motives, their *amour-propre*, most of the men are not entirely innocent themselves. Cinna, Prusias, and Antiochus allow themselves to be controlled, to lose their ability to judge, and to act against the public good because of their servitude to love. While Cinna and Prusias can be manipulated because of their amorous love, Antiochus naïvely believes that motherly love will conquer Cléopâtre's hatred of Rodogune and allow him to marry her. Thus, females take advantage of masculine love in order to serve their desire to kill.

Despite the success with which Corneille's vengeful and ambitious women manipulate men, these plays generally have fewer actual deaths in them than other tragedies, but this lack of death is extremely important in itself, particularly in *Nicomède* and *Cinna*. In both of these plays, females' attempts at provoking the death of a male are unsuccessful, but their lack of success gives the male the opportunity to pardon them and their accomplices and prove his own goodness. Both Nicomède and Auguste obtained control of the State through unconventional means, Auguste by killing the legitimate ruler and Nicomède by a coup d'état. Despite this fact, when they pardon the offenders, they earn the admiration of the people and prove their legitimacy. Likewise, females are no longer in control, as was Arsinoé, and they are no longer a threat, as was Émilie. As such, patriarchal order is reestablished, and men, not women, have power and are willing to use it for good, not vengeance or personal ambition as did the females.

While these plays show how love can cause a male to act against his better judgment in order to serve a female, in the next chapter, love will be the primary reason for which a man will kill or contemplate killing another, but *not* at a female's request. And again, we will also see that love weakens men, causing them not to act in their own best interest.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Carlin 100, 58; Rohou 182; Greenberg 143

<sup>2</sup> Darmon 26; Rohou 182; Greenberg 150

<sup>3</sup> Doubrosky 328; Greenberg 150; Carlin 98

<sup>4</sup> Greenberg 95; Bertaud 8; Abraham 69

<sup>5</sup> Lasserre 43; Doubrovsky 275, 323; Bertrand 9; Greenberg 115, 179; Bouvier 227;  
Merlin 45; Carlin 97

## CHAPTER 6

### LOVE

Although Corneille insists on the secondary role that love must take in tragedy, he maintains that its presence adds to the spectator's enjoyment of the play and can serve as a foundation for its primary action (*Œuvres Complètes* 3 124). Since the seventeenth-century spectator was expected to obtain pleasure from a tragedy because of its ability to evoke terror and pity and to purge the spectator of undesirable passions, such as excessive love, love could easily be exploited to show individuals suffering because of their love and to show the danger of being dominated by love (145-46). Because of Corneille's belief in love's ability to be used to please, which he sees as the primary function of tragedy, he regularly exploits it to create dramatic interest in his plays (171). Though Schmidt asserts that many of his later plays, such as *Suréna* (1675) and *Sertorius* (1662), show his increasing emphasis on love (113), many of his earlier plays also show love as a principal force which drives the characters to act. Médée's scorned love for Jason, for example, is the primary reason why she murders Créon, his daughter, and her own children. Likewise, as Rohou explains, all of the plays of the tetralogy depend on the conflict between love and an opposing duty as the basis for the dramatic intrigue: "le bonheur règne, sous forme de paix, d'estime et d'amitié, d'amour surtout. Mais un malheureux accident (*Le Cid*, *Horace*) ou la découverte d'un complot (*Cinna*) ou les

deux...(Polyeucte)...exige que le héros sacrifie l'essentiel: son amour...et peut-être sa vie..." (159).

Despite the fact that Corneille considers love an important part of tragedy, most of his works that rely heavily on this theme illustrate the detrimental effects of allowing oneself to be dominated by love. As he says of Rodrigue and Chimène:

ces passions font leur malheur, puisqu'ils ne sont malheureux qu'autant qu'ils sont passionnés l'un pour l'autre...leur malheur fait pitié, cela est constant, et il en a coûté assez de larmes aux spectateurs pour ne le point contester. Cette pitié nous doit donner une crainte de tomber dans un pareil malheur, et purger en nous ce trop d'amour qui cause leur infortune, et nous les fait plaindre...

(*Œuvres Complètes* 3 145-46)

Thus, Corneille sees that too much love can cause misery and misfortune, especially when it is in conflict with a more noble value, such as honor or country, which are more "mâles" (*Œuvres Complètes* 3 124).

As Schmidt says, in Cornelian tragedy, "the love element and the demands of the male ethic do not coexist well..." (117). Since love is not part of the masculine ethic that inspires characters to uphold the socio-political values of the patriarchy, conflict easily arises between masculine heroism and love, a feminine value centered on private interest and personal desire. The pity that the spectator feels for characters who sacrifice their love to more masculine politico-centric values contributes to the play's cathartic function, as does the terror inspired by the murderous drive of characters who are unwilling to abandon their love for a greater cause (Émelina 106). Perhaps it is because the conflict that arises between love and the male ethic easily evokes the pity and terror essential to the Aristotelian tragedy that Corneille insists on

incorporating politics as well as love into all of his tragic works. Because both elements are present in all of his tragedies, they are inseparable (Greenberg 89), and for this reason, I will be discussing both in this chapter. Nevertheless, my primary focus for this chapter will be to demonstrate how Corneille uses the relationship between gender and death to present the conflict that exists between love and the masculine ethic.

Since *Le Cid* was the most successful of Corneille's plays that illustrate the conflict between love and the masculine ethic, it will be the principal focus of my study in this chapter, but because *Pertharite*, *Suréna*, *Clitandre* and *Sertorius* also heavily emphasize the incompatibility of these two ideals, I shall include them in my discussion as well. Also, although love does play an important role in all of these tragedies, *Le Cid* is the only one in which a male's ability to perform his masculine duty is not corrupted by his love, and ultimately, there is reconciliation between love and duty. In the others, love generally leads men, and sometimes women, to act in a way which is socially or personally destructive, primarily because they value it over all else, including honor and patriotic duty. Thus, in this chapter, I intend to show how Corneille illustrates not only the conflict between love and the masculine ethic but also the negative consequences of overzealous love.

From the beginning of *Le Cid*, it is evident that the protagonists Chimène and Rodrigue are truly in love, but during the course of the play, a dispute between their fathers presents a seemingly insurmountable obstacle to their personal happiness. In their situation, lovers are separated by their duty to avenge their fathers, causing them to be obliged to repress their love for one another for the sake of honor. As Greenberg says, "All of their difficulties arise not from themselves, not from their desires, but are imposed from without. Their love is presented as essentially unproblematic to them...From the moment the play commences they are shown not

only as in love but as perfect lovers” (48). The start of their misery, therefore, is in fact not their love, but their adherence to the masculine value of honor, which obligates them to disregard their love in order to avenge their fathers. For, seventeenth-century society expected males to value honor above love and personal interests since they were obligated by the patriarchal code to fight for their family’s honor, which is inseparable from their own, when they have been dishonored. Though some women such as Chimène choose to value honor over love, they certainly were not expected to do so, and, as will be demonstrated in this chapter, their attempts at upholding honor are generally unsuccessful since they have no direct means to protect their honor without the assistance of a male.

Although the principal subject of this chapter is love, it is essential to discuss the events which transpire between Chimène and Rodrigue’s fathers and lead to the corruption of the couple’s happiness. When the king chooses Rodrigue’s father, Don Diègue, to be his son’s *gouverneur* instead of Chimène’s father, the Count, the latter is offended and slaps Don Diègue. Because of the *soufflet*, Don Diègue’s honor will remain tainted until he can get his son to avenge him by challenging Chimène’s father to a duel. Although he is aware of his son’s love for the Count’s daughter, this is of little importance compared to the need to uphold the masculine value of honor. As he explains to Rodrigue, “Nous n’avons qu’un honneur, il est tant de maîtresses; / L’amour n’est qu’un plaisir, et l’honneur un devoir” (III.vi.1068-69). Thus, in accordance with the gravity of the situation, Don Diègue says to his sword:

Passe, pour me venger, en de meilleures mains;  
Si Rodrigue est mon fils, il faut que l’amour cède,  
Et qu’une ardeur plus haute à ses flammes succède,

Mon honneur est le sien, et le mortel affront  
Qui tombe sur mon chef rejaillit sur son front.

(I.v.257-62)

Upon seeing Rodrigue, therefore, he reminds him of his filial duty to risk his life for his father if needed since his blood is indeed not his own but his father's (Greenberg 73-74). As he says, "Viens, mon fils, viens, *mon sang*, viens réparer ma honte, / Viens me venger" (I.vi.268-69, emphasis mine). Thus, even though Don Diègue may lose his son, he commands him to challenge the Count to a duel, saying, "Meurs ou tue" (I.vi.277).

Adhering to the same value system as his father, Rodrigue is fully prepared to avenge the wrong that has been done to his father until he learns that the offender is Chimène's father. Don Diègue, however, prevents his son from openly expressing his hesitancy since the masculine ethic implies that honor must be defended at all costs. He does not want Rodrigue to vocalize the reluctance that his devotion to his love causes since this sentiment is incompatible with the masculine ethic and would reveal weakness. Rodrigue's father insists that his son keep his feelings to himself, saying, "Ne réplique point, je connais ton amour, / Mais qui peut vivre infâme est indigne du jour" (I.vi.286-87). By not allowing Rodrigue to express his concerns, therefore, he forces him to silence his love, hiding his vulnerability from the public view. His actions in public are to reflect his allegiance to his *devoir du sang* and his masculine valor, even if this means that he must kill his lover's father.

In the plays discussed in this chapter, both men and women must choose between duty and love. Because females who are not married owe their loyalty to their immediate family, their familial obligations can possibly conflict with their love. For married women, though, choosing between love and duty is generally unproblematic since their primary duty is loyalty and

devotion to their husband, and thus coincides with love. In *Pertharite*, for example, Rodelinde wants Garibald to commit an act so horrifying that it would ruin his reputation, despite the fact that he has been a good ruler, purely because she wants to take vengeance on him because she believes that he has killed her husband. Admitting his goodness, though, she states,

Je dis que la vertu règne dans ta personne,  
Avec eux [his subjects] je te loue, et je doute avec eux,  
Si sous leur vrai Monarque ils seraient plus heureux;

(II.v.636-38)

Even though she is aware that he is probably a better ruler and better for the State than Pertharite, she chooses to discredit him and is willing to sacrifice her own honor and her own humanity out of loyalty to her husband. Explaining her conflicting opinions of Grimoald, she says to him,

Je te dois estimer, mais je te dois haïr,  
Je dois agir en veuve autant qu'en magnanime,  
Et porter cette haine aussi loin que l'estime.

(II.v.702-04)

Though she knows he can be virtuous, in a self-sacrificial act that Rohou describes as heroic, she tells Grimoald that she will be willing to marry him only if he will kill her son, which he agrees to do. To win Rodelinde's love, therefore, he will have to sacrifice his magnanimity and honor in favor of Machiavellianism<sup>1</sup>. With the exception of the ambitious wives discussed in detail in Chapter 5, therefore, married women, such as Rodelinde and *La Mort de Pompée*'s Cornélie, are motivated completely by their loyalty to their husband's memory, even if their actions are contrary to the good of the State, demand self-sacrifice, or even the sacrifice of their loved ones.

Although women are expected to value love above all else and are considered normal for doing so, men who prioritize love over duty are often portrayed as weak and emasculated. Just as Rodrigue must choose between love and duty, in *Sertorius*, for example, the hero is given the choice of marrying the woman he loves or the one who will help him benefit the State. While both Rodrigue and Chimène choose duty over love, Sertorius appears rather unheroic because he cannot bring himself to agree to marry Aristie for the good of Rome since he loves Viriate and does not want her to marry anyone else (McDermott 116-17). Even though he knows that he should marry Aristie, he simply does not choose to marry either one. He, therefore, chooses inaction and non-heroism because of his inability to decide between duty and love (Abraham 120). His greatest contribution to society, in fact, will be his death because as long as he remained in a state of indecision, he could not move forward to help Rome and his army would simply stagnate (Carlin 14).

Although Sertorius's weakness comes from his inability to decide to marry for love or to benefit the State, in *Suréna* and *Pertharite*, both heroes act purely out of love. While Suréna simply refuses to agree to marry the king's daughter because of his love for Eurydice, Pertharite, a dethroned king, shows his devotion to love in a more active manner. He endangers his life by returning to his former kingdom just to be able to see his beloved Rodelinde and even offers not to challenge his enemy for the throne in return for his wife. Because of his readiness to abandon his throne and even die for love, he is emasculated. As Sweetser says, Pertharite has "l'attitude femelle d'esclavage, attitude dominée par la sensibilité et symbolisée par les larmes" (186). Pleading for the return of his wife, he says to Grimoald,

Rendez-moi Rodelinde, et gardez ma Couronne,  
Que pour sa liberté sans regret j'abandonne.

Avec ce cher objet tout destin m'est trop doux.

(V.v.1827-29)

Thus, not only does he risk getting killed to see Rodelinde, but also, he is willing to sacrifice his honor and his power to become, as Rohou says, simply “average” for love (196; Carlin 90-91). Both Suréna and Pertharite, therefore, feel more of an obligation to their own personal happiness rather than the will or benefit of the public (Rohou 217).

Although Corneille's heroes typically must choose between two completely incompatible courses of action, in *Le Cid*, Rodrigue really cannot opt not to fight Chimène's father simply because his value system will not allow him not to avenge his father (Greenberg 1-2). In his famous *Stances*, he debates his options, but, as Prigent explains, when a hero must choose between *sang* and *amour*, he must choose *sang* (164-65). Though Rodrigue hesitates between his obligation to his father and his desire not to anger his beloved, it is clear that he has internalized his father's morals and that he believes that he would shame himself if he did not confront the Count, for lamenting his predicament, he refers to himself as the “Misérable vengeur d'une *juste querelle*” (my emphasis, v. 295). The only option that he sees that will free him from his situation is suicide, and yet suicide without vengeance would still leave his father dishonored. Rodrigue simply must convince himself to accept the duty that requires him to sacrifice Chimène, but unlike his father, he belongs to a new generation which values love and is not capable of extinguishing his feelings to serve his honor (Carlin 52; Doubrovsky 98). Debating with himself, therefore, he says:

Je dois à ma maîtresse aussi bien qu'à mon père.

Qui venge cet affront irrite sa colère,

Et qui peut le souffrir ne la mérite pas.

(I.vii.324-26)

Rodrigue knows that he cannot challenge Chimène's father to a duel without angering her, and yet, if he does not try to kill him, he will be unworthy of her love. He must resolve the internal conflict that prevents him from investing himself entirely in his duty and renders him vulnerable. Only after he "chooses" to obey his father, to fully accept his duty to uphold the masculine value system and to abandon his weakness, will he be able to confront the Count unhesitatingly (Greenberg 54). Thus, realizing that he is doomed to lose Chimène whether he avenges his father or not, he resolves to let Chimène go and save his honor, thereby negating his conflict and allowing his masculinity to thrive. He says, "Allons, mon bras, du moins sauvons l'honneur, / Puisque aussi bien il faut perdre Chimène" (I.vii.341-42). Although he must sacrifice his beloved, he will save his honor and remain worthy of her, even if she will no longer have him. By choosing to avenge his father, therefore, he chooses love as well (Greenberg 53).

While Rodrigue's love does not hinder his ability to perform his duty as a male and thereby gain glory, love is a source of weakness for both Sertorius and Suréna, which proves to be an obstacle to their glory, and will ultimately be the primary reason for their death. As demonstrated above, Rodrigue's desire to prove himself worthy of Chimène causes him to fight more valiantly and thus earn greater glory. His love, therefore, helps him perform his filial duty. As with Rodrigue, Suréna's and Sertorius's sense of duty prevents them from being with the person they love, but with the latter two, their inability or unwillingness to sacrifice their love for their duty causes them to make decisions which will cost them their lives.

In most of Corneille's earlier plays, such as *Le Cid* (1637), men value heroism and patriotic duty above all else. In his later plays such as *Sertorius* (1662) and *Suréna* (1675),

though, they become the victims of their own conscience, which will not allow them to betray their love, even if doing so would be in their own best interest or benefit the State. As Rohou explains, in Corneille's latter tragedies, "Le héros cherche consolation dans les valeurs intimes, dans les droits de la conscience et dans l'amour qui tend à remplacer la générosité comme source de vigueur et la gloire comme reconnaissance de la valeur" (217). According to Muratore, in *Suréna*, Corneille's last tragedy, devotion to love is so important that "it is more wrong to betray one's own emotions than to betray one's country" (73). While men become less interested in service and more concerned with their personal lives, though, their self-centeredness leads them to become self-destructive as well. Because they are dominated by their personal interests, their actions are geared toward preserving their love, not toward serving their country.

Though Rodrigue's father values the masculine ethic above love, in Corneille's later tragedies, love causes older men to lose their heroism (Delcroix 662). Both Sertorius and *Suréna* had been valiant generals who had served their State well in the past, but now that they are older, they are unable to sacrifice their personal interests when they conflict with their patriotic duty. As Carlin explains, though, "Solutions in Corneille's theater come from positive action, especially self-sacrifice" (141). Though Rodrigue was willing to give up his beloved for duty, he will ultimately become a hero and be given Chimène's hand in marriage as a result of his sacrifice. Both Sertorius and *Suréna*, though, will merely succeed getting themselves killed for their refusal to do their duty and forgo their love.

In *Suréna*, the hero could have possibly saved his own life by agreeing to the king's request that he marry his daughter, but his devotion to Eurydice would not allow him to do this. As Sweetser says, "Il est assassiné par jalousie amoureuse et par politique ... *Suréna* rejette l'offre d'alliance matrimoniale avec son roi: l'amoureux l'emporte donc sur le loyal serviteur"

(241). Though he rejects the king's offer because of his loyalty to Eurydice and not out of disdain for his king, his actions are interpreted as disobedience to the king and are a principal reason for his assassination. Suréna loses his worth to the State by refusing to marry Mandane, but even so, he attains a higher, more personal form of glory by remaining loyal to his conscience. As Alexandre says:

La désobéissance de Suréna à son roi, loin d'être le signe de la victoire de son amour sur sa gloire, manifeste...un honneur profond, intime, authentique: car libre de tous les attachements aux dignités du monde, de tous les pièges de l'honneur mondain, il est mobilisé par la seule conscience....Cet honneur intime...va conduire le héros au bannissement et à la mort...(141-42)

In *Sertorius*, the hero makes his feelings for Viriate too public and will provoke his lieutenant, who is in love with her also, into killing him out of jealousy. Though Sertorius explains to Viriate that he cannot marry her, he is too self-centered to keep his own feelings to himself. Though he tells Perpenna that he intends to let her have her, he cannot refrain from telling her that he loves her and that he does not want her to marry anyone else. He cries,

...[J]e ne puis vous voir entre les bras d'un autre,  
Et c'est assez vous dire à quelle extrémité  
Me réduit mon amour que j'ai mal écouté.

(IV.ii.1258-60)

His own egotism, therefore, causes him to want Viriate to desire him, even though he does not intend to marry her. Likewise, though reassuring Perpenna that he can have Viriate, he implies that she will always prefer him because of his rank, a rank that Perpenna lost to Sertorius when

his army abandoned him to serve the general. Knowing that Viriate will not want to marry Perpenna because he is a mere lieutenant, Sertorius says insultingly:

Que sert que je promette, et que je vous la donne,

Quand son ambition l'attache à ma personne?

(IV.iv.1489-90)

Provoking Perpenna's jealousy, Sertorius seems to boast, knowing that Viriate will continue to prefer him to any other (McDermott 118). Had he successfully kept his feelings for Viriate hidden, she might have been willing to marry Perpenna in spite of his rank because of his noble birth, but because Sertorius openly admitted his love, she has a reason to hope that he will some day decide to marry her. Though Perpenna ultimately kills Sertorius out of jealousy, Sertorius himself must be held in part responsible for his own death, since his inability to keep his love secret destroyed any chance that Perpenna may have had at pleasing Viriate (McDermott 116-17). As Rohou says, "Toute la valeur de [Sertorius] n'aboutit qu'à son assassinat par son lieutenant Perpenna, jaloux d'un héros que lui préfèrent soldats et maîtresse" (218).

While Sertorius allowed his love to interfere with his patriotic duty, making him no longer an effective general, Rodrigue was able to fulfill his filial duty because he was able to accept the need to save his family's honor, even at the cost of losing Chimène. Since Rodrigue resolved his internal conflict, he is able to approach Chimène's father, fully intent on killing him, even though the Count is very experienced in battle and he himself has never fought before. If Rodrigue defeats the Count, he will not only prove that he is worthy of Chimène, but also that, like his adversary, he is a great warrior, just as his own father whom he is defending used to be. Full of confidence, therefore, he challenges the Count, knowing that his adversary has never lost:

J'attaque en téméraire un bras toujours vainqueur,  
Mais j'aurai trop de force ayant assez de cœur,  
À qui venge son père, il n'est rien impossible:  
Ton bras est vaincu, mais non pas invincible.

(II.ii.417-20)

Corneille takes advantage of the risk of death involved in the duel to illustrate the dangers of overconfidence by pitting an inexperienced adolescent male against an undefeated warrior. Although Chimène's father is impressed with Rodrigue's courage, he is too egotistical and does not take the challenge seriously. We learn through Rodrigue's victory over the Moors in Act IV, though, that despite his young age and his lack of experience, he is naturally a very skilled fighter. Nonchalantly, the Count says, "Trop peu d'honneur pour moi suivrait cette victoire: / A vaincre sans péril on triomphe sans gloire" (II.ii.435-36). It is difficult to say whether Chimène's father would have lost had he had more respect for his opponent, but, just as his egotism caused him to act out of haste and slap Don Diègue, this is the primary reason why he loses the battle. As the king himself says, "Le trop de confiance attire le danger" (II.vi.630).

Many critics have already demonstrated that the primary function of *Le Cid* was to represent the early beginnings of the centralized monarchy and the death of feudal values whereby the Count's defeat represents the demise of feudalism, so I shall not re-state what has already been made clear through these previous studies<sup>2</sup>. I will, however go into some detail about the role that gender plays in illustrating it.

Since politics is a masculine domain, it is only logical that Corneille chose to represent the transition between two political systems through conflict among males. The Count is a strong and fearless veteran of combat whose victories symbolize the past dominance of the

feudal system and whose egotism prevents him from subscribing to the rules of the monarchy (Greenberg 44). He rejects the inferior position that the Subject holds in relation to the Sovereign under the new monarchy and sees himself as the king's equal. Demonstrating the power that he feels he has over the State, he says of the king, "Et ma tête en tombant ferait choir sa couronne" (II.i.384). Don Diègue, however, fully respects the authority of his king, and therefore represents devotion to the monarchy. Thus, when the Count feels that he has been insulted by Don Fernand's choice, he redirects his hostility toward the king onto Don Diègue, who, being too old and weak to defend his own honor, passes the duty of avenging himself onto his son. Chimène's father, therefore, is at the center of every conflict that occurs within the play and creates constant opposition between the old and the new political systems, and likewise will continue to do so even once he is killed.

Since the female is excluded from politics, the only viable means of political succession is through males. Unlike the Count, Rodrigue's father upholds the values of the monarchy as shown through his acceptance of the king's decisions (vv. 149-50; 240-41). As with his belief in the importance of honor, therefore, he passes down his political beliefs to his son, ensuring the continuing support of the monarchy. The Count, though virile and politically viable himself, has produced a mere female, a politically impotent shadow of himself, to continue his legacy. His daughter, the offspring of feudalism, cannot compete within the masculine political realm as can Rodrigue. Though she espouses the values of the male ethic and attempts to uphold them, her gender will pose an obstacle to her success, and her attempts to reconcile her gender and her value system symbolize the final death throes of feudalism, which will ultimately be silenced into submission.

The fact that Rodrigue is young and inexperienced in relation to both the Count and Don Diègue results from the linear relationship to one another of the play's male figures. As Greenberg explains, they not only illustrate the transition from the feudal system to the monarchy, but they also represent "different moments of one eternal masculine essence" (41; Carlin 55). Don Diègue, says to the Count, for example, "Vous êtes aujourd'hui ce qu'autrefois je fus" (I.iv.206), thus indicating that the Count is living Diègue's past. Similarly, sending his son into battle after he defeated Chimène's father, he says, "Viens, suis-moi, va combattre, et montrer à ton Roi / Que ce qu'il perd au Comte il le recouvre en toi" (IV.i.1109-10). Rodrigue, therefore, is to become what the Count was through combat. In this schema, the stages of manhood— adolescence, adulthood, and old age— are marked by the males' ability to kill. Before Rodrigue's victory over the Count, he is a mere adolescent, a child compared to his experienced adversary. Likewise, since Diègue is no longer strong enough to fight, he has lost his virility and entered old age. When Rodrigue kills the Count, however, he proves his own virility, abandons his boyhood and replaces the latter as the adult male (Greenberg 53).

Once Rodrigue defeats the Count, he has fulfilled his obligation to avenge the wrong done to his father. Having resolved to kill the Count despite his love for Chimène and following through with his decision, he liberates himself from his internal conflict and then from his filial obligations. At the very moment that he kills the Count and frees himself of his duty to his father, though, he imposes upon his beloved the task of deciding what measures she should take against him for taking her own father's life. As Greenberg explains, "While it [the Count's death] frees Rodrigue from the obstacle of his own internal conflict, it fixes Chimène in hers" (55). For her, though, there is no solution which can allow her to both remain with her beloved

and to avenge her father's death. Thus, although the Count is now dead, he is again the impediment to the two lovers' happiness.

Even before the duel between the Count and Rodrigue, Chimène knows that her relationship with Rodrigue will suffer because of her father's attack on Don Diègue's honor. Lamenting her situation, she says, "Impitoyable honneur, mortel à mes plaisirs, / Que tu me vas couter de pleurs et de soupirs" (II.iii. 461-62). Demonstrating her understanding of masculine values, she explains to Elvire, "Les affronts à l'honneur ne se réparent point" (II.iii.470). Nevertheless, prior to the Count's death, Chimène retains a slight hope that she and her beloved will still be able to remain a couple (vv. 481-94). However, once Rodrigue kills her father, ironically, Chimène herself becomes just as obsessed with honor as any of the male characters in the play, adopting the masculine ethic that she had just criticized only moments before (Schmidt 22). Atypically for a seventeenth-century female, she becomes just as obsessed with *gloire* as Rodrigue and his father had been and tries to avenge her father's death in order to save her family's honor (Carlin 51).

While the Count's death was responsible for causing Chimène to adopt the masculine ethic, in *Sertorius*, both Viriate and Aristie have masculine values as well. Ironically, Sertorius and Perpenna are the only characters in this play whose actions are motivated by love, but the women are driven by their pursuit of honor and power. Once Sertorius reveals his love to Viriate, she responds,

Je ne veux point d'Amant, mais je veux un époux,  
Mais je veux un Héros, qui par son Hyménée  
Sache élever si haut le Trône où je suis née,  
Qu'il puisse de l'Espagne être l'heureux soutien,

Et laisser de vrais Rois de mon sang et du sien.

(IV.ii.1288-92)

Likewise, in Act I, when Aristie tells Sertorius that she wants to marry him, she explains that she wants to use him to regain her honor, not that she wants to marry him out of her emotional attachment to him. For both Aristie and Viriate, though Sertorius is a general and not a king or even a descendant of royalty, like Perpenna, his reputation as a great leader has made him worthy of their hand in marriage. Both of them see that his actions make him more worthy of esteem, and more marriageable, than his rank and lineage alone. As Carlin explains, therefore, “In the manner of so many Cornelian heroes of both sexes, desire is inspired by the love object’s virtue and political standing, inextricably linked” (113). As a result, they experience no conflict between duty and love. Their desire to marry him is a conscious choice based on his worth and coincides with their adherence to the masculine ethic, and the fact that they value the male ethic more than both Sertorius and Perpenna, makes these males seem even weaker and more effeminate. Sertorius will lose his heroism because he cannot sacrifice his love for duty, and Perpenna will dishonor himself by killing Sertorius out of jealousy over Viriate.

As a female who had valued her love for Rodrigue above all else before her father was killed, unlike Viriate and Aristie, Chimène is not used to conforming to the masculine ethic. In order to decide what to do to avenge her father, she looks to a male for guidance. Because Rodrigue himself had recently been in almost exactly the same position as she now finds herself, she models her actions on his and demands his death in return for that of her father (Carlin 51, 54). Explaining her actions to Rodrigue, she states, “Tu n’as fait le devoir que d’un homme de bien; / Mais aussi, le faisant, tu m’as appris le mien” (III.iv.921-22). She had to learn from Rodrigue that in order to obey the masculine ethic, she needed to be prepared to sacrifice her

beloved for honor; but she also learned from the fact that Rodrigue killed her father in order to remain worthy of her that she could only be worthy of him by avenging her own father, even if that meant that he must die. As she states,

De quoi qu'en ta faveur notre amour m'entretienne

Ma générosité doit répondre à la tienne:

Tu t'es, en m'offensant, montré digne de moi,

Je me dois par ta mort montrer digne de toi.

(III.iv.939-42)

The greatest difference in Chimène's and Rodrigue's situations is that the latter's duty only caused him to separate from his beloved; if she succeeds in avenging her father, however, both the people whom she cherished the most will be dead. Her price for obeying her *devoir de sang* and remaining worthy of her lover is much higher than his. While he opts against suicide in favor of doing his filial duty, Chimène's decision to avenge her father leads her to plan to commit suicide once her duty is completed. She tells Elvire, therefore, that she plans to kill Rodrigue and to die after him, reuniting with her lover in death (III.iv.858-59).

Just as Chimène says that her death will follow Rodrigue's, in *Suréna*, Eurydice tells Suréna's sister that if he is killed, she will die immediately after him (vv. 1123-24; v. 1686). While both women express the desire to be reunited with their lovers in death, the two have very different reasons for anticipating the death of the person they love. Chimène is seeking Rodrigue's death out of duty to her father, but Eurydice only contemplates Suréna's death because Palmis, Suréna's sister, suggests that his loyalty to her may cause him to get killed. Because Suréna is such a strong general, the king feels that he is a threat, but to assure his power over Suréna, he wants to marry him into his family. Explaining this to Suréna, he says, "Je ne

vous saurais croire assez en mon pouvoir, / Si les nœuds de l'Hymen n'enchaînent le devoir” (III.ii.899-900). Though Eurydice herself has been promised to the king's son, Pacorus, her desire to have total control over Suréna keeps her from allowing him to marry Mandane, even though the marriage would just be a political arrangement (Sweetser 242). Demonstrating her egotism, she says to Palmis, “Savez-vous qu'à Mandane envoyer ce que j'aime, / C'est de ma propre main m'assassiner moi-même?” (V.iv.1705-06). Even though Palmis warns her of the serious danger that he is in, she does not believe that he will get killed and does not do enough on her own to stop it from happening (Bertaud 7, 9). Had she been more careful, she would have given Suréna permission to marry the king's daughter to try to save his life. As Bertaud says, “Eurydice aime mal Suréna parce qu'elle s'aime trop, parce que'elle est dominée par l'amour propre” (6). Thus, whereas Eurydice's egotistical love for Suréna will ultimately be a leading cause for his assassination, his love for her causes him to be willing to sacrifice everything, including his life, to remain loyal to her.

Both Chimène and Rodrigue are instructed by their fathers to take action on their behalf. While Rodrigue was convinced by his father's words to avenge his honor, Chimène is persuaded to act by signs—not words or sounds. When she finds her father dying, it is his blood that tells her that he wants her to avenge him:

Il ne me parla point mais pour mieux m'émouvoir  
Son sang sur la poussière écrivait mon devoir,  
Ou plutôt sa valeur, en cet état réduite,  
Me parlait par sa plaie et hâtait ma poursuite.

(II.vii.685-88)

Also, explaining to Élvire why it is her duty to pursue Rodrigue, she says, “Quoi? J’aurai vu mourir mon père entre mes bras / Son sang criera vengeance et je ne l’orrai pas!” (III.iv.841-42). Whereas Rodrigue was asked directly to confront the Count after his offense, Chimène hears her father’s request to be avenged only through visual symbols, not through vocalization, and visual signs will again remind her of her duty when everyone is celebrating after Rodrigue defeats the Moors. Though everyone believed that she would be so impressed by her true love’s valor that she would stop pursuing him, she says, “...combien que pour lui tout un peuple s’anime, / Ici tous les objets me parlent de son crime” (IV.i.1143-44). Lack of speech, therefore, recalls the silence associated with the patriarchal society’s repression of the feminine voice, not only through Chimène’s understanding of her father’s wishes by visual symbols, but also by the fact that love must be silenced in order for her and Rodrigue both to fulfill their duties.

Although they must sacrifice each other for honor, neither Rodrigue nor Chimène sacrifice the love that they feel for one another. Nevertheless, as already demonstrated with Rodrigue and his father, the masculine ethic is incompatible with love. For this reason, when in public, the love they feel must remain unexpressed—as non-speech—since expressing love can only impede their attempts at avenging their fathers. This is particularly true with Chimène since females are typically expected to value love over honor (Schmidt 53). If she did not keep her love silenced, her attempts at avenging her father’s death by seeking Rodrigue’s would seem insincere. As a male, Rodrigue was expected to fulfill his duty of avenging his father, since it was standard for a son to do so in the seventeenth century. As a female, though, Chimène, was not expected to persist in seeking Rodrigue’s death. Her duty to her father extended only to asking the king to avenge his death. Once she had done this, however, she should have been free of her obligations to her father (Schmidt 20, 139). Chimène, however, would not be satisfied

with simply asking for justice without actually seeing it done. Since she knew that everyone was aware of her love for Rodrigue, it was particularly important for her to not let the public's knowledge of her feelings interfere with her pursuit of justice. Thus, her refusal openly to express her continuing love for her adversary is her attempt to overcome society's gender biased belief that females do not value honor over love, a task which will be particularly difficult for her since everyone knows that she can only save her father's honor at the expense of her beloved's life (Toczyski 510).

Toczyski insists on Chimène's dual nature since she does love Rodrigue but must pursue him as a part of her *devoir de sang*. As in *Horace*, there is a distinct difference between what she, as a female, can say in public versus what she says in private. Chimène reveals her love only in the privacy of her home, and usually in conflicting statements where she expresses her love for Rodrigue while affirming her need to pursue him (516-17). She tries to fool the public into thinking that she has lost her love for Rodrigue when she goes to beg the king for justice, but once she returns to her home, she reveals her true feelings to Elvire (Bertaud 9-10).

... [Q]uoi que mon amour ait sur moi de pouvoir,  
Je ne consulte point pour suivre mon devoir,  
Je cours sans balancer où mon honneur m'oblige;  
Rodrigue m'est bien cher, son intérêt m'afflige,  
Mon cœur prend son parti, mais contre leur effort  
Je sais que je suis fille, et que mon père est mort.

(III.iii.829-34)

Once again, feminine emotions, which are contrary to the masculine ethic, are to be expressed only within the privacy of the home. In *Horace*, though, Sabine and Camille were to refrain

from crying outside the home to avoid offending the public. Chimène, however, consciously chooses to refrain from showing her love for Rodrigue in public so that her desire for vengeance may be taken seriously.

Just as Chimène does not talk of her love in public, Suréna and Eurydice hide their love because they know that she has been promised to the king's son. Unlike Chimène, though, Eurydice publicly admits that she is in love, but she refuses to reveal Suréna's identity. Even though she has agreed to marry Pacorus, she makes it clear to him that she is giving him only her hand, and not her heart. Pacorus, though, wants her love as well, demanding more of her than what is required for a political marriage (Prigent 501; Rohou 224). Just as he wants more of Eurydice than should be expected, when the king insists that Suréna marry into his family even though he does not want to, he is asking more of his general than just service to the State. Pacorus and Orode, therefore, become tyrannical by trying to use civic duty as a justification for interfering with the couple's private lives (Rhou 224). As Prigent says,

... Pacorus demandera le cœur d'Eurydice alors qu'il devait se contenter de la main. De même, Orode demandera plus à Suréna qu'une loyauté formelle. Pacorus et Orode sortiront l'un et l'autre de leur ordre et deviendront tyranniques...ils provoquent la tragédie en cherchant à obtenir ce qui ne leur est pas dû. (500)

As Prigent suggests, both Suréna and Eurydice will die largely because of their unwillingness to submit to Orode and Pacorus' tyranny, and it is true that Eurydice will collapse and die purely from grief once she learns of Suréna's death (Bertrand 5; Muratore 134). Nevertheless, it is important to note that not just love, but politics as well, are causes for both Suréna's and Sertorius' death. As stated earlier, though Sertorius provokes Perpenna's jealousy over Viriate,

Perpenna had already been hurt by Sertorius since his own army left him to serve the latter. The former's jealousy is simply another factor which contributes to his ultimate decision to kill Sertorius. For Suréna, though, his love leads him to disobey Orode, and since the king was already insecure about the general's strength and popularity, his disobedience is merely an excuse to kill him (Muratore 133). As Suréna says,

Mon vrai crime est ma gloire, et non pas mon amour,  
Je l'ai dit, avec elle il croîtra chaque jour.  
Plus je les [Pacorus and Orode] servirai, plus je serai coupable,  
Et s'ils veulent ma mort, elle est inévitable.

(V.iii.1651-54)

Thus, Orode's insecurity leads him to commit, as Prigent says, "une erreur politique" by having his general killed, even though he had been the State's greatest military asset (500). Unlike *Horace's* Tulle, who does not have Horace executed because it would be best for the State to keep him alive, Orode acts as a tyrant. His decision to have Suréna assassinated was based on his own insecurities and not on the public good. As Carlin says, therefore, "Orode puts his kingdom in danger by killing his most successful military leader because he owes him too much" (139). Suréna's devotion to love merely gave Orode an excuse to eliminate him because it caused him to disobey. While it could be said that love corrupted Suréna's desire to serve the state, it was truly Orode's insecurity that corrupted his ability to judge wisely and caused him to kill his best general.

Knowing that kings normally value the good of the State above all else, in *Le Cid* Chimène tries to take advantage of this when she approaches the king to demand justice after her father's death. Not only does she appeal to his sense of pity for her as a daughter who has lost

her father, but also she tries to encourage him to take up her cause on his own behalf because of the loss that he, as king, has suffered with the Count's death. Interestingly, the majority of her plea is not intended to inspire his sympathy for her, but to provoke his own anger against Rodrigue for having killed the Count. Though she comes to the king with tears and laments, revealing her feminine sensibility, she spends most of her time pleading with him in masculine terms, reminding him of the Count's military worth and the loss that the State has suffered because of Rodrigue's actions:

Sire, mon père est mort, mes yeux ont vu son sang  
Couler à gros bouillons de son généreux flanc,  
Ce sang qui tant de fois garantit vos murailles,  
Ce sang qui tant de fois vous gagna des batailles,  
[...]  
Rodrigue en votre Cour vient d'en couvrir la terre,  
Et pour son coup d'essai son indigne attentat  
D'un si ferme soutien a privé votre État,  
De vos meilleurs soldats abattu l'assurance,  
Et de vos ennemis relevé l'espérance.

(II.vii.665-68; 672-76)

Again, as with her understanding of the importance that males place on honor, Chimène demonstrates her grasp of masculine values by explaining the impact that her father's loss will have on the State and its defense, claiming that the State is more vulnerable because of Rodrigue's actions. Although one could possibly infer that Chimène truly is primarily concerned for the well-being of the state, particularly when she asks the king for justice, telling him that her request is "Plus pour votre intérêt que pour mon allégeance" (II.vii.700), her words are only

intended to sway him to grant her wish. Unlike her adherence to the masculine value of honor, which never varies, her supposed concern for the State dissipates later, after Rodrigue has proven himself to be as valiant a soldier as the Count had been. Though he replaces the Count in terms of his military worth, Chimène continues to insist that the king take vengeance on him for having killed her father.

In contrast to *Cinna*'s Emilie and *Horace*'s Camille, who want vengeance because of a personal wrong that has been done to them and which has cost them a loved one, Chimène demands justice purely out of her sense of duty to her father, not because she genuinely wants Rodrigue to die. For this reason, when Rodrigue offers her the opportunity to kill him herself, she cannot do it. Believing that she wants him to die for having killed her father, Rodrigue seeks to satisfy her; and although there had been no possible way for him to fulfill his duty to his father and please her earlier, he believes that he can now offer her the chance to relieve herself of the anger that she feels toward him by giving her the opportunity to kill him herself. He says to her, "N'épargnez point mon sang, goûtez sans résistance / La douceur de ma perte et de votre vengeance" (III.iv.863-64). But even though Rodrigue repeatedly offers his sword to Chimène, telling to use it to avenge her father, she cannot use it. She tells him, "Je dois te poursuivre et non pas te punir" (III.iv. 954), showing that her actions are motivated only by duty and not her feelings toward him. Implying that she wants him to survive her attacks and that she fears for his life, she says, "Mon unique souhait est de ne rien pouvoir" (III.iv.994). If she were to take Rodrigue's sword, her vengeance would be assured, but all hope that she has that he would survive her attempts at killing him would be destroyed (Bertaud 9-10).

Chimène also cannot use Rodrigue's sword herself because the only females in Cornelian tragedy who successfully kill someone by their own hand are the "monstrous mothers":

*Rodogune*'s Cléopâtre, *Théodore*'s Marcelle, and Médée. Even *Pertharite*'s Rodelinde comes close to becoming a monstrous mother by proposing to kill her son to see Grimoald's reputation tarnished (Sweetser 180-81). All of these mothers lose their femininity by committing violent acts, and although Chimène is very strong and self-determined, as are many of Corneille's "evil" women, she cannot abandon her femininity. She merely chooses to hide her femininity in order to fulfill her obligations to her father by seeking her lover's death. Killing Rodrigue herself would demand that she fully extinguish her love for him and become violent, thus stripping herself entirely of her femininity and becoming an inhumane monster rather than regain her family's honor. Thus, when Rodrigue says:

Sauve ta renommée en me faisant mourir.

she replies,

Elle éclate bien mieux en te laissant en vie,

Et je veux que la voix de la plus noire envie

Élève au Ciel ma gloire, et plaigne mes ennuis,

Sachant que je t'adore et que je te poursuis.

(III.iv.978-82)

Unlike Horace, who claimed to gain greater glory than usual in battle by killing someone he loved for the good of the State, Chimène would only earn infamy if she were to kill Rodrigue herself to satisfy her private vengeance. Just as Rodelinde avoids becoming a monstrous mother by not carrying out her suggestion, Chimène avoids infamy as well by not killing Rodrigue herself. In addition to not soiling her own name, though, she sees a direct correlation between prolonging her own suffering and increasing her glory. By allowing him to live, her glory is greater since she must continue to try to have him killed in spite of her love.

In *Clitandre*, which is exceptional in that most of the characters are atypical for the time and do not behave in accordance with their gender roles, Pymante resembles Perpenna in that his jealousy, especially over love, causes him to try to kill his rival. Though this in itself is not unusual, what is noteworthy is that this play contains the only example of a female, other than a “monstrous mother,” who tries to use a sword to kill her rival. Though Dorise is a female, she, Pymante, and Perpenna are all examples that Corneille uses to show the dangers of overzealous love in the presence of a rival. As Corneille says of men in his *Discours de la tragédie*:

Un honnête homme ne va pas...faire un assassinat de sang froid; mais s’il est bien amoureux, il peut faire une supercherie à son rival, il peut s’emporter de colère, et tuer dans un premier mouvement, et l’ambition le peut engager dans un crime, ou dans une action blâmable. (*Œuvres Complètes* 3 147)

Because they are willing to kill for love, both Dorise and Pymante are, as Sweetser says, “amoureux criminels livrés à leur passion, désireux de posséder l’objet aimé à tout prix” (108). Because this play is atypical of Corneille’s works and is not one of his better-known plays, I shall not analyze it in great detail; however, Dorise is particularly interesting in that her overzealous love causes her to deviate more explicitly from her gender role than any other female in Cornelian tragedy. Even Corneille’s murderous mothers attempt to disguise their masculinity by using feminine discourse in public: In *Rodogune*, Cléopâtre talks of motherly love and her conjugal duty to avenge her dead husband, and in *Médée*, the *sorcière* claims that her anger over Jason’s infidelity has dissipated and that she is only concerned for her children. In *Clitandre*, though, the fact that Dorise tries to use a sword to kill her rival, though unsuccessfully, is particularly noteworthy since she later disguises herself as a male when hiding and admits to her own shame for having lost her femininity by trying to kill Caliste. As she says,

Quelle honte importune au visage te monte  
Pour un sexe quitté dont tu n'es que la honte?  
Il t'abhorre lui-même, et ce déguisement  
En le désavouant l'oblige infiniment.

(II.v.609-12)

Whereas the other murderous females do not reflect their masculinity externally, Dorise's masculine disguise correlates with her un-feminine behavior (Zuerner 760; 762). As Zuerner says, "So great is her crime and shame in her own mind that she can no longer consider herself a woman ('pour un sexe quitté'): her crimes ... have dishonored her gender, which she then disavows by renouncing women's clothing" (760).

Since both Dorise and Pymante attempt to commit murder out of jealousy, when Dorise disguises herself as a male, she effectively becomes a second Pymante, but throughout the play, she expresses hatred and disgust for Pymante. When she realizes that she has become like the person whom she despises the most, she rejects her criminal personality. Deciding to forgo her jealousy and her love for Rosidor, she is ready to confess her crime. Just before doing so, though, she changes clothing, thus recuperating her femininity and becoming reassimilated into society. By renouncing her masculine personality and her jealousy, therefore, she reaffirms social order (Baker 42).

In *Le Cid*, although Rodrigue and his father both adhere to the patriarchal order's belief that honor is to be valued above all, their opinions concerning true love are exceedingly different. While Don Diègue thinks that all women can easily be replaced and are certainly not worth worrying over, Rodrigue, like Suréna, believes otherwise. He feels that losing Chimène to

defend his father's honor is a tremendous sacrifice and is in itself a reason to die. Already having offered his sword to Chimène so that she could use it to kill him, he says to his father:

Ma foi m'engage encor si je n'espère plus,  
Et ne pouvant quitter ni posséder Chimène,  
Le trépas que je cherche est ma plus douce peine.

(III.vi.1078-80)

Thus, although Rodrigue killed Chimène's father in defense of a masculine value, he is willing to die for a feminine one. As before, though, Don Diègue silences his son's expression of feminine emotions in favor of more masculine discourse. Having already chastised him for sighing (v. 1036), he reminds his son of his duty as a young male:

Il n'est pas temps encor de chercher le trépas,  
Ton Prince et ton pays ont besoin de ton bras.

(III.vi.1081-82)

Thus, he stops Rodrigue from thinking of his own personal situation and his desire to satisfy Chimène and tells him to instead concentrate on serving the public, who needs him now.

As Rodrigue evolves from an adolescent who only thinks of love to a young man who must think of his serving his country, his battles change from being driven by private interests to his desire to serve the public. The first time that Don Diègue forced his son to refrain from expressing his love and to face the possibility of dying in battle, for example, was because it interfered with his desire to have his own personal honor restored. When Don Diègue sends his son to fight the second time, however, it is to defend the State. As he sends him to the battlefield, he reminds him of the proper way for a man to die. Rather than flatter his son's desire to die for love, he says:

Là, si tu veux mourir, trouve une belle mort,  
Prends-en l'occasion puisqu'elle t'est offerte,  
Fais devoir à ton roi son salut à ta perte.

(III.iii.1098-1100)

As a male, therefore, Rodrigue's father reminds him that he should want to die serving the State, not over the loss of a mere female.

Though Don Diègue tells Rodrigue that he should hope to die on the battlefield, it would be unacceptable for Rodrigue to not try to defend himself. If he simply allowed himself to get killed, then he would have betrayed his king, and his own death would return him and his family once again to a state of dishonor. Since he had been willing to lose Chimène while recuperating his family's honor, losing it again is a price that he could not pay. Thus, explaining to her why he defended himself in the battle against the Moors, even though he had repeatedly expressed his willingness to die since that was what she wanted, he says,

... déjà cette nuit m'aurait été mortelle  
Si j'eusse combattu pour ma seule querelle:  
Mais, défendant mon Roi, son peuple et le pays,  
A me défendre mal je les aurais trahis...

(V.i.1495-98)

Again, when he had to choose to act out of love or patriotic duty, he chose to act according to the male ethic and repress his desire to satisfy his beloved's need for vengeance. Thus, as Carlin says, duty to his country forces him to suppress the feminine in himself (56).

Since Don Diègue knew that the masculine code of honor demanded that his son fight valiantly for his king, he advises Rodrigue that if he wishes to win back Chimène, he should do

so by conquering the Moors and proving his worth. Telling him that he needs to gain a public victory in order to heighten his glory now that he has successfully killed defending a private cause, he sends him again to confront death. This time, however, Rodrigue is to fight for the good of the State and, by proving his worth to the State, hopefully convince the king to pardon him for having killed the Count. Don Diègue says to his son,

Ne borne pas ta gloire à venger un affront,  
Pousse-la plus avant, force par ta vaillance  
La justice au pardon et Chimène au silence;  
Si tu l'aimes, apprends que retourner vainqueur  
C'est l'unique moyen de regagner son cœur.

(III.vi.1102-06)

Don Diègue, therefore, wants his son not only to have the personal glory of having avenged his family's honor, but also to heighten his glory by becoming a hero to the State. Only by fighting for the State will he gain the public recognition that he will need in order to become a true hero and, consequently, deserve to be pardoned for having killed Chimène's father<sup>3</sup>. As Rohou says, therefore, "De *fil*s d'une lignée particulière, défini par ses devoirs envers elle, Rodrigue devient le *héros* de la collectivité, ce qui confère de nouveaux droits à ce nouveau personnage...Le mérite de Rodrigue dans l'ordre nouveau abolit son crime dans l'ordre ancien" (163).

Unlike Suréna and Sertorius, who were not able to serve their country's political needs because of their love, Don Diègue uses Rodrigue's feelings for Chimène to drive him to fight more valiantly for his country. Rather than allowing his love to cause him to seek his own death, Don Diègue uses it to motivate him to perform his patriotic duty as a male and to force him to conform to his gender role. He explains that Rodrigue's victory over the Moors would again

make him desirable enough for Chimène to value him more than honor and that she would literally “silence” her attempts at seeking justice in favor of love. Just as Don Diègue hopes to use love to make his son conform to his gender role, he hopes that Rodrigue’s valiance will motivate Chimène to abandon her cause and reject the masculine ethic, which would make her conform to her gender role as well.

Though Rodrigue’s private victory over the Count transformed him from an adolescent into a man, his public victory over the Moors changes him from Rodrigue, Don Diègue’s son, into the hero to the State known as le Cid (Rohou 163). Just as he had to confront death to earn his manhood, he had to confront it again to earn his status as a hero. Acknowledging Rodrigue’s new identity and his military worth, the king declares,

Sois désormais le Cid, qu’à ce grand nom tout cède,  
Qu’il devienne l’effroi de Grenade et Tolède,  
Et qu’il marque à tous ceux qui vivent sous mes lois  
Et ce que tu me vaux et ce que je te dois.

(IV.iii.1235-38)

Consequently, although the king had initially promised Chimène justice for Rodrigue’s crime (v.747), once he returns victorious from the battle, he proves himself to be too valuable for the State to sacrifice him for Chimène’s personal vengeance. As the king says,

... l’Etat défendu me parle en ta défense:  
Crois que dorénavant Chimène a beau parler,  
Je ne l’écoute plus que pour la consoler.

(IV.iii.1264-66)

Thus, as Carlin explains, Rodrigue's heroism renders him invulnerable to Chimène's request for justice (52).

Although Chimène's initial claim to justice was valid, once Rodrigue becomes a hero, she is doomed to lose. According to the patriarchal order, public interests, or, as Jean Bodin would say, the interests of the *res publica*, take precedence over private ones, or those of the *res privata*, since the survival of the State, and consequently of the sovereign, depends on that of the *res publica* (Assaf 30). Therefore, once Rodrigue proves himself to be essential to the preservation of the State, the king decides that she must sacrifice her personal vengeance for the greater good<sup>4</sup>. For, as Schmidt says, "Rodrigue has become a public hero, and Chimène's revenge is considered a private vendetta that threatens the country with the loss of its protector" (64). Consequently, her request for justice will be rejected, denying her validity within the public domain (Toczyski 510).

Although certain Cornelian heroines, such as Viriate and Aristie, who are portrayed as fairly masculine women, do value honor over love, they are atypical of their time. It is generally assumed that love is more important to females than honor. For this reason, even though Chimène makes every attempt at hiding her true feelings for Rodrigue in order to convince the king to avenge her, he assumes that her demand for vengeance is not really sincere. To assure himself of her feelings, though, he tricks her into believing that he is dead to see her reaction. Revealing her femininity, when he tells her that he has died, she does swoon. Rodrigue's faked death, therefore, forces Chimène to reveal her love for Rodrigue, which she had previously successfully hidden, discrediting her attempts at expressing hatred for him because of his crime. As Toczyski says, therefore, "Chimène's swoon merely serves to verify his preconceptions regarding her disposition toward Rodrigue and will hereafter only obscure any other potential

regulatory basis for her speech acts” (510). Thus, revealing her love gives the king yet another reason to deny Chimène the right to justice, even though she continues to insist that he die for his crime. When the king says,

Consulte bien ton cœur, Rodrigue en est le maître,  
Et ta flamme en secret rend grâces à ton Roi  
Dont la faveur conserve un tel amant pour toi.

She is only insulted and cries,

Pour moi mon ennemi! l’objet de ma colère!  
L’auteur de mes malheurs! l’assassin de mon père!  
De ma juste poursuite on fait si peu de cas  
Qu’on me croit obliger en ne m’écoutant pas!

(IV.v.1400-06)

Not only does she accuse the king of simply not listening to her, but also, she is horrified at the idea that she should still marry her father’s assassin, despite the fact that Rodrigue had killed him only because he had dishonored Don Diègue first.

In Cornelian tragedy, with the exception of *Clitandre*’s Caliste, whom Rosidor believes to have died though she was merely passed out, only males die or are rumored to have died and return from the dead in some form. While some men are mistakenly thought to be dead and reappear later, such as Rodrigue, Pertharite, and *Polyeucte*’s Sévère, other males, such as Attila’s brother and Œdipus’s father Laïus reappear in spirit form and ask for vengeance for their deaths. When a male is mistakenly thought to be dead, there are many possible outcomes of his return, most of which put females in an awkward position. Cléopâtre, for example, married her first husband’s brother thinking he was dead, and Pauline, now married to Polyeucte, had to face

Sévère who had returned in hopes of marrying her himself. Finally, twice, when Chimène believes Rodrigue to be dead, she reveals her love for him, giving the king a weapon to use against her when she later claims to still want him to die for having killed her father. Therefore, rather than act upon her words, the king decides to act upon his idea of what she should want given her reaction to Rodrigue's supposed death and imposes that she should marry him, despite the wrong that she feels has been done to her. Though her speech clearly shows her adherence to the masculine code, the king can only interpret her actions in terms of her love for Rodrigue, and thus in terms of what he believes that she should value as a female (Schmidt 153).

Because she is a female, as Schmidt says, "Chimène's position is one of forced dependence and lack of tangible power" (22), and even though her father is killed, the king becomes her new father and has control over her destiny. As he says, "Prends courage, ma fille, et sache qu'aujourd'hui, / Ton Roi te veut servir de père au lieu de lui" (II.vii.681-82). Consequently, she still remains in a state of dependency and her resources are limited. Having been ineffective in obtaining justice from the king as females usually do, therefore, she resorts to using her sexuality to her advantage and says that she will marry whoever should kill Rodrigue. Thus, abandoning the feminine technique of trying to appeal to the king's emotions for justice, she tries to use her sexuality to gain access to the sword that she needs to avenge her father as males would, which is through combat. As she says to the king,

Sire, permettez-moi de recourir aux armes,

C'est par là seulement qu'il a su m'outrager,

Et c'est aussi par là que je me dois venger.

À tous vos Chevaliers, je demande sa tête.

Oui, qu'un d'eux me l'apporte, et je suis sa conquête

[...]

J'épouse le vainqueur si Rodrigue est puni.

(IV.v.1408-12; 1414)

Thus, just as Émilie was to be Cinna's victory prize for Auguste's death, Chimène wishes to be "le prix" (v. 1566) for whoever should kill Rodrigue. Although the king will not agree to this, he will agree to let Don Sanche, who is in love with Chimène, fight against Rodrigue, and that she is to marry whichever of the two is the winner. Just as Émilie was willing to prostitute herself for Auguste's death, so is Chimène in return for Rodrigue's. As with Émilie, therefore, Chimène uses the only currency that she has, her body, to try to purchase Rodrigue's death.

When the battle is over between Rodrigue and Don Sanche, once again, Chimène mistakenly believes that Rodrigue is dead, but rather than agreeing to marry her champion, she immediately professes her love for Rodrigue and her disgust with Don Sanche for supposedly having killed the man she loved. Upon seeing Don Sanche's sword covered with blood, she cries,

Quoi? du sang de Rodrigue encor toute trempée?

Perfide, oses-tu bien te montrer à mes yeux,

Après m'avoir ôté ce que j'aimais le mieux?

(V.v.1716-18)

Thus, when she believes that she has fulfilled her duty to her father, she no longer feels the need to hide her love for Rodrigue. She publicly gives voice to her love which, prior to this moment, she had only done in the privacy of her home for fear that it would interfere with her ability to avenge her father.

When Chimène realizes that she was mistaken and that Rodrigue is alive, she knows that it is no longer possible for her to pretend not to love him and that any attempt that she made to demand justice now would be in vain. Seemingly resolved to accept his victory, she will not ask for vengeance again. His survival and her mistaken belief that he is dead, therefore, silence her attempts at claiming justice in the name of the masculine ethic. She is forced to abandon her father's cause and to accept her own femininity by marrying Rodrigue, for whom she has openly professed her love.

In both *Pertharite* and *Le Cid*, love contributes to restoring social order. In *Le Cid*, because Chimène was a female who repeatedly expressed masculine values and seemed to favor them over feminine ones, she had been a threat to social order. Rodrigue's non-death, however, restores social order by forcing Chimène to act in accordance with her gender role. She must now accept the king's decision to allow him to survive since she herself has shown that she would regret his loss, and she must continue to love him since the king has ordered that he is to be her husband. In *Pertharite*, Grimoald realizes that he cannot have Rodelinde and wishes to return to Edüige. His despicable behavior, though, leads her to reject him until he proves himself worthy of her. To please her, he hands the throne back to Pertharite, even though the king was willing to relinquish it without a fight in exchange for Rodelinde. Though his lack of political ambition seems to refute masculine values, it restores both his honor and social order as well in that it places the rightful monarch once again on the throne. Because of love, as in *Cinna* and *Nicomède*, the potential usurper comes to realize the error of his ways. As Muratore says, therefore, "...her [Edüige]'s final action, her attempt to restore to Grimoald his virtue, demonstrates that love can often be constructive in purpose and capable of ameliorating a person's character" (114). Unlike in *Sertorius* and *Suréna*, if a man's love does not prevent him

from serving the needs of the State, it can actually help him better himself and become a better subject. When it does interfere, it ultimately contributes to his death.

Although this study focuses on death and gender, it is essential to address Rodrigue's and Chimène's marriage since many critics have questioned whether or not it will actually take place. Though Rodrigue wins Chimène's hand in marriage, the play does not end with the couple's imminent union; nevertheless, there are several factors which indicate that it will come to pass, including the fact that both Rodrigue and Chimène defended their own honor to remain worthy of the other. More importantly, though, the political transition that the play represents would not be complete without Chimène's marriage to Rodrigue.

Not only did Rodrigue defeat the Count, representing the formal end of feudalism, but also by surviving Chimène's attempts to have him killed, he symbolically quashes any attempts to destroy the new monarchy. Rodrigue's mere survival, though, is not enough to represent the complete the transformation from a feudalistic society into an absolutist one. Remaining advocates of feudalism need to be incorporated into the new, absolutist society, and the best way to show this is through Chimène's marriage to Rodrigue (Greenberg 53). The Count's death alone, therefore, does not in itself represent the true end of feudalism. Chimène's marriage to Rodrigue, the ultimate expression of their love for one another, however, will. As Schmidt says, therefore, love "adds an important alternative to male heroics, which denies the preservation of humanity..." (132). While their marriage promises the continuation of Rodrigue's lineage, it will secure the future of the monarchy as well. Without this final step, the transformation would remain incomplete.

In conclusion, in all of Corneille's tragedies discussed in this chapter, characters must choose between duty and love. For married females, like Rodelinde and even *La Mort de*

*Pompée's* Cornélie, duty does not conflict with love since society expects them to value their conjugal duty over all else. Even *Horace's* Sabine, who was born Albaine, acknowledges having changed political allegiance once she married a Roman: "Je suis Romaine, hélas! puisqu'Horace est Romain, / J'en ai reçu le titre en recevant sa main" (vv. 25-26). Even when Horace kills her three brothers who were fighting for Albe, she is expected to stay with and support Horace because, as a female, she is bound by her conjugal duty. Likewise, even though Rodelinde knows that Grimoald has been a better ruler than her husband, she is expected to attempt to avenge the latter. For unmarried females, though, such as Chimène and Eurydice, love and duty do conflict. Chimène must avenge her father at the cost of her beloved, and Eurydice should have been willing to let Suréna marry Mandane since the king demanded that he do so for the good of the State. While Chimène chooses duty over love and ultimately will be given to her beloved in marriage, Eurydice's selfishness contributes to her lover's assassination.

Though Suréna is assassinated largely because of Pacorus's jealousy, as with Sertorius, love is not the only reason for his death. With both Suréna and Sertorius, politics and love are inextricably linked. Perpenna's and Pacorus's jealousy over love merely serves as a final catalyst for their assassination. Orode's insecurity over Suréna's strength and popularity had already led him to feel that he was a threat, and Perpenna was already jealous of Sertorius since his army had abandoned him to serve his rival. Neither Suréna nor Sertorius was able to give up their love totally in the best interest of the state, although both claimed to do so. Suréna made no attempt at claiming Eurydice for himself since she was promised to Pacorus, and Sertorius said that Perpenna could have Viriate. Neither of them, though, truly were prepared to take action when the action contradicted their love. Suréna would not marry Mandane, and Sertorius would

not marry Aristie; and because of this, they both had a weakness that ultimately caused them to get killed.

Suréna, Sertorius, Pertharite, and Grimoald are all shown as weak because of their love. Whereas seventeenth-century masculine ethics place honor, patriotic duty, and political power all above love, these men have misplaced priorities. Suréna and Sertorius are assassinated because of their aberrant value system, and though Pertharite and Grimoald do not die, like Suréna and Sertorius, they are both certainly unheroic because they are willing to give up the throne without a fight for love.

Contrary to Suréna and Sertorius, when Rodrigue must choose between duty and love, he is fully prepared to sacrifice his love in order to avenge his father, even though he knew that he would lose Chimène in doing so. As with Suréna and Sertorius, he does not forgo his love, but unlike them, he is able to repress it in order to fulfill his duty. Because he is willing to sacrifice his love for duty, he becomes a hero. In addition, since his father suggests that he fight more valiantly in order to win Chimène's love back, his love actually serves his duty and helps him become a more heroic male.

To summarize, for Corneille, unmarried females must choose duty over love, whereas married females must remain loyal to their conjugal duty before showing loyalty to the state. Males, however, are always expected to value duty over love at all cost. If they do not, their love will cause them to be weak and to suffer and possibly to die.

Though love also plays a significant role in *Polyeucte*, *Théodore*, *Médée*, *Œdipe* and *Andromède*, these final tragedies will be dealt with simultaneously in the following chapter, Christian and Mythological Plays, because the role of the divine influences the ways in which the characters view death. In *Polyeucte* and *Théodore*, God's grace helps the Christians face

martyrdom without fear. In *Œdipe* and *Andromède*, the gods demand a sacrifice, and because of their awesome powers, death seems inevitable. Humans must then choose to give in to destiny or to take action and try to oppose the gods' will, even though the situation seems futile. Finally, *Médée*, a goddess, has to decide whether to allow herself to be victimized by Jason's infidelity or to free herself from her earthly ties by killing her children in order to recuperate her divine nature.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Rohou 196; Abraham 112; Doubrovsky 330.

<sup>2</sup> Carlin 50; Kimmel 54; Greenberg 39; Doubrovsky 89; Rohou 163.

<sup>3</sup> Carlin 52; Abraham 56; Rohou 163.

<sup>4</sup> Greenberg 50; Rohou 163; Schmidt 64; Merlin (1994) 251.

## CHAPTER 7

### CHRISTIAN AND MYTHOLOGICAL TRAGEDIES

All of the tragedies discussed in the previous chapters portray the challenges of the human experience, where men and women had to rely only on themselves and their personal motivation to accomplish a given task, whether it be to kill someone or to choose between duty and love. However, in the remaining tragedies, which are Corneille's Christian and mythological tragedies, the divine influences the way characters live their lives as well as the way they perceive death. *Polyeucte* (1643) and *Théodore* (1646) both demonstrate the effect of God's grace in the lead characters' lives and in their ability to go to their martyrdom without fear. *Andromède* (1651) and *Œdipe* (1659) show humans who must face the possibility of death due to the gods acting within their lives, and finally, *Médée* (1639) portrays a divinity who had rejected her divine nature for love and recovers her true identity by committing murder. Although each of these plays contains a central theme discussed in a previous chapter, the influence of the divine on the way the heroes and heroines approach death demands that they be dealt with in a separate chapter.

Most tragedies use the threat of death to evoke terror and pity in the spectator; however, in Christian martyrdom plays, the main characters genuinely want to die for God, making it difficult for the spectator to feel either terror or pity for them. In both *Théodore* and *Polyeucte*, though, Corneille succeeded in circumventing this problem by portraying not only the hero's and

heroine's success in obtaining their martyrdom, but also by combining the religious drama with a secular one whose principal action involves the characters surrounding the martyr. In addition to Christian loyalty, both of these plays show love as a central theme. In *Polyeucte*, the spectator is intended to feel pity and terror for Polyeucte's wife, who loves her husband and does not want to lose him, more than for the doomed hero himself. Corneille's solution for evoking terror and pity in *Théodore*, though, is much more ingenious since the heroine is a virgin who has given herself wholly to God and, unlike Polyeucte, she has no legal attachment to another individual in the play. Instead of allowing conjugal love to carry the tragic element of the play, Corneille uses the Governor's wife's excessive maternal love and desire for vengeance to evoke terror, and indeed makes the spectator feel terror and pity for Théodore herself by temporarily *denying* her martyrdom.

As stated earlier, each of the plays that I shall discuss in this chapter contains a central theme that has already been dealt with in the preceding chapters. With *Polyeucte*, this theme is love. As Rohou explains, this play is not only a Christian tragedy, but also a "drame d'amour" in which the hero's loyalty to God is in direct conflict with his devotion to his wife (175). From the first line of act I, Pauline is shown as being an obstacle to her husband's salvation when his friend Néarque, who had introduced him to Christianity, criticizes him for hesitating to go to his baptism because of his wife's dream. He declares,

Quoi? vous vous arrêtez aux songes d'une femme!

De si foibles sujets troublent cette grande âme!

Et ce cœur tant de fois dans la guerre éprouvé

S'alarme d'un péril qu'une femme a rêvé!

(I.i.1-4)

From the beginning of the play, therefore, human love, as represented by Polyeucte's attachment to Pauline, is in conflict with divine love since it is the reason why he wants to delay his commitment to Christianity through his baptism.

Just as *Polyeucte* begins by introducing the secular drama surrounding Pauline, *Théodore* begins by presenting that of Marcelle, the governess, who, like Pauline, will be the primary source of the play's tragic emotions. But unlike *Polyeucte*, *Théodore*'s central theme is Marcelle's personal ambition and her desire for vengeance against Placide, her husband's son, not the heroine's martyrdom. Although *Théodore* is a Christian tragedy, and, like *Polyeucte*, is intended to provide the spectator with models of Christian virtue to admire and imitate<sup>1</sup>, as Abraham explains, "Its main action deals with conflicts originating in erotic and political rivalries, and the religion of the martyrs is far more Cornelian than Christian. Furthermore, the major protagonists are Placide and Marcelle with Théodore as passive as the two brothers of *Rodogune*" (92). The principal drama concentrates on the exchanges between Placide and Marcelle, not on Théodore's suffering for her faith. She is, in fact, nothing more than a victim of circumstances that have nothing to do with her religion. Marcelle just wants to see her daughter, Flavie, marry Placide, whom she desperately loves, but he loves Théodore even though the latter has no interest in him. Marcelle, therefore, wants to use Théodore's religion as an excuse to eliminate her daughter's rival and to take vengeance on Placide for rejecting Flavie. The driving force behind Marcelle's actions is her motherly love; for she does everything in her power to try to get Placide to marry Flavie, who is sick and dying because of her unrequited love, and, this being ineffective, she will resort to murder to punish him for his cruelty (Abraham 93; Sweetser 141). As Prigent explains, therefore, even though Théodore will ultimately die in the name of Christianity, her true crime is only that of having been loved by Placide (205).

Given that *Polyeucte* is a Christian martyr play, the spectator already knows that the hero is going to die for his faith, but the first time that he or she will see how this will happen is through Pauline's dream. Dreams are always associated with the female in tragedies, and explaining their function, Calvet states that the dream is used to "laisse entrevoir des événements graves et normalement imprévisibles, qui sont le fond de la pièce" (113). Likewise, they are always a reflection of fatality, not hope or heroism, and foreshadow the death of the hero, as in *Horace*, when Camille foresees Curiace's death, and in *Polyeucte*, when Pauline envisions her husband, surrounded by a group of Christians, assassinated at the hand of her own father. Explaining the end of her dream to Stratonice, her *confidente*, she says,

J'ai vu mon père même, un poignard a la main,

Entrer le bras levé pour lui percer le sein.

Là, ma douleur trop forte a brouillé ces images;

Le sang de Polyeucte a satisfait leurs rages.

(I.iii.239-42)

A second purpose of the prophetic dream is to incite terror since, from the very beginning of the play, spectators see the inevitability of the hero's death and a detailed description of the gruesome manner by which it will happen. Though they only hear a description of the death, as Calvet says, "en suspendant de lourdes menaces sur la tête des spectateurs, [le songe] contribue à former cette atmosphère d'anxieuse attente et de vague terreur qui est nécessaire à la tragédie" (113-14).

Only females have prophetic dreams in tragedies (Prigent 108); and generally, males consider them trivial and not worth worrying over, as with Néarque. For, the intangible nature of dreams makes them a poor excuse for a man to not behave courageously and face possible

danger. In addition, fear is not a very “manly” emotion. Even if men believed in the prophetic nature of dreams, they are rarely shown as fearing death. The only ones who do fear dying, such as *Andromède*’s Phinée, are shown as weak and cowardly. Since most males in tragedies attempt to heighten their glory, if their death will accomplish this, it is not to be avoided.

*Polyeucte* is Corneille’s only Christian tragedy that contains a prophetic dream. In it, Pauline’s dream causes her husband to hesitate to be baptized. Because Polyeucte’s concern for her feelings interferes with his ability to be courageous enough to follow Néarque to his baptism, Néarque believes he is becoming weakened by his attachment to her and, in fact, loses his manliness. Insulting his masculinity, therefore, he points out that he is courageous enough to fight valiantly in battle and risk losing his life but that he wants to postpone his salvation because of the mere “songes d’une femme.” Thus, as Carlin explains, “[T]he first scene establishes the conflict between male courage and ambition and the contamination of it by the female dream world, full of sentiment, diluting the drive to virtue” (67). Also, Néarque devalues Pauline by referring to her twice in terms of a mere object: “une femme.” By objectifying her, he shows that he sees sentimental attachment to a female as frivolous and unworthy of consideration, especially when it interferes with Christian duty. Reiterating his belief, he tells Polyeucte,

Rompez ses premiers coups, laissez pleurer Pauline;

Dieu ne veut point d’un cœur où le Monde domine,

(I.i.65-66; 74-76)

Thus, Néarque claims that Polyeucte’s devotion to his wife not only weakens him and causes him to lose his manliness, but also binds him to worldly concerns. She, therefore, embodies all that he must sacrifice if he wants to devote himself to God, but Polyeucte is not completely ready to abandon his attachment to her. Acknowledging his weakness before her, he says,

Je sais ce qu'est un songe, et le peu de croyance

Qu'*un homme* doit donner à son extravagance,

[...]

Mais vous ne savez pas ce que c'est qu'une femme,

Vous ignorez quels droits elle a sur toute l'âme,

(I.i.5-6; 9-10, emphasis mine)

Polyeucte, therefore, admits to Néarque that he cannot be as “manly” as he should in his wife’s presence and that she causes his courage to wane. He nevertheless attempts to justify his feelings by saying that Néarque does not understand his situation since he is not married. Although this is true, Néarque’s lack of sympathy for Polyeucte’s dilemma is due to the fact that his value system differs from Polyeucte’s more than to his marital status. Since Néarque has already been converted and is a baptized Christian, he understands that all that matters is his loyalty to God. Unlike Polyeucte, who does not fully understand the demands of Christian faith since he has not yet been baptized, Néarque has a greater understanding of the sacrifices that a person needs to be prepared to make in order to fully commit to Christianity. Explaining Polyeucte’s duty as a Christian, he says:

Il faut ne rien aimer qu’après lui [God], qu’en lui-même.

Négliger pour lui plaire, et femme, et biens, et rang,

Exposer pour sa gloire, et verser tout son sang:

(I.i.74-76)

Until Polyeucte is prepared to sacrifice everything for God, his love for Pauline will cause him to be more concerned for her feelings than for his own spiritual well being. His concern for his life, though, is not a factor. Though Polyeucte must be convinced to ignore his feelings for Pauline,

he is already prepared to accept the possibility that he may die for his faith since Roman law required that Christians be executed. For both male and female Christians, dying for God was the most glorious death possible and a certain means to salvation (Stegmann 589; Calvet 183). This is why, although Polyeucte is concerned for his wife's feelings, he is not afraid of her dream. As he explains,

Je méprise sa crainte, et je cède à ses larmes,  
Elle me fait pitié sans me donner d'alarmes,  
Et mon cœur, attendri, sans être intimidé,  
N'ose déplaire aux yeux dont il est possédé.

(I.i.17-20)

Therefore, although Polyeucte is not afraid of dying, his greatest fear is that of displeasing his wife.

What is unusual about *Théodore* is that, whereas most of Corneille's plays that show the negative effects of excessive love focus on romantic sentiments, in this play, he demonstrates that even excessive maternal love can be destructive. Although Marcelle is a hateful woman whom critics usually compare to Corneille's other "monstrous mothers", unlike them, her wish for her child's happiness is sincere and drives her to be one of the most passionate characters in Cornelian theater (Stegmann 595). She is unlike *Nicomède*'s Arisnoé who only wanted her son in power so that she could control him. Nevertheless, because Marcelle is so unlikable, Placide revels in flaunting his love for Théodore before her. As he explains to his friend Cléobule in the first scene of Act I,

Ce n'est point un secret que cette passion,  
Flavie au lit malade en meurt de jalousie,

Et dans l'âpre dépit dont sa mère est saisie,  
Elle tonne, foudroie, et pleine de fureur,  
Menace de tout perdre auprès de l'Empereur:  
Comme de ses faveurs, je ris de sa colère,  
[...]  
Je me plais à braver cet orgueilleux courage,  
Chaque jour pour l'aigrir je vais jusqu'à l'outrage;

(I.i.62-67; 71-72)

In this passage, Placide shows that he is aware that Marcelle's anger has led her to make threats, but he does not heed her warnings, just as *Suréna*'s Eurydice mistakenly does not believe that the Emperor will kill Suréna if he does not marry Mandane. Just as Eurydice was at least partially responsible for Suréna's death, Placide will be largely, if not wholly, responsible for Théodore's ultimate death because of his frivolous attitude concerning Marcelle's anger and desperation. For he not only does not believe her threats, he provokes her into acting on them. Her excessive motherly love and Placide's carelessness, therefore, will cause Marcelle to ask her husband to have Théodore killed so that Placide will lose hope of ever being with her.

Though Théodore is a virgin who has devoted herself entirely to God and has no interest in human love, she is an obstacle to Flavie's happiness because Placide loves her. Thus, explaining her intention of having Théodore killed to force Placide to abandon the idea of ever marrying her, Marcelle says to her *confidente* Stéphanie, "L'amour va rarement jusque dans un tombeau / S'unir au reste affreux de l'objet le plus beau" (I.iii.261-62). Even though she hopes that she can get Placide to accept Flavie by killing the object of his desire, she recognizes the possibility that her strategy may not work. Even so, Marcelle reveals her true, vengeful nature

by declaring that whether or not Placide marries Flavie, she would enjoy seeing Théodore die since she has been the obstacle to her daughter's happiness: "Quoi qu'il arrive enfin, de la sorte outragée / C'est un plaisir bien doux, que de se voir vengée" (I.iii.267-68). Though Théodore has not returned Placide's love, her mere existence causes Marcelle to hate her since Placide will not renounce his love for her and marry Flavie. So, while Polyeucte's human love for Pauline is the obstacle preventing him from being able to commit fully to his divine love for God, Théodore is the divine obstacle that is preventing Flavie from obtaining the human love that she desires from Placide.

Even though Polyeucte experiences a conflict between human love and divine love, Néarque helps him decide to commit fully to Christianity in spite of Pauline's concerns. Néarque also understands the danger that Pauline poses to Polyeucte's salvation because his love for her attaches him to the physical world. When she approaches, Néarque instructs him to flee:

Fuyez un ennemi qui sait votre défaut,  
Qui le trouve aisément, qui blesse par la vue,  
Et dont le coup mortel vous plaît, quand il vous tue.

(I.i.104-06)

Polyeucte's attachment to Pauline represents the only real danger that he encounters since her power over him could cause him to lose the courage to go to his baptism. If he were to miss this opportunity, he could die not physically, but spiritually. As Calvet says, "Ce n'est pas le danger de perdre la vie, c'est le danger de la conserver et de manquer la couronne du ciel" (149). Consequently, devotion to human love over divine love implies death.

Though Néarque will succeed in persuading Polyeucte to be baptized, the decision is ultimately Polyeucte's. As with all of Corneille's heroes and heroines, neither Polyeucte nor

Théodore are totally passive characters who simply allow themselves to be led to their martyrdom (Loukovitch 223; Lasserre 205). Aristotelian tragedies must portray heroes who exercise free will since they are intended to inspire spectators to either imitate or despise their actions (Sweetser 23). In addition, free will is not only a characteristic of the tragic hero, but it is also an essential element in conversion to Christianity. As Ackeroyd explains, “. . . man is fallen and shut out of God’s presence, but ‘whensoever a man shall turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away.’ (2Cor3:16). . . . [I]n the final analysis it will always be his soul, his own will and mind, which predominates” (35). In order to be converted, Polyeucte must choose of his own free will to become Christian despite his wife’s concern for his life. He must decide for himself between human love and divine love, and this is what he does when he follows Néarque’s advice and flees from Pauline. Just as Horace and Curiace fled from Sabine and Camille’s tears in order to retain the masculine aggressiveness they needed to fight one another, Polyeucte runs from Pauline in order to recuperate his courage, and with it, his masculinity, and follows Néarque to his baptism.

When a person chooses to become Christian, through baptism, he or she welcomes God’s grace into his or her life and thereby merits salvation (Loukovitch 224). By doing so, though, he or she is not controlled by God but is *helped* by His grace to overcome the obstacles to his or her salvation. As Sweetser explains, God gives Christians *enough* grace to help them decide on the proper course of action (23), and Polyeucte is aware of this. Before his conversion, when Néarque asks him how he expects to be able to face the torments that Christians must undergo since he cannot resist his wife’s tears, he declares, “Votre Dieu, que je n’ose encor nommer le mien, / m’en donnera la force en me faisant Chrétien” (I.i.91-92). He knows that God’s grace will help him overcome his fears once he is baptized. While Polyeucte had needed Néarque’s

help, or the help of another human, before his conversion to persuade him to choose divine love over human love, after his baptism, God's grace will give him the strength that he needs in order to do so.

Unlike Polyeucte, who converts during the course of the play, Théodore is already Christian from the beginning of her tragedy. As such, the effects of God's grace in her life are much less evident than in *Polyeucte*. She is already a good Christian from the start of the play and experiences only minimal psychological conflict. For this reason, she has been criticized by Loukovitch as being "trop chrétienne" (366-67), by Abraham as unheroic since she only rarely takes action (93), and by Baker as seeming like not much more than God's puppet (55). Her only concern is that she remain both physically and spiritually devoted to God since she is not only Christian but also considers herself to be married to God. Even though she has a double duty as a Christian and a spouse of God, because she has already been baptized and has the help of His grace, she has little difficulty in remaining loyal to them. *Théodore* is more baroque in nature than *Polyeucte*, which is very classical, largely because the hero experiences a great deal of psychological conflict. Baroque characters, however, typically do not (Fleock 243). Even so, like Polyeucte, Théodore has had to overcome her own conflict between human love and divine love, and God's grace has helped her to do so without overpowering her free will (Niderst 477). Explaining that she has consciously been avoiding Didyme, for whom she has feelings, she says,

Voilà, pour vous montrer mon âme tout nue,  
Ce qui m'a fait bannir Didyme de ma vue:  
Je crains d'en recevoir quelque coup d'œil fatal,  
Et chasse un ennemi dont je me défends mal.

(II.ii.403-06)

Just as Nérarque warns Polyeucte to flee from Pauline, the enemy who can cause his spiritual death, Théodore sees Didyme as her enemy and tries to avoid him for fear that he may cause her to fail in her duties by delivering to her a “coup d’œil fatal”. Like Polyeucte, though, she does not fear physical death, but a spiritual one. For she repeatedly requests that Marcelle send her to her death since, as she explains, “La mort n’a que douceur pour une âme chrétienne” (v. 586). But contrary to Polyeucte, she is able to neglect her human love fairly easily since she was baptized before the beginning of the play and is helped by His grace to remain faithful to her duties. Since she sees herself as married to God, if she were to give in to her feelings for Didyme, not knowing that he too is Christian and that she could love both him and God, she believes that she would be committing adultery. For her, therefore, physical death would be infinitely preferable to her failing in her duty as a spouse of God.

Only after Polyeucte is touched by God’s grace does he truly understand his duty as a Christian. Before his conversion, his only obligations were to the State and to his wife. Once he is baptized, though, his value system changes instantaneously, and he puts God above all else, including the preservation of his own life. Whereas before his conversion, he was rather indecisive and needed Nérarque to convince him to be baptized, once he is baptized, God’s grace inspires him not only to choose divine love over human love, but also to pursue *actively* his martyrdom. He wants to glorify Him through dying for his faith and to preserve the state of grace that he is in by dying immediately after having been touched by God. When Nérarque tries to convince him not to go to the temple and destroy the pagan altars since he will certainly be executed for it, Polyeucte explains that he wants to go since he knows that he will obtain not only his death but also his salvation by doing so:

Mais dans le Ciel déjà la palme est déjà préparée.

[...]

Mes crimes en vivant me la pourraient ôter.

Pourquoi mettre au hasard ce que la mort assure?

(II.vi.662; 664-65)

Just as Horace had wanted to die immediately after his victory in order to preserve his glory at its height, Polyeucte wants to preserve his faith at its strongest in order to guarantee his salvation by dying immediately after his conversion. As Prigent says, “Polyeucte ... doit mourir pour mettre sa gloire à l’abri du temps....La victoire sur la nature ne s’obtient plus en risquant sa vie mais en perdant sa vie” (Prigent 72-73). And while Horace gained glory through serving the State and earning public approval, for Polyeucte and Théodore as well, glory is personal and is to be earned by serving God, whether or not the public or the State approves. Thus, even though men owe their blood to the State, as explained in Chapter 4, Polyeucte will not renounce his faith to serve Rome. Although Pauline reminds him of his obligations to the state, he responds,

Je dois ma vie au Peuple, au Prince, à sa Couronne,

Mais je la dois bien plus au Dieu qui me la donne:

Si mourir pour son Prince est un illustre sort,

Quand on meurt pour son Dieu, quelle sera la mort?

(IV.iii.1211-14)

Since Polyeucte does acknowledge his debt to Rome and even admits that dying for Rome would be illustrious, his desire to die for God is not intended as an act of rebellion against the State but for the glory of God (Stegmann 589). Even though he does not particularly want to offend Rome, his refusal to save himself to serve the State demonstrates that he values God more; and,

even though Corneille normally portrays heroes who are admirable for putting the State above their own interests, he shows that loyalty to God should come before all else, even if it is at the cost of one's life.

Although Christian duty is of utmost importance for both Théodore and Polyeucte, for Pauline, conjugal and familial duty take precedence; for she, like most females in the seventeenth-century, was raised to sacrifice her own desires when they are in conflict with patriarchal values (Gibson 43; Greenberg 130). Though she had been in love with Sévère, who was neither politically powerful nor wealthy, she obeyed her father's wishes that she marry someone who would be politically more beneficial to him, making hers the first political marriage of Cornelian tragedy. He forced her to sacrifice her love to become the currency that he would use to buy political power. Thus, as Prigent says, "La féminité de Pauline subit les lois de la politique et l'ambition politicienne....[and] est devenue un enjeu de pouvoir" (107). Ironically, the political position that Félix acquired by her sacrifice would later put him in the situation of having to choose whether or not to execute her husband.

Even though Pauline had to make a tremendous sacrifice for her father's political career, she committed fully to her marriage to Polyeucte, falling in love with him because it was her duty to love her husband. As she says, "Je donnai par devoir à son [Polyeucte's] affection / Tout ce que l'autre avait par inclination" (I.iii.215-16). Even though Polyeucte was imposed on her by her father, she takes great pride in remaining loyal to him and is just as obsessed by her conjugal duty as Polyeucte is to his Christian duty (Schmidt 100). Even when Polyeucte rejects her for his faith, she tells Stratonice,

Je l'aimerais encor quand il m'aurait trahie,

Et si de tant d'amour tu peux être ébahie,

Apprends que mon devoir ne dépend point du sien,  
Qu'il y manque, s'il veut, je dois faire le mien.

(III.ii.793-96)

Likewise, even though her father tells her that Polyeucte is unworthy of her after his conversion, she will not renounce her love for him and hopelessly tries to convince her husband to disavow his faith. Because the spectators know that Polyeucte is doomed, they feel pity for Pauline because of her desperation, and terror for her in anticipation of Polyeucte's death. She is especially pitiful since the only reason she is on the verge of losing her husband is because she *was* an obedient daughter and gave up the man whom she truly loved in deference to her father's choice, and since Félix is responsible for applying the law, he is the one who will kill her husband even though she begs him to spare his life. Since neither Polyeucte nor her father is convinced to change his mind despite her pleas, Pauline finds herself alone and helpless, the victim of masculine politics and her own obedience (Prigent 111; Greenberg 127). The husband that she was ordered to love now prefers death to her, and her father prefers the security of maintaining his political position by executing Polyeucte to his daughter's happiness. Thus, as Prigent says, "Elle découvre que la politique prend sans jamais donner, qu'elle arrache l'héroïsme à ses sources—la nature et l'amour—pour l'abattre dès qu'il est affaibli....Elle a sacrifié le plus profond d'elle-même à son père puis à son mari. En vain... L'épreuve de la féminité mondaine s'achève dans un désastre" (111).

While Pauline's devotion to her husband brings her glory, Marcelle takes advantage of her husband's indebtedness to her as well as his fear of her brother, who is close to the emperor, to manipulate him. Knowing that Valens is now governor only because her brother gave him her hand in marriage, Marcelle uses his indebtedness to her to control him. Since Marcelle had

married Valens with the promise that Placide would marry her daughter, she reminds him of his marital promise as well as Placide's lack of respect for her and Flavie's desperate condition. She says,

Jusques à quand, Seigneur, voulez-vous qu'abusée  
Au mépris d'un ingrat je demeure exposée,  
Et qu'un fils arrogant sous votre autorité  
Outrage votre femme avec impunité?  
Sont-ce là les douceurs, sont-ce là les carresses,  
Qu'en faisaient à ma fille espérer vos promesses,  
Et faut-il qu'un amour conçu par votre aveu  
Lui coûte enfin la vie, et vous touche si peu?

(I.iv.275-82)

She tries to make him feel guilty for not keeping his promise to her and Flavie, implying that his inaction is the reason why Flavie is now dying of unrequited love. Declaring that she wants him to kill Théodore, she says, "[C]'est sa mort que je veux" (v. 314). Knowing that Valens cannot execute Théodore for personal reasons, she gives him the excuse that he needs to arrest her: she is Christian, and the Emperor demands that Christians be punished. Although Valens initially protests, Marcelle reminds him of her brother's political power. Since he is too intimidated by her brother to oppose him, he gives in. Consequently, since Valens has a legal excuse to arrest Théodore, he is willing to become a tyrant for her:

Sans en importuner l'autorité suprême,  
Si je vous suis suspecte, n'en croyez que vous-même,  
Agissez en ma place, et faites-la venir;

Quand vous la convaincrez, je saurai la punir,  
Et vous reconnaîtrez que dans le fond de l'âme  
Je prends comme je dois l'intérêt d'une femme.

(I.iv.327-32)

Just as Félix chooses to sacrifice his child's interests for his own self-preservation, Valens will do the same by punishing Théodore for Marcelle, even though his son is in love with her (Prigent 205). As Paulin says, "...[S]'il aime Placide, il redoute Marcelle / Il en sait le pouvoir, il en voit la fureur" (V.i.1496-97). Thus, even though Marcelle does not have any legal power, because of Valens's submissiveness, she is more powerful than he is.

Valens is too afraid of Marcelle's power to refuse to comply with her demands. He is a mere puppet that she manipulates in order to benefit her daughter who is dying because of her unrequited love. By having Valens dispose of Théodore, she intends to control his son as well. As Sweetser says,

[Placide] ne peut pas accepter d'épouser la fille de celle-ci, Flavie, car il aime Théodore. Il souffre de l'avilissement de son père, Valens, dont la position et l'autorité dépendent de Marcelle....[L]a belle-mère entend disposer de son beau-fils, non pour elle-même, mais pour sa fille dont la vie dépend de l'amour de Placide. (138)

If Placide were to renounce his love for Théodore and accept the political marriage arranged by his father, he could save her life. Nevertheless, he refuses to agree to marry Flavie in hopes that Théodore will some day return his love, even when he realizes that Marcelle has arrested her because of him. Though Corneille states in his *Examen* that Marcelle's desperate attempts to conclude Placide and Flavie's marriage are "capable de purger l'opiniâtreté à faire des mariages

par force” (272), as with Suréna, Placide’s refusal to renounce his love and agree to a political marriage shows the danger of excessive love since it will result in Théodore’s death.

While Valens is weak because he allows himself to be controlled by his wife, Félix is equally pathetic because all of his actions are determined by his fear of losing his position as governor. Once he arrests Polyeucte, he only knows that Sévère could have him removed from power, if he is not capable of carrying out the emperor’s order to kill all Christians. Félix’s decision to have Polyeucte executed is based on his fear of Sévère, who is now the emperor’s favorite, more than his desire to obey the law; for he does not want to kill Polyeucte since he is married to his daughter. Knowing the power that Sévère has over her father, Pauline asks him to speak to him on Polyeucte’s behalf:

Mon père est en état de vous accorder tout,  
Il vous craint, et j’avance encor cette parole,  
Que s’il perd mon époux, c’est à vous qu’il l’immole,  
Sauvez ce malheureux, employez-vous pour lui,

(IV.v.1350-53)

Even though Sévère does so out of love for Pauline, Félix believes that he is trying to trick him into disobeying the emperor’s orders and is only further reassured in his decision to kill Polyeucte. His insecurity, therefore, prevents him from recognizing the sincerity of Sévère’s request, even when his *confident* is convinced. When Félix tries to persuade Albin that Sévère is trying to trap him, Albin sees the true nature of both Sévère and the governor:

Je n’ai vu rien en lui qu’un rival généreux,  
Et ne vois rien en vous qu’un père rigoureux.

(V.i.1449-50)

Thus, even though Pauline has been the perfect, obedient daughter to Félix, he will once again betray her love by killing the very husband that he gave to her. His decision to protect his political position, even at the cost of his daughter's husband, renders him despicable, or, as Sévère says, a "père dénaturé" (v. 1747). She is again the victim of masculine politics since Polyeucte will be killed for political power.

Despite the fact that *Polyeucte* is a Christian tragedy, Pauline is one of the most feminine and most sexual characters in Cornelian tragedy (Prigent 110; Rohou 176). Just as Sabine and Camille attempted to use feminine tears to get Horace and Curiace not to fight, Pauline uses tears to try to get Félix to spare her husband's life and to try to convince Polyeucte to save his own life. As she tells Stratonice,

Avant qu'abandonner mon âme à mes douleurs,  
Il me faut essayer la force de mes pleurs,  
En qualité de femme, ou de fille, j'espère  
Qu'ils vaincront un époux, ou fléchiront un père;

(III.ii.815-18)

She will try to use tears to appeal to Félix's sense of fatherly love and to Polyeucte's sense of conjugal love. Speaking to her father, she begs for clemency on the part of "la bonté d'un père" (v. 873; v. 894); and even though Félix attempts to persuade Polyeucte to renounce his faith, he will not risk losing his political power to save him. As he says, "Je l'abandonne aux lois qu'il faut que je respecte" (v. 910).

When Pauline addresses Polyeucte, after realizing that she cannot use logic to convince him to save himself, she actually makes reference to her lost virginity, which she sacrificed to

him. Realizing that he would rather die for his faith than live with her, she feels very sexually undesirable:

Est-ce là ce beau feu? sont-ce là tes serments?

[...]

C'est donc là le dégoût qu'apporte l'Hyménée!

Je te suis odieuse après m'être donnée!

(IV.iii.1237; 1251-52)

As Prigent says, she expresses the idea that he is *physically* revolted by her after having given her body to him, which is one of the most explicit sexual references found in Cornelian tragedy: “Jamais encore une héroïne cornélienne n’avait eu l’audace d’évoquer en ces termes l’amour physique: la féminité est passée de la sensualité à la sexualité” (109-10). Only after she reminds him of her physical sacrifice does he confirm that he still loves her, but he also says that he loves God more. Her sexuality, therefore, evokes the notion of temptation, but his faith is strong enough to allow him to resist her charms. Her femininity, therefore, fails her both as a daughter and a wife, rendering her powerless to prevent her husband’s death. Contrarily, rather than allow himself to be tempted by his human love for Pauline, Polyeucte prays that she will become Christian and join him in divine love:

Mais si dans ce séjour de gloire et de lumière

Ce Dieu tout juste et bon peut souffrir ma prière,

S’il y daigne écouter un conjugal amour,

Sur votre [Pauline’s] aveuglement il répandra le jour.

(IV.iii.1263-66)

Because he still loves her, he wants her to be touched by God's grace so that she too may be martyred for God and attain eternal salvation. Since she is not willing to convert, though, he decides to separate himself from her since she represents his last tie to the physical world, and he will do this by offering her to Sévère (Schmidt 150; Prigent 75). As he tells her,

Vivez avec Sévère, ou mourez avec moi.

Je ne méprise point vos pleurs, ni votre foi,

Mais de quoi que pour vous notre amour m'entretienne,

Je ne vous connais plus, si vous n'êtes Chrétienne.

(V.iii.1609-12)

By offering to let Pauline marry Sévère, Polyeucte relieves himself of his conjugal obligations to her, even though she will not accept his proposal. The gesture itself frees Polyeucte to go to his death with a clear conscience and thinking only of the glory that he will receive in dying for God, not of his wife whom he is leaving behind.

Pauline's identity is inextricably linked to her gender role as daughter and wife, especially since she sacrificed her personal desires to her father and married Polyeucte for the benefit of masculine politics (Schmidt 100; Greenberg 127-28). Théodore, however, rejects all worldly gender-based identities in favor of her devotion to God (Baker 55; 57). She will nevertheless become a victim of her femininity because Placide does not see her as sexless, and her determination to remain faithful to God and be chaste leaves her vulnerable to suffering.

Théodore recognizes that, even though she is being arrested supposedly because she is Christian, the real reason is that Placide loves her. But because his love gives her the opportunity to die in the name of her faith, she welcomes her punishment. Encouraging Marcelle to avenge herself, she tells her,

Armez-vous à ma perte, éclatez, vengez-vous,  
Par ma mort à Flavie assurez un époux,  
Et noyez dans ce sang, dont vous êtes avide,  
Et le mal qui la tue, et l'amour de Placide.

(II.iv.569-72)

Like Polyeucte, Théodore aspires to become a martyr, and even though her religion is nothing more than an excuse to kill her, she still sees her death as the means by which she will triumph and obtain glory just as Polyeucte does (vv. 575-76).

Though Théodore is happy to allow herself to be martyred for Placide's love, Valens convinces Marcelle that this would only make Placide angry and would not help her win his love for Flavie. Instead, he proposes to make Théodore unworthy of him by prostituting her to soil her virtue. This is what renders Théodore so tragic, not her martyrdom, because she would prefer death to prostitution, especially since she has committed herself both spiritually *and* physically to God. As Valens says, Théodore "voudrait de mille morts racheter cette peine" (v. 668). Though she is given the choice of either renouncing her faith or being prostituted, neither option will allow her to remain loyal to her duties as a Christian or virginal bride of God (Sweetser 141). Since she was saving her virginity to remain worthy of God, being prostituted would make her commit adultery, and by renouncing her faith, she would commit blasphemy. Lamenting her choice, she says,

Et quel choix voulez-vous qu'une Chrétienne fasse,  
Réduite à balancer son esprit agité  
Entre l'idolâtrie et l'impudicité?

(III.i.768-70)

Because Théodore finds herself trapped in a situation which forces her to sacrifice one of her two duties, the spectator not only pities her but also fears for her destiny (Sweetser 141). Realizing that God will not punish her for being forced to violate one of her duties, though, she refuses either option:

Reprenez votre grâce, et choisissez vous-mêmes,  
Quiconque peut choisir consent à l'un des deux,  
Et le consentement est seule lâche et honteux.  
Dieu tout juste et tout bon, qui lit dans nos pensées,  
N'impute point de crime aux actions forcées.  
Soit que vous contraigniez pour vos Dieux impuissants,  
Mon corps à l'infamie, ou ma main à l'encens,  
Je saurai conserver d'une âme résolue,  
À l'époux sans macule, une épouse impollue.

(III.i.772-80)

By refusing to choose, she remains innocent since she does not willingly consent to dishonor her commitment to her duties. And though she knows that her body will be subject to the infamy that Marcelle and Valens impose on her, her soul will remain pure. Even so, the spectator still pities Théodore since she is denied the martyrdom that she truly desires and must undergo the physical and psychological duress of being prostituted. Her suffering, therefore, is due to the fact that she is unable to escape her corporal existence (Doubrovsky 284-87; Prigent 199). As Doubrovsky says, "Le scandale, c'est que le corps soit *prostituable*... La virginité prostituable, c'est le héros devenu, malgré son courage et sa préparation à la mort, radicalement *vulnérable*, dans la mesure où il est existence physique" (284). By depriving Théodore of her martyrdom

and forcing her into prostitution, Marcelle and Valens force her to take on a sexual identity, which she had previously always rejected, and condemn her body to oppose the spiritual duties with which she had come to identify herself. She is forced to acknowledge her femininity and the vulnerability of the physical body to which she is confined.

Rather than remaining passive as she had been when she believed that she was going to be martyred, Théodore begins actively to seek death in order to escape her physical self, even going so far as to ask Placide for his sword—which he does not give to her— so that she may kill herself (Doubrovsky 284; Baker 55). Her suicide will prove unnecessary, though, when Didyme, who is also Christian, saves her from the brothel by taking her place. Knowing that he will be killed for freeing Théodore, he hopes not only to save her virtue, but also to obtain his own martyrdom. Just as Théodore was willing to be martyred for Placide's love, Didyme consents to become a martyr for her virginity (v. 1442). Her femininity, therefore, is the catalyst for both of their eventual martyrdoms.

While Marcelle's daughter was still alive, she had spared Théodore's life so as not to anger Placide in hopes that he would one day agree to marry Flavie, but once she dies, Marcelle's motherly love drives her to avenge her daughter. Since both Didyme and Théodore want to be martyred, though, they argue over the right to claim responsibility for causing Flavie's death and show no sympathy for Marcelle's loss. Angered by their lack of compassion, she blames them both:

O couple de ma perte également coupable,  
Sacrilèges auteurs du malheur qui m'accable,  
Qui dans ce vain débat vous vantez à l'envie,

Lorsque j'ai tout perdu, de me l'avoir ravi.

(V.vi.1666-70)

Having “tout perdu,” therefore, her violence explodes in one of the most gruesome endings of Cornelian tragedy when she simultaneously stabs Didyme and Théodore, and, having no other reason to live, kills herself. As Rohou says, explaining the motivation behind Corneille's vengeful women, including Marcelle and *Rodogune's* Cléopâtre, “Leur passion procède d'une frustration qui n'est pas seulement celle de l'ambition, mais celle de l'être privé de la valeur qui avait été sa raison d'être. Leur violence est aussi masochisme frénétique, que comblera le suicide” (183). While Cléopâtre's desire for vengeance and suicide were based on her refusal to live *without* her political identity, Marcelle's vengeance was due to the hatred caused by her excessive motherly love. Marcelle commits suicide because she refuses to accept a *purely* political identity as the governor's wife, since she can no longer use her position to benefit her daughter. Just as Cléopâtre considered her suicide a victory over her loss of power, though, Marcelle dies triumphantly, knowing that she has killed those responsible for her daughter's death and has caused Placide to suffer:

[...] triomphante entre ces deux mourants [Théodore and Didyme],

Marcelle les contemple à ses pieds expirants,

Jouit de sa vengeance, et d'un regard avide

En cherche les douceurs jusqu'au cœur de Placide;

(V.viii.1817-20)

In both *Polyeucte* and *Théodore*, one person's death causes a series of events which are the culmination of each tragedy. Whereas in *Théodore*, Flavie's death provokes Marcelle's murderous rampage, in *Polyeucte*, the hero's martyrdom is the catalyst for Pauline's and Félix's

miraculous conversions to Christianity, beginning with Pauline's. Describing her conversion, she says to her father,

Père barbare, achève, achève ton ouvrage,  
Cette seconde hostie est digne de ta rage,  
[...]  
Mon époux en mourant m'a laissé ses lumières,  
Son sang dont tes bourreaux viennent de me couvrir  
M'a dessillé les yeux, et me les vient d'ouvrir.

(V.v.1719-20; 1724-26)

Polyeucte, therefore, becomes a Christic figure in that his death and his spilt blood bring salvation to those whom he leaves behind (Baker 54; Carlin 68). He becomes the intermediary through whom Pauline receives God's grace. Knowing that her husband can now love her as a Christian, she can follow him in death and be with him: "Polyeucte m'appelle à cet heureux trépas" (v. 1733). His sacrifice, therefore, leads to her conversion and brings about the unification of human love and divine love<sup>2</sup>.

Because of Polyeucte's execution, Pauline rebels for the first time against the patriarchy, stepping out of her role as obedient daughter and declaring her independence (Schmidt 55; Greenberg 143). As Schmidt says, "She is finally untouchable as far as Félix's authority over her is concerned" (55). She becomes as obsessed with becoming a martyr herself as Polyeucte had been and, disgusted with her father, tries to provoke him into killing her by proclaiming her disobedience (vv. 1735-40).

Though Pauline first announces her newfound faith, Félix ultimately claims that he too has been converted. Félix's conversion, though, is more than somewhat dubious, especially

since it occurs after Sévère not only chastises him for his heartlessness but also implies that he will return to avenge Polyeucte: “Adieu, mais quand l’orage éclatera sur vous, / Ne doutez point du bras dont partiront les coups” (V.vi.1761-62). Given Félix’s cowardliness, it is doubtful that his conversion is sincere. All of his actions before this moment have been motivated by his fear of Sévère’s ability to have him removed from power, and when he finally realizes that Sévère sympathized with Polyeucte and Pauline, he understands that he had indeed become the enemy for enforcing the law. He then suddenly proclaims that he too has been converted, which appeases Sévère, since he now supports the cause for which Polyeucte had died and Pauline was willing to die and claims that he too would be willing to be martyred for their cause. By declaring himself Christian, therefore, he becomes one of the “good guys” and saves himself from Sévère’s wrath.

Even if Félix’s conversion is not sincere, it serves the purpose of allowing Polyeucte’s death to reestablish social order. While initially, Polyeucte’s death empowers Pauline to reject patriarchal values in favor of Christian salvation, once Félix reveals that he too has been converted, she again accepts her role as daughter: “Qu’heureusement enfin je retrouve mon père!” (v. 1784). Her own conversion allows her to reunite with her husband, whereas Félix’s allows her to forgive him for killing her husband and accept him again as her father. As Prigent says, “Pauline aime son père et son mari en Dieu. Elle se retrouve fille et femme en Dieu” (112). Since Polyeucte’s death supposedly converts *both* Pauline and Félix and allows them to maintain a somewhat normal father-daughter relationship, a new, Christian patriarchy is formed; and although Sévère does not convert himself, since he witnessed the strength of the Christians who were willing to die for their faith, he promises to protect their sect, suggesting the future success of Christianity (Carlin 44; 70).

While *Polyeucte* ends optimistically and implies hope for the future, such is not the case with *Théodore*. *Théodore* ends in a veritable bloodbath, with not only the Christians' and Marcelle's deaths, but also the implied suicide of Placide. Since Valens could have protected Théodore if he had been stronger and not afraid of Marcelle, Placide blames him for her death. To punish his father while sparing himself the shame of parricide (Sweetser 139, 141), he stabs himself and says to Valens,

Pour ne point violer les droits de la naissance  
Il fallait que mon bras s'en mît dans l'impuissance,  
[...]  
Et je me suis puni, de peur de te punir.  
  
Je te punis pourtant, c'est ton sang que je verse,  
Si tu m'aimes encor, c'est ton sein que je perce,

(V.ix.1867-68; 1870-73)

Because of Valens's refusal to defy Marcelle and try to prevent Théodore's death, Placide realizes that his father has been more concerned for his own political well-being than for his son's happiness. Her death leads him to become disillusioned and to realize that Marcelle had been right in claiming that Valens and Placide both owed their political standing to her (Greenberg 142). As she had said, "...[J]'ai fait ce que sont, et le père, et le fils" (v. 174). Without her support, Valens had been incapable of acting for himself, and his weakness results in the destruction of the society that he was supposed to have governed as well as the death of his loved ones.

*Théodore* and *Polyeucte* both portrayed characters who were helped by God's grace not only to be unafraid of death, but also to aspire to it because of their belief in salvation and eternal

life through martyrdom. None of Corneille's other plays feature the idea of hope for life after death so prominently as his Christian tragedies; generally, death is portrayed positively in his other plays only if it can be used to obtain earthly glory. While Corneille uses the divine in his Christian tragedies to show how God helps people overcome the obstacles to their salvation, in his mythological plays, he uses the seemingly limitless power of the gods over human life to evoke terror and pity and to show that everyone is able to determine his or her own destiny, no matter how hopeless the situation may appear.

Because Corneille's *Œdipe*, *Médée*, and *Andromède* are based on well-known Greek myths, it is not necessary to analyze them in great detail, but it is most interesting to show how Corneille's interpretation of them differs from other versions of them. While he was generally faithful to the original myths with his interpretations of *Médée* and *Andromède*, he drastically changed *Œdipe* by creating Dircé, Œdipe's sister and the daughter of the deceased king Laïus, and by giving her a love interest. As stated earlier, Corneille considers love to be an essential part of tragedy since it contributes to a play's ability to please the spectator, and the original myth did not contain a love theme. Although the threat of imminent death serves to create a general atmosphere of terror in each of Corneille's mythological tragedies, he uses both parental love and romantic love to inspire the spectator to feel both terror and pity in all of them.

While the gods themselves do not appear in *Œdipe*, in this play as well as *Andromède*, death seems inevitable because people are convinced that they must sacrifice one person's life in order to appease the gods and save their society. Corneille evokes terror in both of these plays by having parents and lovers fear for the life of the potential victim; and because death seems unavoidable, both of these plays generate an atmosphere of hopelessness, which causes the spectator to feel pity as well. As with *Polyeucte* and *Théodore*, though, the potential victims

themselves willingly accept the idea of their death, making them less pitiable than their loved ones who lament over their loss.

While Andromède is chosen to be sacrificed, Dircé volunteers to be killed. Even though Andromède does not choose to be martyred, she and Dircé are both willing to die for the good of their society. All of Corneille's mythological plays, including *Médée*, portray women who are admirable because they do not allow themselves to be passive victims of destiny. Instead, Andromède and Dircé appreciate the opportunity to be martyred to benefit society, and Médée chooses to rebel against society by committing murder. All of these heroines are self-determining, and they are generally more courageous and independent than the men who love or used to love them (Abraham 116). Because they choose action rather than passiveness, as do most of the men, they are the ones to imitate.

Dircé and Andromède share conventionally masculine values because their foremost reason for accepting their death is political. Andromède's willingness to sacrifice herself is a move of pure generosity since she knows the town is being punished because the gods are jealous of her beauty. Dircé's primary interest in dying, however, is due to her personal ambition as seen through her repeated references to her *gloire* (115; Prigent 374). Reflecting her commitment to masculine values, she wants to earn the glory of being the one to free Thèbes from the curse that is plaguing its people since she has been denied her right to rule over them. Because Œdipe was the only male heir to Laïus's throne and is supposed to have died as a baby, Dircé was believed to have been the king's only legitimate heir. When he was killed, she should have become queen, but because Œdipe married her mother, he willfully took the crown that was rightfully hers, making him a tyrant (Abraham 116; Doubrovsky 339, 340). Because Œdipe deprived her of the glory of ruling over Thèbes, she wants what she can earn by sacrificing her

life for its people. When Thésée asks her what she intends to do, she implies that she should be the legitimate queen and says, “Finir les maux publics, obéir à mon père [Laïus], / Sauver tous *mes sujets*” (vv. 680-81 emphasis mine).

The importance of romantic love in Corneille’s *Œdipe* cannot be overstated; for Dircé’s desire for glory is in conflict with her love for Thésée (Abraham 115). Though she is committed to sacrificing her life for her country, she regrets the idea of losing Thésée:

Impitoyable soif de gloire,  
Dont l’aveugle, et noble transport  
Me fait précipiter ma mort,  
Pour faire vivre ma mémoire;  
Arrête pour quelques moments

[...]

Et souffre qu’en ce triste, et favorable jour,  
Avant que te donner ma vie,  
Je donne un soupir à l’amour.

(III.i.779-82; 86-88)

Even though she regrets losing Thésée, she shows her commitment to the male ethic and prefers a glorious death for Thèbes to living to save her love.

When Thésée suggests that he commit suicide after her death, she rebukes him for considering doing so. Instructing him on masculine values, she tells him that women can rightfully die for love but that men are to have more control over their emotions.

Oserai-je, Seigneur, vous dire hautement,  
Qu’un tel excès d’amour n’est pas d’un tel Amant?

S'il est vertu pour nous [women], que le Ciel n'a formées  
Que pour le doux emploi d'aimer, et d'être aimées,  
Il faut qu'en vos pareils [men], les belles passions  
Ne soient que l'ornement des grandes actions.  
Ces hauts emportements, qu'un beau feu leur inspire,  
Doivent les élever, et non pas les détruire [...]

(I.i.63-71)

Thus, men should only allow their love to help them accomplish noble actions, just as Rodrigue was inspired to greatness by his desire to deserve Chimène in *Le Cid*. Nevertheless, because Thésée can only wait for his beloved to be sacrificed and would prefer to die as well, spectators cannot help but pity him.

Despite Thésée and Dircé's tribulations, the most pitiful character in *Œdipe* is Jocaste. As Louvat explains, by postponing the revelation of Œdipe's true identity, Corneille brings out the pathetic in Jocaste's situation by having her suffer first as a mother, then as a wife, and then as both (xxxix). When Dircé is chosen to be Thèbes's sacrificial victim, she is tormented by her motherly love since she anticipates losing her daughter. Shortly after Dircé is absolved, she finds herself in the same position again since she believes Thésée is her son, and now he is to be killed. Later, she is convinced that even though Thésée is her son, her current husband, Œdipe, killed Laïus, to whom she had first been married. She therefore experiences a veritable emotional roller coaster ride even before Œdipe's real identity is exposed. Once the truth is revealed, though, she will not be able to cope with her own feelings of guilt and shame and kills herself (Sweetser 190). Refusing to recognize Œdipe as both son and husband, she only acknowledges her daughter as she is dying. As Nérine explains to Dircé,

Son âme en s'envolant, jalouse de sa gloire,  
Craignait d'en emporter la honteuse mémoire,  
Et n'osant le nommer son fils, ni son époux,  
Sa dernière tendresse a toute été pour vous.

(V.viii.1949-52)

Because Jocaste sent Œdipe away in an attempt to avoid realizing the gods' predictions, she feels guilty for having caused everyone's misfortune. Hoping to escape her shame and preserve the glory she had obtained through living what she had believed to be a virtuous life, she kills herself without acknowledging her relationship as both mother and wife of Œdipe. Œdipe himself, however, will deal with the situation differently.

Unlike Jocaste or the Oedipus portrayed by Sophocles and Seneca, Corneille's Œdipe does not accept his guilt (Carlin 108). Though he becomes disillusioned and realizes that all of his supposedly noble actions had in fact been crimes, rather than blame himself, he holds the gods responsible for having led him to commit parricide, regicide, and incest, and proclaims his own innocence. Since he had been enticed into all of his wrongdoings by what were supposedly opportunities for public glory that the gods had presented to him, he blinds himself to never again be a victim of their manipulation (vv. 1991-94). Unlike Jocaste, therefore, he does not kill himself since he knows that he is not guilty of voluntary wrongdoing, and he refuses to allow himself to continue to be victimized by the gods through his blinding (Carlin 109). Likewise, when he voluntarily sacrifices his eyes in a declaration of his own free will, he also proclaims the freedom from the gods' control for all of Thèbes:

‘Prévenons, a-t-il dit, l'injustice des Dieux,  
[...]

Ne voyons plus le Ciel après sa cruauté,  
Pour nous venger de lui, dédaignons sa clarté,  
Refusons-lui nos yeux, et gardons quelque vie  
Qui montre encore à tous quelle est sa tyrannie.'

(V.ix.1988; 1991-94)

As shown through his use of "nous," he sacrifices his eyes not only to earn his own freedom, but also that of his people. And although Sweetser says that the gods would have accepted Jocaste as their sacrificial victim and that Œdipe's blinding was not necessary (190), as Louvat observes, it was Œdipe's gesture that not only caused the plague to stop but also brought about miracles (xxxii). In an ending that recalls the Christian belief in Jesus's sacrifice for mankind,

Ce sang si précieux touche à peine la terre,  
Que le courroux du Ciel ne leur fait plus la guerre,  
Et trois mourants, guéris au milieu du Palais,  
De sa part tout d'un coup nous annonce la paix.

(V.ix.1997-2000)

Thus, while Christianity proclaims that Jesus was both God (the Father) and the Son of God and that his death as both brought about mankind's salvation, Œdipe's rejection of death as both husband and son of Jocaste and his declaration of innocence and self-determination saves his people. By blinding himself for the public good and by reclaiming his heritage as Laius's son, he is no longer a tyrant, but a legitimate king. As Carlin says, "When Œdipe at last assumes his burden in act 5, scene 5, he transforms it into heroism. The gods have given him the opportunity to save his people...but his virtues are his own creation, and owe nothing to any deity" (109).

Just as Jocaste sees herself as responsible for fulfilling the oracle's predictions, Andromède's mother, Cassiope knows that she is to blame for angering the gods because of her vanity over her daughter's beauty. While she had previously accepted the gods' demands of a sacrificial female of their choosing, now that her own daughter has been chosen, she futilely tries to convince them to take vengeance on her rather than her daughter. Cassiope's desperation as a mother who must witness her daughter's gruesome death because of her own pride makes the spectator feel sorry for her, and although Andromède herself is a willing victim whose only regret is that her death separates her from her beloved Phinée, she is pitiable because she is a mere victim of her mother's vanity (Sweetser 166).

Phinée himself comes across as more pathetic than pitiable because he is unwilling to even attempt to save Andromède through any action of his own and does nothing but cry and lament over the possibility of losing her. After Persée saves Andromède from being devoured, therefore, she criticizes Phinée for his cowardice.

Vous avez donc pour moi daigné verser des larmes!

Lorsque pour me défendre un autre a pris les armes?

Et dedans mon péril vos sentiments ingrats

S'amusaient à des vœux, quand il fallait des bras?

(IV.iii.1214-17)

Even though she knows that he may have died trying to save her, he could have died gloriously *with* her and proven his love to her. His complete lack of courage, though, made him both unmanly and unworthy of Andromède, especially since she was courageous enough to be willing to sacrifice her own life for the public good. His decision to accept destiny passively made him

reprehensible since he was unwilling to fight for his beloved's life even though the circumstances were grim.

While both *Œdipe* and *Andromède* focus on the influence of the gods on humans, *Médée* concentrates on the goddess's evolution as a divinity in a terrestrial environment. Though the basic plot of Corneille's *Médée* does not vary tremendously from those of Euripides and Seneca, which were discussed in detail in chapter 2, his version nevertheless emphasizes politics, Médée's divine nature, and Jason's own guilt much more than the others. Nevertheless, like Euripides's heroine, Corneille portrays Médée as a victim who is to be pitied because of her husband's infidelity even though her actions are heinous. Corneille, however, stresses the sacrifices that Médée had to make as a goddess in order to stay with Jason as well as her recuperation of her divine nature once he has betrayed her (Abraham 52).

Not only did Médée leave her own family against her father's will, she also surrendered her powers to be with Jason since Créon would take the couple into his protection in Corinth only if she agreed to do so. When she is banished from Corinth as a part of a truce between Créon and Acaste, though Jason claims that he is being forced into a political marriage for Médée's and his children's protection, she knows that this is nothing more than an excuse. Médée warns him, though, that her power alone renders her more dangerous than both Créon and Acaste.

Qui me résistera si je te veux punir?

Déloyal, auprès d'eux crains-tu si peu Médée?

[...]

En moi seule ils n'auront que trop forte partie.

Bornes-tu mon pouvoir à celui des humains?

(III.iii.907-08; 914-15)

Jason's mistake is that he chooses to be disloyal to his vow to Médée even though she has sacrificed everything for him, and, as Abraham says, he, Créon and Créuse are all being "stupid" since they know that Médée's supernatural powers and her willingness to kill make her very dangerous (52). Their own selfishness drives them to act irrationally and provoke Médée's anger, for which they will suffer dearly.

Contrary to Euripides's and Seneca's tragedies, Créon's actions in Corneille's play are motivated not only by political interest, but also by his fatherly love since he wants to satisfy his daughter's passions. When Jason enters Corinth, therefore, he inspires both Créon and Créuse to desire him. As he tells Pollux,

[...] mon bonheur ordinaire

M'acquiert les volontés de la fille et du père,

Si bien que de tous deux également chéri,

L'un me veut pour son gendre, et l'autre pour mari.

(I.i.105-08)

Since Créon can benefit politically from Jason's marriage to his daughter and she desires him physically, as Greenberg says, "Jason joins the sexual to the political, making them inseparable" (29). Their joint mistake in trying to satisfy their desires is rendered even more evident through their common death.

Rather than joining Jason through marriage, Créuse and her father are united in death because of Créuse's criminal desire for a man who was already married and Créon's approval of it. As they are dying, Créuse confesses her guilt in trying to satisfy her amorous desires referring

to her “souhais imprudents” and her “indiscrète envie.” Likewise, Créon admits that as her father, he should have refused her marriage to Jason. As he says, “Si ton jeune désir eut beaucoup d'imprudence, / Ma fille, j'y devais opposer ma défense” (vv. 1409-10). Consummating their mutual crime, therefore, they die together as lovers more than as father and daughter, showing their equal guilt of excessive and selfish desire. Speaking to her father, Créuse says,

Monsieur, et si pour moi quelque amour vous demeure,  
Entre vos bras mourants permettez que je meure,  
Mes pleurs arrouseront vos mortels déplaisirs,  
Je mêlerai leurs eaux à vos brûlants soupirs.  
Ah! je brûle, je meurs, je ne suis plus que flamme [...]

(V.iii.1433-38)

Even in death, therefore, desire consumes them, just as it did when they chose to neglect the danger of offending Médée. Créon had underestimated her power since he had said to Pollux concerning the amount of time that Médée was given to prepare before she was banished, “Mais en si peu de temps que peut faire une femme?” (v. 1118). Though Pollux reminded him that Médée is not actually *une femme* by replying, “C’est peu pour une femme, et beaucoup pour son art” (v. 1120), Créon’s personal interests and those of his daughter caused him to act imprudently. By killing them both, though, Médée refused to allow herself to be martyred for either masculine politics or for feminine sexual desire.

When Médée renounced her powers for Jason, she sacrificed her divine identity in favor of a human identity as a wife and mother. As such, she allowed herself to become assimilated into the patriarchal system under which Jason lived (Greenberg 16-36). Though she had

willingly given up her powers, she was conscious of the sacrifices that she had made for him. Explaining that she will not kill him, she says, “Jason m’a trop coûté pour le vouloir détruire” (v. 354). As explained in chapter 2 with Euripides’s and Seneca’s *Medea*, Corneille’s heroine realizes that she can avenge herself by killing Jason’s children, whom he loves, and that she can simultaneously destroy his lineage (Greenberg 20; Goodkin 47); yet their deaths serve another purpose in Corneille’s version. When Jason betrays her, she will in turn reject her human identity since she had adopted it only for him. To do so, she must separate herself from her earthly ties. Since Jason has already rejected her as his wife, her only attachment to the human world is now her children. To liberate herself from her role as “mother” and completely recover her divine identity, she must kill them even though she still loves them (Greenberg 34; Goodkin 49). As Abraham suggests, not only will she separate herself from her earthly ties by killing them, she will ensure that her progeny are not contaminated by humans as she herself has been by destroying them (53). Stating that she will not allow her children to be mixed with Créuse’s, she declares,

Faut-il ce déshonneur pour comble à mes misères

Qu’à mes enfants Créuse enfin des frères?

[...]

Je l’empêcherai bien, ce mélange odieux,

Qui déshonore ensemble et ma race et les Dieux.

(III.iii.885-86; 891-82)

Though Médée intends to kill Créuse, she does not want her children to be raised by any human beings because she is proud of her heritage. Since she had betrayed her own family for a mere man, her refusal to allow her children to be raised among humans once again symbolizes her

rejection of the earthly life that she had previously favored. She will refuse her role as mother to purify her divine self and her race by killing the offspring that resulted from her forbidden love for a human (53).

In summary, Corneille's Christian plays show how men and women maintain free will but are helped by God's grace to overcome obstacles to their salvation. His mythical plays, however, use divinities to imply that, although people may believe that they cannot control their own destiny, this is not the case. In *Polyeucte* and *Théodore*, Corneille not only demonstrates the efficacy of God's grace that allows Christians to make sacrifices for their faith, including their worldly possessions and even their own lives, but also he shows that Christians must choose to serve God above all else. Corneille's secular tragedies imply that men must be willing to sacrifice their lives for the good of the State, even at the cost of a loved one, and that women must be loyal first to their husbands and then to their family before acting on their own desires. His Christian tragedies, however, demonstrate that both men and women should devote themselves to God first and even neglect their other duties if they are in conflict with Christian values.

Though *Polyeucte* and *Théodore* are both Christian tragedies, Corneille has added a secular plot centered on human love to each in order to stimulate their dramatic interest. In *Théodore*, Marcelle's motherly love drives her to kill Théodore, whose only function in the secular drama is that she is the obstacle to her daughter's marriage to Placide. Théodore's martyrdom, therefore, is only the result of Marcelle's vengeance. In *Polyeucte*, Félix's fear of losing his political position causes him to ignore his fatherly love and to execute his daughter's husband because he is Christian. Human love plays a much more significant role in this tragedy

than in *Théodore*, though, because Polyeucte must overcome his own attachment to his wife in order to devote himself to God, even though his commitment to his faith will result in his death.

Unlike his Christian tragedies, Corneille's *Andromède* and *Cédipe* use the threat of imminent death to create an atmosphere of hopelessness and to cause the spectators to feel terror and pity. Ironically, although males are usually associated with bravery in the face of death, both of these plays show females who are more courageous than men when it appears that they are going to die. While men generally risk their lives for the good of the State by confronting death on the battlefield, both *Andromède* and *Dircé* are willing to die for the public good in a less aggressive manner by allowing themselves to be sacrificed to the gods. Likewise *Andromède* and *Dircé* are admirable for their bravery primarily because of their willingness to confront death. Corneille portrays the men who love them as less respectable since they consider themselves powerless against the gods and talk of committing suicide after their beloved's death—which is an ignoble way for a man to die. Those men who act and confront the gods, such as *Persée* and *Cédipe*, are admirable because they are not passive victims, and the latter's refusal to commit suicide is his form of victory over the gods though he has committed incest, parricide, and regicide. Just as *Andromède* and *Cédipe* demonstrate self-determination in spite of one's circumstances, *Médée* also shows a heroine who refuses to let herself be victimized. Since she was a goddess who had compromised her divine nature for her love of a human, when he betrays her, she not only avenges herself, but also severs herself from her human identity by killing their offspring. By rejecting motherhood, she recovers her divine identity and is no longer a victim.

In conclusion, since Christians desire their martyrdom and are helped by God's grace not to fear death, Corneille incorporated a secular drama based on human love into his Christian

tragedies to help them evoke terror and pity. The source of the love in both *Polyeucte* and *Théodore* is feminine sexuality, even though Théodore does not wish to have a sexual identity since she wants to remain a virgin for God. Because Placide desires her, though, she will be the victim of feminine jealousy and vengeance. In *Polyeucte*, however, Pauline will be a source of temptation for her Christian husband. More importantly, because Pauline sacrificed her true love for him, the spectators feel pity for her and fear for her loss. Corneille's mythological tragedies, though, evoke terror and pity by suggesting that death is inevitable since the gods have been angered. With the exception of *Œdipe*, the females in them are generally shown as more courageous than the males since they choose to act rather than be passive victims of destiny, even in the face of death. In *Andromède* and *Œdipe*, characters must decide whether or not to allow themselves to be victims of the gods' will, and those who passively accept fate are shown as weak. This is especially true for males, who are supposed to be courageous in the face of danger. Women provide examples for the males since even they, the conventionally weaker sex, are able to confront the danger posed by the gods in order to benefit the state. When the men are unwilling to risk their own life, though, they are shown as being cowardly and are criticized by females. Whereas humans acknowledge the danger that they are in in *Andromède* and *Œdipe*, in *Médée*, Jason carelessly ignores the risk that he is taking by betraying his sorceress wife. This play shows death as the consequence for Jason's carelessness in choosing his own interests over his conjugal duty; and Médée herself chooses to reject her human identity and to return to a wholly divine state by killing her half-human children. Despite their differences, all of these mythological plays show that individuals are responsible for their own actions.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Lasserre 192; Calvet 56; Clarke 239

<sup>2</sup> Sweetser 123-24; Abraham 75; Lasserre 191

## CONCLUSION

Though Corneille's tragedies illustrate the values of a typical patriarchal society, his works are innovative in their use of death to present spectators with gender-specific models of behavior to either imitate or reject according to his own and seventeenth-century France's view of gender roles. While all the dramatists discussed in this dissertation show differences in masculine and feminine death, Corneille maintains these differences as a result of his characters' acting in accordance or in conflict with the patriarchal code. He uses death, therefore, not only to evoke terror and pity, as do all writers of Aristotelian tragedies, but also as a punishment for opposing the masculine ethic to try to teach his spectators the importance of behaving according to their gender role. His contemporaries, however, mainly exploit death simply its ability to provoke the spectator to feel terror and pity even though they do use it to give a negative impression of males who cannot control their physical desires. Contrary to Cornelian tragedy, ancient Greek tragedy most often portrays death to illustrate the positive qualities of females who are willing to sacrifice their lives for masculine values. Even so, Greek tragedy also occasionally shows women performing heinous acts of violence to avenge themselves of a wrong that they have suffered. Like Corneille, though, ancient Greek dramatists sympathize with females such as Medea who, in spite of their horrendous crimes, are themselves victims of masculine society. Roman tragedies such as Sénèque's *Medea*, however, are more like sixteenth-century French tragedies in that they imply that women who do not accept their secondary role in society do not merit sympathy and instead deserve whatever negative consequences they receive for their

misconduct. Like Sénèque, Renaissance dramatists tried to provoke strong emotions through their portrayal of extreme behavior. Their works represent women who are completely despicable, others who are exceptionally pitiable, and tyrants who are excessively cruel in order to show the dangers of letting passion dominate reason. Sixteenth-century French tragedy uses death to illustrate this theme in general, and frequently, those who cause suffering are not punished. Though some of Corneille's tragedies deal with the dangers of allowing oneself to be dominated by one's passions as well, he primarily uses death to insist upon the importance of conforming to one's gender role since those who do not conform usually die or provoke the death of someone they love.

Because the king is the most important public figure in any aristocratic society, dramatists from each of the aforementioned periods habitually placed kings in central roles in their works. Corneille addresses the question of the nature of the king in his tragedies by providing his spectators with models of both good kings and tyrants. Whether he showed tyrants behaving cruelly or good kings performing magnanimous acts, his works always suggest that kings are to act only in the best interest of the State, even if they have to neglect their personal interests in order to do so.

Unlike Cornelian tragedy, Greek tragedies always portray kings as good and use death to show the personal sacrifices that kings must make for the good of the State. As a political body, the king is legally bound to act in the State's best interests, but because he is also a physical being with human feelings, he may experience conflict between his political obligations and his physical desires. Nevertheless, because the king must always act on the State's behalf, he frequently must neglect his personal feelings in order to fulfill his political duty. In Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* and Euripides's *Iphigenia at Aulis*, for example, Agamemnon has to sacrifice his

daughter to the gods in spite of his fatherly love so that his army may be able to sail to Troy. Although Aeschylus initially seems to criticize Agamemnon for his cruelty to his own daughter, the king is ultimately justified because her death made Greece's victory over Troy possible. Corneille's tragedies focus on the king's political acts more than on the conflict between his physical self and his political self. He portrays kings who must judge criminals and decide if it is in the State's best interest to punish them by death or to allow them to live. *Horace's* Tulle, for example, does not execute Horace even though he killed his sister—a crime punishable by death—because it is in the State's best interest to keep him alive. Likewise, Corneille shows that former tyrants may become legitimate kings through good acts. Because *Cinna's* Auguste chooses to pardon Cinna and the other conspirators rather than immediately kill them, as would a tyrant, he proves himself to be a good and just ruler, which makes him gain the public favor and thereby become legitimate. Thus, while ancient Greek tragedies show that a good king should be willing to kill his own daughter for the benefit of the State, Cornelian tragedy emphasizes the king's refusal to kill, or non-death, to illustrate the nature of the legitimate king.

Sixteenth-century tragedies such as Garnier's *Porcie* and Grévin's *César* frequently address the question of tyrannicide, whereas it is mentioned hardly at all, if ever, in ancient Greek and Roman tragedies. Corneille also addresses tyrannicide, and in one of his tragedies, *Héraclius*, a tyrant is indeed killed by a *coup d'état*. Generally, though, Cornelian tragedy shows that divine justice is responsible for punishing tyrants, not other people. Most sixteenth-century tragedies also portray tyrannicide negatively, but, many Protestant tragedies written after the St. Bartholomew's day massacre encourage it. In Cornelian tragedies, divine justice intervenes and causes tyrants to die by means that reflect their crimes. Attila, for example, who refers to himself as *le fléau de Dieu* and is known for his violent temperament, dies as a torrent of blood

rushes from his nose when he cannot control his rage. Similarly, Ptolomée, who had Pompée killed because he was too afraid to either turn him away or offer him protection from César, dies ignobly as his ship sinks while he is running away from César's army. With the exception of *Suréna's* Orode, none of Corneille's tyrants goes unpunished if they do not become a legitimate ruler through good deeds.

While Corneille presents his spectators with examples of both good kings and tyrants, both humanist and non-Cornelian baroque tragedies most frequently showed kings as tyrants who are nothing less than odious and have no sense of compassion because esthetics of the time demanded extreme actions which provoked strong emotions. In Garnier's *Les Juives*, the king, Nabuchodonosor could not possibly be more malicious when he kills a group of Jewish children in front of their mothers. The spectators are overcome not only with horror over the king's action, but also with pity for the mothers who must witness the slaughter of the children whom they love. These women, in fact, become the primary source of tragic emotion in the play because it mainly focuses on their laments over their doomed children. Motherly love, therefore, drives the tragic element of the play.

In Corneille's contemporaries' tragedies, however, kings do not just kill to be cruel. Instead, they often act as tyrants by trying to use their political power to satisfy their physical body's desires, which results in the death of a female and occasionally, of a male as well. In Tristan l'Hermite's *La Mariane*, for example, Hérode had killed all of Mariane's family and forced her to marry him. Although she is married to him, she scorns him and refuses to return his love. Eventually, Hérode has her executed, namely because of her constant rejection. Likewise, Du Ryer's *Lucrece* shows a king who tries to seduce a married woman who is known for her virtue. He feels that she should be flattered by his advances and succumb to him because

of his rank, but because she will not give herself to him, he eventually rapes her, after which, she commits suicide.

Although Corneille's contemporaries depict kings who commit horrendously violent crimes, they rarely suffer because of their actions, with the exception of Hérode, who goes insane after killing Mariane. Instead, the female is often shown as responsible for her own misery because of her beauty. Men who cannot control their desire are merely victims of feminine beauty. In *Lucrèce*, Théophile's *Pyrame et Thisbé* and Hardy's bourgeois tragedy, *Scédase*, males blame females for being too beautiful to resist, thus, they are not responsible for their own actions, and all of the heroines die. The most important aspect of these tragedies, therefore, is that they evoke terror and pity, and although they show that men perform heinous acts because they are unable to control their passions, very few of the males who do violence to women in these tragedies is punished.

Even though Corneille wrote his tragedies during the same time period as Hardy, Théophile, and Tristan, his tragedies infrequently present kings or any other males who try to use their political power or physical strength for physical self-gratification, and more importantly, even when it is suggested, it never comes to fruition. His only tragedy that even suggests rape is *Clitandre ou l'innocence délivrée*, in which Pymante unsuccessfully tries to rape Dorise. Corneille rarely shows females as victims, and those who are victimized by males are the victims of masculine politics, not rape, which distinguishes his works from those of his contemporaries. His females frequently lose a male whom they loved because of masculine politics, but they refuse to remain victims in that they rebel against the society that cost them their loved one in order to obtain vengeance. *Horace's* Camille, for example, curses Rome in public for causing Horace to kill her fiancé, and *Polyeucte's* Pauline finally rebels against her father once he

executes her husband; and *Le Cid*'s Chimène refuses to accept the king's order to abandon her attempts at avenging her father until she has truly exhausted all of her options. Thus, in Cornelian tragedy, masculine death often brings about feminine rebellion against patriarchal order.

With the exception of *Médée*, whose heroine is in fact not a female, but a goddess, Cornelian tragedy shows feminine attempts at vengeance are rarely effective and are only successful when the female is willing to lose her own life for it. Camille, for example, wanted to cause Horace to soil his honor for having killed her fiancé, so she provokes him into killing her. Likewise, in *Théodore*, though Marcelle knew that she would die for killing Théodore, because she wanted to avenge her daughter's death, she was willing to do so and considered herself triumphant. Even Cléopâtre was willing to drink from the poisoned cup in *Rodogune*, hoping to convince her son and his fiancé, whom she hated, to drink from it as well. Attempts by other females who rely on the help of one or more males to kill for them when they want to take vengeance prove unsuccessful. Émilie (*Cinna*) tries to enlist Cinna's help to kill Auguste; Chimène (*Le Cid*), the king's and Don Sanche's; Léontine (*Héraclius*), Martian's; and, in *La Mort de Pompée*, Cornélie tells César that she will send someone to kill him to avenge Pompée's death. None of the aforementioned females successfully avenges their loved one by the end of the play, and most have ceased to try. Men, however, are much more successful at avenging themselves. Perpenna (*Sertorius*) kills Sertorius for having taken his army and the woman he loved; Orode (*Suréna*) supposedly kills Suréna for not marrying his daughter; and Rodrigue (*Le Cid*) kills the Count to avenge his father. Though spectators admire Corneille's females for their strength and courage, unlike his males, they always fail at avenging themselves other than at the cost of their own lives. Although they do not simply allow themselves to be victimized and

attempt to avenge wrongs done to them, they are ultimately silenced by the patriarchal system either by ceasing to try to avenge themselves or by getting themselves killed.

Even though Corneille's contemporaries do not frequently punish tyrants who act on cruelty and their desire for physical gratification, they show that tyrants who are dominated by their love for a female who uses it to control them often suffer and / or provoke the death of one or more of their loved ones because of it. In Rotrou's *Cosroès*, for example, when the king's adoration of his wife, Syra causes him to let himself be manipulated into giving the throne to her son rather than his own, Syroès, his son rebels and claims his right to the crown, condemning his wife and her son to death. Cosroès is so overwhelmed with grief that he commits suicide in order not to live without her.

Unlike other baroque dramatists, Corneille portrays kings who allow themselves to be dominated by love fairly infrequently. Whereas half of the non-Cornelian tragedies that I studied showed the harm done by love-stricken kings, only three of Corneille's eighteen tragedies cover this theme; nonetheless, it is far from absent in his tragedy. For example, *Nicomède*'s Prusius is so blinded by his love for Arisnoé that he helps her conspire to have his own son killed. Similarly, *Pertharite*'s Grimoald is prepared to commit infanticide and ruin his reputation as a good king because Rodelinde, whom he loves, asks if he would be willing to do so to receive her hand in marriage. Finally, in *Sophonisbe*, both Massinisse and Syphax are so in love with the queen that they were willing to give up their political power and betray their countries to marry her, even though they would still keep their royal titles. All of these kings are portrayed negatively because of their excessive love. Grimoald and Prusius are willing to murder because of it, and Prusius, Massinisse and Syphax are all shown as being weak and lowly because they value love above State and paternal duty. Even *Sophonisbe*, a mere female, knows that kings

should value their country more than love, and for this reason, she criticizes Massinisse and Syphax both for betraying their country because of their love for her and for allowing themselves to live as servants to Rome because of their feelings. Instead of imitating them, she becomes as a model for masculine behavior when she commits suicide in order to save her country the humiliation of seeing her taken as a slave to Rome. Massinisse and Syphax's non-death, therefore, renders them anti-models for masculine behavior since they are shown negatively for their lack of loyalty to their countries.

No females in the ancient Greek, Roman or sixteenth-century tragedies used in this study attempt to dominate men or to exercise political power by exercising control over males. In both Cornelian and non-Cornelian seventeenth-century plays, though, females, usually queens, attempt to access political power either for themselves or their offspring by manipulating or even killing males. If a queen wants political power for herself, she must either be able to control the king, who has actual power, as Tristan l'Hermite's Fauste tries to do in *La Mort de Chrispe*, or she must eliminate the male or males whose mere existence is preventing her from having the right to keep power herself, as Corneille's Cléopâtre (*Rodogune*). If she wants her child to have power, she must convince the king to act on his or her behalf, even if he must ignore his own child's rights or wishes, as do Corneille's Marcelle (*Théodore*) and Rotrou's Syra (*Cosroès*). Nevertheless, respecting the dominance of the patriarchy, the efforts of females who try to access power are never rewarded, though they may momentarily have the illusion that they are successful. In *Cosroès*, *Rodogune*, *La Mort de Chrispe*, and *Théodore*, power-hungry queens ultimately opt to commit suicide when they realize that they cannot have or keep the power they so desire and that they must either submit to masculine dominance or die.

While *Cosroès* is a good example of a weak king since his actions are driven by his desire to please his wife whom he loves rather than his interest in serving the State, Corneille's kings who allow themselves to be controlled by others usually act not on love, but on fear. In *La Mort de Pompée*, for example, Ptolomée's counselors convince him that he will put himself and the State in danger if he either offers Pompée protection from César or turns him away. Their solution: kill him. Likewise, in *Suréna*, Orode's counselors make him believe that Suréna is a threat to him since he is a powerful and well liked general who would most likely be able to take Orode's throne from him if he were he to decide to do so. Although Orode initially attempts to make himself feel more secure by having Suréna marry into his family, because he refuses the offer, the king has him killed, which is a politically unintelligent decision since Suréna was his best general.

Both Orode and Ptolomée were (unnecessarily) afraid of losing their lives and were willing to commit murder in order to prevent that from happening. In *Théodore* and *Polyeucte*, however, rulers are also motivated to act out of fear, but unlike the aforementioned kings, they were simply afraid of losing their political power. Both of them were willing to put the person their own children loved in harm's way in order to protect their political position, even though the only crime that Théodore and Polyeucte had committed was that they were Christian. Félix's and Valens's political ambition makes them both particularly loathsome since they were too spineless to risk sparing Polyeucte and Théodore and were willing to sacrifice their children's happiness for their political career. Neither child, though, wanted to bear the burden of living after their beloved was killed. Félix's daughter asks that her father to kill her as well, though she will change her mind once he converts to Christianity, and Placide will kill himself to cause his father to suffer for the harm he has done. Both Félix and Valens therefore, demonstrate the

danger of overzealous political ambition and cowardice since their fear of losing power brings about suffering and death.

Even if Corneille resembles other baroque dramatists in his portrayal of kings who are dominated by love in *Sophonisbe*, *Pertharite*, and *Nicomède*, unlike his contemporaries, he frequently depicts subjects whose passion is excessive as well. Only one non-Cornelian tragedy, Hardy's *Scédase*, represents individuals other than kings who allow their passions to control their actions. Though male subjects are legally obligated to serve the State, their extreme love for a female most often causes them to act inappropriately. For example, though Cinna realizes that Auguste is a just and equitable ruler whom he rightfully should serve, he is willing to conspire with Émilie to kill the emperor because she will only give herself to him on condition that he do so. Therefore, he is willing to commit a crime that he personally opposes because of his love. Other men, whose love is not reciprocated because the woman they desire is in love with another man, try to avenge themselves by killing their rival, as with Perpenna (*Sertorius*), Phinée (*Andromède*), Pymante (*Clitandre ou l'innocence délivrée*) and Pacorus (*Suréna*). While the first three cannot have either the love or the hand of the female they desire, Pacorus is exceptional in that he Eurydice has agreed to a political marriage with him, but he is not satisfied since he knows that her heart belongs to Suréna. Even though political marriages do not imply that one has to give both hand and heart to the betrothed, Pacorus's greed will not allow him to simply accept Eurydice's hand. By attempting to force her to give her heart to him as well, he tries to impose political duty onto personal freedom. He, therefore, refuses the separation of public and private interests. His desire to have more than what Eurydice legally owes him and her refusal to abandon her love for Suréna and are ultimately major factors contributing to the latter's assassination. Finally, other men, including Suréna, Sertorius and even *Horace's* Curiace

are simply not able to perform their civic duty as they should because it is in opposition to their feelings. Suréna flatly refuses to engage in a political marriage with Mandane because he loves Eurydice; and Sertorius will not ask Aristie to marry him because he is in love with Viriate, even though he knows that joining forces with the former would benefit his army tremendously. Finally, though Curiace's love for his opponent's sister as well as his friendship with Horace prevent him from fighting wholeheartedly. All of these men, therefore, let personal feelings, usually love, interfere with civic duty, and their inability to separate the two renders them vulnerable and ultimately contributes to their death.

Exceptionally, in *Clitandre*, a female subject, Dorise, tries to murder her rival. This play is particularly unusual in that it illustrates Corneille's use of gender reversal in his theater. While Dorise not only tries to commit an act of violence *by her own hand*, which only his ambitious and conventionally masculine females such as Marcelle and Cléopâtre do, she is also dressed as a male throughout the majority of the play. Other, more typically feminine women who wish to kill do so because they want to avenge the loss of a loved one, and they always enlist the help of a male to try to accomplish the act. As mentioned earlier, though, these women are rarely successful, whereas only the ones who are willing to lose their own life do indeed avenge themselves.

Though Dorise is unsuccessful in killing Caliste, she regrets having attempted to murder her, and because she acknowledges the error of her ways, she is pardoned. Dorise's jealousy caused her to resort to violence, which is a typically masculine means of resolving problems. By resorting to such means, she loses her femininity, and when she realizes this, she is ashamed of her actions. She then chooses to renounce her violence and jealousy, which causes her to lose her masculine identity and recuperate her femininity, as illustrated through her change of

clothing. Representative of her reassimilation to her proper social role, she trades her masculine clothes for a dress and confesses her crimes before the king. Rather than be punished, she is offered Clitandre's hand in marriage. Her non-death, therefore, once again shows the rewards of accepting one's role in society as well as the clemency of the good king. In the same play, however, Pymante is not sorry for trying to kill Rosidore and even insults the king and the prince. Unlike Dorise, he does not ask for forgiveness, and because he refuses to humble himself, apologize, and accept his inferiority to the king and prince, he is condemned to death. Criminals who revert back to being loyal subjects are forgiven, and those who do not are punished by death.

Although Corneille focuses on males who allow their passions to take precedence over civic duty, like sixteenth-century French tragedy and Seneca's *Phaedra*, he also shows women the negative consequences of allowing love to interfere with their ability to reason. His Créuse (*Médée*), Flavie (*Théodore*), and Eurydice (*Suréna*) all suffer because they are not willing to abandon their love for a male. Créuse ignores the danger of taking Jason from his sorceress wife, for which she and her father are killed; Flavie dies of a broken heart at Placide's constant rejection; and Eurydice will not allow Suréna to marry Mandane, provoking his assassination, after which, she dies as well. Women, therefore, should not allow their passion to dominate reason. Otherwise, they will suffer.

Unlike tragedies from other periods, Greek tragedy in particular portrays females who sacrifice their lives for the benefit of men as main characters, such as Euripides's *Alcestis* and his *Iphigenia at Aulis*. In both of these tragedies, females acknowledge that their lives are not as valuable as men's, and because they understand this and are willing to die for men, they are described as "good". And although Euripides's *Hippolytus* portrays a female, Phaedra, who

cannot control her love for her stepson, she is still admirable because she decides to kill herself rather than dishonor herself or her husband by betraying her feelings. Sixteenth-century tragedy, however, also contains “good,” submissive women as main characters, such as Garnier’s *Porcie*, but their central themes are generally political rather than based on the social role of the female herself. Most females whose domestic life is the subject of sixteenth-century and Senecan tragedy are immoral and often despicable. In Garnier’s *Hippolyte* and Seneca’s *Phaedra*, for example, Phaedra resents her conjugal duty and tries to seduce her stepson. When her efforts are unsuccessful, she convinces her husband that he tried to seduce her. Hippolyte is then killed by Neptune, after which Phaedra herself is killed. Likewise, in La Péruse’s *Médée* though Jason betrays the sorceress, she is shown as lacking all motherly sentiments, since she kills her children in cold blood, and as undeserving of sympathy since she is in her situation because she did not wait for her father to give her an appropriate husband. She, therefore, is punished for rebelling against patriarchal order by being betrayed by the man whom she herself chose to be her husband. Both Hardy’s and Jodelle’s *Didon se sacrifiant* also illustrate the importance of conjugal duty, because Didon finds herself abandoned by Énée, whom she fell in love with after her husband was killed. Nevertheless, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, death did not free a woman from her conjugal duty. She comes to recognize that Énée’s departure is intended to make her suffer for having been disloyal to Sichée’s memory. To recuperate her innocence and free herself from her guilt, she therefore commits suicide, liberating her pure and loyal soul from her tainted and disloyal body.

Female suicide is a fairly common theme in both pre-Cornelian and Cornelian tragedy. As demonstrated above, females commit suicide to retain their honor, as Euripides’s Phaedra does; or they kill themselves to avoid losing their royal titles, as do, for example, Corneille’s

Sophonisbe and Jodelle's Cléopâtre (*Cléopâtre Captive*); or they may commit suicide to escape an undesirable situation, like Montchrétien's Reine d'Ecosse or Corneille's Marcelle (*Théodore*); and, finally, women kill themselves to escape physical shame, as do Du Ryer's Lucrèce, and Corneille's Jocaste (*Edipe*). Males, however, commit suicide most frequently in non-Cornelian baroque tragedies. In *La Mort de Mithridate* by La Calprènedé, for example, the only way to escape captivity, which was a fate more humiliating than suicide, was to die. In addition, in Théophile de Viau's *Pyrame et Thisbé*, Pyrame kills himself after believing that Thisbé was already dead. In non-Cornelian baroque tragedies in which a male and female die, such as Rotrou's *Antigone* and Mairet's *Sophonisbe*, males always die before females. Most frequently, females kill themselves or are killed for political reasons, and males commit suicide in reaction to their loss. In these tragedies, therefore, feminine death causes males to become disillusioned about the political systems which they had defended and, lamenting the loss of their loved ones, they commit suicide. This scenario, however, never occurs in Cornelian tragedy, *Horace* being the most striking example. The reason for this could be that non-Cornelian baroque dramatists infrequently represent negative consequences for criminal acts, and usually, the criminals themselves are kings. In their plays, tragic emotions are evoked through the king's ability to victimize his subjects while he remains unpunished. Their subjects are rendered helpless before the tyrant and decide to kill themselves to escape his rule. Corneille's tyrants, though, either convert and become good kings (*Cinna*) or they are killed through divine punishment (*La Mort de Pompée*'s Ptolomée) or commit suicide (*Rodogune*'s Cléopâtre). Either circumstance eliminates the need for the subject to die to free himself from tyranny.

Though Corneille uses divine justice to illustrate his belief that tyrants will be punished for their injustices, he also makes use of the divine to illustrate humankind's ability to exercise

free will. In both his Christian and mythological tragedies, men and women have the ability to choose their course of action, whether it be to remain loyal to the Christian God or to oppose the pagan gods, as long as they were willing to face the consequences. Only, in his Christian martyrdom plays, *Polyeucte* and *Théodore*, God's grace helps the hero and heroine overcome the obstacles to their salvation. Because Christian martyrs desire death and consequently inspire spectators' admiration for the strength of their convictions rather than terror or pity, Corneille incorporated a secular drama into both of these plays to evoke tragic emotions. In both *Polyeucte* and *Théodore*, spectators pity the female more than the male, and feminine sexuality poses a threat to salvation. Because Polyeucte is tied to the physical world by his love for his wife, he must literally free himself from her by offering to give her to her former lover. Only then will he be free to die for God. In *Théodore*, however, though the heroine is a virgin who has given herself to God, she is the object of a male's desire. Because Placide is in love with her, Marcelle refuses to execute her out of fear of angering him. His love, therefore, becomes the obstacle to the death that she avidly desires.

In summary, Corneille creates situations that force his characters to prioritize certain values above others, including civic duty, love, family obligations, personal desires, and loyalty to God, and often their choices compel them to oppose other values. In Cornelian tragedy, though, males and females do not share the same value system. While his tragedies show that both men and women should prioritize Christian duty above all else, men should value civic duty above filial duty, and love should come last. Since women have no legal right to political power, they are expected to value domestic interests, including love, above political ones. Women who are married should be devoted to their husbands before their own parents, and loyalty to the State follows. Unmarried women, however, must prioritize familial duty before romantic love, and

this often means that they will have to sacrifice love for their family's political well being. Masculine politics, therefore, precedes the unmarried woman's personal interests, even though Corneille's portrayal of political marriages suggests that women should have more control over their choice for a husband. Corneille's characters are compelled to make decisions that should reflect their conformity to their gender role as dictated by seventeenth-century morality. However, this does not always happen. Those whose value system does not reflect that of their gender will ultimately be killed, commit suicide, or provoke the death of others.

Even though this study focused on pre and early seventeenth-century tragedy, it would be interesting to compare Corneille's representation of gender and death to that of classical dramatists such as Racine and even eighteenth-century authors, including, for example Voltaire or Crébillon. Though Racine began writing tragedy as Corneille was ending his career, his view of tragedy was very different from that of his predecessors; so different, in fact, that he did not believe that death was a necessary element of tragedy (*Jean Racine* 33). Unlike Corneille, he did not emphasize politics in his tragedies and instead, focused on the sentimental, trying to inspire his spectators to feel more pity than terror. One must wonder, therefore, whether feminine suffering plays a greater role in his tragedies than in Corneille's: he emphasized love and the pathetic, conventionally feminine themes, more than politics, which Corneille associated with masculine values and heroism (32). Racine also believed in fate and pre-destination, which puts him in opposition with Corneille, whose mythological and religious plays intended to illustrate men and women's ability to exercise free will. Racine's religious tragedies such as *Esther*, therefore, do not focus on the hero or heroine's conflict between human love and divine love. The primary goal of *Esther* is to have spectators pity the Jews who are Assuérus's captives and

then admire Esther for throwing herself on the king's mercy to beg for their release (30).

Loyalty to God is no part of the drama.

Eighteenth-century tragedy is also very different from Cornelian tragedy, yet many of the ideas presented by Voltaire were more similar to Corneille's than even Racine's. Certain post-Classical authors such as Crébillon presented gruesome subjects such those used in the late sixteenth century, yet like Racine, they emphasized sentimentality and the pathetic over traditional Aristotelian terror and pity. And although they portrayed gruesome subjects, they focused on the emotional reaction of the characters who witnessed the grim spectacle more than on the actual act itself (Rohou 287). Most of Corneille's works, though, evoke both pity and terror. Not only does he allow his spectators to witness individuals suffering and pity them, he also describes gruesome death in great detail and, unlike Crébillon, at times even portrayed it on stage. Voltaire, however, treated more intellectual subjects than most Romanesque authors in his tragedy and was even a great admirer of baroque and classical tragedy (269). Like Corneille, Voltaire's tragedies often dealt with political issues, but he was innovative in that he based many of his works on French national history (Knapp 81). Because many of his tragedies were critical of the political and religious practices of his time, one can speculate that he uses death to criticize these eighteenth-century institutions (Rohou 268-69). Contrarily, Corneille's use of both masculine and feminine death was intended to instruct the seventeenth-century nobility on proper behavior for one's gender and class.

The relationship of behavior, gender, and class evolves from Corneille to Racine and the post-Classics toward the valorization of individuality over the dictates of a society as a whole, and even the common belief that Corneille illustrates human beings as they should be demonstrates the notion that most seventeenth-century writers shared the values of the society in

which they lived. While the anthropology of death and gender in Corneille's tragedies does illustrate seventeenth-century French society's emphasis on conformity to patriarchal values, it also shows how the patriarchal system imposes its values upon individuals living under it, since his characters who reject their role as dictated by the system, such as Marcelle (*Horace*), Cléopâtre (*Rodogune*), Pymante (*Clitandre ou l'innocence délivrée*) and Médée, suffer for their individuality. Corneille also illustrates that he himself opposes his society's acceptance of the complete dominance of males over females by portraying admirable women who are duped by their forced submission to patriarchal values such as Pauline (*Polyeucte*), Camille (*Horace*), and even Chimène (*Le Cid*), who, despite her love for Rodrigue, still wished to avenge her father. Contrarily, Corneille's males are never victimized by society and only suffer for mistakes that they make as individuals, such kings who allow themselves to be controlled by others (*Nicomède's* Prusius) or subjects who let love interfere with patriotic duty (*Suréna*).

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