Chapter 5

Tragedies of transition:

*Persée et Démétrius* (1663) and *Pyrrhus* (1663).
Tragedies of transatiation: *Persée et Démétrius* (1663)
and *Pyrrhus* (1663).

"... un apprentif qui travaille encore sur la besogne
que le maître lui taille."

(D'AUBIGNAC)

It seems impertinent to assume, as one so easily
could, that the slowing-down of Thomas Corneille's dra¬
tic production in the second half of the 1660s is due pri¬
marily to increasing competition from Racine, whose first
play, *La Thébaïde*, is performed at the Palais-Royal on 20
June 1664. We have no evidence from either dramatist about
his opinion of the other, at least until 1685, when both
literary careers are virtually complete and Racine, in his
speech of welcome to the new Academician, must perforce be
flattering in his statements. We have seen that, as it is,
he says little here of Thomas' worth as a dramatist. Be¬
tween February 1662, when *Maximian* appeared, and 1670,
Thomas Corneille brought out six plays: four tragedies
(*Persée et Démétrius, Pyrrhus, roi d'Epire, Laodice and La
Mort d'Annibal*), of which all but the second deal with
Roman themes, one tragi-comedy, *Antiochus*, and a comedy,
*Le Baron d'Albikrac*. The first two of these plays, per¬
formed at the beginning and end of 1663 respectively, have
come down to us without a word of explanation from the
author; *Persée*, in particular, is commonly considered to be
a poor play, and rightly so, as I hope to prove. Between
*La Thébaïde* and *Bérénice*, then, Thomas brings out only
two self-styled tragedies and his tragi-comedy.
Lack of information prevents anything more than intelligent speculation on the reason for the two-year silences between *Pyrrhus* and *Antiochus* and between the latter play and *Le Baron d'Albikrac*. There are, though, three factors to be taken into account: the Corneilles' move from Rouen to Paris; the relative failure of *Persée* and *Pyrrhus*; and competition from a newcomer, Racine.

It was in October 1662, when Pierre was 56 and Thomas 37, that one of the most memorable events in the life of the two brothers took place: the decision to leave Rouen and set up house permanently in Paris. Pierre moved into the hôtel in the rue du Chaume belonging to the duc de Guise, a literary patron of considerable standing - his circle included the abbé de Pure and Donneau de Visé, both confirmed cornéliens - and it would appear that Thomas did likewise. Three months later, in January 1663, Pierre brought out *Sophonisbe* at the Hôtel de Bourgogne; a few days earlier, probably, Thomas had had *Persée et Démétrius*, a tale of "frères ennemis", staged at the same theatre. Neither play had much success; but where the "querelle de Sophonisbe" has helped to underline the decided merits of Pierre's tragedy, despite the author's self-criticisms in the April 1663 *Au Lecteur*, commentators have been unanimous in their disapproval of *Persée*. If Loret is as undiscrimin-


atingly enthusiastic as always in his announce of the play in the *Muse historique*, d'Aubignac is less flattering when, with a few weeks' hindsight, he tells us in his *Seconde Dissertation* that the audience "ont abandonné après les premières représentations le Démétrius du jeune Corneille, comme une pièce indigne de leur attention". The Parfait brothers find that the subject "n'a rien d'intéressant", that Persée is "bas & odieux", Démétrius "un amant transi, qui se tue pour une maîtresse", while Philippe, poor soul, can match neither Maximian nor Stilicone, for "(il) n'agit ni par ambition ni par tendresse". Reynier, in the few lines he devotes to it, considers the play to be probably Thomas' weakest.

Pyrhrhus, equally unprefaced, has attracted virtually no comment. Most critics, including Lancaster, express their difficulty in even keeping track of the story-line in a plot which "is even more difficult to follow than that of (Thomas Corneille's) Bérénice, which is saying a good deal". Certainly, in the years 1662 and 1663, contemporaries were unrelenting in their depreciation of the


younger Corneille's talents and objectives. In 1662, Chapelain said of him: "A force de vouloir surpasser son aîné, (il) tombe fort au-dessous de lui, et son élévation le rend obscur sans le rendre grave", while the following year the author of the *Pratique du théâtre* was even more hostile: Thomas is looked on "comme un apprentif qui travaille encore sur la besogne que le maître lui taille & qui la gâte quelquefois pour ne pas bien exécuter ce qu'on lui ordonne".5

Yet despite such strictures we have, I feel, to be clear on one important point: it was not until the early 1670s, or at most the very late 60s, that Racine's real merit and his own peculiar talents are commented upon. *La Thébaïde* appears in 1664 with no recorded comments; all we have are brief mentions of the play in three private letters of Racine to Le Vasseur in November and December of the previous year. *Alexandre* gets some mention in the gazettes of the day, but also criticism from, for example, Saint-Evremond, at least early on, in 1666 (two years later he will modify his remarks); and in the first preface to *Alexandre*, dating from 1666, Racine takes a confident, indeed arrogant, stand against his detractors. "Je n'ai pas prétendu donner au public un ouvrage parfait", he writes. "Je n'ai pu m'empêcher de concevoir quelque opinion de ma

tragédie, quand j'ai vu la peine que se sont donnée de certaines gens pour la décrier. On ne fait point tant de brigues contre un ouvrage qu'on n'estime pas... Je n'aurais jamais fait si je m'arrêtai aux subtilités de quelques critiques, qui prétendent assujettir le goût du public aux dégoûts d'un esprit malade. Similar remarks are called up two years later, when Racine defends Andromaque in his Dédicace and his first preface. 1668 saw back-handed compliments from Saint-Evremond after an initial reading and criticisms of the play by Subligny in his La Folle querelle.

Now, even Saint-Evremond will later come to be "touched" by Andromaque, and Madame de Sévigné's more emotional responses in the early seventies are but one small sign that Racine is then being seen in his true light. Much of the criticism of La Thébaïde, Alexandre and even of Andromaque is petty and carping; some of it is criticism by default. The absence of Racinian correspondence between 1665 and 1676 does not help us to get the true situation in perspective, but, given the mixed reception accorded to Racine's early plays and the undoubted defects in at least the first two, it would seem legitimate to question whether Thomas Corneille was scared away from the theatre by the first attempts of an author still in his twenties. It is more likely to have been the result of his own lack of success with Persée and Pyrrhus, before Racine ever came on the scene with his story of "frères ennemis".

If Pierre Corneille found in Livy and Appian the basis for the ambition, jealousy and heroic death of Sophonisbe, and if he deliberately avoided repeating incidents which already existed in Mairet's Sophonisbe, the same Livy, which Thomas will use a few years later for La Mort d'Anni-bal, provides a complete account of the relations between Demetrius and his father and Rome, an unfortunate episode from which no-one emerges unscathed. Only fragments of Polybius' account of the same events have come down to us, but these add at least one important detail to Livy's otherwise very full account, as we shall see. In addition, Justin provides a very brief version of the story. All that we can say, if we try to judge the situation from an independent point of view, is that, according to Livy, Perseus' accusations against his brother and the weak manner in which Philip accepts them, are perhaps less criminal in the end than the pressure exerted by Rome and the equivocal attitudes of Demetrius himself.

In his Dictionnaire universel géographique et historique of 1708, Thomas Corneille relates the actions of Philip V after his defeat by the consul Flamininus at Cynocephales in 197 B.C.

Philippe fut premierement vaincu par Q. Flamininus (sic), Capitaine des Romains, qui ne luy laissa que la Macedoine, & le forca de quitter toutes les villes qu'il avoit en Grèce. Comme il continua d'opprimer les Grecs, ils s'en plaignirent aux Romains, auxquels il fut obligé d'envoyer son jeune fils, appelé Demetrius, pour s'excuser. Demetrius demeura quelque temps à Rome, où il se fit tellement aimer, qu'il fit agréer par le Senat, les excuses de son père. Philippe chagrin de ce qu'on l'avoit plutôt absous en consideration de Demetrius que par la crainte qu'on cêt eué de son pere, prêta l'oreille
aux fausses accusations de Persée son fils aîné, qui prétendait que son frère le vouloit empoisonner.

Philip's remedy was swift, as were its consequences:

Les défenses qu'apporta Demetrius ne furent point écoutées. Il fit mourir le fils innocent, & en mourut de regret peu de temps après, ayant découvert la méchanceté de Persée, à qui il laissa un grand appareil de guerre qu'il avait dressé contre les Romains.

According to Livy's long account, in the 40th book of his Roman history, Perseus did all in his power to prevent Demetrius from mounting the throne, by arousing in Philip strong anti-Roman feelings:

Ibi cum alii mores et instituta eorum, alii res gestas, alii speciem ipsius urbis nondum exornatae neque publicis neque privatis locis, alii singulos principum eluderent, juvens incautos et amore nominis Romani et certamine adversus fratrem omnia tuendo suspectum se patri et opportunum criminius faciebat. Itaque expertem eum pater omnium de rebus Romanis consiliorum habebat: totus in Rersea versus cum eo cogitationes eius rei dies et noctes agitabat.

As Demetrius, for his part, stoutly defends the Roman methods and objectives, Perseus' cause is already all but won; he accuses his younger brother of having tried to kill him. But Philip is unsure about the accusations and reserves the right to sleep on the matter before deciding what part Demetrius may have played. In the end he sends two ambassadors to Rome, charged to discover the true facts, but these messengers, before their departure, are persuaded

by Perseus to furnish false reports about his brother once they return to Macedonia. Finding himself estranged from Perseus and his father, Demetrius takes steps to avoid arousing anti-Roman feelings in his friends: he himself, for example, stops speaking about the Romans or having any contacts with them.

While awaiting the ambassadors' return, Perseus finds a new means of casting suspicion on Demetrius. He confides in Didas:

_Hunc quoque Perseus, sicut plerosque patris amicorum, ex quo haud cuquam dubium esse cooperat, ad quem regis animo ita inclinato hereditas regni pertineret, inter coniuratos in fratris perniciam habuit. In prae sentia dat ei mandata ut per omne obsequium insinuaret se in quam maxime familiarem usum, ut elicere omnia arcana specularique abditos eius sensus posset._

_Haec super cetera tristem adventum in Macedoniam regi fecerunt. Movebant eum et prae sentia crimina: exspectandos tamen, quos ad exploranda omnia Romam miserat censet._

Hardly had he received this unpleasant task than Didas learns that Demetrius was planning flight to the Romans. "_Hoc consilium extemplo et fratri proditur et auctore eo indicatur patri ... Demetrius dissimulanter adservari iussus._

_A few months later, the ambassadors are announced, bearing a false letter in which T. Quinctius appears to wish to excuse Demetrius' fault in wanting to mount the throne._

Philip's suspicions, strengthened by Perseus' wicked insinu-

9. Ibid., xxi, 10-11, p. 68.
10. Ibid., xxiii, 3-5, pp. 72-74.
ations, are confirmed: one of Demetrius' best friends is tortured and put to death without giving the slightest proof to substantiate the accusation. Once more, Perseus maintains that Demetrius intended to flee from Macedonia:

Ab Thessalonice Demetriadem ipsi cum iter esset, Astraeum Paoniae Demetrium mittit cum eodem comite Dida, Perseum Amphipolim ad obsides Thracum accipiendo. Digredienti ab se Didae mandata dedisse dicitur de filio occidendo. Sacrificium ab Dida seu institutum seu simulatum est, ad quod celebrandum invitatus Demetrius ab Astraeo Keracleam venit. In ea cena dicitur venenum datum. Poculo epoto extemplo sensit, et mox coortis doloribus, relicto con vivio cum in cubiculum recepisset se, crudelitatem patris conquerens parricidium fratris ac Didae scelus incusans torquebatur. Intromissi deinde Thyreis quidam Stuberaeus et Beroeaeus Alexander injectis tapetibus in caput faucesque spiritum intercluserunt.

The two other possible sources of the play - Polybius and Justin, in his much later epitome of Pompeius Trogus - hardly add anything to these details. But Polybius does make more explicit than does Livy the promise by Flamininus to Demetrius that he and Rome would help the younger son in his struggle against Perseus and for the throne of Macedonia. In book XXIV of his Histories, Polybius writes:

Nam et Senatus, qui uni Demetrio hoc beneficium voluit imputari, adolescentis animum inani spe extulit, et Perseum Philippumque offendit graviter, quod non propter se, verum propter Demetrium, benignitatem populi Romani viderentur experiri. Titus Quinctius autem, seducto adolescente, et arcano cum ipso habito colloquio, ad eamdem calamitatem haud parum contulit. Nam et juvenem blanda spe demulsit, quasi essent Romani non multo post regem eum constituturi; et Philippum quoque non mediocriter irritavit, hortatus illum per literas, ut protinus iterum Romam Demetrium cum amicis mitteret, ilisque quam plurimis maxime que idoneis. His siquidem

11. Ibid., xxiv, 3-7, p. 76.
occasionibus impulsus Perseus, mox patri persuasit, ut in Demetrii mortem consentiret. 12.

Both Livy, in a passage which occurs some time after his account of Demetrius' death (book XL, chapter 54) and Justin, towards the end of his short version, suggest that Philip comes to regret his treatment of his younger son. Livy tells us that the king is repentant; Justin goes further: "His rebus offensus Philippus inpatientius in dies mortem Demetrii dolebat, tunc et insidiis circumventum suspicari, testes indicesque torquere. Atque ita cognita fraude non minus scelere Persae quam innoxii Demetrii morte cruciabatur, peregissetque ultionem, ni morte praeventus ruisset. 13.

From the above, and particularly from Livy, who provides by far the greatest detail concerning the episode, certain points emerge. The two sons are carefully distinguished: Livy indicates in two places - book XXXIX chapter 53 and book XL chapter 9 - that Perseus is illegitimate and this may call in question the right to the throne which he claims over Demetrius, five years younger than he (book XL chapter 6). In talents and general temperament, Livy


suggests a clear difference. As the incident of the sham battle after the sacrifice shows (book XL chapter 6), Demetrius may be a more skilful warrior, even although he would appear to be more ingenuous, too, less able to see the political dangers of probably well-meant acts\textsuperscript{14}. Polybius sums that matter up when he says that Perseus not only lagged behind his brother in good feelings towards Rome, but was much his inferior in other respects, both in natural ability and acquired accomplishments\textsuperscript{15}. Finally, it emerges from Livy that, despite the pains taken by Philip to ensure a fair hearing for Demetrius (the summoning of two elder independent counsellors, the presence of unarmed men to support Perseus and Demetrius, as recounted in chapter 8 of book XL), the strength of the evidence brought by the elder son and the ambivalent attitude of Demetrius himself were too strong for the king who, right up to the end, refused to condemn him publicly, as Livy recounts (book XL, chapter 24).

The basic historical situation, with its echoes of Nicomède, is fraught with interest. The rivalry of two brothers, which Racine will soon see to be a highly dramatic

\textsuperscript{14} E.g. in book XL, vii, 4-5; ed. cit., p. 18: "Ad has excipiendas voces speculator ex convivis Persei missus cum incautior obversaretur, exceptus a iuvenibus forte triclinio egressis male mulcatur. Huius rei ignarus Demetrius 'quin comissatum' inquit 'ad fratrem imus et iram eius, si qua ex certamine residet, simplicitate et hilaritate nostra lenimus?"

\textsuperscript{15} Polybii historiarum reliquiae, XXIV, 7; ed. cit., pp. 688-689.
subject; the ambiguous attitude of a king, torn between
reason of state and affection for his legitimate son and
open to jealousy at the thought that Roman pardon is less
due to his own merits than to Rome's affection for Demetrius;
plotting behind the scenes, corruption of ambassadors, false
letters; here are all the ingredients for another play deal-
ing with *la politique des Romains au dehors*. Much will de-
pend on the weight Thomas Corneille gives to Rome and to
Flamininus, perhaps the greatest culprits of all as far as
history goes, and to any additional new material.

In 1664 Racine will write a play around Eteocles and
Polyneices in which, as he tells us in the Preface, love
plays hardly any part. *Alexandre*, his following tragedy,
goes to the other extreme, and it is only with *Andromaque*
in 1667 that the combination of the two, nowadays looked
on as typically Racinian in the tragic effect they seek to
create, is really achieved. We have seen that Thomas Cor-
neille has insisted on the love-element in his Roman tra-
gedies so far, not only as a ressort for action, but as
providing dramatic interest in its own right. Characters
like Helvie and Placidie have been added to historical
situations or take on a new importance.

This process is continued with *Persée et Démétrius* in
1663, where Erixène is invented by Thomas for the purposes
of his story. Now, in the ninth volume of their *Histoire
du théâtre français*, the frères Parfait speak about a
"Tragédie d'un Auteur Anonyme, sur le plan de M. l'Abbé
d'Aubignac, non imprimée", called *Erixène* (pp. 12-13). The
only details given about this play, performed at the Marais, are contained in a passage they quote from Donneau de Visé's Défense de Sophonisbe: "Il y a deux ans que l'on joua une Pièce au Marais, intitulée Erixène, dont M. l'Abbé d'Aubignac avait été trois ans à faire le plan. Cette Pièce parut sous le nom d'un jeune homme, qui a beaucoup d'esprit, il en avoit fait les vers qui furent trouvés fort beaux; mais ce sujet ayant été généralement condamné, bien qu'on eût été tant d'années à le composer, empêcha la Pièce de réussir." As the Défense dates from 1663, de Visé's remarks, for what they are worth, must refer to 1661. Could the versifier of d'Aubignac's prose draft ("un jeune homme") have been Thomas Corneille, then thirty-six years old, and who will, some years later, turn Molière's Dom Juan into Le Festin de Pierre? Does Erixène come from this unsuccessful play of 1661, unmentioned by Madame Deierkauf-Holsboer or by Charles Arnaud? The hostility aroused in d'Aubignac by Pierre's Discours the previous year and the unambiguous criticisms made of Thomas himself in the abbé's remarks on Sertorius in 1663 might seem to make this hypothesis unlikely. But equally there is no evidence to disprove it, and d'Aubignac's bark may have been worse than his bite.

Erixène, the court prisoner, is introduced, not just for her own sake, but in order to provide a stronger rôle for the King's favourite, Didas, for the latter's anger

will, it is hoped, be stirred up when Démétrius, compelled to marry the favourite’s daughter, refuses to renounce Erixène, whom he loves. The place of Didas in Livy’s account created problems of justification for Thomas Corneille, and broadening the interest to include not only Didas but also his daughter (a rival, as it were, to Erixène) is an interesting and potentially masterly stroke.

This is only the first of several important changes of emphasis in Thomas Corneille’s dramatised version of the story. In broad terms, Thomas has kept some of the traditional elements, such as, for example, the Macedonian king’s displeasure on being asked to give up some of his territorial conquests (I.1), the episode of the letter, the false ambassadors. But in the dramatist’s hands, Pérése becomes a weaker character: it is Onomaste, his confidant, who has to encourage him to speak to Philip. Didas’ rôle, as we saw, is enlarged, so that he becomes a meneur du jeu and also bears part of the blame. At the same time Démétrius is made much less responsible for his links with the Romans: he is advised to flee to Rome. Philippe, on the other hand, is no longer the keen adversary of the Roman army whom history depicts. His indecisiveness does not culminate in the poisoning of Démétrius, for the younger son beats Commode on his own ground and commits a glorious

17. Cf. his dying words to Phénice, recounted in V.6:
"Averti du poison qu’un père me prépare,
"J’évitais par la fuite un ordre si barbare,
"Et si pour les grandeurs mon cœur eust soupiré,
"J’avois chez les Romains un azile assuré ..."
suicide. (Indeed, may the change not be a deliberate attempt to "improve on" the poison and suicide of Commodo, when the historical accounts provide death by poison and strangulation for Commodus, and smothering for Demetrius?) The passing of Démétrius is rendered more poignant by the presence of Antigonus, who could have saved the prince's life.

There are, it would seem, three reasons which incite Démétrius to commit suicide. Firstly, he has learned fairly early on about his father Philippe's intentions. Secondly, he has little desire to be sent into exile. And thirdly he believes that Erixène either demands or needs his death. In connection with this latter point, one should examine his closing words, recounted in the sixth scene of act V. In this 20-line passage, it is significant that two lines deal directly with the poisoning and a further two with his exile in Rome, while sixteen lines are given over to his abandonment by Erixène. The princess, as we have seen and will see, has several functions in the play. The most basic would appear to be that of helping to fill five acts, for Persée's accusations and the reactions of the king are insufficient to furnish five acts, and the absence of the ambassadors has to be compensated for by events of a rather different nature.

For in the play, there is little insistence on direct intervention by the Romans: only Démétrius, back from the west, acts, in Philippe's eyes, as the representative of all that is evil and aggressive in Roman policies. The
commission of inquiry sent by the Romans to Philippe to enquire about his attitude to them plays no part in the play. As a result, the king's assertions that "c'est trop voir les Romains pousser les Rois à bout" (IV.6) are the result of Didae's cunning provocation and the hasty, equivocal actions of Démétrius in scene 5, rather than of direct pressure on him by the Romans.

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The problem that Thomas faces in Persée et Démétrius is thus one of balance. His characters - whether by design or not, it is impossible to tell - are all very similar to each other, less highly coloured than history's account. The interest is spread over five people, and the introduction of Frixène, who is now the most frequent character in the play, does not really solve the difficulty that arises from the nature of the clash between the two brothers. Démétrius, ingenious in Livy, become more perceptive in the 1663 tragedy, but is still the underdog, while Persée is a weaker man than in history, and Philippe is an indecisive king. Yet the play is about the rivalry of the two young men, must, to some extent at least, deal with the historically attested ambition and political naivety shown by the one and the other, and should contrive to be good theatre, by a disposition of events tending to heighten the dramatic situation and obscure the issue as long as possible. To this end, the weight given to each character is important; the dividing-line between
tension and slackness is a very narrow one.

The exposition lasts until the fourth scene of act II, for Philippe does not appear until the beginning of that act; and by the end of it, in II.5, the initial situation has been taken on a stage further by the foreseeable reaction of Démétrius to Persée's plans. How, then, does Thomas Corneille seek to gain the audience's interest in these first two acts? What dramaturgical devices does he use?

The delay in Philippe's entry is less important than the arrival of Démétrius only in the last scene of act I. His presence in act I is necessary, if only to counterbalance the black picture of him painted by Persée in the first three scenes, a portrait which the brief scene between Erixène and Phénice (scene 4) can do little to redeem. Démétrius' next appearance is with Persée and his father in the major scene of act II (scene 3), so little enough time is left for the younger brother to justify himself and establish an identity. And time, or the absence of it, is what is insisted upon in the opening scenes, confirming the picture we already have of Thomas as a writer of tragédies-crise. The first two scenes of the play, with Didas and Onomaste, Persée's confidant, show the elder son summing up the previous day's events (scene 1) and awaiting (scene 2) on the day of the action the return of the envoys from Rome. The unities of time and, incidentally, of place are thus brought to the audience's attention; events, as we shall see, are by the end of the play compressed into a
shorter span of time than in the historical accounts.

The sense of urgency thus created in the exposition, even if it is only relative, is heightened by the language of all three characters in the first two scenes. The key word here is _perdre_. "Si vous ne le perdez, il vous faudra perir" (Didas, I.1); "Et songez ... qu'en perdant votre frère ..." (Onomaste, I.2); "Perdons ce frère ingrat" (Persée, I.2). Yet the hatred which inspires these words is the result of Persée’s jealousy, the unhappy because ill-defined mixture of political ambition and love which largely contributes to the lack of success of the play:

Que de son coeur en vain je tâche à l'éloigner (Démétrius)
Si sa mort ne me laisse assuré de regner ...
Ayant su son amour, par un decret fatal,
Sans me sentir Amant je me fis son Rival;
Mais las! je n'appris pas long-temps à la connoître
Qu'en secret je devins ce que je feignis d'estre. (I.2)

Erixène's refusal of him (I.3), his knowledge that she loves his brother, come to balance the weight that has been given to the character of Persée. Indeed, what is noticeable is the manner in which Thomas has fought shy of a direct conflict between Persée and Démétrius. The former is threatened, as his talk of "ma perte" and "(le) péril où je suis" in I.1 shows. But from the start he passes or attempts to pass much of the responsibility for action on to Didas, whose increased rôle makes him almost as important a character as the prince. "Vostre propre Interest à parler vous convie", Persée tells him (I.1),

Le rang que vous tenez hazarde vostre vie,
Et le Prince ne peut achever ses desseins
Qu'il ne punisse en vous l'ennemi de Romains.
Once this point is made, Persée can fall in with the Machiavellian plans of Onomaste, a precursor of Narcisse, and taking advantage of the king's plans for Démétrius ("Tant que le Roy ... / Le force d'epouser la Fille de Didas", I.2), ensure that Didas, rebuffed by the younger son's inevitable refusal of his daughter, has yet another reason to be grateful to Persée and help him in his project.

Despite the unsatisfactory alliance of love and ambition, the improbable explanation of how Persée's plans to thwart Démétrius out of jealousy turned into love of Erixène, the initial plan worked out by the older son seems watertight, and is exciting from the dramatic point of view. Inevitably, before the close of the act, in scene 5, we learn that Erixène loves Démétrius, and that she is not alone in her feelings: "Le peuple icy vous aime, & Rome vous estime". But the act does not end simply with a facile restoration of balance to the stage. True, we have Démétrius' assurance of love and Erixène's recommendation to him that he should flee. But what is more important is Erixène's awareness that Persée is trying to corrupt Didas, for this information is thus made available to Démétrius and confirms what we, the audience, have already observed in the first scene or two:

On m'a de tout instruite ...
J'ay découvert qu'il cherche à corrompre Didas.
Tous ceux en qui le Roy semble avoir confiance
Sont déjà contre vous de son intelligence,
Didas seul l'embarrasse & s'il peut le gagner,
Le sang n'aura plus rien qu'on luy voye épargner (I.4-5)

Now, Démétrius sees the danger ("Didas auprès du Roy plus
que tout est à craindre") but his remaining speeches to Erixène in scene 5 are filled with conventional love-jargon: fuir, vous quitter, m'éloigner de vous, aimer comme il faut, vous voir, flater ma flamme, mourir à vos yeux.

It is only at the end of the exposition, in the next act, that Didas comes into his own, only there that he and not Erixène can dominate Démétriuss' situation in the play. The plans of Persée and Onomaste, and the unfavourable impression they give of Démétriuss, are countered by the presence of Erixène and Démétriuss at the end of act I. But the essential response, that of the intended victim, is not a relevant one: he sees, or appears to see, only one side of the struggle (the amorous one), whereas it is the political side, or the combination of political and love reasons, that guides the conspiracy against him. If balance is maintained between the frères ennemis at this point, it is almost despite the younger of the two; at best it is a false balance and it needs Philippe to come and restore it.

The king's presence overshadows the last scenes of the exposition. Here he meets Persée and Démétriuss (II.3 and 4) and Onomaste (II.2), but it is only in the third act that he comes face to face with Erixène. It is significant that the king, Démétriuss and Erixène are never all on stage together. The younger son is also disfavoured in not having a confidant (unless it be Erixène herself), whereas Philippe has Antigonus and Persée Onomaste, until the end of act III. Even in his three scenes with Erixène, Démétriuss has to suffer the presence of her confidante Phénice (I.5, III.6 and IV.1).
Until all the cards are on the table, though, in II.3, Démétrius has as fair a say as the historians recount. Thomas' handling of this major interview closely follows the narrative in Livy (book XL, chapter 8), both in the order of speaking - Philippe, then Persée, then his brother - and in detailed points: the examples of Attalus and Eumenes, the Quintius and Scipios, the sham battle which Démétrius mentions and in which "tous deux Chefs de partis nous cherchons la victoire". Like Erixène, Philippe is basically sympathetic towards him ("Je garde encor pour luy des sentiments de Pere", II.1), much as Mithridate, in 1673, will make a distinction between Xiphaires and Pharnace. He says he wants to be unbiased, but at the same time details the crime of the ingrat, as he calls Démétrius, and indicates at the end of the first scene that Didas has already informed him on some points.

The king's demeanour, reminiscent of Auguste (Cinna, II.1) and foreshadowing Mithridate (III.1), is here in keeping with history's picture of him at his best, and the two sons are allowed their say, Persée for 104 lines, Démétrius for some twenty more (II.3). But incidental changes reveal a different emphasis in the play. Philippe, for example, is explicitly said to have witnessed the sham battle ("Vous fustes le témoin de ce Combat d'adresse", Démétrius says to him in self-justification), whereas Livy's account is less clear on this point: "Duo soli (Perseus and Demetrius) tua tegentes latera, pater, praevecti sumus, et secutum est Macedonum agmen: hoc ego, etiam si quid antea
admisissem piaculo dignum, lustratus et expiatus sacro, tum cum maxime in hostiam venena gladios in comissionem praeparatos volutabam in animo ..."¹⁸. This implicit advantage to Démétrius is supported by other details. He is made more logical and more persuasive in Thomas Corneille than in Livy; he does not now admit, as then, that he may have been drunk at the time. Despite the suddenness of his defence ("AppeMé sans sçavoir que j'eusse à me défendre", II.3), he comes off better than Persée in Philippe's summing-up and scores over his brother in his closing remarks. This apparent whitewashing of some of his "crimes" is not just a question of bienséances, although they play a part here, as in La Mort de Commode, for example. It is required to counteract the effect of his "agreement" to marry Didas' daughter.

The dramatically important distinction between the two brothers is kept, although in an attenuated, watered-down form, not solely a result of changes in Démétrius. There is no direct mention, as there is in historical accounts, of Persée's illegitimacy; at best an ironical passing hint, which may well have nothing to do with the matter¹⁹. But the main changes here concern the younger brother, as they had done the older in act I. Démétrius is not merely more persuasive in debate; he is more perceptive, too, when in

¹⁹. Persée: "Ce n'est pas sans raison qu'un Peuple teméraire Ne veut pour votre Fils connoistre que mon Frere ..." (II.3)
the last scene of the act he tells Didas that he sees Persée's ruse in getting him to "accept" Didas' daughter and then refuse her.\(^{20}\)

The offer and acceptance of Didas' daughter, then her rejection by Démétrius are cleverly juxtaposed; the almost immediate switch from a long and rhetorical third scene through the transitional fourth to the humiliating refusal in scene five ensures that full emotional value is given to this **péripétie** and that the act ends on a dramatic note. What will Didas do, now that his important rôle in the state and more particularly in these court intrigues, made clear in the first two acts, has been challenged, albeit indirectly? Events are thrown into the balance, but now that the exposition is clear, the characters are left to stand on their own feet; the artist's apparently impartial but ever-present hand is withdrawn and Démétrius must rely on what support he can himself summon up.

The core of the play, in acts III and IV, centres on the evolution of Démétrius in the new circumstances, from the logical approach he had adopted in the first two acts to the near-frenzy in which he indulges in his last appearance, in IV.5. Running parallel to this development is the change in Erixène, who moves from jealousy towards accept-

20. Démétrius: "Je voy d'où m'en vient l'ordre, & qu'un Frère jaloux Prétend par mes refus accroistre son courroux." (II.5)
ance of Démétrius at the beginning of the last act. The struggle between the two brothers, as we saw, is less direct than in Thomas' historical sources; in the play it is largely transferred to the contrasting moods and reactions of Démétrius and Erixène, for Persée appears in only three of the fourteen scenes of act III and IV, whereas Démétrius is present in six and Erixène in eight. What of Philippe and Didas' part in this struggle? Erixène's jealousy, now that she believes Démétrius to be in love with the favourite's daughter, is heightened by Philippe's arrival in the second scene of act III. With the appearance of Didas himself, the situation seems to be approaching a climax, for although Didas, as Démétrius had persuaded him in act II, says that his daughter is socially unworthy of the king's son, he also shifts the blame on to the younger son:

Me croyant contre luy du parti de Persée,
Plus d'accord, plus d'hymen; loin d'en souffrir les noeuds,
Ma perte désormais est l'objet de ses vœux. (III.3)

The effect, then, is to underline Démétrius' ambition rather than Didas' modesty, and the favourite's further accusations merely strengthen the impression. The emphasis is thus temporarily moved off Erixène and on to Philippe, whose concern becomes more and more general. But Thomas sees that the king's presence could only lead to a solution of the problem and he has Philippe called away by Onomaste. (scene 4).

Both Philippe and Erixène are in false positions at one point or another in what is a transitional act. On his
arrival in scene 2, Philippe is behind the times in believing that "enfin du Ciel la bonté souveraine / De deux Freres jaloux semble étouffer la haine", but Erixène is none the wiser, as scene 1 proves. Her other interview with Phénice (scene 5) leaves her in an uncertain situation. Didas' remarks had not proved that Démétrius refused to marry his daughter, but neither can she be sure that he would not do so. So she can still describe Démétrius as a "traistre" and this calls for the last scene of act III, where the prince has to persuade Erixène that it is she that he loves.

This third act is less tense than the second, but it is necessary that Erixène's attitude should be established, for the subsequent change in act V is what gives the play the small amount of tragic effect it creates. The princess's unwillingness ever to forgive, her rejection of Démétrius is emphasised by being carried over from the last scene of act III into the first scene of act IV. The interval here is put to little effect. The two interviews come too close to one another, as Erixène admits, when at the end of IV.1 she says: "Prince, c'est perdre temps qu'en parler davantage". The second one is needed to prepare the one meeting alone in the play between Persée and Démétrius.

21. Cf. "Qu'il se repente ou non, il m'a manqué de foy, Et je me souviendray de ce que je me dois" (III.1), "Qui trahit un moment reste toujours coupable" (III.6) and "L'Amour parle, à le coeur, malgré tout son dépit, Se sent toujours force d'écouter ce qu'il dit". (V.1)
The lateness and uniqueness of this scene in the tragedy tells us much about Thomas' conception of the subject, the difficulties he found and the mistakes he has made. Clearly, despite the invented parts, especially the rôle of Erixène, Démétrius must be brought to at least the point (death) where history leaves him. Yet the flatness of Persée as a character and the ineffectiveness of the stage Philippe in acts II and III are not adequately compensated for by a more active Didas or by Onomaste, who only appears in six scenes in the play. An impasse has been reached at the end of act III, with the departure of Philippe, the absence of Persée and the suspicions of Erixène. Act IV, then, has to concentrate on Démétrius, as the previous three dealt with Persée, Philippe and Erixène respectively, and show the audience a character who is, in effect, out of character, inconsistent in Aristotle's terms, blackened to provide a run-up to the dénouement which the public can expect. Démétrius' disgrace is heightened by the strength of his reaction to Erixène's apparent conquest of Persée:

Seigneur, au nom des Dieux laissez-moy ma Princesse,
De quelque aimable Objet cherchez ailleurs la foy,
Il en est tant pour vous, il n'en est plus pour moy.

(IV.3)

Defeat in love thus replaces part of the treachery recounted in the historical sources of the play; certainly here, love (totally absent in Livy) has temporary precedence over the importance of Démétrius' Roman sympathies. If his lucidity is still stressed, it is usually mentioned
by himself and may be suspect. His jealous despair gives way to threats on Persée's life (IV.3-4) and to blaming Didas (IV.4). This last element completes the stalemate: for whatever the crimes of Persée, the fact remains that in act II Démétrius had refused to marry Didas' daughter. The ball is back in the king's court and Didas' suggestion that he put his younger son to death is of such consequence that Philippe's indecision at the end, coupled with hints that Antigonus may persuade Démétrius to depart of his own accord, leaves all to play for.

The dramatic requirements of a dénouement are often at variance with the notion of bienséances, perhaps the most important, because the most all-embracing, of the guide-lines which affected seventeenth-century French writers of tragedy. Livy recounts the successful assassination of Demetrius and only fourteen chapters later (book XL chapter 54) does he mention that the false witnesses who testified against him have been found out. In most tragedies of the time, where evil apparently conquers good, there is at least a hint that the malefactors pay for, or will eventually pay for, their crime, that the blind will recognise their error. Now, Thomas Corneille has compressed the episode of the false testimony and has included it at the beginning of act V, before the arrival of Persée in scene 3. This allows him to avoid a feeling of complete

22. "Je le say (le mortel désespoir), je le voy, mon coeur en sent l'outrage
Il s'en émeut de honte, il en frémit de rage ...
Je voy ce que sur luy (Didas) le Ciel m'offre à vanger" (III.3. My italics).
revulsion in the audience's mind and to use once again a situation he had employed in Commode and especially in Stilicon and Maximian in the immediately preceding years, where a character maintains an attitude, ignorant that his true nature and deeds have been found out. But this new example is less successful than that of 1662, which in turn had less impact than Stilicon in 1660. The misunderstanding is of lesser importance, for Démétrius commits suicide and Persée is shown, before he exits, to have had nothing to do with his death. His immediate departure, though, leaves little time for an examination of his past responsibility in the light of this new event; he remains in a false position for too short a time to emulate the increasingly tense closing minutes of the 1660 and 1662 plays. In any case, he has none of the bravado of Stilicon or Maximian, and Démétrius' suicide, anticipating assassination, makes of Persée a more unrelieved villain than Stilicon, and an unrepentant one. The clamouring crowd may well secure his death.

Démétrius dies an unnecessary death, as will Hannibal in Thomas Corneille's La Mort d'Annibal six years later, but he dies gloriously, avoiding the ignominious fate of the historical character or the messily long drawn-out agony of Commode, whose demise is historically similar. The balance of characters is thus established, Démétrius redeems his pettiness of act IV. But this is just the problem: the play's ending is unsatisfactory, especially for Erixène, the invented character, who is left in the lurch, promising
a revenge on Dido and Perseus which Antigonus immediately afterwards (V.7) shows to be unnecessary. No figure stands out from the rest and although there is no complete villain, there is no fully likeable character, either. Although this may seem a small, indeed naïve, point, it is a dramatic necessity which Thomas Corneille would have done well to ponder. Discrimination, even prejudice, is required to turn an incident into a theatrical possibility. "Je veux bien distinguer Xipharès de son frère", Mithridate will say in 1673 (II.3) and this point remains, despite later torturing doubts ("De ce trouble fatal par où dois-je sortir?", IV.5). But Philippe's stand, although historically accurate, is much weaker, more hesitant: "Sans prendre aucun party je veux paroistre égal" (II.1); "entre deux Fils j'aime à me partager" (II.3); "dans le trouble où je suis je ne sçay que resoudre" (IV.8). In the absence of characters equally infused with tragic potential, as in Bérénice, he needed a figure like Stilicon, Buchérius or Maximian - an evil man who sees the light, an innocent character dying an undeserved death, or an ambitious man, unrepentant to the end - to carry the play off. Persée et Démétrius cannot stand alone on the ambivalent character of Démétrius and the emotional maturing of Erixène.

Whatever Thomas Corneille's most recent critic may say, the fortunes of Erixène are made sufficiently clear at the end of the play23 and her rôle, if uninteresting, 

23. Cf. Collins, Thomas Corneille, p. 128: "The play has an unsatisfactory ending since the fate of Erixène is left unresolved."
can be understood. The last technical requirement of tragedy has been fulfilled, for Persée's scheming, although in the event not directly responsible for Démétrius' death, will too, it is clearly hinted, be punished in its turn. This final twist to the tale, compressing in time Livy's account and disposing as best the dramatist may of the invented character Erixène and the meneur du jeu Didas, is surely more satisfactory than in, say, Edward Young's 1753 translation/adaptation of Thomas' play, where Erixene is forced to marry Perseus despite her will, is then cursed by Demetrius, stabs herself to death and is only then followed into death by Demetrius.

The 1663 French tragedy is, when all is said and done, a play of characters rather than action, a family play rather than the portrayal of a struggle for political power. Each act concentrates on one character, as we have seen, and in the end the disadvantages are seen to outweigh the possible advantages of this rather mechanical approach. One may wonder whether the dramatic situation preceded the creation of the individual parts or whether the network of characters gave rise to a suitable dramatic structure. The most that one can say is that the development of the plot is not of the most logical. But it is bounded at both ends by Rome, whose physical superiority the heir presumptive acknowledges at the start:

Mais le Prince (Démétrius) pour nous leur sert toujours d'ôtege,
Et leur intelligence est trop à redouter
Pour nous croire en pouvoir de rien executer. (I.1)

and which appears again in the last scene of all:
Otherwise, events are on a more personal, humdrum level, swinging between "indifférence" and angry impatience. But even the indifference of Erixène, her negatively expressed love of the "traistre" Démétrius, this passive passion which she calls "ce que l'indifférence eut jamais de plus doux" (III.6), is but the public expression of a constantly felt affection, and Démétrius' anger in act IV is not (it is perhaps a matter of regret?) the result of any new outside force coming into play. The end product is boredom, for Thomas Corneille's technical expertise here is simply not capable of putting interest into a family rivalry where the claims and actions of an elder brother, apparently not born out of wedlock, seem, and are said by his father\(^24\), to be more legitimate than those of his disgruntled junior. It is the constant and poorly motivated changes in the fortunes of Persée and Démétrius and in the relations of Erixène now with one, now with the other — and in particular the need to reconcile the illegitimate claims of Démétrius with the historical character — which explain

\(^{24}\). Philippe, II.1: "Je connais que Persée a raison de se plaindre".
the lack of success of the first of these 1663 tragedies.

It is generally agreed that, when he came to write Pyrrhus, Thomas Corneille drew his inspiration from the life of that character described by Plutarch. There is, however, a more contemporary French reference to one of the main characters in the play, and the dramatist may well have come across the figure in this popular novel and then referred back to Plutarch, whom he significantly changes.

In their histories both Diodorus (book XIX chapter 35) and Justin (book XIV chapter 6) make brief mention of DeIdameia, the sister of the Pyrrhus of Thomas' play. But the reference in both cases is a passing one and can hardly constitute a source. Plutarch's account, in his Life of Pyrrhus, however, is rather fuller. He tells how the infant Pyrrhus is confided for safety to Androcleion, Hippias

25. Young’s plagiarizing version is hardly better, but a lyrical critic in the Gray’s Inn Journal of 17 March 1753, commenting on the Drury Lane performance, attributes to the three main male characters a distinction which it should have been Thomas Corneille’s duty to create. "Philip is distinguished by a Warmth of Temper, an Haughtiness of Soul, and a Tenderness for his Children, that runs over in the most affecting Manner. Perseus is a different Villain from any we have seen on the Stage; Policy and Bravery are so blended in him, that we see their mixed Effects in every Scene; and Demetrius is of so amiable a Disposition, that an Audience must be naturally inclined to love him, and for his Sake to dread the restless turbulent Spirit of Perseus, whose Contempt of Demetrius vents itself in a sneering artful Strain." (p. 125)
and Neander, who take him to Glaucias, king of the Illyrians (book II chapter 2 to book III chapter 1). When he is twelve, the boy is returned by Glaucias to Epirus and is put on the throne there (book III chapter 3). Plutarch recounts how he has few teeth, is able to effect cures by sacrificing cocks, and is happily blessed with a divine, hence unharmable right toe ...

When seventeen, Pyrrhus is stripped of his power and joins Demetrius, son of Antigonus, who had taken as his wife Pyrrhus' sister Deidameia (book IV chapter 2). The young man is selected to marry Antigone, a daughter of Berenice (one of Pompey of Egypt's wives) by her previous marriage to Philip (chapter 4). Antigone proves to be an excellent wife and Pyrrhus is sent back to Epirus to regain his kingdom. He there makes peace with Neoptolemus, and this leads to a joint exercise of royal power (book V chapter 1).

Gelon, however, a man devoted to king Neoptolemus, offers Pyrrhus a present of two oxen. Myrtilus, a cupbearer, then asks Pyrrhus to give him the oxen and when he refuses, Gelon urges Myrtilus and Neoptolemus to join him in poisoning the young co-ruler (book V chapters 3-4). The cupbearer pretends to accept but informs Pyrrhus, who invites the rash Neoptolemus to supper and there kills him (book V chapter 6).

In this account, the historical character of Pyrrhus and his uneasy relationship with Neoptolemus are well brought out. Deidameia is mentioned but in passing, as the
wife of Demetrius, and Plutarch makes no other significant reference to her in his Lives. Only some twenty years before Thomas’ play appears, however, La Calprenède had started publishing his ten-volume novel Cassandre, which was to be received with high favour by the mid and late seventeenth-century reading public and to go through a number of editions after it was complete in 1650. In the first book of the fourth part of his novel, La Calprenède devotes a section of his loosely unified plot to the study of DeIdameia. This daughter of Aecides, king of Epirus, and of Phtia, has an unexceptional childhood but soon after her thirteenth birthday her father is attacked by some of the Molossians, is defeated and besieged in Ambracia. Eventually help reaches the beleagured Aecides from Agis, king of the Lacedemonians. DeIdameia has fallen in love with Agis and he asks for her hand as a reward for his services and his determination to destroy the remaining rebels. The only risk to the match comes from Neoptolemus, an ambitious man who had been besieged along with Aecides and whose anger now is caused by jealousy of Agis.

The rebels are defeated within three months, whereupon Agis confesses his love to DeIdameia. When she confirms her affection for him, he sends his army back to Greece. Aecides now requests his brother Alexander for permission for the marriage. But Alexander is killed in battle; Aecides succeeds him and DeIdameia, from being a mere prince’s daughter, becomes daughter of a king and probable inheritrix, as she was the new king’s only child.
But Aecides’ new status has persuaded him that Agis is not good enough to become his son-in-law. The lovers swear eternal affection, but Aecides is adamant. Agis thinks that Deidameia is destined for Cassander, son of Antipater, and that by this alliance Aecides, with the help of Antipater, intends to secure his position in Greece. After listening to his plans, Aecides gives Agis three days in which to leave the country. Deidameia’s tears have no effect on her father, but when Agis begs her to flee to Sparta with him, she says she is unable to carry her faithfulness to this extent and must obey Aecides. The young man threatens suicide but to no avail; the couple part, with renewed vows of loyalty, but shortly afterwards Deidameia learns of Agis’ death in battle and receives his last message, written with a handy javelin-head in his own blood on a piece of paper which he conveniently had in his pocket on the battle-field. Predictably, the young maiden claims that her life is now but a living death ...

So far, so good. Suddenly, however, Deidameia’s mother becomes unexpectedly pregnant and the birth of a son, Pyrrhus, followed by the mother’s death, alters the whole power structure. Neoptolemus, with Antipater’s help, stirs up a revolt against Aecides who, two years after Pyrrhus’ birth, is forced to flee from Ambracia, along with Hippias and Androclides. They arrive safely at Byzantium, but Aecides dies soon afterwards. Pyrrhus, now an orphan, has been entrusted to Glaucus, king of the Illyrians.
Now Thomas, whether in Rouen or Paris, to which he and his brother moved at the end of 1662, can hardly fail to have known and read La Calprenède's rambling ten-volume novel. Plutarch's Lives, too, were readily available, in Amyot's sixteenth-century translation. What changes has he made, firstly, in the Greek narrative, and how much of this is attributable to the contemporary Cassandre? Both Plutarch and La Calprenède tell of the infant Pyrrhus being confided to the king of Illyria. In the former account the episode takes pride of place; we see Pyrrhus in his boyhood, youth and manhood, in his relations with Antigone and Neoptolemus. La Calprenède's version concentrates more on previous events - the affair between Agis and Déidamie and the jealousy of Néoptolemus - but ends with the confiding of the young prince to the Illyrian king. Plutarch mentions Androcleion, Hippias, Neander and Glaucias, as well as Demetrius, Déidameia, Antigone and Néoptolemus; La Calprenède turns the first named into Androclide and Glaucias into Glaucus, keeps Aecidès and Néoptolemus and adds Agis, the Lacedemonian king.

It seems likely that Thomas Corneille saw the dramatic potential in each of these accounts and chose, when making them into a tragedy, to compress events, narrow the perspective and have Pyrrhus and Déidamie of an age to be suitable lovers. He could thus abandon Agis, whose sighing life and melodramatic death are not strictly in keeping with the climate of the 1660s. Secondly, while taking Pyrrhus the man (as in Plutarch) and using as background information
the story of his childhood, Thomas effects a major change: instead of the real son of Aecides being confided in infancy to Glauceas, the king of Illyria, he institutes a classic case of mistaken identity. Glauceas, too, is superfluous as a main character and is replaced as guardian by Androclide (La Calprenède’s form of the name). And Androclide switches the infant prince for his own son, Hippias (another figure out of Plutarch, but in a new rôle), who is brought up as Pyrrhus. Neoptolemus is kept as ruler of Epirus and will, as in La Calprenède, be shown as a rival for the hand of Déidamie. Antigone, who it is intended will become Pyrrhus’ wife, is shown to be Neoptolemus’ daughter in Thomas’ play, not the daughter of Philip and Berenice, as in Plutarch – the dramatist has again reduced the number of characters and relationships in accordance with the requirements of seventeenth-century tragedy. Neoptolemus, Antigone and Déidamie are given confidants; the only important one is the king’s, Gelon, a character whom Thomas Corneille found in Plutarch’s narrative.

The whole emphasis of Thomas’ play is different from that of Plutarch and indeed Pyrrhus goes beyond the ideas which the dramatist would have obtained from a collation of Plutarch and La Calprenède. There are minor changes, necessitated by the change of purpose (the inclusion, for example, of the hackneyed letter, this time in duplicate, revealing all about the mistaken identity nexus) or by the requirements of character-contrast, perhaps even bientèances.
(Gelon becomes a likeable character). But the important alteration is that now the play centres on Androclide and on Déidamie, who become essential characters as far as both the structure and the interest of the play are concerned.

This can be observed, at the lowest level, in the scene structure of Thomas' tragedy. Cut of twenty-six scenes, Déidamie appears in eighteen and is by far the most frequent character in the play. She is followed by Néoptolemus, whose rôle, as we shall see, is largely a static, stabilising one (fifteen scenes) and then by the real Pyrrhus, believed to be Hippias (eleven) and Androclide (ten). But Androclide's "presence" or influence goes far beyond his physical presence; as it is, he and Déidamie are the only characters in the play to appear in all five acts. The rôle of Déidamie, who is in love with and is loved by the person known as Pyrrhus (actually Hippias) must be taken in conjunction with that of this young man; her eighteen scenes make up for "Pyrrhus'" mere five, which contrast with the eleven which the supposed son of Androclide spends on stage.

Given the amused disbelief of critics when called upon to disentangle the plot of Pyrrhus, it is perhaps as well to state that the play is not really as complicated as they (as academics, not theatregoers) make out. A number of basic facts and situations must be borne in mind. Firstly, there is the controlling influence of Androclide, modelled very closely on two of Thomas Corneille's previous
ambitieux, Stilicon and Maximian. Androclide's desire to wield power (allegedly through his son, as Stilicon had also maintained) is dependent on his knowledge that "Hippias" is in fact Pyrrhus, the son of Aecidès, while the man going under that name is his own son Hippias. And only one other main character, Dédamie, is aware of the substitution, as we learn in scene four of act I. The play will largely be concerned, therefore, with the maintaining of attitudes: Androclide keeping his secret firmly to himself, even when his real son's life is at risk, precisely in order to raise him who bears the name of Pyrrhus to the highest position in the state; or Dédamie toying with Hippias who, believing himself to be Pyrrhus and hence her brother, fears an incestuous relationship (I.5). For the others, attitudes are maintained until recognition of truth comes. The real Pyrrhus learns from Dédamie in III.6 that he is her brother: "Ce Pyrrhus qu'à perir exposerent mes refus / Est le Fils d'Androclide, & vous estes Pyrrhus, / Nous nous entendions mal". Androclide's son, in the long opening scene to act IV, eventually learns this fact from the same person: "Ouy, vous estes son Fils, & son Fils est mon Frere". Antigone, who is off-stage during this important period early in the second half of the play (from III.2 to the middle of act V, in fact) gradually finds out the truth, for she it is who brings news of Androclide's imminent death, commenting: "Les Dieux contre le Pere ont employé le Fils, / Au moins si d'Hippias Androclide est le Pere" (V.3); while Néoptolemus maintains a quizzical doubt through all the confusing reports, until in the last
lines of the play he receives written proof from the late queen that a substitution has taken place and can finally be convinced: "La Reine a prononcé, je n'en murmure point" (V.5).

The second point which the audience has to grasp is the basic pattern of love-relationships. Officially Antigone, Néoptolemus' daughter, is to marry the man known as Pyrrhus but she loves and is loved by "Hippias", the real Pyrrhus. Dédamie, for her part, loves "Pyrrhus" (Hippias), who returns the affections, despite his qualms about what he believes to be their blood-relationship, and this couple's mutual love is contested by the king, Néoptolemus, who seeks Dédamie's hand. To these two basic situations must be added the third passion, Androclide's ambition, which seeks to place "Pyrrhus" (his son, Hippias) on the throne.

Once these major facts are realised, the rest of the imbroglio falls into place. Néoptolemus threatens to kill his rival "Pyrrhus", but Dédamie, aware that Androclide knows of the mistaken identities, believes that the father will reveal the truth in order to save his son's life. Androclide's lust for power, however, is stronger than his paternal affection: he allows "Pyrrhus" to be condemned for daring to love Dédamie. This error of judgement on Dédamie's part is then counter-balanced by one which Androclide commits. Dédamie comes to believe that Androclide has clarified the position and that Néoptolemus is aware that the real Pyrrhus is her brother. In fact he has not,
so instead of getting Hippias pardoned, Déidamie sees her brother forgiven by the king. With his own son now under suspicion, Androclide's feelings change: he stirs up a revolt, but is killed in the process. Unrepentant to the end, he dies on stage, and Néoptolemus, convinced at last about the mix-up in infancy, allows Pyrrhus to marry Antigone, while Hippias can have Déidamie as his wife.

The basic plot is thus relatively straightforward; what makes it more complicated than this brief résumé would suggest is not so much the difficulty we experience in interpreting allusions and situations (for we are aware from the outset that Déidamie and Androclide are in the know, even if the other characters are not), but rather the unnecessarily vague references to people used by characters whose lack of awareness of the identity mix-up makes the use of such general terms annoying rather than interesting. Collins, in his brief mention of Pyrrhus, quotes a speech by Néoptolemus (IV.4) which brings out the confusing reference to fils, fille and so on. But what is not stressed there is that, while Androclide and Déidamie, also possibly Pyrrhus and Hippias, once they are enlightened, could use such vagueness to dramatic advantage, it is a hindrance rather than a help on the lips of Néoptolemus, who believes firmly in the original pattern of relationships until very late on in the play.

If total relevance has not yet triumphed - and Pyrrhus quite definitely suffers as a result - the play is skilfully constructed and for the most part is well developed. In addition, it contains at least two interesting character studies, which depend for their success on the dramatic structure and the devices which Thomas Corneille uses. Despite the multiplicity of details, the play is adequately unified; it seems pointless to quibble about the *deus ex machina* ending with Gelon's duplicate copy of the queen's note, for do many of what were, and are still, considered the best seventeenth-century tragedies not have endings which, in themselves, are as arbitrary as those of, say, most Molière comedies? The important point is not there, but in the previous action, the characterisation of Androclide and the others and the peril (to use Pierre Corneille's interesting term) which at least Androclide faces and deals with before his death. The acts and scenes are of normal length; there is adequate *liaison des scènes* and all characters are on stage at the end. There are no monologues in the twenty-six scenes; we have seen elsewhere that Thomas Corneille's plays tend to be busy ones, with little time for the internal doubts which his elder brother had portrayed. Thomas is careful to avoid irrelevant meetings of characters: Déidamie and Antigone do not meet until the middle of act V (scene 3), while Pyrrhus and Hippias only coincide in the last scene of the play. The conspirator Androclide only speaks with his real son twice (act IV scenes 2 and 3), although (or because?) he is aware from
the start of the true situation. And it is fair to say that these avoidances are plausibly handled - there are few, if any, unmotivated exits in the play.

So much for the general structural pattern. What of the exposition, which is a test for any adequate tragedy, the nooëud and the dénouement? How dramatic does Thomas manage to be, and how artificial are the means he uses to create dramatic tension? It has to be admitted that he succeeds decidedly well with the first and even the second act, and that it is only in the central section of the play that he loses the thread of interest. This is probably because he misjudges the moment when Pyrrhus is informed of his identity and then aggravates the situation by having Hippias enlightened in the following scene (IV.1, after a brief, action-free interval) and still disbelieved by Néoptolemus when the king appears in scene 3. The play picks up considerably in act V, when the interest turns on the dying culprit Androclide, and on Antigone, who had appeared in only five scenes in the preceding four acts.

The opening act introduces all the main characters except Néoptolemus, who conventionally serves to give a fresh and interesting start to events after the first interval. Necessary statements of position are made in scenes 1-3, which allow us to sort out the feelings of Antigone (scenes 1-2) and of "Hippias" (Pyrrhus) in his relations with Antigone (scene 2) and Déidamie (scene 3). After this rapid introduction of characters who are still unaware of the substitution of children, Thomas clears the situ-
ation up well, for the audience at least, in a brief fourth scene, into which many of the necessary details of the story-so-far are compressed. In addition to points of past history, two essential facts emerge: Androclide is as aware as Déïdamie of the true situation, and the latter, justifying the past silence on the matter, believes that the truth must now out:

_C'estoit peu que deux Rois eussent signé l'Accord, Malgré les seuretes qu'un tel Accord fait naistre, Androclide toûjours a craint pour son vray Maistre, Et n'a voulu par là, de peur d'estre surpris, Jusqu'au jour de l'hymen hasarder que son Fils. Ce jour paroist enfin, & rien n'est plus à taire. (I.4)._

The first of the two interviews with "Pyrrhus" (Hippias) in the next scene confirms her in her belief: "Le destin de Pyrrhus peut enfin éclater" (I.6).

But Androclide thinks otherwise, in a highly dramatic entry and tense closing scene to the first act. His ambition to see "Pyrrhus", alias his son Hippias, on the throne and married to Antigone force from him the supporting argument that Glaucias' army is still ready and a danger to Epirus and its king Néoptolemus. He has none of the scruples of Déïdamie: "Pyrrhus avec son nom luy (à Hippias) ceda l'avantage / Qu'un Monarque en naissant eut toûjours par partage, / ... / Et ce n'est pas à moy d'en démentir le Sort" (I.6). _Le sort_, a term used equally falsely by Thomas' previous _ambitieux_, contrasts immediately with his position of powerfulness: as far as he and Déïdamie know, he holds the only copy of the letter which Phtia left at her death to inform successors about the substi-
tution and, as Déidamie had said to her confidante in the first scene, it had been Androclide who had persuaded Néoptolemus to re-establish Pyrrhus in the kingdom. The exposition thus ends on a masterly first péripétie, with Déidamie frustrated and Androclide apparently fully in command.

The second act not only introduces Néoptolemus but carries the action forward notably, as it concerns Déidamie and Androclide, who also appears, and in addition Pyrrhus and Hippias, who are absent. The centres of interest are the king and Androclide and in the middle of their struggle, attempting to control both characters, is Déidamie. The act is again highly dramatic, for Déidamie is faced with an impossible choice and even when circumstances appear to favour a solution and place her enemy Androclide in a tight spot, it is Androclide, in the last scene, when Déidamie is absent, who manages to restore, or rather reaffirm his dominant position.

The king's love for Déidamie is clearly brought out in the first scene. It is only because of this that he has been persuaded to re-establish "Pyrrhus" as co-ruler. But unless Déidamie is willing to return his love, then "Pyrrhus'" life is at stake: "Il est trop criminel s'il nuit à mon amour" (II.3). The young girl must therefore decide. She is faced with several different choices, however: her own love for "Pyrrhus"; her need, therefore, to protect "Pyrrhus" from marriage to Antigone; her need, too, to save "Pyrrhus'" life - in so doing, can she refuse to
marry Néoptolemus? Now, the king is unaware of all but the last of these three situations, and perhaps not unreasonably so, for, as he affirms, "Je crois ce que je vois" (II.3). Yet Dédamie is placed in very much the same situation as Andromaque will find herself in four years later, in Racine's tragedy. Unlike Andromaque, she counters threats with open defiance:

Ce Frère contre qui ta trahison conspire,
Redoutera bien moins le plus affreux trépas
Que la secrète horreur de me voir dans tes bras.
Prononce là-dessus, tu vois toute mon âme. (II.2)

After a transitional scene, in which Androclide is made aware of what is going to happen to "Pyrrhus" and learns what Dédamie's attitude is, he meets her in their second interview alone (II.4, cf. I.6). On the surface, the ball is now in Androclide's court. He expresses fears for his son's safety and assures Dédamie that he will reveal who "Pyrrhus" is, even although "son secret révélé le livre à sa (Néoptolemus') vengeance" (II.4). In addition, Dédamie feels confident enough to mock the conspirator, whose ambition she now believes frustrated:

"... épouser un Tyran (Néoptolemus), m'unir à sa Famille,
Me plaît mieux que l'affront de devenir ta Fille. / Après ce franc aveu, délibere & rescous". (scene 4). But Androclide is more cunning than she realises. When Antigone arrives in the closing scene of the act, announcing "Pyrrhus'" arrest and claiming that Dédamie prefers her own love (for "Hippias") to concern for her brother's ("Pyrrhus'") safety, Androclide skilfully places the blame on his son and especially Gelon. Antigone's accusations
against him are direct:

Ne dissimulez point, j'ay trop, j'ay trop su voir
Ce que l'ambition a sur vous de pouvoir.
Pour le sang de Pyrrhus la Couronne est certaine;
Et comme par sa mort Deidamie est Reine,
Et qu'elle ne hait pas les soins de vostre Fils,
L'espoir de le voir Roy vous a semblé permis? (II.5).

The father replies that Déidamie loves his son
("Hippias", really Pyrrhus) and is loved in return, and
that it is his son, and particular Gelon, who are guilty
of letting "Pyrrhus" (really Hippias) be arrested. He
moves towards disowning his son, calling himself a "père
déplorable" and his son "mon Fils, ce lâche Fils" but
never goes to the farthest limit in doing so. His last
words to Antigone in the act run as follows:

Dans ces extremitez interdit & confus,
Je sçay que tous vos soins se doivent à Pyrrhus;
Mais à mes tristes voeux en secret favorable,
Sauvez-le, s'il se peut, sans perdre un Fils coupable.

If the first act closed with a character, Déidamie,
frustrated and in danger, the second ends in a different
but equally dramatic key. This time it is the audience,
not the audience and the character, who experience the
tension, for Antigone, like her father, is unaware of
Androclide's two-faced dealings. Both have been exposed
to his machinations in this act, and Déidamie has had to
face a second interview with him, whose success was but
illusory. She will be off-stage until the close of act
III, but it is in the early scenes, with the unconscious
help of Antigone and the king, that Androclide's position
will be strengthened still further.

Herein lie at once the strength of the play, as an
ingenious, carefully interlocking series of misapprehensions and wrongly drawn conclusions, but also its weakness, which becomes apparent towards the end of act III and in act IV. For the more successful Androclide is in maintaining the mistaken identity nexus, the more unnecessary or irrelevant it becomes. This is really where Pyrrhus differs from Stilicon, to the latter's advantage. Androclide is as aware as the 1660 conspirator was of the true situation: both want power, ostensibly through their sons, whom they know. The audience is aware of the truth - less clearly so, perhaps, in Stilicon than in Pyrrhus, but still aware, and the son (Euchérius or Hippias) is ignorant of what is going on behind his back. But Stilicon can devote himself full-time to the plotting, and this impression is heightened most skilfully by the very fact of his rare appearances and cryptic statements. In comparison, Androclide is heavy-handed and unsubtle; the problem of the identity of his son, whether the real one, known to all but Déidamie and himself as Pyrrhus, or the one he says is his and condemns ("Hippias", really Pyrrhus), takes on such importance and becomes so confused that when we realise that its influence on Néoptolemus has been virtually nil, we are justified in asking whether Thomas Corneille has been leading us up a very twisting garden path.

Before this, though, the dramatist has to push the conspiring father as far as he can go. He had been caught off-balance in act II by Néoptolemus' plan to arrest "Pyrrhus". In act III, the first part of the noëud will
close on the fourth scene, when, like Stilicon, Androclide will disavow his "son": "... mon coeur / Ne connoit point de Fils en qui m’oeste l’honneur". The whole of the third act concentrates on "Hippias" and his relations with each of the main characters in turn – with Antigone in scene 1, with Néoptolemus in scene 2, Gelon in scene 3, Androclide in scene 4, Déidamie in scene 5 and especially the last, sixth scene, the only time in the play in which both brother and sister are completely alone and the occasion for Déidamie to tell "Hippias" that he is in fact Pyrrhus. Each of the first few scenes pushes "Hippias" into ever greater difficulties. Antigone complains that Déidamie is keener to save "Hippias" than she is to rescue her brother "Pyrrhus" from his imprisonment. Néoptolemus, however, who arrives in the second scene, is unwilling to do anything about "Pyrrhus", until Déidamie returns his affection.

Je luy (à "Pyrrhus") donne ma Fille, & quand je puis prétendre
Qu'il fléchisse sa soeur, qu'il la force à se rendre,
Son orgueil dédaignant tout ce qu'il tient de moy,
A l'affront d'un refus abandonne ma foy.

At least Néoptolemus, blind though he is, is consistent: all he wants is "ou la main de la Soeur ou la teste du Frere" (III.2), and he is unwilling to listen to "Hippias" arguments or protestations of love for Antigone (scenes 3 and 4).

The disavowal of his own "son" by Androclide in scene 4 of the third act provides the climax, the concluding moment to the tension-building of the first part of the
play. He talks about his devoir, his sort, his honneur, much as Stilicon had done - but, as I said, the difference between condemnation of a false son, as here, and that of Euchérius, the real son in Stilicon, is a witness to the lower merit of the 1663 production. Néoptolemus is momentarily clear-sighted, as Honorius was, when he adds, in commenting on "Hippias'" ready, fearless reply to Androclide, "Et qui craint de trop dire ou trop dissimuler, Peut montrer quelque trouble avant que de parler". (III,4). But the subject ("Un Sujet si fidèle") is more convincing than his apparent offspring, condemned for conspiring with Déïdamie.

Pyrrhus starts becoming untidy in the very next scene (scene 5), when Déïdamie, arriving and believing that Androclide has revealed the mistaken identites to the others present, appeals for Pyrrhus' (i.e. "Hippias") safety. "Voyez moy toute en pleurs ... / Pour ce malheureux Prince implorer vos bontez ..." The outcome of this error of judgement (an understandable one, as she did ask quite plainly if all had been cleared up) is that the real Hippias ("Pyrrhus") is released at the end of scene 5, and the real Pyrrhus ("Hippias") is told by Déïdamie in the last scene that he is her brother and not the son of Androclide. "Allons mon Frere, allons malgré son imposture/... / Vous placer dans ce Trône", says Déïdamie encouragingly, while Pyrrhus, now that he is sure who he is, is more prudent. "Vivez pour Hippias, c'est moy qui vous l'ordonne", he counsels. "On me croit vostre Amant, j'en dois garder le nom". And all he plans to tell the king is "ce
que je doy" (III.6).

Now, the revelation to Pyrrhus of his true identity could have been a potentially fruitful dramatic device, had Thomas Corneille taken it to its logical conclusion and put it to work. But little happens in act IV to further the action significantly. There is considerable repetition; and the new situation in which Androclide finds himself at the end is not a definitely dangerous one and could, in any case, have been reached in a different, more plausible way. The first error, as we have seen, is in having "Pyrrhus" learn his real parentage so soon after "Hippias" has been enlightened: there is thus no room for a playing-off of one character against the other. The real Hippias is now relieved of his fears of incest, which in any case the audience, Dédamie and Androclide knew he had no need to worry about. His expression of love for Dédamie is, in the new circumstances, conventional, and his eager words to Androclide, informing him that he is his son, add little but a touch of naivety to the scene.

Secondly, there is the attitude of Dédamie. As in her first interview with "Pyrrhus" in act I, so here, in IV.1, she lets the deception run on for half of this scene, the longest of act IV. To some extent, this apparent callousness or unmotivated unreasonableness is necessary dramatically, as "Pyrrhus" needs time to work up his despair before Dédamie lets him in to the secret. But again this process is not successfully handled: it satisfies neither us nor her, for we are all, except "Pyrrhus", in
the know. Thirdly, the clash of personalities between the newly enlightened Hippias and Androclide (IV.2) could have been a forceful one. But Androclide is too much master of the situation and this episode is no preparation for the conspirator's worry which occurs in the last scene of the act, when the king plans to put "Pyrrhus" (Androclide's real son) to death.

When Néoptolemus arrives (scene 3), Androclide accuses himself, Stilicon-fashion, and in so doing, sums up the other's arguments against him:

Deidamie a acu qu'une indigne esperance,
M'a fait du vray Pyrrhus dérober la naissance,
D'un échange secret j'ose appuyer l'abus,
Hippias est son Frere, & mon Fils est Pyrrhus.

This last line is but one example of the repetitiveness of this fourth act. There is repetition in language; Déidamie repeats that she thought the king had earlier been apprised of the true situation, and that she loves Hippias, while Néoptolemus sticks obstinately to his guns through all this wordiness, quite unable or unwilling to believe that there has been an identity mix-up. The word-repetition is painfully obvious - the situation may be unusual, human nature slow to respond, but only the characters can be unaffected by the mind-deadening series of assurances. From Déidamie in scene 1 we have "vous estes Hippias", "Oui vous estes son Fils, & son Fils est mon Frere" and "Vous estes Hippias, Hippias est mon Frere", while the former "Pyrrhus" struggles to sort things out in scenes 1 and 2: "Androclide est mon Pere", "son Fils est vostre Amant", "Je sui Hippias, ... vous estes mon
"Père", "Hippias est Pyrrhus, vous n'êtes point son Père" and "Hippias est son Frère, & je suis vostre Fils". Scene three, with all four characters on stage (Déidamie, Hippias, Néoptolemus and Androclide) is a real field day for confusion. In turn, they declare: "Hippias est mon Frère, Hippias est Pyrrhus"; "Hippias est Pyrrhus, je ne suis point son Frère"; "Quoy, Madame, Hippias n'est point Fils d'Androclide?"; "Hippias est son Frère, & mon Fils est Pyrrhus .." One need hardly insist on the ineffectiveness of such verbiage.

Déidamie, too, has to re-state the error she made in III.5, believing that Androclide had revealed all to the king, and for good measure the audience has a further assurance in act IV (scene 3, cf. scene 1) of her love for Hippias. But all this is, in the end, to no avail, for Néoptolemus shrugs off the theory of substitution and Androclide's unpatriotical arguments and continues to believe that "Pyrrhus" (i.e. Hippias) must be put to death. The "Père malheureux", Androclide, will be spared, he says confidently, "Pyrrhus perira seul". So in the end we have a flicker of tension, as Androclide, in an uncustomary a parte, sees that his own offspring is in a tight spot. "O Dieux de mon bonheur jaloux", he whimpers, "Par ce projet funeste où me réduisez-vous?" But the audience remains largely indifferent: Androclide has asked for it, in a way; there has been an unnaturally complicated working-up to the present position; and in the end one rather sides with Néoptolemus in ignoring all these strident claims and counterclaims.
The play concludes predictably enough. The king's threats to Déïdamie in the opening scene of the final act merely serve as a contrast to the last five scenes, when the tide turns, thanks to an uprising against Néoptolemus led by Androclide. Given the various individuals' characteristics, this is about the only way out of the dilemma; and it is a proper rebellion, graphically described by Antigone in act V scene 2, not just an unnecessary piece of local colour, as in many other tragedies of the time, which conclude satisfactorily enough without outside intervention. Hints that Androclide is perhaps the villain are dropped loudly in scene 1 by Déïdamie; scene 2 heightens suspicions, but the frightened first witness has "veu sans rien connaisse". It is Antigone who calmly and modestly recounts her own efforts and gives a glowing description of "Hippias", his valour, his success and his magnanimity. "'Qu'on épargne, dit-il, 'qu'on épargne Androclide'". Euchérius never fought better, in an identical situation, to back up the ruler's frightened guards.

But Néoptolemus still asks the obvious question: who is who? Androclide arrives, expiring but unrepentant, and dies, still maintaining that the real Pyrrhus is his son and that "Je n'ay rien fait dont mon coeur se repente" (V.5). It is only when Androclide has breathed his last that the king allows himself to voice doubts: "Je voy que pour Pyrrhus c'est son Fils qu'il me rend, / Mais en seray-je creu s'il le nie en mourant?". But the arrival of Hippias, whom the king has only seen once before in the
play (IV.3), entails further questions, and a further declaration from Hippias that he loves Déidamie. Neither his nor Déidamie's word is good enough for the cautious monarch; it requires Gelon's decision to pluck up courage and reveal that he has a duplicate copy of the dying Phtia's comprehensive explanatory note for the dénouement to be complete. The audience has gathered that Gelon and Androclide, confidant and favourite of Néoptolemus respectively, do not see eye to eye, and it is this enmity which Gelon gives as the main reason for Phtia's cautious foresight. She had feared that "Quelque jour Androclide osast manquer de foy" and, "nous ayant veus de touttemps ennemis", went ahead and "me confia ce que je fais connoistre" (V.6). Despite inadequate notice in the play, this is moderately plausible and, together with Gelon's explanation of his own reactions, makes the ending less of a deus ex machina than it might appear at first sight. For the confidant says to his master

J'ai craint de vostre amour les vifs emportemens.
Et jusques à l'hymen resolu de me taire,
Je laissois Androclide en pouvoir de tout faire.

All in all, then, Pyrrhus is a less disastrous play than bemused critics would almost invariably claim. It has a good first two acts, with suspense and surprise - presumably a key intention of Thomas Corneille in this tragedy - well maintained. If the last part of act III and the four scenes of act IV are less successful, the dénouement is not without interest, this time, perhaps, because of the characterisation of Androclide. The play is not
straightforward by any means, but its complications are reduced on a second and subsequent reading, and the same could be true of performance.

What was Thomas' intention in writing a play of this kind? There seem to me to be three main answers, and none coincides with the principal interest of a tragedy such as Quinault's Astrate, played a year after Pyrrhus. There Astrate, son of the murdered king of Tyre, is in love with the usurper's daughter Elise. And although there is an attempt by Sichée to place on the throne the late king's son, Astrate, whom he has brought up as his own, in secrecy, the main interest lies in the love of Astrate and particularly of Elise, an amoureuse criminelle, who has been responsible for dispatching Astrate's father and two elder brothers, and who commits suicide in the end. The element of suspense is reduced, for Sichée informs Astrate that he is the legitimate ruler and he, not some hesitant confidant, produces the letter to prove it.

Despite its quaint moments of local colour, then, Astrate is turning away from interest in surprise to an analysis of love, which is stronger even than ambition. As the Journal des savants says of the play, in a review published on 23 March 1665, "cette pièce a de la tendresse partout et de cette tendresse qui est propre à M. Quinault". Pyrrhus is one of the very rare tragedies in the years 1663-1664: apart from Pierre's Sophonisbe in January 1663 and Thomas' Persée et Démétrius, there are only La Thébaïde (June 1664) and Othon (July 1664) before Astrate in the
closing weeks of 1664 or the beginning of 1665. We shall be looking briefly at La Thébaïde in a moment and at Astrate in greater detail in the next chapter, but should get clear first that in Pyrrhus Thomas seems to have been attempting several things. His play may be a study of the struggle in Pyrrhus and/or Hippias. Or it could be seen as the progressive enlightenment of Neoptolemus, delayed until the last possible moment. Finally the dramatist could have been wanting to insist on the characterisation of Androclide, the only figure, along with Déidamie, present in every act: his cunning and ambition contain reminders of Stilicon and his lack of repentance recalls the case of Maximian a year or so before. Now obviously none of these three can constitute the sole interest of the play; but it could be maintained that Pyrrhus fails because there is no clear priority given to one or the other.

Historically, and in Cassandre, Neoptolemus is a usurper, who stirred up a revolt against Aecides and caused him to flee and die soon afterwards. Yet this aspect of the king is not really insisted upon by Thomas Corneille. True, Déidamie labels him thus in I.5, in her conversation with "Pyrrhus", and the king calls himself a usurper in II.2. But according to Antigone in the opening scene, he will rule along with Pyrrhus - as in Plutarch, in fact, before Pyrrhus there turns round and dispatches Neoptolemus. The tyranny of royal power is replaced by the tyranny of love (up to a point), turning the king into a single-minded, if not passionate, lover, jealous of rivals'
attentions. And this obsession, although strong enough in itself, is further weakened, inevitably, by our knowledge that Déïdamie is aware of the past substitutions, and could act to change the situation.

Audience awareness, then, is an important factor to be borne in mind when we come to judge Pyrrhus. This is always a tricky problem for the dramatist to solve, and all one can say in this instance is that Thomas Corneille should either have delayed the news until later than the first act, or revealed it then but made much greater use of it. It does, incidentally, help to preserve the bien-séances, in a play which is concerned, like most classical tragedies, with closely related characters. As Déïdamie is aware from the start of what is what, there is no risk of incest; the voix du sang plays but a small part in the action (e.g. in I.5). Déïdamie only meets Hippias ("Pyrrhus") once before IV.1, when Hippias realises he can marry his "sister". Similarly, she only meets her real brother Pyrrhus ("Hippias") three times before he is enlightened (I.3, III.5 and 6).

If the audience or reader is informed of the confusion from the outset, surprise is in the play perhaps more for the benefit of the characters than the public. In our sophistication, we tend to forget that the influence of one character on another stage character is an important aspect of the seventeenth-century dramatist's purpose. For example, the whole question of admiration,
I feel, deserves to be re-examined in this light. Thomas Corneille's main task, then, in this very varied play Pyrrhus, was to reconcile knowledge with doubt and absence of knowledge (leading to surprise), to place together characters like Androclide and Déidamie, who are aware, Pyrrhus and Hippias, who are eventually enlightened, and Antigone and Néoptolemus, whose "blindness" is maintained until act V. The task of achieving a balance between these various forces was a daunting one; and it is perhaps not too much of a condemnation to say that Thomas Corneille only partially succeeded in his venture.

When Racine came, for whatever reason, to compose his La Thébaïde, it is clear that, as a man still in his early 20s, he was finding some difficulty in the working out of a satisfactory dramatic structure. The play was first put on by Molière's troupe at the Palais-Royal, presumably to compete with Boyer's La Thébaïde at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, as the third of Racine's three letters to the abbé Le Vasseur, believed to have been written in December 1663, would suggest. The previous month, he tells Le Vasseur

27. I hope to be able to examine this idea shortly elsewhere, taking into account the dual meaning of admiratio, admiration and wonder.

that the play is not as far on as he would have liked.

"Le 4e (acte) était fait dès samedi; mais malheureusement je ne goûtais point, ni les autres non plus, toutes les épées tirées: ainsi il a fallu les faire rengainer, et pour cela ôter plus de deux cents vers, ce qui est malaisé". In December, he says that "je n'ai fait que re-toucher continuellement au cinquième acte, et il n'est tout achevé que d'hier. J'en ai changé toutes les stances avec quelque regret".

Now later, in the Preface to the play, Racine will comment on the absence of love and the bloody dénouement. But this is only in 1676: for twelve years, then, La Thébaïde, or Les Frères, as he refers to it at the time of composition, will stand without any criticism from the author. If, as seems probable, he wrote the play - but with whose encouragement? - as a counterattraction to Boyer's tragedy at the rival theatre, much more highly regarded for its performance of tragedy, Racine also notes, in the December 1663 letter, that the Hôtel de Bourgogne will only be able to play that La Thébaïde "après trois autres pièces". Among these are probably Pierre Corneille's Othon and quite conceivably Thomas' Pyrrhus. So if Racine, in the first of his plays which have come down to us, appears to have been indulging in the favourite and quite legitimate seventeenth-century pastime of com-

29. Ibid., pp. 457 and 459.
30. Ibid., p. 460.
posing a play on a theme already popular and playing at another theatre, we must also realise that his La Thébaïde, performed eventually in June 1664, is directly contemporary with the superficially intricate plot of Pyrrhus.

It goes without saying that La Thébaïde is more straightforward, in every sense of the word, than Pyrrhus. Not only is the plot easy to follow (although one can still offer a variety of interpretations concerning the centre of interest); the characters, with the possible exception of Créon, are almost entirely devoid of guile and speak their minds openly, bluntly, at times with un-concealed venom. But it is the dramatic structure that I should like to examine here. Taking Rotrou's Antigone and making out of the first two acts and two scenes the whole of his five-act tragedy, Racine has been able to strip the action down to its bare essentials and keep it strictly unified. In having a previous play to work from (and his use of it is frequent) the dramatist has perhaps an easier task than Thomas Corneille, whose sources - and this is true of Pyrrhus - are usually purely historical or at most based on a prior non-dramatic work.

The twenty-five scenes of La Thébaïde place the play among those of normal or near normal length. The fourth act has only three scenes but, as we shall see, one of these is of considerable length. The unities are observed, the unity of place being maintained by the reports of Olympe (I.1, II.2, V.2), who acts as a messenger to inform the two women of what goes on outside the walls of Thebes,
and time is emphasised at great length. This will, of course, become a constant feature of Racine's later plays, where references to past, present and future time help to fill out, and compensate for, the bare structure and sparse action of Racinian tragédie-crise. "Depuis six mois", says Jocaste, in the opening lines of the play (I.1, line 3), and Étéeclé, too, refers to the time span when he arrives (I.3, line 132). Other characters mention the duration of past time: Hémon addressing Antigone in II.1, speaks of "Après un an entier de supplice et d'absence" and later claims that "un moment loin de vous me durait une année". Antigone believes (II.3) that the "long éloignement" of the two brothers will have led to a change in their affection, and Étéeclé later confirms (IV.1) that his hatred "n'est pas, Crémon, l'ouvrage d'une année". In that same act, in the great meeting between Étéeclé and Polynice, their mother refers (scene 3) to the "deux ans d'absence" which have now come to an end.

All this, and more, is necessary to fill in the background, create the atmosphere and give to the present its sense of urgency, privilege and, perhaps, doom. Present time, though, is of direct relevance to the dramatist within his five acts and can make up for, and explain, the

31. I am quoting (but with modernised spelling) from the original, 1664 text of La Thébaïde, 140 lines longer than the definitive version, as published in La Thébaïde de Racine, ed. M. Edwards, 1965. This seems to me to offer a more useful parallel with Thomas' tragedy, because it shows us Racine's play without revision and cuts.
lack of physical action. Emphasis is placed on the primacy of one particular day: "Ce jour détestable" (I.1), and Jocaste reminds us of this in II.3, when she asks the rhetorical question "Ce jour-ci tout entier n'est-il pas de la trêve?" Speed is of the essence of the play - "dès aujourd'hui (I.3) becomes "dès cette heure" and even "dès ce même moment" within the same scene - and there are several injunctions to run: "il faut se hâter, chaque heure nous est chère", says Jocaste (I.6) and the verbs courir or fuir form a leitmotiv to the action (lines 17, 661, 1032, 1364, 1623).

Circumscribed by such imperatives, the characters have little time for inessentials. The personal feuds which are at the source of their situation are bad enough on the human level. And if the Gods or Fate take only a small part directly in what happens to them, the characters are all aware of the inhumanity of their own actions and the crushing force of circumstances which weighs upon them. Inhumain reflects a very important side of the plot: "ces inhumains", Polynice and Etocle, I.1, line 17; "ce prince inhumain", line 133; "Etocle ... inhumain", line 614; "un champ inhumain", "cette guerre inhumaine", line 1171; "(Antigone) inhumain", line 1628, and there are several other examples. This excess, this inhumanity or absence of forces on the same human scale as the characters, is also reflected in the use of mille. "Mille objets", "mille combats", "mille fois", says Antigone in II.1, and later she talks of "mille criminels" (III.3). Jocaste mentions
"mille sceptres" when addressing the two warriors in IV.3, and while Olympe has heard "mille bruits confus" (V.2), Créon fears "mille coups mortels" (V.3) and "mille tourments divers" (V.6).

These remarks may seem more indicative of a particular aim in characterisation than of a trend in dramatic technique; but it is important to realise the repetitions within La Thébaïde, and the impressions that this repetitiveness seeks to create if we are to judge the simplicity of the play's structure correctly. Emphasis on the family feuds, coming both from inside and outside the family circle, from inside and outside the walls of Thebes, helps to supplement the pattern of meeting and avoidance seen within the play itself. In the first three acts, there are always two fairly important characters who do not appear (in addition, of course, to Ménéée, who plays an important part in the action but is not a listed character). Polynice and Hémon are absent from act I, Étèocle and Créon from act II and Polynice and Hémon again from act III. Only in act IV do all six characters (Étèocle, Polynice, Jocaste, Antigone, Créon and Hémon) meet for the first and last time, in scene 3. And this provides a graphic contrast with the fifth act, for in its six scenes only Antigone and Créon from among the main characters appear, three and four times respectively. The distribution of characters bears out the theme of the play, the deep-rooted hatred existing between Étèocle and Polynice, and the attempts - naïve, sincere, or well stage-managed -
of the remaining characters to achieve a reconciliation. Antigone and Jocaste, the two women of the play, appear most frequently, Antigone sixteen times and Jocaste fourteen. Créon is in twelve of the twenty-five scenes, but Étécle in only seven and Polynice in less than half that number.

The pattern of avoidance thus becomes significant. Jocaste and Antigone both meet Créon several times (but always together) before IV.3, as in I.4 and 5 and III.4 and 5, and the two women meet Hémon, Créon's son and Antigone's lover, too: Jocaste in II.3 and 4, Antigone in all the four scenes of that act. But Créon never meets Hémon before IV.3 and obviously never will after that encounter. Of Hémon's five appearances in the play, only one is alone with Antigone (II.1) - this emphasises the point that Racine will make later about the absence of love in the play. But the most significant avoidance pattern is that concerning Étécle and Polynice. They, too, only meet once, in the attempted reconciliation scene at the end of act IV. Before then the dramatist has taken care to keep them well apart, four scenes and an interval occurring between the departure of Étécle (I.4) and the arrival of Polynice (II.3) and three scenes and an interval between the latter's leaving (II.4) and Polynice's return (III.4). This pointed inability to meet on even semi-friendly terms serves to underline the warlike attitude of the two brothers which we know from récits exists while they are fighting, or attempting to fight, off-stage.
Within his framework, then, Racine has managed to compress a fair amount of material into his five acts. The exposition is well-handled, covers a lot of ground and has a varying pace to attract and retain the audience’s attention. The first two short scenes allow a graphic presentation by Jocaste, and contrast both in length and mood with the third and fifth, where the widow meets Etéocle and Créon respectively. The overbearing self-confidence of Etéocle is seen here and in scene five in relation to Jocaste’s fears and reproaches, and is underlined by his attitude, when he orders Créon to follow him as they cross in the transitional scene 4. This subservience of Créon to the king acts as a necessary brake on the accusations of Jocaste concerning the uncle’s ambitions, for Créon uses Etéocle’s command as an excuse to depart. As he does so, he suggests that Hémon and Polynice, who he has admitted are in league with each other, be summoned, but their arrival is delayed by Jocaste, to allow herself and Antigone time to talk of Créon as "le perfide" and "cet ambitieux" (lines 327 and 330). The act ends with an a parte in which Antigone admits her love for Hémon.

The first act has thus succeeded in presenting all the main characters, directly or indirectly, and, both in words and through the length of time accorded to each, in indicating the nature of the power structure within the fated family. Important issues have been highlighted, while those to which Racine is going to attach less importance - e.g. love - are played down. It takes the second act, with its
four scenes, before the first major péripétie occurs, and in the first two scenes, before Polynice arrives, there is a chance for development, a reiteration almost, of the situation reached in act I. The minimal place accorded to love is emphasised by Antigone's claim (line 348) that she needs to follow her mother Jocaste to the temple, and by the excessive preciosity of Hémon's protestations of love in this and the second scene\(^2\). We learn in greater detail why Hémon followed Polynice and have confirmation from Antigone that her two brothers will not easily be reconciled. The report from the oracle (II.2) serves to place the family feud in the context of the whole Oedipus episode, but this generalisation, with its element of fate, is then immediately contrasted, in scenes 3 and 4, with the very particular concerns of Polynice, who arrives with Jocaste. Here both Antigone and Hémon try to cool the situation down, but when the breaking of the truce is announced, Polynice's fury is visible (scene 4), backing up the strong condemnation of Étôcle in which he had indulged earlier (scene 3). This sudden call to arms, in the breathlessly short scene 4, contrasts vividly with the verbal violence and attempts at reasoned argument in the

\(^2\) He addresses his beloved as "un si bel objet" (line 363), "une beauté céleste" (line 484) and talks of "votre aimable présence" (line 343), "un bien si doux" (line 346), "vos beaux yeux" (line 353) and so on. While unexceptional in itself—in terms, that is, of Quinaultian drama of the late 1650s and early 1660s—this language is untypical of the later Racine and is especially out of place in this particular context, where Antigone, and even more so the remaining characters, have other preoccupations and employ a very different style.
long third scene, which itself had followed two scenes whose vocabulary of love and death had a deadening effect on the real business in hand. This skilful progression in length and tempo, the sudden whipping-up of a tense dramatic situation, show that Racine is already aware of the structural needs of tragedy.

Antigone, who had occupied all but one of the scenes in the first two acts, gives way to Jocaste, present in II.3 to III.5, who in turn will be relayed by Créon (III.4 to IV.3). The widowed queen is still fearful: this is apparent in the monologue (scene 2, the only standard soliloquy of the play) and is not affected by the news that Mélecée, Hémon's brother, had intervened between Étécle and Polynice-Hémon. This, then, is the first stage of the build-up to the major confrontation of IV.3. The second is the arrival of Étécle (scene 4) and his statement that he is still unwilling to risk losing the throne (line 828). The third comes with the ambivalent remarks of Créon himself. In scene 5 he claims that Polynice, in seeking an interview with his brother, will come seeking peace (line 897) but when left alone with Attale in the last scene, his hatred of Polynice for having killed his son Mélecée, and his own political ambitions, are seen to be as great as ever. His stage-management of events had failed when Mélecée died in the cause of peace, but his recommendation that Étécle meet Polynice (scene 5) will, he plans, foment the discord once again.
These three steps on the road to the son's interview culminate in a moment of dramatic insight into Créon's character. His rôlet of troublemaker is seen again in the two transitional scenes at the start of act IV when, instead of dissuading Etéocle from his unambiguous statements of personal, deep-rooted hatred of his brother, the uncle deliberately supports Etéocle, with a view to antagonising him further. The last scene of act III and the two opening ones of the fourth are of capital importance structurally, for Créon is here free to act as he wishes, unhindered by Jocaste or Antigone, and to play on the sensibilities of one of the two frères ennemis. Their meeting is given due prominence by Racine - the third scene of act IV lasts for almost 260 lines, practically one-sixth of the whole tragedy in its original version. But it is important to note that little new is said: the remarks and attitudes are foreseeable, the attempt at reconciliation of no avail. The one possible escape route (the king of Argos' offer to give Polynice a crown, line 1239) comes as news to Polynice, but had already been mentioned by Créon in the presence of Etéocle and the two women in III.5, had had a cool reception then from Etéocle and is now rejected out of hand by Polynice. The longer the scene, in fact, the clearer is the complete lack of progress. This is, dramatically speaking, similar to, and yet the very antithesis of, other Racian scenes which, in context, are long, such as the récit de Théramène in Phèdre, for although lengthy accounts or arguments give the characters time to reflect on their situation, so
that Thésée, for example, comes to an understanding of his
crime and plight, the six characters in La Thébaïde argue
fruitlessly and end in complete deadlock.

The dénouement, Racine thought twelve years after the
event, was probably "un peu trop sanglante". But despite
this, the play is still "le sujet le plus tragique de l'an-
tiquité". One wonders whether, five years after the famous
remarks in the preface to Bérénice (1671), Racine has
moved slightly away from his belief that bloodshed is not
necessary in tragedy. If tragédie and sang could go
together in 1664 and be only mildly condemned in 1676, per-
haps Racine's comments, like so many other dramatists' pre-
fatory material, must be seen primarily in their particular
context, as justification of one or a small number of works,
rather than as an explanation of a whole œuvre. With a
well-known subject, too, the dramatist's hands are tied:
this is where both Pierre and Thomas Corneille can, and
do, profit as far as inventiveness in the nature and order-
ing of events goes. Ménecée, we know already, had died;
Jocaste's death Racine places in the interval between the
last two acts, and the death of Étéocle is announced by
Olympe in scene 2, after Antigone's stances. The third
scene, with its lengthy récit by Créon, brings news of
the inadvertent killing of Hémon by Étéocle (line 1477)
and the fact that, as he lay dying, Étéocle had managed to
dispose finally of an over-confident Polynice.

The blood, then, although existing in quantity, does
not bespatter the stage itself. Antigone had held on to
life (V.1) only because Hémon was still alive, but she
disappears after Créon’s récit and leaves him to gloat over his "conquest" of Antigone. With the rival Hémon gone, and despite his other son’s death as well, he feels supremely confident: "Et je perds beaucoup moins que je ne crois gagner" (line 1580). This croyance, the songe of the bloodshed (1599), is shattered by news of Antigone’s suicide (scene 5), and the play ends with the mental collapse of the conspirator, prevented in extremis from killing himself.

The only physical violence on stage, then, is Créon’s unsuccessful suicide attempt in the closing lines; the other five deaths are all described in récit form. It is true that they are largely concentrated into the last act, but this is in the nature of the story, and Racine’s 1676 remarks about the bloodshed seem now, and must have seemed even then, to be excessively cautious. Indeed, if we take his comments on the dénouement sanglant and those on love, in the last paragraph of the Preface, and read behind them, we are led to see that he approves of the bloodshed (because it is historical and by implication tragic) and disapproves of any love in the play. He admits its existence grudgingly, but sees such complications in any further extension of it that it is clear that his main preoccupation lies with "les incestes, les parricides et toutes les autres horreurs qui composent l’histoire d’OEdipe et de sa malheureuse famille". Racinian relevance, seen in the pruning of Rotrou’s double got, is carried to, or within an inch of, its logical conclusion, in his very first published play.

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Having in this chapter looked at two of Thomas Corneille's less successful plays and an almost exactly contemporary tragedy by Racine, it is time to draw some conclusions. One is tempted, of course, to decry Thomas' performances and insist or assume that even in this early work the newcomer will have scored off the author of Timocrate and Stilicon. And this despite the lack of attention so far accorded to La Thébaïde by critics, both in the seventeenth century and to a large extent today. It is salutary to have to compare two or three largely unrecognised plays, to see just what differentiates the two dramatists concerned, and perhaps admit that their similarities are greater than their differences.

All three tragedies (Perrée et Démétrius, Pyrrhus and La Thébaïde), of course, deal to some degree with the question of power, the wielding of authority, the gnawing influence of ambition. Within each play, then, there are strong rivalries and enmities, and as these occur inside the close-knit Aristotelian family circle, the play's structure, in each case, will centre, not on meetings of friendship or reconciliation, but on deliberate avoidances. This is reflected in the overall structural pattern of each tragedy, not least Pyrrhus. In Perrée et Démétrius, Erixe, Démétrius and Philippe never come together, and Philippe only meets Didas on two occasions in thirty-one scenes. In the same year, with Pyrrhus, Thomas carries this process even further. For in addition to the actual failures to meet (Pyrrhus and Hippias only in the last scene
of the play, Déïdamie and Antigone in the middle of the last act), there is, of course, the added element of disguise which makes any physical meeting a time of incomprehension. Finally, as we have just seen, in La Thébaïde, Racine frustrates the most necessary reunions. Créon is kept apart from Hémon until act IV, while the two quarrelling brothers avoid each other with equal success.

The two dramatists' aim, then, in each case seems to be largely similar. Both Thomas Corneille and Racine rely on a structural pattern consisting of a mixture of interviews, meetings between characters and deliberate avoidances. In this way, the play's structure is seen to closely mirror the theme, with its emphasis on irreconcilables, on the self-seeking, ambitious character. Where Racine differs from Thomas Corneille, perhaps, is in his handling of pace. By this I refer not so much to the varied length of scenes within an act or acts within a tragedy, but to the mingling of scenes of more general import with those where the individual self predominates - an extension, at scene level, of the sententiae scattered through Pierre's tragedies. In the disposition of scenes, Thomas Corneille has little to learn from Racine; he is a master at timing events in order to create intense dramatic moments, and we have seen in previous chapters that, when necessary, he can make skilful use of intervals and off-stage time. Racine, it seems to me, goes a stage further than this, however, as in the second act of La Thébaïde, where the first two scenes, although concerning individuals, deal with their problems on a more general level, and this pro-
vides a vivid contrast to the aggressive individualism of Polynice in the second half of that act.

But it is clear that the structure cannot be looked at in a vacuum; the themes of a play will inevitably influence it to a very large extent. In *Persée et Démétrie*, love plays quite an important part, as we have seen, and the same is true of Quinault's *Astrate* in 1665. But its presence is less keenly felt in *Pyrrhus* and Racine is right when he comments that it has very little place in his first tragedy. Later, of course, it will come to dominate his theatre and take possession of most, but not all, of his characters, whose inability to come to terms with this overwhelming force will be reflected in the structure and dramaturgical devices of these plays. Would it be fair to say, then, that if we take the three main plays we have examined in this chapter, the more apparent straightforwardness of Racine's structure, when compared with *Pyrrhus* or even *Persée et Démétrie*, is in part but necessarily due to the absence of love as an irrational force? Obviously there are many other elements that enter in, and which must be taken into consideration; and later, of course, Racine can construct a spare play on the very theme of love. But *Bérénice* can now be seen to be an exception, a cas-limite, and to talk of the "simplicity of Racine" is to tread on very unsure ground.\(^33\) In the con-

\(^{33}\) As H.T. Barnwell, for example, has shown, in his "Peripety and discovery: a key to Racinian tragedy", *Studi francesi*, 26 (1965), pp. 222-234.
text of the plays discussed here, however, it is Racine's strict thematic unity, which also happens to exclude passion and the irrational, which makes *La Thébaïde* appear more straightforward. And this despite the fundamental simplicity of Thomas' two tragedies, which I have attempted to indicate in earlier pages.

Another factor to be borne in mind is that of invention. In *Persée* Thomas Corneille introduced a new character Erixène, gave Didas a considerably more important rôle than in the historical sources and also shifted the balance of power and inherent characteristics as they concern Persée and Démétrius. In *Pyrrhus*, Antigone comes closer into the tight circle of characters, Androclide becomes a main character, replacing Glaucias, and of course there is a major change of emphasis with the introduction of mistaken identity. Each play, then, is taken on its merits: characters may be suppressed, but in so doing the family pressures on the upgraded remaining ones become greater. If new figures are added, this is in order to introduce a new line of attack (e.g. love) or sharpen the conflict, as in the case of Didas and his jealousy of Erixène. New characters can, but do not necessarily, result in more complex plots; they can also lead to a more clearly defined, better motivated action. In comparison, Racine's method is fairly clear: he avoids the risk of duplication of action by taking half an existing tragedy and making his whole play out of that, compressing events where need be, as Thomas does, too. The process was
not new in seventeenth-century drama - writers of comedy in the first half of the century would regularly turn part of a Spanish comedy, say the first of the three jornadas, into a play in its own right. But within the shorter time span of tragedy in the mid-60s, Racine could afford to avoid breadth of action and concentrate on depth of analysis or self-revelation. If he is "simpler" than Thomas Corneille in Pyrrhus, is Persée et Démétrie much more complicated that La Thébaïde? Structurally no; and we cannot subscribe to the notion that, in character analysis, which will influence structure up to a point, Racine is a greater, more perceptive psychologist that Thomas Corneille or even Quinault.

There are, then, three major fields - dramatic structure, choice of themes, acceptance or alteration of sources - where differences and similarities between Thomas Corneille and Racine at the beginning of his career can perhaps most easily be seen. There are other points, which complement and explain the impressions we gain when thinking about these major categories. The interaction of character, for example, in the first place, and the need for the dramatist to decide whether his cause is best served by having characters who are "much of a muchness" or who are strongly differentiated. This is a matter where Persée et Démétrie and La Thébaïde, for all their differences, can be compared, for Thomas Corneille seems - deliberately or not, it is impossible to say - to have worked out a series of characters who are all very similar to each other,
of much the same weight, whereas in La Thébaïde there is
more parti pris, as in earlier Thomas Corneille plays, such
as Stilicon. The balance of characters, then, allied to
the balance of themes and inevitably to the question of
structure and dramatic devices, is an area in which Thomas
Corneille often, but not always, succeeds. The privilege
of invention has its concomitant risks.

Secondly, there is the question of appearance and
reality, a favourite hunting-ground for those who still
think baroque a useful literary concept, but of vital im-
portance in the understanding of much later seventeenth-
century literature. How far do the characters see, and
to what extent are they blinded? In Persée et Démétrie,
despite the strong presence of love, they do see, if at
times only just, whereas in Pyrrhus, thanks to the substi-
tution of children, both Antigone and Néoptolemus are de-
luded until the last act - this despite, or largely because
of, Androclide and Dédamie, who have various reasons for
keeping their important knowledge secret. Ambition and
love are well and truly intermingled in the first of these
two plays, unsatisfactorily so, one might think, but the
characters remain essentially aware. What of La Thébaïde?
On the whole, as I have pointed out, the action is con-
ducted on the surface, often vehemently or despairingly.
But surely illusion or self-delusion also enters in, in
the person of Créon. This is the importance of his last
appearance, the recognition which he briefly achieves. He
does not go as far as Auguste or Stilicon, but he is more
advanced along the path to self-knowledge than Maximian or
Androclide, who die unrepentant, or even than Horace, who cannot understand the importance of the other characters' and the audience's knowledge of his guilt (This is the essential factor explaining the need for the last act in Horace.). In act V, Créon talks of his croyance (line 1580) and his belief that the bloodshed is nothing but a songe (line 1599). But this stage is then passed, he has to face reality, even if this results in a mental collapse which is a step short of Stilicon's tragic self-control.

It seems important, then, not to dismiss the flatness of Pérasé or the complicated mistaken identities of Pyrrhus out of hand. Perhaps the self-delusion of Créon (and the naïve hopefulness of Jocaste, too, one might add) is merely expression in a different way of the physical disguise which Thomas Corneille indulges in in the late 1650s and, again, briefly in 1663. The fundamental straightforwardness of even Pyrrhus' plot shows that disguise is not all it is made out to be. It goes out of favour because it is unnecessary: there are other ways in which characters can disguise their own feelings or by which authors can lead one or more characters up the garden path (with the possibility of a return journey down it, towards reconstruction). Can we say that Racine is more "relevant" than Thomas Corneille, to borrow Madame de Mourgues' term? L'autonomie de Racine? But we must not forget that behind his inventiveness lies a fairly close overall attachment to historical or literary sources, while Thomas Corneille, treating for the most part new or at
least previously undramatised episodes, is given an equal, if different, freedom.

Racine, in La Thébaïde at least, is certainly as single-minded as Thomas, if not more so, in that he pursues a steady single course. There can be little doubt about the main centre of interest in the 1664 tragedy, whereas we may still ask what the aim of Pyrrhus is. The characterisation in both authors is of similar quality, and Racine is no more accomplished than Thomas Corneille as a dramatic constructor, a creator of good, tense theatre. The verbal richness of Racine, the presence of an atmosphere which is his and his alone, will come later; it is barely visible in La Thébaïde, although, as we have seen, in his use of repetition, he is taking the first, crude steps in the right direction. In the end, perhaps the main point is this: Racine will come to use a fairly stark dramatic structure for a closely argued, deep analysis of often irrational passion, and it would seem that in La Thébaïde he has tried, in his first play, to achieve the first of these elements without risking the second. And to that extent he has succeeded. Thomas Corneille's aim is at once less clear, and simpler. If Racine, without ignoring structure, will put plot and especially characterisation first, Thomas has a predilection for structure, and uses it to bring out the emotions and characters he shows, rather than the other way about. In this, as a practical and now experienced homme de théâtre, he is supremely successful. And it seems necessary to insist that in
offering a well thought-out, logical, dramatic play, Thomas Corneille also offers us characters, many of whom are of considerable psychological depth.
Chapter 6

The influence of love: Antiochus (1666) and Laodice (1668)
The influence of love: *Antiochus* (1666) and *Laodice* (1668)

Between Pyrrhus and Thomas Corneille's next play, the tragedy/tragi-comedy *Antiochus*, there lies an indisputable two-year gap, an interval in which a new dramatist, Racine, appears on the Paris stage. *La Thébaïde*’s first performance is followed eighteen months later by that of Alexandre, and when, a few weeks afterwards, Thomas Corneille brings out his *Antiochus*, it is inconceivable that he has not seen, or at least read, the first of the new author’s plays. Indeed the Au Lecteur to *Antiochus*, printed in March 1666, seems to take up a point made by Racine in his *épitre dédicatoire* to the duc de Saint-Aignan and published only in the first edition of *La Thébaïde* in October 1664. "J'espère qu'étant dépouillée des ornements du théâtre", the young Racine writes to his patron, "vous ne laisserez pas de la regarder (*La Thébaïde*) encore favorablement. Si cela est, quelques ennemis qu'elle puisse avoir, je n'appréhende rien pour elle; puisqu'elle sera assurée d'un Protecteur que le nombre des ennemis n'a pas accoutumé d'ébranler." In his first preface to appear after this, Thomas writes in the Au Lecteur to *Antiochus*: "Chacun a son gout pour la Comedie (= drama), & quelques belles que puissent estre les choses, il suffit qu'elles ne plaisent pas à ceux qui les condamnent, pour leur donner droit de le dire. L'Auteur n'acquiert point par là celui de les traiter d'Ennemis. C'est bien souvent sans aâsavoir son nom qu'ils publient ce qu'ils pensent de son Ouvrage,
& s'il est quelquefois des suffrages briguez pour attirer plus d'approbation qu'on n'en mérite, je croy que la Censure peut avoir lieu, sans que l'Envie y ait toute la part que l'amour propre nous luy fait donner."

Some two years after Antiochus there appears Laodice, the second of Thomas' three tragedies dealing with Republican Rome (although here, as in Rodogne or Nicomède, the emphasis is placed on things other than the Romanness of the setting). Laodice is the first of Thomas Corneille's Roman tragedies to fall within the accepted "Racinian" period, and it will obviously be important to consider in this context, not only the content and structure of Racine's early tragedies, in particular Andromaque, performed a few weeks before Thomas' play, but also those of Antiochus (dating from the first half of 1666) and of a tragedy like Astrate, one of Quinault's best known works, performed between the end of December 1664 and the first few days of January 1665.

Originally printed as a tragi-comedy, Antiochus contains an Au Lecteur in which Thomas quotes his apparent sources and details the changes he has made to the historical situation. Valerius Maximus gives one version, which is embroidered on by Appian and Plutarch, allowing the dramatist to concentrate on Séleucus' sacrifice. At two points, he says, he has departed from the commonly-accepted

story-line; and if we examine his reasons, we see that they are the result of his concern both for propriety or seventeenth-century susceptibility and for the dramatic unity of his play. He has, firstly, drafted a plot in which Stratonice is not Séleucus' wife but simply about to be married to him and therefore, in theory, open to persuasion by others. "Si je semble avoir affoibli par là ce qu'un si extraordinaire effort luy a fait acquérir de gloire", says Thomas Corneille, "du moins ceux qui n'ont qu'une mediocre ferveur pour le Sacrement, n'auront point à m'opposer que la resolution de se défaire de sa Femme n'est pas la matière d'un grand triomphe."

Secondly, his portrait of Antiochus and his introduction of Arsinoe as an alternative to Stratonice have allowed him to dispense with Erasistratus. "J'en ay tiré cet avantage que l'échange du Portrait ayant fait connoistre à Arsinoé tout ce que le Prince (Antiochus) s'obstinoit à taire, m'a donné lieu de lui faire jouer le personnage du Medecin Erasistrate que me fournissait l'Histoire, & d'en conserver ainsi les plus considérables circonstances." A third consideration, also mentioned in the Au Lecteur, will, like the other two, inevitably have some bearing on the structure of Antiochus: the characterisation given to the title-character himself. "Je me suis particulièrement attaché", writes Thomas Corneille, "à donner à Antiochus le caractère de ce profond respect qui l'empêcha de recevoir personne dans sa confidence, & le fit resoudre à mourir plutôt de la fièvre lente qui le consumoit, qu'à chercher quelque secours, en déclarant une passion qu'il voyoit trop condamnable pour
ne la détester pas luy-mesme. S'il s'échappe à la découvrir à Stratonice, c'est parce qu'il la scât entierement interessée à luy garder le secret, & plutôt pour luy faire voir la nécessité de sa retraite, que par aucune esperance de l'heureux changement qui arrive en sa fortune."

Now, all three ancient historians mentioned by the dramatist introduce Erasistratus but there are two different versions of his intervention. In Valerius Maximus' De Parentum amore et indulgentia in liberos, Seleucus I Nicator yields his wife Stratonice up to his son, Antiochus I Soter, only son of Seleucus and Apame, on learning from the doctor Erasistratus that Antiochus has fallen madly in love with her. The son, overcome by love, is held in check by respect for his father, and his life becomes a living death, casting a shadow over the whole household. Valerius Maximus goes on:

Sed hanc tristitiae nubem Leptinie mathematici, vel, ut quidam tradunt, Erasistrati medici providentia discussit: Iuxta enim Antochum sedens, ut eum ad introitum Stratonices rubore perfundi, & spiritu increbrecere, eaque egrediente pallere, & excitatiorem anhelium subinde recuperare anmadvirtit; curiosiore observatione ad ipsum veritatem penetravit. Intrante enim Stratonice, & rursus absente, brachium adolescentis dissimulans adprehendendo, modo vegetio, modo languidio pulsu venarum compertas, cuius morbi aeger esseit, proximusque id Seleuco exposuit. Qui carissima sibi conjuge filio cedere non dubitavit. Quod in amorem incidisset, fortuna acceptum referens: quod dissimulare eum usque ad mortem paratus esseit, ipsius pudori imputans: Subiciatur animis senex, rex, anans: Iam patebit quam multa, quamque difficilia paterni affectus indulgentia superavit.

In both Appian and Plutarch, Erasistratus, reaching the same diagnosis as in Valerius Maximus, adopts a more subtle, roundabout approach of informing the king than Valerius Maximus' rather brutal method. Appian tells us in a lengthy account in his *Roman history* how Erasistratus, convinced of Antiochus' passion, decides to tell Seleucus that the prince is in love with his (the doctor's) wife:

respondet Erasistratus: "Meam amat uxorem." Tum Seleucus: "Ergo, o optime! quum sis amicus noster tot mutuis devinctus gratiis, et in primis honestus vir ac sapiens; non servabis mihi juvenem regium, amici ejusdemque regis filium, amantem infeliciter, et ad mortem usque celantem morbum ob modestiam? Despiciesne hoc modo non Antiochum solum sed Seleucum etiam?" Ad haec Erasistratus, tergiversans, et velut argumentum invincibile afferens: "Ne tu quidem, inquit, quamvis pater, tuam uxorem si amaret, ei concederes!" Ibi vero per canes regios deos de-juravit Seleucus, omnino volentem libentemque datu-rum ei se illam fuisse, et egregium exemplum editu-rum paternae benevolentiae in modestum et continen-tem in isto malo filium, tali calamitate indignissai-mum."

The first half of Erasistratus' plan is thus complete: he has extracted from the king the promise that he would give up even his own wife if the need arose (Earlier, in his despair over Antiochus' chagrin, Seleucus had, according to Appian, envisaged renouncing the kingdom if that would help his son. He was astonished that there could be any woman whom he, the king of Asia, could not prevail upon to marry such a son as his, whether by entreaties, by gold, by gifts or by the whole of that great kingdom, the event-ual inheritance of the sick prince, which Seleucus would give to him even now, if he wished it, in order to save him.) Immediately the doctor passes to the second part of his revelation:
Et ille tandem, perspecto regis affectu, quem serium esse, non simulatum, patebat; aperuit rem, et, quo pacto celantem deprehendisset, exposuit. Seleuco vero jam laeto, minime facile fuit, persuadere rem filio; neque magis facile, persuadere idem uxori. Postquam autem persuasit, advocato in concionem exercitu, qui forte esse jam aliquid praesenserat, enumeravit suas res gestas, et imperii amplitudinem, quae longe major sit sibi esset, quam ulli ex caeteris Alexandri successoris; adeo, ut jam senescenti sibi difficile sit tanto imperio praecessisse.


Plutarch, in his Demetrius XLIII - XLIV, fo11ows Appian's account by including details of Erasistratus' ruse. But there are two other historians who deal with Antiochus: Lucian, an immediate successor of Plutarch in Greece, and the fourth-century historian Julian. Lucian, in his de Syria des, chapters 17 and 18, tells of the doctor's indirect but tactful approach, but in his Misopogon Julian returns to the version of Valerius Maximus:

Cognitum igitur morbum Erasistratus Regi exponit. Ille quod liberos amaret, permittere se ait filio uxorem. At is tum quidem recusavit: patre autem

mortuo non multo post tempore, quod munus antea sibi datum generose repudierat, cupidissime arripuit.\footnote{Julian, \textit{Misopogon}, in \textit{Opera}, Paris, S. Cramoisy, 1630, part II, pp. 73-74.}

Julian is thus the only one of the five to show us Antiochus waiting patiently for his father's death; Appian and Plutarch talk of Stratonice's immediate switch from Seleucus to Antiochus, while, on this detail, Lucian is the most explicit. As for the historical truth of the episode, commentators are divided. The \textit{Real-Encyclopädie} of Pauly-Wissowa affirms that "die Geschichte dieser Heirat ist in völlig romanhafter Weise überliefert", while Erwin Rohde maintains that "die Geschichte enthält in sich nichts Unmögliches, und man hat sie bisher auch als Wahrheit hingenommen.\footnote{Pauly-Wissowa, \textit{Real-Encyclopädie}, I. Ed., Stuttgart, 1884, s.v. \textit{Antiochos 21}, col. 2151; E. Rohde, \textit{Der griechische Roman und seine Vorläufer}, 2nd edition, Leipzig, 1900, p. 56.}

We shall be looking presently, in greater detail, at the changes which Thomas Corneille made in 1666 when writing his tragi-comedy/tragedy. But it is immediately clear that the opening remarks in the \textit{Au Lecteur}: "Valere Maxime le propose comme un rare exemple de la tendresse dont un Père est capable pour son Fils, à Appian & Plutarque qui l'étendent un peu davantage ..." may well show the minimum range of strictly historical reading that Thomas undertook in preparation for this new play. He omits Erasistratus, as he tells us, but he retains, for example, the
latter's question put to Sélèucus about whether the king would be prepared to give up his own wife in order to save his son. The questioner is Arsinoé, and although Stratonice is not yet even his wife, the king replies in terms as vehement as those in Appian, Plutarch or Lucian:

Arsinoé: Stratonice vous charme, & vous sentez pour elle
Tout ce qu'un rare Objet attend d'un coeur fidelle.
Dans cet excès d'amour, prest à la posseder,
Si le Prince l'aimoit, la pourriez-vous ceder? ...

Sélèucus: Jamais douleur n'auroit de matiere plus ample,
J'oseray l'avouer, mais le Ciel m'est témoign
Que pour sauver mon Fils, j'irois encore plus loin.
Je ne reserverois Sceptre ny Diadème ... (V.1).

The story of Antiochus I Soter, in addition to being well attested by Latin and Greek historians, proved to be a popular theme in mid and late seventeenth-century France. Elsewhere I have tried to show that Thomas' hero may well have inspired both the name and, more importantly, much of the characterisation of the Antiochus in Racine's Bérénice (1670); at least this suggestion seems as valid as those provided to date by other commentators. But Racine's masterpiece treats a quite different historical episode and different characters. The Antiochus that Valerius Maximus, Appian and Plutarch deal with can be found in no less than five plays which appeared between 1642 and 1666: Gillet de la Tessonnier's Triomphe des cinq passions, published in 1642; Brosse's Stratonice (1644); Du Fayot's

La nouvelle Stratonice (1657); Quinault's Stratonice (1660) and finally Thomas Corneille's Antiochus of 1666.

The third act of Gillet's composite tragi-comedy draws the audience's attention to Antiochus rather than to Séleucus, who does not appear on stage. The Avertissement au lecteur declares that the author wanted to "représenter combien absoluë est la tyrannie que les passions exercent sur l'esprit de l'homme quand vne fois il s'est laissé sousmettre à leur empire", and his anguished prince goes as far as declaring his love to Stratonice herself:

Il me faut bien passer puisque vous rougissez,
Et oé dois bien mourir puisque vostre colere
M'apprend que mon amour commence à vous desplaire:
Car enfin ie vous aime, & vous connaissez bien...".

The author recognises the importance of such a change, but maintains that it is necessary for his depiction of unbridled passion. "... Si ie l'eusse fait paroistre sur le Theatre avec la mème reverance & la mème discretion qu'il a dans l'Histoirë, qu'on luë auroit plustost donné des louanges que du Blasme: Ainsi ie me serois fouruoyé de la route que ie veux tenir, à l'aurois fait en l'esprit des Auditeurs vne impression toute contraire à celle que ie me suis proposé pour but & pour fin..." (Avertissement).

This third act shows Stratonice warding off her stepson's advances; and it appears that Antiochus, conscious of the guilty extremes of his desire, dies from loss of blood caused by the voluntary opening of an old wound:

Mais le sang que ie pers m'approche du dernier terme,

Mon œil s'appesantit, ma paupière se ferme,
Le succombe, à perdant la lumière du jour,
Le meurtre du seul regret d'avoir eu de l'amour. (p. 78)

Gillet's changes to the Seleucus story are remarkably similar to the interesting nuances that Gilbert, Bidar and others will give the Phèdre legend before it is finally refined into Racine's 1677 tragedy. But the Antiochus episode undergoes further development before Quinault uses it in 1660. Brosse shows us a Stratonice who, as in later versions, is merely "destinée pour femme" to Séleuque, for his Antiochus is engaged to Thamire, the infanta of Thessaly, while at the same time being loved by Stratonice. Informed by Erasistrate of his son's passion, Séleuque becomes angry before finally yielding in the last act, where he agrees to marry the unfortunate Thamire and thus leaves no loose ends untied. Some thirteen years later, Du Fayot returns to the Gillet version of the story, and the historical accounts, showing us a Séleucus who has been married for two years to Stratonice, with the latter still in love with Antiochus but able to restrain her feelings, while the prince himself makes no advances to her:

Iusqu'à quand tiendrez-vous, Tyran de ma raison,
Mon esprit en langueur à mon âme en prison,
Pour m'empêcher de voir que dessus la Justice
Est fondé le refus que m'a fait Stratonice? ... Pardonnez, belle Reynne, à ma temerité
Si l'ay tendu le piège à vostre intégrité,
Et contre vostre honneur osé trop entreprendre,
Je condamne mon feu de mourir sous ma cendre.

This ending is conventional, using the doctor's ruse to

persuade the king, who finally yields in the classic argument of seventeenth-century French tragedy, the value of raison d'état over love. "Estant Pere & Mary, vous estes aussi Roy", the doctor (here called Listrate) counsels,

L'estat que vous tenez est le maistre suprême
Sous qui doient plier femme, fils & vous-mèsme.
N'examinez donc pas quelle est l'utilité
Mais regardez plutôt à la nécessité
Au bien de vostre Estat, au salut du Royaume,
Le reste n'est au prix que chimère & phantosme ...(IV.4)

The theme of Stratonice and Antiochus was strongly criticised by the abbé d'Aubignac in his well-known Pratique du théâtre. Rounding on the plays by Gillet, Brosse and perhaps even Du Fayot, d'Aubignac states that

J'estime qu'il est très difficile de faire un Poème Dramatique, dont le Héros soit toujours au lit, ny de représenter cette circonstance, et qu'il y a peu de moïens de la changer en telle sorte que l'on en pût conserver les agréemens: outre que le temps et le lieu de la Scène seront tres difficiles à rencontrer; car si Antiochus est encore au lit le matin, il faudra bien travailler pour le faire agir dans le même jour. De mettre aussi la Scène dans la chambre d'un Malade, ou devant sa porte, cela ne seroit guère raisonnable 5.

May these chilling remarks not be, at least in part, at the source of Thomas' desire to write a play on the Stratonice-Antiochus episode, initially in the late 50s? For, as Etienne Gros points out, the story has, whatever d'Aubignac may say, decided dramatic potential. "L'histoire de Stratonice", he writes, "fournissait aux auteurs

9. 'Aubignac, La Pratique du théâtre, ed. P. Martino, Algiers, 1927, p. 66. The Pratique appeared in 1657 (privilège 15 January 1656, achevé d'imprimer 1 June 1657), as did Du Fayot's comedy; the latter's privilège and achevé dates are, however, not known.
deux situations essentielles - un fils amoureux de sa belle-mère, un père rival de son fils - et un dénouement émouvant: le sacrifice de Séleucus". The subject is chosen by Quinault, who has his Stratonice performed at the Hôtel de Bourgogne on 2 January 1660.

But Thomas Corneille, perhaps inspired by d'Aubignac's words, was also working on the subject, in one of the many theatrical confrontations of seventeenth-century France that brought plays on identical themes on to the stage within a very short time of each other. We know, from one of the few letters that have come down to us, that Thomas was some way advanced on the text in late 1659 when he learned that his rival would probably finish earlier. The same letter tells us of the reports that had circulated of a rival Stilicon, the abbé de Pure's action and Thomas' gratitude on learning that it was but a scare. "J'en ay assez bien jugé pour suoir tousjours creu que c'estoit une fausse alarme, et vous m'auriez rendu un mauvais office aupres de Mr Magnon si vous luy auiez laisse croire que j'eusse besoin de l'assurance qu'il me donne pour n'apprehender pas le peril de la contrefacon". Thomas' generous

11. Ms. B.N. f.fr. 12763, f° 173. The Magnon play referred to is presumably Zénobie, performed by Molière's troupe on 12 December 1659 and published the following April. December 1659 seems too late for Tite, which is published in 1660 before Zénobie, as its foreword proves, but whose first performance date (if any) is unknown. Herman Bell writes in the introduction to his edition of Tite (Baltimore, 1936, p. 37): "There is no evidence that it was ever acted. It is very probable that the complete failure of Zénobie in December 1659, coupled with Magnon's indifference (professed) to the theatre as a result of his concentration upon the Science universelle, kept Tite from being offered on the billboards. This is, however, mere conjecture."
action over Stratonice is, as it were, a parallel to what he would have expected from Magnon, had the author of Tite indeed been working on a play to compete with Stilicon, successfully produced the following month. Pierre Corneille—or should it be Racine?—will not have the same scruples in 1670, with their plays on Bérénice.

As in Brosse's tragi-comedy, Quinault's Stratonice is only engaged to Séleucus, as is Antiochus to Barsine. But if Stratonice is enamoured of her stepson, so is Séleucus of Barsine! The main point to remember about Quinault's play is that Séleucus does not love his fiancée. M. Gros comments: "Il ne s'agit plus—ou presque plus—d'un conflit entre un père et un fils, il s'agit d'un malentendu, né d'événements antérieurs, et qui subsiste, pendant cinq actes, par la seule volonté du poète." As another critic has rightly claimed, the whole play is nothing but an "enchevêtrement de malentendus."12

Whatever the merits and failings of Quinault's Stratonice, it is important to realise that, in 1666, Thomas Corneille follows the historical sources much more closely than does his famous rival, whose play moves very considerably away from the traditional oppositions between mother and stepson and son and father. We have seen briefly the different seventeenth-century dramatic versions of the story, each with its own variations: Séleucus married

or unmarried to Stratonice; Seleucus agreeing in the end to marry someone else, having given Stratonice to Antiochus, or not having so to agree; the importance or absence of Erasistratus. If we can imagine that Brosse had more influence over Thomas than, say, Gillet or Du Fayot, because Brosse’s king is as yet only engaged to Stratonice, while in the other versions he is married, we must also counter this by Séleucus’s marriage to Thamire in Brosse, which alters the whole nature of his renunciation. Du Fayot’s story, too, introduces the concept of reason of state, again changing the motives for the king’s action. Quinault’s Séleucus, although in love with Barsine, is engaged to Stratonice. Must we say that Quinault here follows Brosse, or is it not more convincing to think that he, and Thomas Corneille some six years later, are following a virtual requirement of seventeenth-century public opinion — or so we must assume, for much work requires to be done on this, perhaps the most important but least documented pressure exerted by the public on seventeenth-century dramatists.

The danger with the Stratonice story is its credibility, the extent to which a situation based on the mere triangle of relationships can last out for five acts. This is where, say, Gillet’s fragmentary play can be seen to be in difficulties, and where the equally insignificant Brosse’s introduction of Thamire in 1644, although altering the tenor of the episode, is proof of the difficulty — for the fewer the characters, the greater the need is to push feelings and declarations to the extreme. Given the rela-
tive singularity of the passions involved, even in the seventeenth-century tragic context, with its play on the call of blood and the numerous examples of vieillards amoureux, the dramatist has to be particularly careful to hold a balance between an historical relationship, with its perhaps improbable emotions but quite definite flavour, and innovations which do not merely update the context but significantly alter the whole point of the original story.

In composing Antiochus, Thomas was, as we have seen, intent on fitting the story to his public's taste, much as he will do two years later in Laodice, with its attempt to "accommoder" the story to the stage, although in so doing having to "affoiblir les Episodes, & ... negliger beaucoup d'ornemens". We cannot know what his play would have looked like, had he in fact preceded Quinault, as seemed possible until December 1659; he would not have had the name of Barsine, presumably, Arsinoé's confidante in 1666, but, from what we know of his and Quinault's dramatic practice, it is unlikely that we would have had Quinault's complications and Quinault's emphasis, either.

The simplicity of the historical narrative is kept by Thomas Corneille. His Séleucus and Stratonice are only engaged, but the more important detail - the love of father and son for Stratonice - is left intact. Erasi-stratus does not appear as such, but his function is filled by a newcomer, Arsinoé, the princesse, a niece of Séleucus, who, in addition to providing the king with information
about his son, helps to balance the pattern of love-relationships. She is joined by Tigrane, a favourite of Séleucus and close friend of Antiochus. Complications are thus reduced to a minimum and the closely-knit Aristotelian family unit is intact. But this is true in so much of Thomas Corneille, particularly in his Roman, post-Timocrates-type plays, while even in his romanesque tragedies, as I have attempted to show, the basic intrigue is less complex than is usually made out. If Arsinoè, as we shall see, happily fills Erasistratus' informant rôle and also adds to the love interest of the play, Tigrane is almost equally important dramatically. The closeness of his friendship for Antiochus is used by Thomas Corneille to bring out, in a varied, stageable way, the historical Antiochus' chagrin and regrets. The one's happiness or seeming happiness causes the other's despair. In particular, Antiochus' state of mind prevents Tigrane (for example in IV.3) from benefiting from his apparent good fortune in having the assurance of Arsinoè's continued love for him.

It would be foolish to claim that Antiochus is more than a competent play, in which little happens and what does is clearly apparent to the audience and to most of the characters. The exposition is well-handled, if conventional: the hero (or anti-hero?) with his confidant, then alone in his only monologue; with his beloved; the latter and her confidante; and finally Stratonice and her husband-to-be, Séleucus. From the first, the order of events is naturally unfavourable to Antiochus, as the stronger, more officially
acceptable attitudes and positions come after his, expressed by Stratonice and the king. But conversely, as the title might lead one to suspect, the interest is centred on him in a number of ways. From the very first scene, we learn that Antiochus owes his life to Tigrane - a point repeated to Arsinoé by her confidante Bar sine in II.1 - but that in return Tigrane has debts to the prince: Antiochus has favoured Tigrane's hopes of marrying Arsinoé.

Voix avez auprès d'elle autorisé mes voeux,
Tiré le doux aveu qui doit me rendre heureux,
Et les plus grands exploits que mon zèle imagine
Sont au dessous du prix que le Roy me destine.(I.1)

This indebtedness allows the prince to ask Tigrane's help in persuading the king to banish him and leads into the monologue (scene 2) - pure Racinian tortured hero, this, but for the box and portrait of his beloved which Antiochus has inconveniently mislaid. The blushing proof of love given by the historical Antiochus every time Stratonice (but no other woman) entered the room, and which had led Erasistratus to his diagnosis, is updated and made more stageable by Thomas Corneille. Much play can be made of the loss, it is longer lasting, more concrete evidence.

In Thomas' tragi-comedy it serves in a way to underline Antiochus' feelings for Stratonice, his belief that his love, "ce secret murmure", is a horreur, what he calls also voeux insensés and transports odieux, and to sharpen the opposition between the prince and other characters (Tigrane, or Stratonice in I.3).

Antiochus' monologue is thus, in this case, an important transition scene, an exploration of the opening inter-
view with Tigrane but also an externalisation of depression - in the shape of the richly-decorated boîte - which is a useful adjunct and corrective to the merely cerebral disorder of the various historical accounts. A third aspect of his plight is shown in the following scene with Stratonice herself, one of three tête-à-tête which he has with her in the course of the play13. He mumbles round the point, drops hints but finally retreats from the brink, asking Stratonice, like Tigrane, to approve his flight. The second part of the exposition - the stating of the queen's position - occupies the last two scenes of act I and, in its character, forms a complete contrast to the hesitations and doubts of Antiochus. Stratonice openly admits her love for him to her confidante, despite the agreement made through her father that she would marry Séleucus, and finds it difficult to accede to the king's request (scene 5) that she should help him to persuade Antiochus to stay for the royal wedding.

Eschewing, as in the previous Roman tragedies at least, the excesses of mistaken physical identity, Thomas comes back in Antiochus to the themes of incomprehension, the generation gap, and mistaken judgement. Séleucus' incomprehension, based on Tigrane's report to him and his own observation of Antiochus, is clearly visible at the end of the first act, and highlights the capital that the

13. I.3 (with her confidante); II.3 and IV.4. In addition, they appear together, but with other characters, in III.2 and 3 and V.4 and 5.
dramatist has already made, in *Stilicon, Maximian, Persée et Démétrius* and will make later in *Laodice*, from the conflicts, jealousies and misunderstandings that arise between a generation of parents and its children. As in the first two tragedies named, this blindness takes the form of misplaced confidence in a character who is far from impartial. As Honorius trusted *Stilicon* and *Constantin Maximian*, so *Stratonice*, as opposed as were these conspirators to the existing situation, is asked by the king to persuade *Antiochus* to stay in Syria.

These hesitations, errors and difficulties contrast, though, quite markedly in *Antiochus*, from act I onwards, with passionate declarations of love. Both the prince (I.2) and *Stratonice* (I.4) indulge in these, and there are less direct expressions, even in scenes one and three of the same act. *Stratonice*'s confession turns into a long development on the irrationality of love—wordy, perhaps, but interesting at this point in time, early 1666, for here, surely, in a serious, measured tone, is a self-analysis of the passion that will sweep *Racine's* characters to destruction in the next few years. If nothing else, it shows that *Quinault's* sentiment is not alone in acting as a forerunner to *Racine* on this score.

The first act of *Antiochus* is thus varied enough, presenting the three main characters *Séleucus*, *Stratonice* and *Antiochus* and their varying attitudes. It is, as an expository act must be, informative. The variety comes from the different characterisations, from the *prises de position* which, even in an only moderately good play, will be main-
tained or at most refined during the succeeding acts. Already the reader can see the problems that Thomas Corneille has had to face in dramatising this historical episode, and some of the solutions adopted. The story has been taken at its crisis, as in virtually all the plays so far examined. Antiochus' love is of long duration; Stratonice's passion for him is equally well-rooted; Seleucus is anxiously looking round for a helper to solve the intractable problem of his son. To make these details live, the dramatist has had to introduce the device of a portrait, tangible evidence of the prince's affection; ready and full declarations of love by Stratonice, who can go as far as generalising about love as distinct from her own passion but who is still unsure of whether Antiochus loves her in return; and finally the king, brought in from early on (although his main presence is in act V) to cast further doubts, through his ignorance, on the troubled situation facing his son and his wife. Seleucus' attitude is perhaps necessary, as an emphasiser, but from a dramatic, structural viewpoint it leaves Thomas almost bound to add another thread of interest, or develop what might otherwise have been only an incidental - for none of the three main characters is in a position to take the initiative at the close of act I.

The scene pattern of the remainder of the play is interesting, in the light of what has just been said. The second act, with four scenes, and the fourth act, with five, are entirely composed of dialogues, with the exception of Stratonice's monologue in IV.1; being in the form of stances makes
this more than merely a monologue, in any case. Of the
eight pure dialogue scenes in these two acts, then, only
two include a confidant: the acts are thus primarily con-
versations between couples of main characters. As Séleucus
is absent throughout both, the main burden therefore falls
on Stratonice and Antiochus and to a lesser extent on
Arsinoé and Tigrane. The third act involves more people
on stage: only two out of the six scenes are restricted
to two characters, the rest have three or four.

Yet despite this it is in acts II and IV, not in the
third act, that what action does occur takes place.
Act III is relatively stagnant but a reasonable amount of
progress is made in the fourth and this is continued in
the fifth. The pace is therefore rather different from
that of the typical Racinian tragedy, where act IV tends
to be an act of repose, refining on situations reached at
the end of the third and ripening the plot for a fifth act
dénouement. How well, then, does Thomas Corneille spread
his material through the noéud of the tragi-comedy, and
what criticisms can be made of his technique?

If Stratonice longs for confirmation of her hopes
that Antiochus loves her, Arsinoé, the king's niece, re-
quires conclusive proof that the prince loves Stratonice
and not herself. The initiative, then, is passed to her,
as in the historical sources it passed to the doctor
Erasistratus. She it is who has found the portrait of
Stratonice and its ornate container. Her reaction is to
substitute her own portrait for that of the queen, hoping
to detect, when Antiochus claims the box back, some glimmer of surprise and hence proof of ownership. Aided by a slow-witted confidante, Arsinoé is left in a dominant position, able to toy with the miserable Antiochus when his eyes light on the boîte in II.2. Now this episode could well have got out of hand: Arsinoé could have become an important figure, developing a variety of characteristics and rivalling Stratonice, on whom history’s episode turns. Thomas, however, is careful to limit her appearances and influence - she is present on stage less than any of the other main characters (seven scenes out of twenty-five) and although her suspicions are now confirmed by Antiochus’ reaction to the portrait, the dramatist allows her no immediate scene in which to say so. She exits as soon as the queen appears, her curiosity satisfied, but essentially disappointed.

The rest of act II is foreseeable enough. Stratonice eventually, after a long interview, sees the portrait (although Antiochus does not), is surprised, and leaves in disappointment. The prince remains behind disconsolately with Tigrane. As Arsinoé’s influence has been strictly limited, and Stratonice has joined Antiochus amid his uncertainties, action can now only come from Séleucus, who meets his son for the first time in the play in III.1. Thomas Corneille gets some capital out of the third act, it is true. Firstly, there is the confrontation between the three major characters (scene 2), when Antiochus thinks his love of Stratonice will be betrayed, whereas
Stratonice plans to reveal his apparent love of Arsinoë. And secondly, the latter part of the act is taken up with the prince's bewilderment on being told that he can marry Arsinoë. Again, the romanesque possibilities surrounding the portrait are handled reasonably delicately by Thomas Corneille. If in III.2 Séleucus, on seeing the portrait of Arsinoë which Stratonice shows him, is no longer ignorant but misled, the position is at least cleared up for Antiochus in the next scene, when he realises that his father has been talking of his niece and not his wife. But the slightly dramatic situations in this act cannot conceal the lack of progress. Arsinoë's confirmed conviction about Antiochus' love leads to her interview, in the middle of act IV, with Séleucus, who alone can now take the initiative. But such action depends on his being well-informed, whereas at present Tigrane, Stratonice and he are all still misled, while Antiochus believes, largely correctly, that he is generally misunderstood.

This holding operation is pursued into act IV. Arsinoë's interview with the king in the interval between the acts ends in her refusal of Antiochus, because of her full knowledge that he does not love her. Stratonice, still worried by doubts about Antiochus' affection, wants Séleucus' position cleared up. The situation of the two women has changed little from what it was by the middle of act II. But the impasse has to be broken somehow. With Tigrane, the king and Stratonice misled, uncertain of the truth, and Arsinoë the instigator of the portrait ruse, it can only be Antiochus who breaks the spell. At least, this is more
credible than if Arsinoé had just suddenly decided to renounce her game. After three and a half acts during which his chagrin has kept everyone guessing, Antiochus admits to Stratonice that it is she whom he loves (IV.4). Into this long-awaited interview (the last one alone was in II.3) much is compressed: his admission of love, her explanation of the portrait mix-up and her assurance to him that she loves him rather than the king. For Antiochus' confession, his victory over enduring chagrin, can only lead to her equally frank admission. Each is reassured, although still aware of royal plans and official attitudes. By the end of the act, after Arsinoé's arrival, it only remains for the king (and Tigrane, via Arsinoé) to be enlightened. The unravelling of the plot is thus carried well back into act IV, and in the fifth it will be a question of whether Séleucus, perhaps because of his age (constantly mentioned, latterly by Arsinoé in IV.5) will yield Stratonice to his son.

The lovers, after much delay, have managed to declare their feelings; and Thomas has succeeded in delaying until the first scene of the last act the enlightenment of Séleucus. In a sense, although it is far less dramatic, the king's choice now is similar to that which will face Laodice. Either she or her son has to die, once Ariarate's identity has been found out (V.2: Ariarate must "devenir ma victime, ou me faire la vostre"). So with Séleucus, faced with a rival. Murder is not required, but death is called for, actual death or political death by exile: "Il meurt si tu ne meurs, c'est à toy de choisir" is how
Séleucus sums it up in his monologue (V.2). The closing scenes merely help to resolve this dilemma satisfactorily, justifying the subsequent label "tragi-comedy". Stratonice can express no real surprise at the news that she and her stepson are in love and if Antiochus holds out through respect, in the face of the certain knowledge that the king has gained from Arsinoë in V.1, it is the latter who, once again, forces the issue, by handing Stratonice's portrait to Séleucus with the words:

*_Ce Portrait confondra son (Antiochus') obstiné silence._* (V.5).

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The author himself indicates, in the *Au Lecteur* to *Laodice*, that the subject of the 1668 play is taken from the thirty-seventh book of Justin's history, and it is perhaps only fair to point out that Pierre's *Rodogune*, with which *Laodice* is usually compared, draws on books 36, 38 and 39 of the same historian. According to Justin's brief account, Laodice had poisoned five of her six children; the last-born is spared and ends by reigning after the queen has been put to death by the angry populace:

*Post haec regibus, qui adversus Aristonicum auxilia tulerant, praemia persoluta: Mithridati Pontico Phrygia maior, filiis Ariaratheis, regis Cappadociae, qui eodem bello ceciderat, Lycaonia et Cilicia datae. Fidiorque populus Romanus in socii filios quam mater in liberos fuit; quippe hinc parvulis auctum regnum, inde vita adempta. Namque Laodice ex numero sex filiorum, quos virilis sexus ex Ariarathe rege susceperat, timens, ne non diutina administratione regni adultis quibusdam potiretur, quinque parricidali veneno necavit; unum parvulum sceleri matris cognatorum custodia edipuit,*
Now, in his Au Lecteur, Thomas makes some short but revealing remarks concerning his handling of Justin. Those who take the trouble to consult the historian, he suggests, "connôis-tront ce que j'ai ajouté à l'Histoire pour l'accommoder à nostre Theatre". The bienséances ("accommoder") would seem to be a principal concern, then, and this is borne out when he goes on: "L'Action principale y (i.e. in Justin) est si forte qu'elle m'a contraint d'affoiblir les Episodes, & de neglecter beaucoup d'ornemens ..." But at the same time it is not just a matter of pruning undesirable elements and leaving the innocuous: he claims to do the first but to also add and expand details in order to give the title-character full scope to show her potential. "Ce que j'ai ajouté à l'Histoire", he saysa, and he adds that this is "pour laisser à Laodice toute l'étendue de son caractère". His final comment is a modest admission of imperfection despite all his efforts: "La matiere estoit belle pour l'ambition, & je ne doute point qu'un autre n'en eust fait voir des peintures plus achevées. Pour moy, j'

One could well believe that this explanation in the
Au Lecteur is, deliberately or not, unnecessary, for in
fact Thomas not only includes in his play the historical
details concerning Laodice; he gives her added vices,
namely an incestuous love and hypocrisy. The latter is a
feature of which the dramatist is particularly fond, while
the incest depends almost entirely on mistaken identity,
to which I shall return. In addition to his blackening of
the title-character, Thomas Corneille adds four more main
stage characters: Aquilius, the Roman ambassador, Axiane,
a Cilician princess, and Anaxandre and Phradate, two princes
who wish to marry Arsinoë, Laodice's daughter. The latter,
an addition to Justin's account, does not appear on stage,
nor does a fake "Ariarate", an impostor who accompanies
the Roman ambassador on his visit to Cappadocia and who is
conveniently dispatched thanks to the attentiveness of
Laodice and her minion.

Considerable amplification of the historical source
was inevitable if Thomas Corneille was to have sufficient
material for a five-act tragedy. But how well has the
added material been grafted on to Justin's brief account?
On what has the dramatist concentrated, and how dramatic
a play is it?
Robinet, in his *Gazette* shortly after the first performance, predictably praises the dénouement as being especially worthy of mention\(^{15}\), even if, in so doing, he fails to enter into helpful detail. A critic more consistently Cornelian in his sympathies was Saint-Evremond, and it is interesting to note that Thomas appears to have sent Saint-Evremond a copy of his play on publication. In February to March of 1668, the author of the *Réflexions sur les divers génies du peuple romain* writes to the comte de Lionne, asking him to send to Holland a copy of Pierre's *Attila* and any new plays of Molière. "Je n'ay de curiosité que pour leurs ouvrages. Les anciens ont appris à Corneille à bien penser, et il pense mieux qu'eux"\(^ {16}\). A few weeks later, acknowledging receipt of a letter from P. Corneille, he says to Lionne:

> Je n'ay point là ny l'Amphitrition ny Laodicé (sic) mais en jettant les yeux par hazard sur Laodicé, les vers m'y ont arrêté plus que je ne pensois. Songez-t-on que l'amour se déguise? Cela est le mieux pensé du monde, et le plus heureusement exprimé. Je vous prie de remercier l'Auteur pour moy de la bonté qu'il a eu de m'envoyer sa piece; je la liray avec grand soin, et avec autant de plaisir assurément. Vous n'aurez point de complimens pour votre particulier, les amitiez bien établis (sic) rejettent tout ce qui peut sentir la ceremonie.

\(^{15}\) Robinet, *Lettres en vers*, 18 February 1668, lines 45-48.

Pepuis votre lettre écrite, j'ay lu un Acte de Laodicé qui m'a semblé le plus beau du monde.

These two very different seventeenth-century critics find matter to praise both in the exposition and in the dénouement of Laodicé. The frères Parfaict, however, in their eighteenth-century history of French drama, are unsympathetic to the point of sarcasm. The play's success, they claim, was great but fleeting; Laodice is but a poor copy of Pierre Corneille's Cléopâtre; while as for the others, "Ariarate n'est qu'un fade doucereux; Axiane est à la glace, & ne tient presque point à l'intrigue; l'Am-
bassadeur Romain n'a aucune dignité; le Prince Phradate n'est qu'un petit confident; & Anaxandre remplit le rôle d'un bas scélérat."

In point of fact, the increase in the number of characters leads neither to congestion nor to inadequate portrayal of all. Indeed, the reader is struck by the relatively frugal ration of characters, especially in the opening acts. In the fifteen scenes of acts I, II and III, there are only thirty-eight character appearances, and nine

17. Ibid., pp. 146-147. Like the one mentioned in the previous note, this letter is undated. On strong in-
ternal evidence, Ternois situates them in February-
March 1668 and April 1668 respectively. The Thomas
Corneille-Saint-Evremond connection is one which, for
lack of correspondence, remains a mystery, but, as is
noted elsewhere, a suggestion by Saint-Evremond that
Pierre Corneille should compose a play dealing with
Hannibal and Scipio may well have been one of the
causes of Thomas' tragedy La Mort d'Annibal, the very
play which follows Laodicé.

18. F. and C. Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre français,
of these refer to confidants. Laodice is present in seven of the fifteen scenes and Ariarate in twelve, but the remaining ten appearances of main characters have to be shared between Axiane, Anaxandre and Phradate. The fourth act is considerably busier, with almost double the number of characters per scene on average, while the last act, opening quietly, builds up during the final three scenes, as is almost inevitable in a well-structured dénouement.

The dramatic effectiveness of delayed entry of the main character has been noted in remarks on other plays in previous chapters. It is a device which Racine uses, too, for example in Britannicus, where Néron's arrival on stage will be heralded by scenes in which the budding tyrant is commented upon by other characters. So, too, in Laodice, almost two years earlier. Laodice's entry is prepared over the four scenes of act I but she appears only in the opening scene of act II. Yet it would be wrong to think that the balance of power at the beginning lies as it does with Pierre's Cléopâtre, or, in a different sphere, with Tartuffe. While Laodice's own position in the state is made clear, so, too, is emphasis laid on the importance of "Cronte" (Ariarate, Laodice's son, in disguise). Yet paradoxically this insistence on "Cronte's" power in the state would in the end only serve to increase the stature of Laodice - for she would have to be great to be more important than he -, were it not for other minor insights. Laodice may summarily dismiss her lackey Anaxandre
as expendable, should he be killed by the Roman ambassador Aquilius' bodyguard (IV.1), but Anaxandre has already been clearly shown, in two scenes with Ariarate (I.4 and II.4-5) to be an unpleasant, bumptious, jealous character, so his death (and hence Laodice's power over him) is not to be feared on that account.

Such tempering of Laodice seems to me to be important, for it explains and helps both the evolution of the character towards the scenic suicide of the closing minutes of act V and also the consequent dramatic structure and devices used to put this portrayal into practice. The Parfaicts' comparison of Laodice with the Cléopâtre of Rodogune (to the latter's advantage) is probably misleading - for Thomas Corneille's heroine is in a different situation, despite the superficial similarities. She is not as "great" as Pierre's character, for two reasons. Firstly, because of the power of "Oronte" and her love for him, as she herself acknowledges in II.1:

\[\text{Je voy sans cesse Oronte actif, ardent, fidelle,}\]
\[\text{Par cent soins empressez me signaler son zèle,}\]
\[\text{Au seul bien de me plaire attacher tous ses voeux,}\]
\[\text{Se soumettre en aveugle à tout ce que je veux,}\]
\[\text{Je m'en sens attendrie ...}\]

This affection is coupled with admiration for his uprightness (IV.1), a flaw in the defences similar in effect to the maternal instinct of Phèdre. Secondly, from early in the play, the audience is aware that "Oronte" is Ariarate (I.3), and thus the emphasis of the hidden identity is greatly changed.

The first act, and in particular the opening scene,
provides a clear and full picture of necessary events, bringing out the position of "Oronte" and his relationship to Axiane and to Laodice. The first scene offers a comprehensive survey of the situation: the reasons given by Laodice for her forthcoming action in granting a king to the Cappadocians and her real motives, as understood by Axiane; some news of the dead sons of Laodice; details concerning Axiane and Cilicia, Axiane's love for "Oronte" and his reported reaction; finally, "Oronte's" own attributes and their importance, despite his lowly birth.

This sense of "Oronte's" inherent worth is carried further in the remaining scenes of act I. While admitting his love for Axiane, and affirming his influence over Laodice ("Je puis ce que je veux sur l'esprit de la Reine", I.2), "Oronte" is indirectly preparing for his exposure as Ariarate:

Plust au Ciel qu'il parust ce Fils, & qu'il fust prest ...... (I.2).

Now, while Thomas Corneille is obviously attempting, in this opening act of his tragedy, to build up an opposition of characters and not let Laodice dominate the scene, as Justin's brief account would suggest, he does not, on the other hand, turn the last remaining son into a superman. From the third scene of the play, where "Oronte" meets Phradate, one of the two suitors for the hand of Arsinoé, there is a parallel, though minor, line of action to that concerning Laodice and her son. Anaxandre and Phradate, the two "princes sujets de Laodice", can be taken as corresponding to and reinforcing the attitudes of the queen and
"Oronte". Anaxandre's ambition (I.4) is to gain power in winning Arsinoë, just as Laodice's is to hold on to undivided power. Phradate, while acknowledging the vital rôle of "Oronte" in Cappadocia (I.3), is himself in love with Arsinoë for her own sake, as a person - and this situation allows Ariarate to reveal himself to the man to whom, he adds, he once owed his life in battle.

Phradate: ... Vous pouvez seul contre eux (rivals) soutenir mon espoir. Vous avez sur la Reine un absolu pouvoir, Et cent fois, quand le trouble est entré dans mon âme, Vous m'avez répondu du succès de ma flamme ... Ariarate: ... Sans vous dans un combat j'aurais perdu la vie, Et cent fois vos bontés s'interessant pour moy Ont daigné m'affermir au rang où je me voy. (I.3)

The reciprocated feelings, the sense of mutual debt and trust, are reflected in the similar language ("cent fois").

The problem of greater or lesser awareness is thus at the core of the play. It is brought out at the close of the first act, in the contrasting successive scenes featuring Phradate and Anaxandre, where Anaxandre's blind ambition, coming as it does after Phradate's talk with Ariarate, only serves to heighten the effectiveness and importance of Phradate's knowledge. The second act, too, closes on a clash between Ariarate and Anaxandre, when the former dismisses as a vain threat the dramatic news that another Ariarate is arriving in the company of the Roman ambassador Aquilius:
J'en tire au moins ce fruit, que s'il est quelque traistre,
Aux perils de ce Fourbe, il se fera connoistre,
Quoy qu'apres les bontees que ma Mere a pour moy,
Mes secrets Ennemis me causent peu d'effroy.

(Ariarate, II.6).

In addition, the feelings of Laodice have to be interpreted in the light of the audience's awareness of her situation. Her history, her love for "Oronte" expressed in II.1 and her presence with him on stage in the following two scenes are conditioned by our knowledge that she is dealing with her sole surviving son. So while in part the horror is increased, revulsion arising from an incestuous passion being shown is avoided and the bienséances are respected.

Awareness, then, with all its dangers for the dramatic success of the play, is very largely successful here, as it was in Stilicon eight years before, where the audience's complicity was involved as a result of even more fleeting statements by the eponymous conspirator. The news of the arrival of the "false Ariarate" in II.6 is interesting in itself, but its true value lies partly in the fear it causes in Phradate and the consequent relief when Ariarate assures him that the newcomer is a fake. Similar emotions were aroused in the confidant Mutian - and in the audience - by Stilicon's apparent sacrifice of his son at the end of the third act, but he, and we, were reassured by the swift rejoinder "Je scay ce que je fais, ne t'en mets point en peine". There, as here in Laodice, the uncertainty created in the minds of the audience and some of the characters both conveys the essential setting of the respective plays - the plotting and ruthless concern with self which are diffi-
cult to portray naturally for any length of time on the stage — and ultimately rebounds on a main character. One might well ask what purpose is served by the fake Ariarate at the end of act II, as Aquilius the ambassador, Ariarate and Phradate all know who the erstwhile "Oronte" is. If Phradate's momentary fear serves to enhance the image of a powerful Ariarate, directly and through Anaxandre, it also has an effect on Laodice herself, emphasising her wickedness and readiness to kill her supposed son in order to ensure her marriage to "Oronte" (III.3). These two main indirect advantages of the "Ariarate" episode are just as important, surely, as the more obvious ones of bringing to the fore any traitors in the country and making Anaxandre declare himself.

If the audience and some, but not all, of the characters have almost throughout the play knowledge which is only progressively revealed to other important characters, the arrangement of scenes and meetings, the tempo of the action and the presence or absence of themes over and above the problem of identity are all important. Axiane and Ariarate only have two scenes alone (or virtually alone): I.2, where the confidante Alcine is present, and III.1, which for Ariarate is the outcome of the previous interview and is not a purely natural meeting. Indeed, Axiane herself appears in but four of the fifteen scenes in the first three acts, indicating that love plays only a minor part
in the play. Instead, emphasis is laid, from the opening scene, throughout the exposition, and again in act IV, on the time-scale of the play, the last hours of this tragédie-crise set against the backdrop of historical events. The choice of a king for Cappadocia has been expected by the people "depuis long-temps" (I.1), while Laodice in act II talks to "Oronte" of her "quinze ans de veuvage" (scene 2) which she would now wish to see at an end. Ariarate himself, as the opening acts tell us, has been at Laodice's court "depuis plus de deux ans" (I.1) or at least "depuis deux ans" (I.3, III.4, V.3). In contrast to a timescale of years is the urgency of the awaited decision - "aujourd' huy" (I.1), "dès aujourd'hui même" (II.1). Linked with this is the arrival of the Roman ambassador. In I.3 he is "plus près qu'on ne pense"; in II.5, as Théodot recounts, "Aquilius est tout prest d'arriver. / A trois milles d'icy chacun le va trouver", and act IV contains a good build-up through scenes 2 (when he and "Ariarate" are still at "mille pas dans la Plaine") and 4 (he is "à vingt pas d' icy") until Aquilius' arrival in scene 6 and his assurance to Laodice (scene 7) that "vous le verrez bientost (your son) ...".

Thus, closeness in space is linked to urgency in time, and the effect which the ambassador's progress has on resident characters far outweighs the little he has a

19. Arsinoé's absence from the stage emphasises the hopelessness of Anaxandre's love. Phradate, by learning of "Oronte's" secret in the first act, is given a new centre of interest and does not fall into the same category as Anaxandre.
chance to say in his four scenes (IV.6-7; V.5-6). The
time framework is thereby of necessity linked to the
question of awareness of identity and to "Oronte's" attempts
to enlighten his mother and also Axiane. Neatness of timing
is essential to the success of any well-constructed classi-
cal tragedy. It has to be admitted as a factor in the
necessary willing suspension of disbelief which allows the
audience to accept the convention of unreality, which of
course is not peculiar to dramatic literature. So in his
interview with Laodice in II.2 Ariarate is on the point of
revealing the truth ("Il ne faut plus cacher ...") but
this Laodice interprets as further advice to her to announce
her plans:

Ouy, ce seroit en vain
Que je voudrois encore déguiser mon dessein,
Comme il est resolu je consens qu'il éclate.

His discussion with Axiane, in the opening scene of the
third act, designed to test whether she loves Ariarate or
"Oronte", is interrupted by the arrival of Laodice at the
very moment when he was about to reveal all: "Et pour ne
taire plus ce qui doit éclater, / S'achez ...". Ariarate's
second interview with his mother ends with her dismissing
him before he has time to explain the position (III.4).

Act IV, as we have seen briefly already, fulfils a
different but equally important rôle in time related to
action within the play. Here, in any case, it is Laodice
who is the dominant character, present with her confidante
Cléone in all seven scenes, whereas Ariarate is missing
from the first four and when he returns he is unable to
get rid of Anaxandre, Phradate or Aquilius. But speaking
of Laodice at the beginning of the last act, Ariarate says to Phradate that "Le temps de ce triomphe est peut-être arrivé" (V.1). "Ce triomphe" is simply a third and final interview with the queen, which will put an end to the continuing misunderstanding. If in a sense mother and son have been equally matched up to now, for Laodice's blindness was paralleled by Ariarate's lack of opportunity to enlighten her, now the initiative lies with Laodice. Symbolically free at last of Anaxandre, whom the crowd has lynched, she can, as it were, get the better of Ariarate, still attached to Phradate. Thus, by declaring her love for him in as many words, she short-circuits his frustrated attempts to reveal his identity.

This series of interrupted declarations is plausibly handled, the arrivals and events being much less fortuitous than in, say, Quinault's Amalasonte. These carefully spaced interviews early in act II, at the beginning of act III and early in the last act provide at once focal points and impetuses to the action, carrying it along until the love declaration in act V, after which events have to be urgently and finally sorted out. The intervals, too, contribute to the momentum which has to be sustained. Those which separate acts II and III and IV and V contain very little material, the first allowing an almost unbroken passage from the Ariarate-Phradate dialogue (II.6)
to Ariarate's interview with Axiane in III.1, while the second of the intervals joins two virtually consecutive conversations between Laodice and her confidante Cléone.

The historical grande criminelle aspect of Laodice is thus rather played down in Thomas' tragedy. It comes out well in the third act, in her dealings there with "Oronte", and there is a similar intensity of characterisation in the fifth act, once Ariarate has screwed up enough courage to tell her that he is her son (V.2). In places, her hypocritical motherliness, by which only she can be deceived, adds to her monstrous criminality 20. But at the end of act IV all is left to play for. What will become of Axiane and Laodice? What about the latter's relationship to "Oronte"? How will Aquilius reveal Ariarate? What about the people? Will they get in first, for there has been regular reference to them earlier: "Mais que le Peuple s'arme ..." (Laodice, III.3); "le Peuple en furie" (Axiane, IV.2); "Dans un grand Peuple émeu" (Phra- date, IV.3)? "Le Peuple animé de rage et de douleur" (V.1) duly dispatches Anaxandre during the last interval, but further threats from "un Peuple émeu contre elle" (V.4) and "la populace émeue" are rendered superfluous by Laodice's suicide in the sixth scene of the same act.

20. "Ma principale gloire est d'être bonne mere,
Et j'en croiray l'éclat au plus haut point monté
Si je mets pour mon Fils le Trône en seureté." (II.2)

Cf. "Attachée à son Sort à moins Reine que Mere,
Je cherche sa grandeur, elle seule m'est chere ...
Ce triomphe est le seul où ma tendresse aspirer." (IV.7).
While her action is thus justified by the existence of popular pressure (unlike many mentions of similar pressure in other seventeenth-century tragedies, which are there merely, it seems, to add some breadth and local colour to the stage performance), it is important to see that public opinion does not, by itself, cause her downfall: "Va, dit-elle, sans toy je scay ce qui m'est due, / Peuple lasche .." (V.6). Indeed, the people's clamour merely helps to make more theatrical the suicide which Laodice realises must come to her in the end. Her feeling for "Oronte" has existed since her first appearance in the play in II.1. But as soon as, in the third interview in V.2, she is pushed into admitting it openly to him for the first time and is then told that he is Ariarate, not Oronte, she realises that either he or she must die. At first she is obsessed by thoughts of revenge, born of her shame and a certain sense of professional pride:

Ah, ce crime est trop grand pour vous le pardonner.
Cinq enfans immolez par mes trames secretes
Me laissez encore moins coupable que vous n'estes ...
(V.2).

Yet she can neither break the family bonds that link her to Ariarate, nor resist the fate that she claims is dragging her down: "Les Dieux l'ont resolu, ma resistance est vaine" (ibid.). In her despair, borne out by the length of this second scene, even after her son's declaration, she remains lucid to the end, rejecting as impractical and dangerous - rather than as unworthy of her - any alliance with a triumphant Ariarate, and granting Axiane her son's hand in extremis.
But no time is lost between her final exit from the stage and her death. She passes Axiane in scene 3 and leaves Ariarate (scene 4) to cope with the princess's astonishment on learning who "Oronte" is. This shortest possible interview is followed by a rapid conversation with Aquilius, the Roman ambassador, and even as Ariarate hastens out in despair to pacify the angry crowd ("J'y cours, mais ... ", V.5), Phradate rushes in and recounts Laodice's picturesque demise. The compression of time is very effectively handled; it accords with the popular mood but also translates Laodice's own character, the ruthlessly determined side to her nature which serves to put her few maternal (but hypocritical) remarks in their true context. Her previous blindness does not prevent an efficient end to her life: she dies with one stroke of her own dagger, after a five-line balcony speech, and a few moments later the play is over.

Thus in the end, as history and the title would suggest, attention is once again focussed on Laodice, the only female protagonist in Thomas' six Roman tragedies and in some respects as terrifying and unscrupulous as any of men: Commode, Stilicon, Maximian ... In her reigns ambition - an ambition not to win or regain power, as is the case with the last two named men, but to maintain her influence and indeed increase it. Again, as with Stilicon and Maximian, her desires cause in her a complete indifference to those whom she uses towards her own ends, such as Anaxandre. But this is not where the main interest of the play lies.
We have seen the strictly dramatic use to which identity has been put in the play, the credible nature of the disguise in the context of the story and the skilful arrangement of events by Thomas Corneille so that Phradate and the audience are sufficiently aware of who "Oronte" is before Laodice declares her love for him, how Ariarate's attempts to inform her are plausibly interrupted and how, once her truth is out, in Ariarate's presence, the inevitably rapid end occurs. But false identity, here used, in its literal sense, for the only time in Thomas' Roman tragedies, is but one element of a complex network of feelings and situations, where love (and other forms of dependence) are linked with ruthlessness (and ruthless masters like time).

Love in Laodice is seen at three levels: in Arsinoé with Anaxandre and Phradate; in Axiane with Ariarate-"Oronte"; and in Laodice with "Oronte". As far as this last couple is concerned, it is clear that in brushing aside Roman customs and planning to marry "Oronte", instead of looking — from among "Oronte", Anaxandre and Phradate — for a husband for Arsinoé, Laodice, like Stilicon, calls her own fate upon her. But she is no Phèdre avant la lettre, for Ariarate's decision to remain incognito means that Laodice's incest comes from her ignorance concerning who he is. It is beyond doubt that her unfortunate passion is genuine; whereas previously the queen only desired power, this "passion" has been overcome by her son's presence. This can be noticed at three points in the play. In the second
scene of act II, "Oronte" sees in Laodice's declarations only her desire to keep the throne free for Ariarate. This explains why he is ready to favour their "union" (although it is true that, knowing who he is, he could have foreseen the danger ...). The second stage, in act III scene 3, ends in Laodice's request that he kill "Ariarate", "Oronte's" refusal and the queen's admission that

Plus Oronte du crime a rejeté l'amorce,
Plus mon amour pour luy semble avoir pris de force.  
(IV.1)

Finally (V.2) she admits that she loves him. This love has existed since the beginning of the play (making it thereby a true tragédie-crise) and does not visibly increase after "Oronte's" refusal to kill "Ariarate" - but the crescendo effect serves to intensify the horror we feel in her presence and accompanies the gradual enlightening of Ariarate himself.

The love-affair involving Arsinoé hardly deserves the name. Arsinoé is so much the object of her mother's attacks and illwill that her relations with Anaxandre and Phradate serve primarily to present these two characters. Anaxandre is the typical arriviste consumed by pride, the ideal man to help and be betrayed by Laodice, who looks on him as an ambitieux (IV.1). He is carefully distinguished from Phradate, in whose eyes Arsinoé, with or without the backing of a throne, is very desirable.

The relations between Axiane and Ariarate are interesting, because they promise most. In each of Thomas Corneille's Republican tragedies, there were captives at
the court of the country in which Rome is taking an interest: in *Persée et Démétrius* it is the princess Érixène of Thrace, in *Laodice* it is Axiane of Cilicia and in *La Mort d'Annibal* there is Elise, the daughter of the Carthaginian general himself. In these plays Rome is shown as an authoritarian power only in *Annibal*, where the main dialogue is not between Prusias-Bithynia and Rome but between Rome and Elise. As in Pierre Corneille's *Pompée*, the Roman intervention in *Laodice* meets with our unqualified approval, while in the preceding tragedy *Persée et Démétrius* it had taken an indirect form, difficult to interpret.

If Axiane is the character who evolves, her attitude recalls the last two plays of Thomas' Imperial Roman period. From the beginning she makes it known that her feelings are for "Oronte" as "Oronte", but when he declares in I.2 that he has feelings for her, her "fierté" prevents her from accepting him. The question of rank is just as important here as it is with Laodice. The queen is prepared - for very self-interested reasons - to leave unmentioned "Oronte's" modest social standing: indeed it suits her better than Anaxandre's high birth. Yet Axiane wants to accept "Oronte" as and for what he is, but she does not manage to say this to him. The questions which the audience asks itself are: how long will "Oronte"-Ariarate take to realise that he is loved? How long will it be before he reveals his proper identity?

At the end of the first act there is already an answer to the first of these questions:
J'ai d'ailleurs la douceur d'avoir pu sans Couronne
Attacher Axiane à ma seule personne,
En voir mes voeux receus sans qu'un feu si discret,
Pour les faire agréer, ait trahi mon secret, etc.

The second act does not concern Axiane, but obviously her time has come to act. The arrival of the so-called Ariarate and Rome's desire to unite her to him provokes a lovers' quarrel, for the princesse de Cilicie is indignant that "Oronte" should be willing to grant her to someone else. Ariarate could now reveal himself as Ariarate, but, as at the beginning of act II, chance prevents him from doing so. In act IV Anaxandre's insinuations and attacks against "Oronte" are rejected out of hand by Axiane (scene 4), and this interest is crowned by Laodice's revelations in scene 3 of the last act.

If love, in the end, is considerably restricted in extent, although present under the surface, both because of Ariarate's disguise and the more immediate concerns of Laodice, it is important to see that the latter's ruthlessness, historically attested, is considerably watered down. This is perhaps made necessary by the very dramatisation of the story, or is at least helped by the need to introduce more stage characters and give them more complex actions or motives. Both Laodice and Ariarate are seen to be not so much free agents as dependent characters.

"Oronte" the roturier indicates early on his gratitude to Phradate, and the notion that they are social equals in this sense is brought out by Ariarate's revealing his identity to him. On the other hand, Laodice is doubly dependent
on "Oronte": because of his power and on account of her genuine but unaccustomed affection for him. The tragedy can thus be seen not merely as a fight against time on Ariarate's part, as he haplessly attempts to inform others of his identity, but as an externalisation of the queen's love for him, which goes hand in hand with her physical power over him. What Thomas Corneille has done is to concentrate neither on the merely terrifying side of Laodice, the historical killer, nor on Laodice the woman in love, whose incongruous affection for "Oronte", if highlighted, could make the play just another romanesque extravaganza. Instead, he has skilfully and successfully woven these two strands together, toning down the violence but at the same time ensuring that love, although expressed and genuinely felt, does not become the principal interest. It is only momentarily that the two strands actually meet, at the beginning of act V, and their forceful separation, flamboyantly, publicly achieved in Laodice's suicide, comes almost immediately afterwards.

Close examination of Antiochus and Laodice allows us to draw some important conclusions regarding Thomas Corneille's penultimate Latin tragedy. In doing so, it might be useful to say a few words about Quinault's Astrate (1665) and compare both authors' general practice with that of Racine in, for example, Andromaque, which falls within these two or three years. It would be profitable
to look principally at the structure of the plays, including points like the use of extraneous details, the deployment of minor characters, the time-scale and audience/character awareness, and then at the general thematic variations before concluding.

It would seem fair to say, from the preceding analyses, that in general Laodice is a considerably more dramatic, scenic play than Antiochus, and not only because of its picturesque ending. The 1666 tragi-comedy, and the Quinault tragedy too, are essentially "low profile" works, set in a lower key, episodic, even. The basic plot of Antiochus is simple enough, a triangle complicated by a father/son relationship (can one say rivalry?) and the presence of a second woman, who the father thinks will take care of the son. In addition there is Tigrane, the king's favourite, necessary as an excuse for not rushing the projected Antiochus-Arsinoē marriage.

The initiative for action lies, in theory at least, with the prince, for his resolution, his love of Stratonice, never wavers. But he fears Sēleucus' reaction and delays revealing the truth to him. It is only in the fourth act that he can even tell Stratonice, although she, too, has long entertained hopes. Given these interminable tergiversations, action must be forthcoming from elsewhere, for here there is none of the internal momentum that keeps a Racinian tragedy moving despite the oft-decried absence of external action. Andromaque is so constructed that whatever Andromaque does, says, or even does not do or say,
inevitably affects all of the other three characters along the chain of unreciprocated loves linking Oreste, Hermione, Pyrrhus and Andromaque herself. Even Bérénice, seemingly the most static of the many Racine tragedies built up on the triangular pattern (A loves B, who loves A, who is loved by C), is progressive, inasmuch as the queen's fortunes pass from assured happiness through first doubts to certain despair and on to acceptance of the new situation and renunciation. There, Titus' decision is made before the play opens and the action, though internal, springs entirely from this. But in Antiochus, the basic situation rapidly reaches stalemate for lack of operators. Further complication is necessary, and the portrait is used to get the action moving. We have seen how the initiative passes subsequently into other hands as well.

Now in Astrate Quinault indulges in, or is a victim of, the same episodic construction. Agénor, a "parent de la Reine", is to marry Elise, the usurping queen of Tyre, who is loved in turn by the rightful king, Astrate, cru fils de Sichée. Antiochus' hesitation in admitting his love in Thomas Corneille's play is mirrored by Astrate's unwillingness to tell Agénor of his passion for Elise. But Quinault leaves more room for manoeuvre, for not only is Astrate's real identity hidden from the other characters, but Agénor, explaining the criminal background to his and Elise's present high office (I.1 and 2), admits the existence of a "prince légitime", third and sole surviving son of the overthrown king, but whose whereabouts are unknown.
As in Antiochus, the second act of Astrate, following an informative opening one, is largely devoted to love (three scenes out of four). Before the end of act I, Elise has told Sichée that she would like to make his son, not Agénor, king, and even Agénor's fifty-four line protestation of love to her at their only meeting on stage (II.2) is of no avail: the tyrant tells her confidante (II.3) that she loves Astrate and that she believes he loves her, and she discloses this love to him in the following scene, their first interview in the play. So far, so good. The interest in act III passes to Astrate, present in all five scenes, while Elise is absent. A report is received that, contrary to her promises and confessions to Astrate in act II, she has been talking to Agénor, has given him the "anneau royal", what he calls "ce gage" (III.3), and that he has refused to yield his prospective bride to Astrate. The latter points out that neither can be happy—Astrate, as he is loved but is apparently being refused marriage, or Agénor, because he is not loved but is being promised marriage. Agénor has Astrate arrested (III.4) but at the same time is arrested himself on the queen's orders and is forced to give the ring to Astrate.

Elise had taken the initiative in appearing to favour Agénor. Now we learn that her feelings are still with Astrate and that she had simply been trying out her prospective husband. In a sense, this avenue is now closed: after the expository details of act I, the clarification of love in most of the second act and Agénor's arrest, another character (Sichée) has to come and hint at the real
situation. This he does by saying that he is the chief conspirator against Elise - but he does not as yet reveal who Astrate is. Thus Astrate is torn between denouncing his father to Elise as a conspirator or, if he keeps silent, losing the love of Elise, which for him is strong and passionate enough to overcome Sichée's devotion to duty ("Et je n'ai point de fils si cher que mon devoir", III.5).

A necessary outcome of Sichée's remarks here is that Astrate will learn his identity. But Quinault has to time this - and in part Astrate's revelations to Elise - as best he can. In fact, Astrate learns who he is in IV.2 and tells the queen in the following scene, assuring her of his eternal love despite aversion for her past crimes. Agélor's death, reported by Gérasfe in IV.4, is a step on the road to the dénouement, preparing the audience for what is to happen. Sichée, supported by his conspirators, seems secure enough, so the five scenes of the last act must turn on Astrate and Elise; the latter's death delayed by sound of popular clamour, the gap being filled by Astrate wanting news of his new-found identity made public. The queen's suicide by poisoning is thus held off until the very last scene of the play.

Both Antiochus and the earlier Astrate, then, have structural deficiencies: impasses in the action of certain characters or action poorly distributed throughout the five acts. But Astrate is not wholly bad, although...
commentary, does nothing to rehabilitate the play. His remarks, such as they are, fail to bring out the fact that much of what he marvels at or ridicules is not confined to Astrate but is similar to much of Quinault. Nor does he reveal that, despite the undoubted ineptitude of certain scenes, the play as a whole, and its structure, are not unsuccessful. As far as Antiochus is concerned, it is perhaps unfair to expect a flawless performance in a field so well trodden by earlier dramatists, especially since, as early as July 1659, Thomas Corneille was admitting to having difficulty with the early stages of the play on Stratoniee: "J'ay fait deux actes d'une piece dont je ne suis pas trop satisfait, mais il est trop tard pour prendre un autre dessein." We cannot know how the 1666 production compared with the earlier, unfinished version, but Thomas may well have felt, like his brother in 1663, when trying to rival Mairet's Sophonisbe, that he could only aspire to "le dessein de faire autrement, sans ambition de faire mieux."

Laodice, like Astrate, is a tragedy based on unknown physical identity, but both plays are far from the inextric...
cable complications of Héraclius or even Thomas Corneille's Bérénice or Pyrrhus. The material is better spread throughout Laodice's five acts; there is still a lot to resolve at the end of act IV, whereas in Antiochus there is only Séleucus' eventual acceptance — and this comes as little of a surprise, for he is a character whose main rôle is to be informed. D'Aubignac's criticism is often carping, but his remarks about the difficulty of constructing a play around a character who is always in bed are perhaps fair.

In addition to attempts to arouse interest and tension in the audience from the interplay of stage-characters, both Quinault and Thomas Corneille, in his two plays, resort to extraneous matter in handling their plots. All these elements are traditional. In Astrate, we learn from Elise (I. 5) that she has consulted an oracle to find out the identity and whereabouts of the sole surviving royal son and rightful heir. The answer comes in II. 1, and having read it the usurper adopts a much more stoical approach than her confidante does:

N'attends point de me voir plaindre de la Fortune;  
La plainte a des douceurs pour une âme commune:  
Mais une âme élevée en doit bien moins trouver  
A se plaindre du Sort, qu'à le savoir braver.

This she does, but always aware that "le destin contraire" (V. 1) will probably yet get the better of her. The oracle, then, is used as a goad for action, as a stimulus to Elise, equivalent to the power of time in tragédie-crise, rather than as fate, as Racine will understand the term.

The people, and public revolt, play a part in both Astrate and Laodice. In Quinault's tragedy, there is a
report, in IV.3, of an imminent popular uprising, supported by the military, and this serves to allow Elise and Astrate to express their eternal love and promise mutual support. Popular pressure interrupts Sichée in V.2 ("Il se fait un grand bruit derrière le théâtre") and Elise, seeing in this and in the arrival of Sichée and his fellow-conspirators ("Voici la Reine, amis; sa perte est légitime"), proof that her time is up, seizes the opportunity to leave and take the fatal dose of poison. In Laodice, outside forces are equally active and not entirely decorative: they succeed in dispatching the unpleasant Anaxandre (V.1) but fail to kill Laodice. Although the queen, as in Astrate, sees that her time is up, she takes a final pleasure in openly defying them ("Sur l'appuy d'un Balcon obstinée à paroistre ...", V.6) and in proclaiming, not dependence, but a glorious, criminal self-sufficiency.

Elise: ...
   ... Je sens que votre (Antiochus') vue
   Rallume ce qu'éteint le poison qui me tue,
   Et que de vos regards le charme est assez fort
   Pour retenir mon âme, & suspendre ma mort.
   (Astrate, V.5).

Laodice: Va, dit-elle, sans toy (le peuple) je sçay
   ce qui m'est deu ... 
   Sans moy qui contre moy te veux prester
   mon bras,
   Tu tremblerois toujours, & ne punirois pas.
   (Laodice, V.6)

The portrait and its boîte is the main external feature in Antiochus. Arsinoé's action principally affects three characters, Antiochus, Stratonice and Tigranes. Antiochus finds himself misunderstood, while his love of the queen is difficult enough for him to handle. Stratonice becomes unsure of whether Antiochus loves her as much as
she does him, or indeed whether he loves her at all.

Tigrane, in turn, has to query Antiochus' support of his love for Arsinoé. It is clear from this, and from previous analysis, that Arsinoé’s ruse is a major factor in keeping the action of Antiochus moving along, however hesitantly. This rather makeshift progress, dependent initially on chance, is different from that of Astrate, although here melodrama (the sudden arrest of Agénor) plays its part. Quinault's play in turn, although less obviously, is inferior to the internal momentum and logical progression of the Roman tragedy Laodice.

If Thomas Corneille, in Laodice, restricts the range of "trucs", he is also, both there and in Antiochus, careful to use minor characters to full advantage. Arsinoé was his main problem in replacing Erasistratus; she is more credible than a doctor would be in a 1666 tragi-comedy (and Antiochus is virtually the last play to bear that label) and is integrated into the love-plot of the play thanks to Tigrane. Yet the rôle is a restrained one - she is principally used to convey information, as was Erasistratus, and Thomas has taken advantage of the structural need of a second love-plot and the contemporary interest in love in drama to let her fill this dual rôle. Two years later, he introduces Anaxandré with a different aim, as we have seen, that of detracting from the image and apparent power of Laodice, who might otherwise seem overbearing and greater than "Oronte". This is his usefulness for the dramatist and for the observant public; for
Laodice, he is a tool, to be employed ruthlessly, but a nuisance, too, and when he dies, she becomes symbolically free.

What of audience awareness and the question of time? In Laodice Thomas Corneille has handled skilfully the problem of Ariarate's identity, using this feature for maximum possible tension and achieving an exciting fifth act. The audience is aware from early on who "Oronte" is but Laodice is not, nor is her crony Anaxandre (to be compared with Phradate, who is taken into the prince's confidence). Laodice's ignorance is not only dramatic in itself; it allows the playwright to portray fully Laodice's admission of love, for the audience's knowledge removes the risk to propriety which this potentially incestuous situation might have caused. Thomas is less successful in Antiochus, with ignorance of a different kind. While the order of events is logical enough, even historical – although with changes and embroiderings, due to the unhistorical characters – Séleucus is shown to be too pliable a character to make the issue of whether he will yield up Stratonice one worth bothering much about. In the absence of a physical identity problem, as successfully handled in Laodice or by Quinault in Astrate and elsewhere, it is clear that the issues to which certain parties are kept blind must be of sufficient importance and interest (even in a tragi-comedy) to hold the audience's attention.

The "happy ending" of the Stratonice story, in all its various versions, clearly militates against the use of time
as a pressure on characters. It is true that the action leads up to "ce grand jour", when Séleucus is to marry Stratonice (Antiochus, I.1), later specified as "demain" (I.5) and thus in accordance with any unity recommendation that Thomas may have felt obliged to follow. But, as in Sertorius and elsewhere, emphasis is on a wider time-span, the age of Séleucus, his "vieux ans" (V.2 and 3), the "cheveux gris" of which he speaks (III.2; V.3), "son âge", mentioned by Arsinoé (IV.5) and seen by her as a prime reason why the king can be persuaded not to marry Stratonice but to give her to Antiochus. There is more than a hint of incongruity coming through even the accepted platitudes of seventeenth-century dramatic royal speech. At least Séleucus' repeated references to old age, strengthened by even more embarrassing gestures\(^\text{24}\), put the projected marriage with Stratonice in its proper perspective and thus act, after a fashion, as a framework for action and change.

Tragedy makes other demands. In Astrate, in addition to her projected change of intended husband, Elise stresses the urgency of the hunt for the last surviving son of the late king (I.5). So for Sichée, if not for the audience (who are as yet unaware of Astrate's real identity) there looms a double danger: the sudden elevation of his son and

\(^{24}\) For example, V.1, where Séleucus, talking of his son, says to Arsinoé:

\[\text{D'un Prince infortuné prévenez la disgrace,}
\]
\[\text{Il y va de ses jours, son destin les menace,}
\]
\[\text{Sauvez-le, sauvez-moy. Pour l'obtenir de vous,}
\]
\[\text{Faudra-t-il qu'on me voye embrasser vos genoux.}\]
the possible discovery by Elise of who Astrate is. In Laodice, the problem of time is well-handled, too: as in Quinault, it is linked to awareness of physical identity and varied by the journey and arrival of the Roman ambassador and the false Ariarate.

It is clear from the above remarks, and from analyses earlier in the chapter, that Antiochus and Laodice, together with Astrate, which serves as a useful contemporary comparison, are variously successful as drama, as five-act structures designed to unfold, develop and conclude an episode capable of interesting and moving an audience. Of the three, Laodice seems to me as successful as any, not least in its logical progression and economy of characters and action. The hoary myth of a "simple Racine" still persists, in some quarters, but are Andromaque, say, or Britannicus or even Bérénice (if we accept that it is active) significantly simpler than Thomas Corneille's 1668 play?

Some final remarks must concern the content of the plays we have examined in this chapter, for the interaction of theme and structure, content and form, seems important and is often neglected by critics. All three of these plays from the mid to late 60s deal with love, and with other forms of dependence as well. In Astrate, the earliest, a major character, Agénor is dependent on another for his existence. He tells us (I.1) that Astrate saved his life when he was a prisoner, while Sichée (I.3) says that Agénor has protected him from Elise's machinations.
Agénor’s debt to Astrate is enlarged upon by the queen in her appreciation of Astrate and his vertu: she thinks that Agénor’s indebtedness is one of the reasons why he is not as highly regarded as some popular reports make out. In both of Thomas Corneille’s plays, too, characters are dependent on others. There is Sélèucus, weak, misled, wholly in the dark for most of the play, so dependent (and yet so pliable at the same time) that Antiochus’ dilemma and chagrin seems unjustifiably long drawn out. The prince tells us of his debts to Tigrane, and Tigrane owes to Antiochus what hopes he has of securing Arsinoé. In Laodice, the queen is powerful, but dependent politically and sentimentally on "Oronte", while the latter, as Ariarate, has debts to Phradate and vice versa.

But the most obvious dependence is that of love, and this is where the differences between Quinault’s tragedy or Thomas’ tragi-comedy and the 1668 tragedy are clearly brought out. Is it mere chance that the structural defects of Antiochus and even Astrate — when considered as dramatic entities — coincide with an extended attention to love, the expression of love, discussion of it and the fears and happiness which it engenders? In Astrate, the poles of interest are passion and the question of politics (Sichée’s conspiracy). But there is no doubt whatsoever that love is the greater interest: Astrate and Elise completely outclass Sichée in the audience’s mind. There are relatively few scenes in the play, only twenty-three, because there is more discussion, often of principle, than there is
action; and what action there is is generally unhurried and predictable. The outcome is no surprise, nor is the method of Elise’s death, given her criminal past. The play is less powerful and suspenseful than Thomas’ later Roman play, precisely because of the hegemony of love, affecting almost identically both Elise and Astrate.

The following year Thomas Corneille handles three levels of love in *Antiochus*: love-in-the-mind, as seen in the opening scene; the tangible proof of the portrait; and the declarations. In dramatic terms Thomas works up from the first to the last, forcing Antiochus to declare openly his love to Stratonice, a feature missing from the historical accounts. But his declaration is hesitant, contrasting with the more obvious confession of Stratonice to her confidante prior to this. And this comparison acts to the detriment of Antiochus, reducing the influence of his declaration in the long run. The importance of love to the story of Stratonice does, at least, give Thomas Corneille a wide range of details to choose from; and from Gillet’s time onwards (although Gillet had to explain the change to his public), the requirements of the stage demanded that Antiochus declare his love to his stepmother in some way and at some point.

*Laodice* is a different matter. There is little emphasis in the play on the Ariarate-Axiane relationship, and Laodice’s incestuous love arises from a lack of knowledge. There is no chance here of reciprocal feeling for, as we saw
earlier, she declares her passion to Ariarate before he has a chance to reveal his identity. In Ariarate are combined potential love and power. But Thomas makes it clear that, as late as 1668, after *Andromaque*, he still wishes his audience to thrill to the sight of a *grande criminelle*, moved by love, it is true, but predominantly self-sufficient, out to retain power, prepared to die if thwarted, and he has constructed a highly successful, tension-filled, tragedy which, unfashionably perhaps, concentrates on this.
Chapter 7

The hero in distress: *La Mort d'Annibal* (1669)
The hero in distress: *La Mort d'Annibal* (1669).

Thirst for power, incest and true love may provide the themes of *Laodice*; but the account of the death of Hannibal which followed it in Thomas Corneille's dramatic production and was performed at the Hôtel de Bourgogne in November 1669 could only be a very different story. "Si la trahison de Pharnace et la fortune de Pompée n'eussent accablé ce formidable ennemi de Rome au moment où il méditait ce grand dessein", La Harpe writes of Mithridates, "son courage et sa renommée pouvaient lui fournir assez de ressources pour l'exécuter, et personne n'était plus capable de faire voir à l'Italie un autre Annibal". The parallel is illuminating; and in trying to discover the merits and defects of Thomas' last Roman tragedy, it would be interesting to compare it with the last of Racine's three, played barely three years later, early in 1673, at the same theatre.

For too long, in fact, academic critics have been content to see *La Mort d'Annibal* as directly inspired by Pierre Corneille's *Nicomède*; the more condescending would suggest that the elder brother even had a hand in its composition. But this type of preconceived denigration - fitting the hypotheses to the notion that Thomas is third-rate - is no more intellectually honest than many other...

attempts to find a "source", and probably considerably less. For *Mithridate*, too, has been seen as a continuation of *Nicomède*, with Racine helping himself to some of Pierre Corneille's finds, and so on. Study of the stream of borrowings - ideas, themes, structures, lines, rhymes, even the relative length of the first and last acts, who knows? - is perhaps more sterile than useful, and can confuse the issue into the bargain. One or two more or less attested facts might prove helpful.

It seems fairly likely that Racine saw a performance of *La Mort d'Annibal* in Paris, and on the basis of this, referred to Thomas Corneille's play in the first Preface to *Britannicus*, when he writes:

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Que faudroit-il faire pour contenter des juges si difficiles? La chose seroit aisée, pour peu qu'on voulût trahir le bon sens. Il ne faudroit que s'écarter du naturel pour se jeter dans l'extra-ordinaire ... Il faudroit, par exemple, représenter quelque héroïque ivre, qui se voudroit faire haïr de sa maîtresse de gaîté de cœur, un Lacédémonien grand parleur, un conquérant qui ne débiteroit que des maximes d'amour, une femme qui donneroit des leçons de fierté à des conquérants ...
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How did Thomas Corneille come to study the "fierté" of which Racine so obviously disapproves? Is the parallel


3. Racine, *ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 246-247 (my italics). Cf. H.C. Lancaster, "A passage in the first Preface of *Britannicus*", *M.L.N.*, LI (1936), pp. 8-10. The privilege of *Britannicus* is dated 7 January 1670; there is no achevé d'imprimer, but publication is generally accepted to have taken place in January. The first performance of *La Mort d'Annibal* occurs on 25 November 1669; the play's privilege is dated 27 February 1670, its achevé 12 April 1670.
with *Nicomède* at all helpful? While in Pierre's 1651 tragedy the Carthaginian is already dead and the audience are witnesses to a succession struggle, the various stages of which depend on Roman and Bithynian attitudes to Hannibal's disciple, Thomas Corneille's tragedy is constructed round the last hours of the warrior's life. Nor is there any equivalent in 1669 of the figure of Arsinoé in Pierre's play. At the very most the story of Nicomède may have sent Thomas back to study the events of Hannibal's sojourn in Bithynia.

But it seems much more likely that he came to the subject thanks to a suggestion by Saint-Evremond, to whom, as we saw in the last chapter, he appears to have sent a copy of his *Laodice*. Possibly before he received it, or conceivably just after, Saint-Evremond wrote to the comte de Lionne in the following terms:

Je souhaite de tout mon cœur que (Pierre) Corneille traite le sujet d'Annibal, et s'il y peut faire entrer la conference qu'il eut avec Scipion avant la bataille, je m'imagine qu'on leur fera tenir des discours dignes des plus grands hommes du monde, comme ils étoient.

This appears to be no more than a desire, at best a suggestion or invitation from Saint-Evremond to Pierre

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Corneille; there are no grounds for assuming that Lionne had heard (and had informed his friend) that Corneille was planning to write a play on the Hannibal episode. Equally, Saint-Evremond may originally have been led to think of this theme by the reported reprise of Scudéry’s Le grand Annibal in 1667 and by Tallemant des Réaux’s comments on the play ("Le Grand Animal") in his Historiettes. If Thomas Corneille takes up the hint passed on by the Corneilles’ friend, the comte de Lionne, but decides to treat another part of the Carthaginian’s life, this is only any author’s prerogative.

Whatever his reasons for choosing the subject, Thomas could have found various historical accounts of Hannibal’s death. The principal one is undoubtedly Livy, who tells us in the thirty-ninth book of his history how Flamininus was sent by the Romans to Prusias and how his arrival forced the Carthaginian to take poison:

Ad Prusiam regem legatus T. Quinctius Flamininus venit, quem suspectum Romanis et receptus post fugam


6. On Scudéry’s play, see P. Mélièse, Répertoire analytique, Paris, 1934, p. 131. There is virtually no information about this; the play has not been printed. Tallemant’s comments can be found in his Historiettes, ed. G. Mongrédién, Paris, 1934, vol. VII, p. 45. Their date of first publication is uncertain, but Tallemant suggests that P. Corneille was glad that Le Grand Annibal was less successful even than his own Attila (performed 4 March 1667, achevée d’imprimer 20 November 1667).

There is no connection between the episode in Thomas’ La Mort d’Annibal and that in Prade’s tragi-comedy Annibal, published in 1649, but performed probably between 1644 and 1647.

Justin, in his History, makes but a passing reference to the actual death, but Cornelius Nepos, in his Lives of eminent commanders, adds to an earlier part of the story what could be an important detail. In the chapter devoted

to Hannibal, Nepos tells of the Carthaginian helping Prusias against Eumenes - the picturesque episode of the serpents in pots flung on to the opposing ships, which Justin also relates. The Roman senate sends ambassadors (including Flamininus) to Prusias, whereupon this Bithynian puppet ruler asks them particularly not to require of him what was contrary to the rights of hospitality, saying that they themselves might make Hannibal prisoner, if they could, as they would easily find out the place where he was. The envoys seek him out at his fortress; a useful slave looks out and informs Hannibal that all the exits are blocked, whereupon the Carthaginian takes poison and dies in his seventieth year.

The ending is conventional and corresponds to Livy's account. Plutarch, in his Life of Flamininus, offers three variants on the death: the prepared poison, as in Livy and Nepos; strangling, aided by a servant; drinking bull's blood, like Themistocles and Midas. But this is a minor diversion; historians are agreed that Hannibal poisoned himself. Yet the lead-in to the suicide leaves much to play for. In particular, what sort of a man was Prusias, and what was his part? Did he play a double game with the Romans and his refugee guest, as Livy suggests, or did the Romans meet with some albeit faint-hearted opposition from

8. C. Nepos, Vitae, ed. A. Fleckeisen, Leipzig, 1898, p. 96: "illud recusavit, ne id a se fieri postularent, quod adversus ius hospitii esset; ipsi, si possent, comprehenderent: locum, ubi esset, facile inventuros".
him, as in Cornelius Nepos? What, in both instances, was Hannibal's responsibility?

The subject is plainly tragic; but it is not necessarily suitable for dramatic representation. Or to make it so, Thomas Corneille would be almost forced to make a number of significant changes. Now, plays on the death of a hero or heroine, particularly refugees or victims of one sort or another, had been popular since around the time of Le Cid. Many are Roman tragedies, more or less. Mithridates, Brutus, Porcia, Pompey, Seneca, Chriopius, Cato and others: plays dealing with their demise fill the Paris stage in the late thirties and throughout the forties and early fifties. But the danger with such subjects is the very possible lack of action. Or where a dramatist is careful to inject some, the division between victim and oppressor can be artificially, and non-dramatically, clear-cut. If we take two early but well-known examples, Scudéry’s La Mort de César and La Calprenède’s La Mort de Mitridate, both dating from 1635, the difficulties become immediately apparent. Scudéry reduces his main characters to five: Brutus, Cassius, Caesar, Antony and Lepidus, keeping Porcia in

9. E.g. La Calprenède, La Mort de Mitridate (sic) (perf. 1635); Guérin de Bouscal, La Mort de Brute et de Porcie (1635-1636); Chaulmer, La Mort de Pompee (1637; cf. Corneille 1642-1643); Tristan l’Hermite, La Mort de Sénèque (1643-1644) and La Mort de Chriape (1644); Auger, La Mort de Caton (1646). If we add to this list Griquet's La Mort de Germanic Caesar (1645), Montfleury's La Mort d’Asdrubal (1645-1646) and similar plays by Gillet de la Tessonnerie, Cyrano de Bergerac and de Nogueres on Valentinian and Isidore (1648), Agrippina (1653) and Manlius (1659), we see the interest shown between 1635 and 1660 in the last moments of a victim, resigned to his fate and stoical to the end.
addition but restricting her rôle (to satisfy the *bien-
séances*) and removing her from most of the action. The
main struggle is between Brutus and Cassius, the con-
spirators, on the one side, Caesar, Antony and Lepidus on
the other. Until act IV, however, there is very little
contact between the two sides; and although the story ob-
viously demands some such separation, the result is an
artificial and essentially *undramatic* juxtaposition of atti-
tudes, only minimally helped by the occasional scene be-
tween Brutus' wife and the wife of Caesar.

An even more clear-cut example of oversimplification
comes from a more passive play than Scudéry's conspiracy
tragedy. In La Calprenède's *La Mort de Mitridate* the two
powers, Rome (represented by Pompée, Pharmace and Emile, a
captain) and Pontus (with Mitridate, his wife Hypsicratée,
his daughter-in-law Bérénice, his daughters Nise and Mitri-
datie and the *chef de la cavalerie* Ménandre), meet in only
three scenes: III.3, where Pharmace talks to his wife Béré-
nice; IV.3, where he meets his father Mitridate, and IV.4,
where he is joined by Hypsicratée, Mitridaté and Nise.
Of these three meetings, two were invented by La Calprenède;
and it is on these unhistorical moments - the final break
between husband and wife, the pathetic interview between
father and son - that the dramatist has been able to build
his play and arouse the audience's interest. Yet much re-
 mains artificial, and resignation in the face of defeat can
easily turn into a series of unedifying lamentations, under-
lining the static nature of the previous acts. Whatever
Carrington Lancaster may say, an earlier critic has more accurately described the *longueurs* of the two opening acts of *La Mort de Mitridate* and the barely credible dénouement:

L'avant-dernière scène de la tragédie, celle du suicide général, révèle clairement l'impuissance de l'auteur, paralysé par cette conception de l'action tragique, à tirer parti d'une situation vraiment forte et dramatique. ... *La Calprenède* n'a rien soupçonné de la scène à faire 10.

What is more astonishing, in fact, than the five-fold death-agony "dans la chambre avec vne coupe sur la table", with the defeated king, struggling against a slow-working poison, finally stabbing himself after having given an order to place "ce pasle corps dans le throsne Royal".

Few indeed are the sons who, like Pharnace, return home to find five relatives' bodies stretched out in front of them ("Pharnace entre dans la chambre, où la tapisserie tirée il void Mitridate & Hypsicratée sur des thrones, & sa femme & ses soeurs à leurs pieds"). Hollywood in its heyday could not have done better than this.

If I have dwelt at some length on this matter, it is because the problems posed by the many plays on *La Mort de* ... in the second third of the seventeenth century were rarely satisfactorily solved - Cyrano's *La Mort d'Agrippine* and Tristan's *La Mort de Sénèque* are happy exceptions to the rule. The refugee or victim *per se* is thin material for five acts. The nearer he is to death

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(in true tragédie-crise conditions), the more resigned, the more stoical, even admirable perhaps, he is, but the less dramatic the tragedy becomes. Obviously, Thomas Corneille's previous La Mort de l'empereur Commode is quite different; whatever its defects, resulting from a dual purpose, it is a play of action until the end.

Now Thomas has not only altered the historical accounts of the events leading up to Hannibal's death; he adds an important, revealing note in the Epistre to Colbert's son which prefaces the printed play.

By the time this Epistre was probably composed, between performance at the end of November 1669 and early April 1670, the date of the achevé, Racine had brought out Britannicus (performed 13 December 1669) and almost certainly had published the first Preface with its remarks critical of Pierre and, seemingly, Thomas Corneille. "Passions tumultueuses", "délicates expressions de l'amour": the claims that Thomas makes in favour of tragedy that gives pride of place to "la politique ou le raisonnement", although it does not treat it exclusively, run counter to the tone of Racinian tragedy as shown in Andromaque and to much of Quinault's work, almost entirely complete by that date. Not long before, possibly as late as the summer of 1668, Pierre
Corneille had written to Saint-Evremond in the following terms: "J'ai cru jusques ici que l'amour était une passion trop chargée de faiblesses pour être la dominante dans une pièce héroïque; j'aime qu'elle y serve d'ornement, et non pas de corps, et que les grandes âmes ne la laissent agir qu'autant qu'elle est compatible avec de plus nobles impressions". If both brothers admit (with a certain defiance) to being unfashionable in their choice of subjects, both claim, too, to be relevant, to make the content of the play fit the historical source.

What about Thomas Corneille in La Mort d'Annibal? It

11. The B.N. Racine exhibition catalogue (1967, p. 32, item 119) dates this letter tentatively July-August 1668, whereas editors of Corneille, including the most recent, A. Stegmann (Œuvres, Seuil, L'Intégrale, 1963, p. 862) prefer 1666. As the letter is a reply to Saint-Evremond's Dissertation sur le Grand Alexandre, praising Corneille's Sophonisbe and published at the end of June 1668 (achèvé 26 June), the later date must be the accurate one. The letter thus comes a few months after the first preface to Andromaque (1666) where, explaining that he has watered down the character of Pyrrhus ("Toute la liberté que j'ai prise, c'a été d'adoucir un peu la féroce de Pyrrhus"), Racine maintains his right to depict passionate heroes: "Tous les héros ne sont pas faits pour être des Céladons" (Œuvres complètes, ed. R. Picard, Paris, 1960, vol. I, pp. 241-242). Cf. what Corneille said about the place of love in his Discours du poème dramatique (M.-L., vol. I, p. 24): "Sa (tragedy's) 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. Il est à propos d'y mêler l'amour, parce qu'il a toujours beaucoup d'agrément, et peut servir de fondement à ces intérêts et à ces autres passions dont je parle; mais il faut qu'il se contente du second rang dans le poème, et leur laisse le premier ... Je ne lui ai jamais laissé y prendre le pas devant, et ... dans Le Cid même, qui est sans contredit la pièce la plus remplie d'amour que j'aye faite, le devoir de la naissance et le soin de l'honneur l'emportent sur toutes les tendresses qu'il inspire aux amants que j'y fais parler."
is clear that the dramatist, even if he had read Nepos as well as Livy, has made several changes to the accepted version of the Carthaginian's last hours. Firstly, he introduces Attale, king of Pergamum, whom he makes, in Flaminius' words, equal in status to Prusias. The historical Attalus had inflicted a defeat on Prusias at Lypredon, and had then concluded a peace treaty with him. But the idea, taken up by Thomas Corneille, that he has succeeded his elder brother Eumenes, dated from eleven years later, 172 B.C., when Eumenes was returning from Rome to Pergamum. Attale, however, is no longer brother of Nicomède, as in Pierre's play of 1651; but Nicomède, mentioned earlier in Justin, as Corneille tells us in his Au Lecteur and Examen, is retained. Finally, and most importantly, Thomas invents Elise, Hannibal's daughter, a strong personality who, standing in for her often absent father, makes it difficult for one to accept the Parfait's criticism that "Annibal, qui seul doit faire tout l'intérêt de la Piece, est si froid & agit si peu, que sa mort ne cause ni pitié ni admiration".

These are the most obvious changes to Livy or Nepos. But in writing his play and working out the relationships and power-struggles Thomas Corneille has managed to be

12. Flamininus to Prusias, III.6: Son pouvoir en ce lieu se trouve égal au vostre, Pareil nombre l'escorte ...

rather more subtle. *La Mort d'Annibal*, with six main characters, contains thirty-six scenes, a fair number by seventeenth-century standards, regularly increasing as the play proceeds from six in act I to nine in the last act. The organisation of entrances and exits is well-handled, there are no monologues, and the action is kept flowing throughout. If Annibal himself appears in only ten scenes (three in each of the second and third acts, two in each of the last two), it is to misunderstand his rôle to say that the play automatically suffers in consequence. Why, more than twenty-five years before, Thomas' brother had brought out a *Mort de Pompée* where the title-character is completely absent, and in the 1660 *Examen* had justified this bold step when he wrote: "Il y a quelque chose d'extraordinaire dans le titre de ce poème, qui porte le nom d'un héros qui n'y parle point; mais il ne laisse pas d'en être, en quelque sorte, le principal acteur, puisque sa mort est la cause unique de tout ce qui s'y passe". By inventing Elise, however, and making her as ardent an enemy of Rome as her father is, Thomas Corneille has more than compensated for Annibal's absences; in fact, he has successfully varied the interest. Elise appears in seventeen scenes, and of these twelve, including the vital first seven scenes of act V, show her without her father. So if we take Annibal's appearances and add to these the dozen scenes featuring Elise and the two in which Nicomède appears without

either the Carthaginian or his daughter (I.3 and IV.5), we have a total of twenty-four scenes - two-thirds of the play - in which Annibal's influence is directly felt. Even the power of Rome (Flaminius) and the ambivalent presence of Bithynia (Prusias) together cannot do better than this.

If such linkings of characters are important in Annibal, so are the avoidances. Attale and Nicomède, for example, both in love with Elise, never meet, nor do Flaminius and the man he is supposed to be taking off to Rome, Nicomède\(^\text{15}\). Other characters meet but rarely: Prusias and his son in only two scenes (I.3 and IV.5), similarly Prusias and his guest Annibal (II.5 and III.4), while the arch-enemies Flaminius and Annibal come together twice only, but then memorably, in act III scene 3 and scene 4. The scene-pattern in the last act bears out this division. Attale leaves for good after scene 3, Prusias after scene 5 and the Roman ambassador in scene 6, so that the final three scenes, almost a coda, can concentrate on those entirely favourable to the Carthaginian cause: Elise, Nicomède and the dying Annibal himself. In a way, this fairly clear-cut separation recalls the schematic, much more arbitrary division into separate camps of earlier plays entitled La Mort de... . But Thomas Corneille has been considerably

15. The nearest Nicomède and Attale come is at the end of IV.6, when Elise, noticing Attale and her father arriving, says to Nicomède:

*Adieu, je vois Attale, il sort avec mon Pere.*

*Evitez leur presence ...*

This he successfully does. Flaminius and Nicomède never even come as close as this to a meeting on stage.
more flexible than a Scudéry or a La Calprenède. The interaction of the two sides is much more visible, the "victims" are shown to be reasonably vigorous to the end, the opposition to be insufficiently coherent.

This last point requires refining, however. In the play Prusias is basically weak and double-dealing. The two men who are undoubtedly stronger than he is, although they are on opposite sides, both stress this, Annibal in II.5 ("Vainqueur de toutes parts, il ne faut qu'un Romain / Pour vous faire tomber les armes de la main"), Flaminius in IV.1 ("Prusias est trop mol, & son inquietude / Pour oser rien de ferme a trop d'incertitude"). The Bithynian king fears Rome in the person of Flaminius, regrets having given refuge to its enemy Annibal, and is in love with the latter's daughter Elise. Yet, as even Annibal says, he has power to wield, although he does not know how to do so:

Quand il peut plus luy seul que trente Rois ensemble,
Au seul nom du Senat il s'intimide, il tremble (II.4).

Toute l'Asie émeuë, & presque sous vos Loix,
Craignoit en vous déjà le plus grand de ses Rois. (II.5)

His military strength is only great when measured against the refugee Carthaginians' lack of influence. Similarly, he is only "young" ("jeune encore", II.4) in comparison to the aging Annibal.

If Prusias is potentially strong but weak in character, irresolute in action, Thomas Corneille is careful to build up Attale, one of the figures he brings into the play, so that he is of virtually equal standing. This he has to do if he wants to gain any advantage from the melodramatic
return of Eumène: for if Attale is not powerful and hence liable to lose much influence, the surprise survival of his brother will have little effect. He has to be in a commanding position, too, to make his marriage to Elise a danger to Rome and also to make Annibal want to seek refuge with him in Pergamum. Then what of Annibal? Here, too, the position is made fairly clear, by the Carthaginian himself when he admits to Nicomède that he was taken in by Prusias on his arrival in Bithynia:

J'ai choisi cette Cour à je m'estois flaté
P'y trouver moins d'embrage, à plus de fermeté.
L'accueil de Prusias, ses offres, ses services,
P'un fort attachement, m'estoient de seurs indices,
Les plus hardis projets m'enfléoient déjà le coeur;
Mais je voy tout à coup qu'un Romain luy fait peur.

(II.4).

Admittedly, his other appearances are less self-disparaging, and he has Elise to put forward a strong case. Equally Prusias' case is, in theory at least, helped by Flaminius.

But the initial impressions stick. How well has Thomas Corneille presented the various points of view? How does the structure of the play bring out these differences? How dramatic a tragedy is it, in the end?

We have seen how Elise and Annibal together, helped to some extent by Nicomède, combine to present the Carthaginian arguments, while Prusias has Flaminius, but not from the start. It is Prusias who dominates the first act, appearing in every scene: Attale, Nicomède and Elise figure in one each, but Annibal does not appear until II.3 and the Roman ambassador until III.3. The structure of the first act admirably brings out the king's feelings, for his interviews
with Attale (scene 1), Nicomède (scene 3) and Elise (scene 5) are interspersed with anxious meetings with his confidant, Araxe, the captain of the guards (scenes 2, 4 and 6). Non-committal about helping Attale in his openly-declared love of Elise (I.1), the king takes a stronger line with his son when he, in turn, admits his passion for the Carthaginian. Reasons of state are added to mere affection, and clash with Nicomède's obstinate resistance to Rome:

Prusias: Cessez de vous flater; nous dépendons de Rome ... C'est elle qui soutient les Trônes qui chancellent ...
Je suis père du peuple avant qu'être le vostre ...

Nicomède: Negligez des Amis qui se font vos Tyrans.
Rejettez une indigne & basse dépendance ...
Ils ne pourront jamais soumettre mon courage ...
(I.3).

The love of the two young men and Prusias' own infatuation, despite his age, place the king in an obvious dilemma. Rome will not look favourably on further interest being shown in the Carthaginian, but equally sending Annibal away would also remove Elise. As far as Thomas Corneille's play goes, nothing can really be done to resolve this problem. Prusias' subservience to Rome is apparent even before the ambassador arrives; his love of Elise is no less obvious, and without outside intervention little can be done to change the mind of a man who can say, for example, "Elise a tous mes voeux; Elise a tout mon coeur; / Et pour moy sans Elise il n'est point de bonheur" (I.2). His feelings are irreconcilable with political reality - any solution can only come from the inside, by manoeuvring Nicomède, with whom he will clash in scene 3, or Attale, whom he has already brushed off (scene 1).
But which is it to be? By concentrating the three declarations of love into the first three scenes of the play, Thomas Corneille has at least cleared the decks for action. The situation may or may not be vraisemblable; but Prusias, present throughout, now has a basis for action in a historical episode where conscience and principle loom as large as action. If he can find out whom Elise herself favours — and he assumes that her preference will go to either Nicomède or Attale, "tous deux jeunes, tous deux bouillans dans leurs desseins", I.4 —, the rival can then be attacked.

It seems important, at this stage in considering the exposition of La Mort d'Annibal, to be quite clear about the use, if not the amount, of love in the opening scenes of the play. I shall return later to the need for love at all in putting the Hannibal story on stage in 1669, but two points can be made now concerning Prusias' "amour de vieillard". Firstly, as we have just seen, it serves as a "point de départ" for action: the presence of rivals spurs Prusias on. Secondly, we should note that in the scene between the king and Elise (I.5), Thomas Corneille is careful to avoid a repeat of the second scene. Prusias does not declare his love to Elise, for her remarks make it pointless. True, his précieux language is brushed aside; and act II scene 2 shows that Elise is aware of Prusias' interest in her. But I.5 serves essentially to bring out Elise's reaction to Attale, whom she rejects ("... il fut dans vos fers avant que d'estre Roy"), and to Nicomède, on whom she
reserves judgement.

On the basis of this information, Prusias feels he can make up his mind. And rightly so - he realises that Nicomède, a declared enemy of Rome, is more acceptable to Elise than Attale (it is only later that we can see that it is the strength of Elise's love for Nicomède that makes her reject Attale, a past prisoner, for her father is only too grateful to consider Attale's present powers and seek refuge with him in Pergamum). So the first act ends on a decision, based, as Prusias tells us, on a certitude, not a mere soupçon (I.6): Nicomède will be revealed to the Roman ambassador as being in love with Elise and dispatched with him to Rome.

The opening act, then, despite its impossible sequence of love-declarations, is not without credibility, even dignity. It would be wrong, as critics imply, to scoff at the fatuity of it all, for Nicomède's confession, at least, is strongly expressed. From the six scenes Prusias emerges as weak, double-faced and unrealistic. Optimism that Rome might ask him to marry Elise, in order to keep the peace, betrays a na"ive confidence distorted by passion, and in Araxe he has no adviser strong enough to change his mind. But the decision which his meetings in act I have sparked off is a step forward; the next two scenes complete the picture and the exposition. After a brief interval, Elise can barely disguise from her confidante the love she feels for Nicomède, a feeling "inconnu pour moy jusqu'à ce jour" and heightened by news of his imminent
departure to Rome. Nicomède's arrival (II.2) allows her, however hesitantly, to let her love be known, with none of the earlier restrictions. It is the king's son, rather, who, despite his joy, sees the true situation: either he or the Carthaginians will have to leave, and the former seems the easier solution.

With Annibal's coming the situation inevitably changes. The dramatist has been able, within a mere eight scenes of exposition, to present the basic position fully and well. Attale, Prusias and Nicomède have declared their love for Elise; Elise has rejected Attale, reserved her position on Nicomède but in private has admitted her love, first to her confidante, then to Nicomède himself. She has also noticed Prusias' passion and by implication has brushed it aside. Prusias, Nicomède and Elise have all faced up to the problem of reconciling their affections with the demands of Rome, and Thomas has managed to keep the meeting between Elise and Nicomède, in which Elise is, for once, seen as a prey to emotion, to the scene preceding her father's entrance.

We saw earlier how, to a large extent, Elise and Annibal combine in the play to present the Carthaginian case. Yet their views complement each other rather than coincide, at least on certain of the key issues. Where her love overcomes adherence to the cause, Elise is less in line with her father than Nicomède is. Her weakness, however limited, is in the present; Annibal's (accepting refuge with Prusias) was in the past. The broader perspective
which Annibal enjoys, the time he has had to reflect, all these allow him to see that the departure of Nicomède will solve nothing, and that he and his daughter must seek asylum with Attale. He is aware of Elise's affection for Nicomède - but the need for protection, the desirability of a son-in-law who is a king override his personal feelings.

The volte-face marked by the late entry of Annibal is well nigh complete. Thomas Corneille has been careful to keep Attale as a definite outsider in the discussions of act I and the beginning of act II. He has appeared in only one scene of the play, the opening one; he has been not more than placated by Prusias, who has helped him in the past, yielded him Pergamum and who makes earnest promises for the future while remaining essentially non-committal. He has been rejected by Elise, who sees him as a former captive rather than a king. Annibal, with nothing to lose, takes a more detached view. Prusias will be spared two refugees; the Romans can hardly take offence, and he and Elise will have effective rather than merely nominal protection. His resolve is only heightened by the conversation he has with Prusias in II.5, where the Bithynian king clearly hopes both to have his cake and to eat it:

Cependant du Senat dont je crains la puissance,
Luy commettant mon Fils, j'acquiers la confiance,
Pour voir Attale à moy je le rens mon égal,
Pais des Amis par tout, & retiens Annibal.

For Prusias, the choice is a difficult one. By letting Annibal depart he would, paradoxically, expose himself further to Roman influence and would also lose Elise. The best
solution would be to continue to protect the two refugees, to promise and let time take its course, as he had said to Araxe at the end of act I. To do this, he must turn on Attale and see that he incures Rome's disfavour. Now, this alternative solution, which provides a conclusion to act II, parallel to his decision about Nicomède at the close of act I, could have offered Thomas Corneille a possible dénouement to the play as he has constituted it, with its additional characters. Attale would become the scapegoat, while the real struggle would continue between the king and his son. But in the end, this might be no more of a guarantee than any other proposal that Hannibal would stay on in Bithynia and that its king could marry Elise. It would also radically change the historical account, already significantly altered. So Thomas, having pushed Prusias to this second decision and thereby added to the picture of him as an irresolute king, returns to Attale, giving him the longest presence in the next two acts and the Romans the chance to force Prusias into an irrevocable choice.

The strength of Elise's love for Nicomède and her rejection of Attale makes her presence in this central part of the noeud almost impossible. Her absence coincides with Nicomède's, so that Attale joins Hannibal in acts III and IV in defending the Carthaginian case against Prusias and Flaminius, who arrives in III.3 and stays for the next seven scenes. Attale is given the cold shoulder by Elise once again in scene 1 and not much encouragement by Hannibal either in the second, although he is referred to the newly-arrived ambassador. But the issue is less crude than this;
events interact one on the other. If Annibal thinks that Attale's future depends on Flamininus, his own is thrown into the balance in the heated exchanges with the ambassador in III.3. Attale's request to Annibal for Elise's hand is brushed aside; the Carthaginian asserts that "Rome attendra long-temps qu'il (Prusias) vous livre son Fils" (scene 3). Prusias, for the sake of a quiet life, says that Nicomède will leave; Annibal announces that he will seek refuge with Attale (scene 4).

The cards have been played logically enough, even inevitably. Annibal's solution was announced almost as soon as he appeared, to Nicomède in II.4. Prusias has not changed, neither has Annibal; the latter is now merely making his decision public. It is Prusias, though, who is being forced into a cleft stick, by the very presence of Attale, Attale at once the desirable monarch, able and willing to grant asylum, and the albeit unsuccessful lover. If Attale is only partly successful, Prusias fails on both these counts, and can be played upon too, by Flamininus. Thomas Corneille has been careful, in the all-important scene five, to have both Attale (openly) and Flamininus(less apparently) close in on the hapless Prusias. Attale seems a good target for the king and the ambassador, but he skilfully parries Flamininus' opening gambit, directing the conversation to Prusias and dealing a first blow to him by his ironical remarks on love. Flamininus' reply is similarly handled:

Je laisse à Prusias le soin de vous répondre ... 
Avouant mon amour j'ay montré ma franchise ...
Now, behind this crucial confrontation lies more than meets the eye. Despite Attale's haughty attitude, Flamininus sees why Prusias wants to prevent Annibal joining Attale, and he counters the king's attacks by mentioning Attale's virtues and past services (III.6). For in Rome's eyes, Nicomède's actions, even more so those of Attale, are nothing compared to the threat posed by Annibal and Elise. But equally, Prusias has still to ensure that Elise can be his, and this he can now only do openly, by directly asking Flamininus. The various affections and relationships have worked their course, from act I scene 1 onwards. Having chosen thus to dramatise the conflict between Rome and Hannibal and in particular the unease of Roman-Bithynian relations, Thomas Corneille has reached the furthest point possible: Prusias has been caught in the Roman trap, and the Carthaginians inevitably along with him.

This game of cat and mouse has been going on for long, Flamininus says, although he has only been present since III.3, and there is no reason to doubt him here:

J'ay les yeux bien ouverts, & sans vous en rien dire,
Je voy depuis long-temps à quoy vostre ame aspire.

(III.6).

In return for Annibal, Rome will let Prusias keep Elise. The alternative is handing her over to Attale, as previously explained. Now, even although one element in the jigsaw is missing (reference to Nicomède's love of Elise—but then the ambassador and Nicomède never meet), there can be no way out, for Prusias at least. Keeping Elise
and thereby destroying Annibal will hardly kindle the daughter's love; letting Annibal join Attale will deprive him of even her presence.

If this could have been the end of the story, if Prusias could have committed suicide or even simply renounced his hopes, as Racine's Bérénice will do, Thomas Corneille could have been credited with a skilfully constructed and interesting play. But as we have seen in all the previous chapters, his respect for history only allowed him to alter details, to "embellir", not to falsify the "vrai". His attempt to dramatise the relations between Annibal and Prusias and Prusias and Flaminius has largely come off, yet only thanks to the presence of Elise, the emotions she arouses and the creation, too, of Attale, linking up with both Elise and her father. But the primacy given to love in the staging of what is a political quarrel has forced one of the chief historical figures, Prusias, into an impasse, and with him the man who controls the puppet's strings, Flaminius.

This explains, then, even if it does not excuse, the return of Eumène, miraculously saved from drowning, and the end of his brother Attale's influence. With this news, and given Prusias' continuing infatuation, Annibal's fate is sealed; his suicide can be but a matter of time. Melodramatic, perhaps, although inevitable; but dramatic, yes, still. The third act can hardly end as do acts I and II, with important scenes in which Prusias makes up his mind. So Thomas Corneille prefaces, maybe even cushions, the announce-
ment about Eumène by a brief message (III.7) that keeps audience interest alive into act IV. Secondly, making capital out of this particular deus ex machina, he shows Flamininius planning to let Attale marry Elise before informing them (or Prusias) about the change in circumstances.

Tactics such as these can be only partly successful, however. Annibal and Elise are too much old hands at the game of diplomacy to be taken in, as Attale is, by Flaminius' sudden backtracking ("Cet heureux changement a de quoi me surprendre", IV.2). With a full two acts to go between the news of Eumène's survival and the final curtain, Thomas Corneille is hard pressed to conclude his story without being led off on to a new track. Even Prusias, an historical character and one who, in the dramatised version, has most to lose by Attale's presence, requires the encouragements of Araxe, turned Machiavellian adviser, before deciding to wager all:

C'en est fait, perdons tout dans ce besoin extrême,
Attale par mon Fils, Annibal par moy-mesme,
Et comme à triompher voicy nostre grand jour,
Perdons jusqu'à ce Fils s'il nuit à mon amour.
(IV.4).

As for Nicomède, he is resuscitated after two acts' absence and made to rush off and relate to Annibal and Elise what a naughty boy Prusias says Attale is. The main problem is to prepare for the Romans' arrival in the last scene of act IV (another well-handled final scene, as are all the ends of acts in Annibal). To do this, to make this final twist on the screw intensive enough, the Carthaginians have to be built up as much as possible, contrasting with the
feverish or misguided activity round about them. This is done in two stages. Firstly, if Nicomède hastily believes Attale guilty and Attale too easily accepts the Roman change of heart, Annibal and Elise maintain their former positions (IV.7). For a suspicious Elise, Attale can only be allowed to win her hand (and no more) if he vigorously espouses the Carthaginian cause. Annibal, too, more readily agrees with Attale's surprise than with his confidence in the future. Straight against this dignified, human, logical scene, Thomas Corneille places the report brought by Alcine of the Roman invasion of Nicomédie. Elise's doubts about Attale and Annibal's fears are only strengthened by the news: "le temps nous est trop cher pour le perdre en paroles".

The second stage of differentiating between Bithynia and Carthage, held over until the beginning of act V, returns to the theme of love which has played such a part in the play. Both of the unlucky lovers, Prusias and Attale, have a final attempt at expressing their passion, the incongruity of the occasion contrasting with Annibal's dire dilemma. Yet the ridicule which is heaped upon Prusias and, to a lesser extent, on Attale, serves two purposes in the end. While it concentrates attention on Annibal and his daughter, increasing their dignity, the worth of their resistance, it also indicates the remove from reality at which at times they live. Attale, at least, has already fought for Annibal and lent him his guards for protection, and he will soon be the adversary of Prusias and the Romans. But for the Carthaginians, the present is what counts, and Nicomède seems a safer bet than the king of Pergamum.
It is paradoxical indeed that Annibal gives up the struggle just when fortune is turning his way. But the order of events in the closing scenes of the play shows clearly the interpretation that Thomas Corneille wants us to put on this action. Attale departs in V.3, having learnt the truth about Eumène from Flaminius; but his promise of action is amply borne out by Araxe's account of his clash with Prusias and the Roman invaders (scene 9). Prusias leaves in scene 5, mocked by the Roman ambassador but swearing vengeance on Nicomède, who has opposed the invading forces in the name of Annibal. Finally, Flaminius flounces out, stung by Elise's final attack on all he stands for:

Elise: Je te dédaigne assez pour fuir l'abaissement D'abandonner ta vie à mon ressentiment. (V.6).

Attale will not return to the stage; his difficult rôle in the play makes it unnecessary, even impossible. But Nicomède comes back to learn of Attale's innocence, Prusias' guilt and eventual death. The coda formed by scenes 8 and 9 of act V allows the dramatist to concentrate briefly but necessarily on the historical event which justifies the title, in a play where such moments of repose are difficult to come by. The calmness with which Annibal announces his suicide is in complete contrast to Prusias' reported death, an anonymous affair in the crowd, very similar to Maximian's in 1662:

Sans sçavoir par quel bras on l'a veu tomber mort...

(V.9).

The insignificance of this event lends all the more weight
to Annibal's decision, taken at an earlier stage, and to
his generous treatment of Nicomède, who is finally united
with Élise. "Le Prince vous merite, il est enfin sans
tache".

La Mort d'Annibal is the third and last of Thomas'
Roman tragedies drawn from the Republican period. The
seventeenth-century public does not seem to have found it
interesting, and even Robinet, that usually ecstatic
gazetier, is forced to admit that "ce Poème, qui m'a ravi,
N'a pas été fort bien suivi". The frères Parfait, more
distinguished critics, are equally unenthusiastic, however,
talking of the "épisodes inutiles" and declaring, as we
have seen, that the historical interest is here misplaced
and gives rise to no valid emotions. In modern times,
opinion has been almost as critical. In the middle of
last century, P.-F. Tissot admitted that "Annibal ....
ne manque pas de quelque fierté sous le pinceau de Thomas",
but added "Malheureusement, l'amour vient mal à propos
distraire le fier Annibal, et mêler ses froides disserta-
tions aux pensées d'un grand homme appliqué tout entier,
quoique si voisin de la mort, au dessein de soulever le
monde contre les oppresseurs de Carthage ... Plus nous
avançons dans l'étude de l'art, moins nous nous résignons
à voir soupirer celui qui donna dans un jour la mort à

16. Robinet, Lettres en vers, 30 November 1669, lines
181-182, in Les continuateurs de Loret, ed. Baron J.
Parfait, loc.cit.
cent mille Romains" 17. One could point out that Annibal is almost the only character in the play not influenced by love.

Reynier, while acknowledging the existence of "grandes beautés" in the fifth act, makes the ingenious suggestion that "l'insuccès de La Mort d'Annibal était le châtiment de la gloire de Timocrate." And later the same scholar offers his version of the traditional tale which even today hinders any rational consideration of the younger Corneille's merits as a dramatist:

Si l'on songe que La Mort d'Annibal est de 1669 et qu'à cette époque le Grand Corneille, découragé par l'échec d'Attila, ne travaillait pour son compte à aucun ouvrage dramatique, on est tenté de supposer que, séduit par le sujet que traitait son frère, il prit plaisir à composer pour lui quelques vers, heureux de se prouver à lui-même que son génie n'avait pas vieilli. Mais en somme nous n'avons pas de preuve certaine pour appuyer une telle hypothèse ... 18.

Luckily, perhaps. Added to which is our knowledge that Pierre was involved at or around this time in Quinault and Molière's Psyché, while the question of Tite et Bérénice is still one of the great unsolved problems in French classical tragedy. Finally, even present-day critics can try to get away with a hasty, incomplete or second-hand reading of the text. Lacy Lockert, for example: "Nicomedes ... is a rather colorless figure, merely the usual young hero of romance; he is conventionally sure of dying if Attalus wins

Elissa ..."19. This is to seriously misunderstand the meaning of Nicomède, disciple and successor of Annibal and endowed with many of his master's qualities.

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In dramatising the Hannibal story, then, Thomas Corneille faced a considerable number of difficulties. Among the least of these, I feel, were the rivalry of Racine (who seems to have been more disparaging of Thomas than Thomas was concerned about him) or the existence of Pierre's Nicomède (for the younger brother was skilful at variation and in any case not averse to bringing out two very similar plays, as Stilicon and Maximian, for example, show). But the problem of staging the last, historically largely inactive hours of an active hero's life remained. Supporting characters were few: Prusias, for whom two slightly varying accounts could only provide relatively meagre material; Flaminius, a character with dramatic potential, certainly; Nicomède. Additional figures to fill out the structure were almost certainly essential. To strengthen the Carthaginian side, a younger person, symbolising the continuity of the struggle; another, perhaps to come, at times at least, in between the two opposed camps of Rome/Bithynia and Carthage. The latter resulted in Attale, promoted into the episode, the former in Elise.

the only woman in the play, and definitely unhistorical.

Much ink has flowed on this point alone, most critics, contemporary and modern, decrying the importance of love in a play dealing with the death of Hannibal. As we saw, Thomas Corneille had reservations about the tragedy's success, both as a printed text and as a play, performed at a time when passionate love had come to the fore on the stage. This is not an apology by the dramatist, but rather an explanation, even a justification. In *La Mort d'Annibal* we do not have "passions tumultueuses", at most only "les délicates expressions de l'amour", all along tied in with political considerations.

Now we may well ask how else Thomas Corneille could have proceeded in 1669 in his attempt to update the sterile pattern of earlier static plays on the death of well-known historical characters. He has kept the basic essentials: Nicomède the disciple, Prusias the unwilling host, Flaminius the arriving ambassador, the impasse into which Annibal is driven and his dignified suicide. Given this framework, what else could Thomas depict in, as he calls it, "un temps qui devroit estre employé à de plus pressants interests" (Epistre)? Surely we must realise that love here is largely, though not exclusively, a means to an end, a means, indeed, of giving dramatic form to a situation, helping to give life to and differentiate between the characters. It supports and strengthens, rather than destroys, the features which Livy describes; it can, despite some of the detail, be seen to be vraisemblable if not vrai,
embroidered on to but not completely altering the historical account.

If we take the crude situation that history provides, we see the position of Hannibal, now in distress, contrasted with the relative power of his temporary host Prusias, supported by and dependent on a much more powerful Rome. Two weak forces, then: the Carthaginians in exile, the Bithynian court; but at the same time the former are endowed with an internal strength of character denied to the latter. To bring out the weakness of Prusias, then, what better way than to resort to the staple weakness admitted by seventeenth-century French characters, namely love? The solution seems sensible enough, not a fault in itself. It has several possibilities, even advantages, quite apart from being acceptable to a 1670 theatregoing public. Firstly, it varies the presentation of human weakness, a difficult thing to stage. Prusias, for example, affirms one thing but believes and does another. To Attale in 1.1 he can say: "J'ay promis, j'ay donné retraite à ce grand homme (Anni-bal)", while confessing (but only after Annibal has said he is about to leave) that he gave him refuge unwillingly. Throughout, even to Annibal himself, he admits his dependence on Rome, and Rome, in its turn, looks on him as hesitant and weakwilled. This particular failing, then, is emphasised by a cognate weakness, his love of Elise, incongruously inappropriate and itself engendering other defects, in particular jealousy, at times masked by hypocritical references to reasons of state, at times coming out openly
as in I.4, when he says to his confidant: "Quoy, je pourrois souffrir qu'Attale fust heureux?" Political weakness alone is undramatic; a form of affection for a much younger Elise leaves Prusias open to ridicule by Attale (acts III and IV) and by Elise herself (act V). He cannot practise what he preaches, being unable to live up to his fine maxim "C'est à fuir ce qui plaist qu'on montre son courage" (IV.3).

The Bithynian king's weaknesses, political and personal, thus combine to form one side of the balance. The other side depends on an equally all-embracing passion, that of vengeance, arising from a second use of love by Thomas Corneille. The exiles that history tells about can summon up little help; those in the 1669 play have Attale and Nicomède, both aroused by love of Elise, expressed at the very outset in act I. There is no need to recapitulate here the various stages of her contact with the two young men. The essential point is that her hand (or her love) must be won at the price of revenge, of active help to Carthage and Annibal. If Nicomède loves but hesitates to defy Rome, Elise would give preference to a more resolute Attale.

Her love thus allows a broader presentation of the Carthaginian case; it also shows that on some points Annibal is insensitive or can be proved wrong. The daughter favours Nicomède because he is not, like Attale, a former prisoner. Her father would countenance Attale's help because it is backed up by present political power. But throughout, Elise's feelings are different from those of any of the three men who seek her hand. She does not, as
do other of Thomas Corneille's young women, make her or-

gueil a question of social rank, of inequality of birth
giving rise to problems of gloire. The restrictions she
imposes are stronger and more natural; her fierté, commented
upon by Prusias and Flaminius, puts affection firmly into
second place behind national interest. If she gives way
to Nicomède, it is "après mille combats" (II.2) and her
admission to him after he returns from a long absence in
the middle of the play is that "Je vous aime en Fille d'
Annibal" (IV.6).

Between the two extremes - Prusias backed up by Flamin-
ius and Carthage supported by Nicomède ("La Fille sur moy
peut autant que le Pere", I.3) - there lies Attale, no
longer Nicomède's brother, as in Pierre Corneille's play,
because Thomas wants to concentrate the important effect of
close family relationship on one unit, Annibal-Elise. Like
Pierre's Attale, though, he moves from one situation to the
other, at first suspected of pro-Roman sympathies, then
using all his power to uphold the Carthaginian cause. The
various forces pulling at this character are not played down.
His protestations of love have as little effect on Elise as
do those of Prusias, and the diatribe he launches against
Flaminius in act III only serves to give the advantage to
the Roman ambassador and to foreshadow the result of Pumène's
miraculous survival. This piece of news means that direct

20. The contrast is great between their co-operation and
the weak father-son relationship of Prusias and Nicomède
in Thomas Corneille's play.
Roman pressure no longer needs to be exerted on Prusias or Annibal. By giving Elise to Attale and keeping the latter's loss of power secret, Flaminius believes that Annibal will have insufficient support to worry Rome. But Prusias' jealousy of Attale puts paid to such a solution. The choice that Rome had offered the Bithynian king (III.5) is still open; Attale, unaware of his lost position, has revealed to the king that he loves Elise.

Love, then, is largely a polarising force in *La Mort d'Annibal*, serving to heighten other already existing differences and make a reasonably clear-cut pattern of two opposing sides. But there is another influence at work which determines the structure of the play. Following the historical account, Thomas Corneille's Annibal swallows poison to avoid being caught in the enemy's trap. In all tragedies inspired by Rome, the character giving his or her name to the play - Commodo, Stilicon, Maximian, Démétrius, Laodice and Annibal - commits suicide in the end; but the only one who history tells us did this is Annibal. In two cases, for example, those of Commodo and Démétrius, historical accounts prove that the protagonists were first poisoned, then strangled. The violent nature of such deaths would mean that they could at most be recounted only in *récit* form, if at all. This is one reason why Thomas has avoided such dénouements. Another is his desire to depict his Roman characters (or those being harassed by Rome) as being as active and in control of their fate as possible.
Thomas' six Roman tragedies consist of three dealing with the Empire and three with the Republic. The Republican era was one of plotting and most seventeenth-century French dramatists choosing to write a Roman play on such a theme have situated it in that period. Thomas Corneille is out on a limb here, placing his conspiracy plays not in the first century B.C. but after the coming of Augustus, under Commodus, Maximian and Honorius, while the last two centuries of the Republic—a period largely given over to Rome's internal problems—take him rather to Greece or Asia Minor. The implications of this change are important. Attacking an emperor becomes at once an action to be condemned and a source of admiration. The question of hierarchy also arises in the Republican plays, when in their contacts with allies or future allies in Macedonia or Asia Minor the Romans have to take into account the statutory rights of the local kings. In these cases, Rome is represented by an ambassador but also by someone brought up in Rome, who complements the attitudes and statements of the Roman representative. A balance of sorts has thus to be maintained between two powers with clearly defined rights. But captives and other strangers (including, say, the "Oronte" of Laodice) are in a much more ambiguous position.

*La Mort d'Annibal*, by its dénouement, is thus different from the other Roman plays by Thomas Corneille. A decisive role is here played by fate, which has influenced the whole career of Annibal and Elise and will continue to do so until the curtain falls. Prusias dies—and it is ironical that
simultaneously Annibal commits suicide. It is Prusias' love for Elise and his jealousy of Nicomède which lead the son to think of leaving and Annibal to envisage exile with Attale. This same passion is thus, from the dramatic point of view, the prime cause of Annibal's death. It gives, as we have seen, dramatic expression to the stalemate position into which Annibal and Elise have been forced.

Love, then, and fate: the impression might be formed that La Mort d'Annibal is a static play, one of inaction, even lamentation, on the model of some thirty years earlier. But this is far from being the case. Thomas Corneille has succeeded in constructing a plot full of movement, both inside the Bithynian capital ("La Scene est à Nicomedie") and from without. Even the first act, necessarily expository, moves to and fro, from Attale to Prusias to Nicomède to Prusias to Elise and back to Prusias in his third conversation with Araxe. Annibal appears in II.3 but by II.5 is already threatening to depart and announces this intention in III.4. Flaminius, in turn, has just entered and the survival of Eumène fills the very end of act III, the interval and the first scene of act IV. Attale exits in V.3 and Prusias two scenes later, and in the last scene of the play comes news of the king's death and of the poison which Annibal has previously taken.

It would be foolish to claim that La Mort d'Annibal is a perfect play. For example, while the unities of time and place are observed, that of action is undeniably broken by the reported survival of Eumène. Although this may
have little effect on the dénouement, providing rather a temporary situation in the second half of the play in which Flaminius can exercise some of his traditional domination over those in Asia Minor, its inclusion cannot readily be condoned. But in many other respects it is a very expertly constructed play, whose lack of success may not have been due to its more obvious features. I have tried to show that love is perhaps less important in itself than has often been said. This is not to pass over the incongruously expressed passion of Prusias or the unsuccessful but determined declarations of love by Attale. But if Elise is right to mock them in that desperate last act, the inappropriate nature of their confessions has to be weighed against the change that has occurred in her, after a struggle perhaps, and with all sorts of restrictions attached, but a great change nevertheless: the acceptance of affection. Yet this is essentially a political play, with historical details and atmosphere and additional material which is there to give dramatic form to a very important but rather low-keyed event.

It is the dramatisation, then, that makes La Mort d'Annibal a work still worth reading and, one would hope, seeing. With all its defects, it is well put together, with good linking of episodes and some skilful timing. Annibal's decision to leave Bithynia gives Flaminius a chance to attack him further and helps to make Prusias appear stronger. Conversely the death of Prusias, occurring earlier than in history and much more anonymously, provides
a final contrast with the dignified suicide of Annibal, to the latter's advantage. As almost always, Thomas Corneille has shown his skill in relating events to each other and in keeping the audience's interest alive, notably at the ends of the acts. With no disguise (but some melodramatic news), the plot is easy to follow and logically worked out.

If the combination of love and politics is necessary or defensible, as I have suggested, but as such did not meet with approval in 1669, this tells us more, I feel, about public taste at the time than about the inadequacies of Thomas Corneille as a dramatist. It is instructive to note that Britannicus, performed just over a fortnight after La Mort d'Annibal, was no great success at the time either. "J'avoue que le succès ne répondit pas d'abord à mes espérances", Racine says in 1676, in his second preface. Whatever Racine may claim in this and the first preface, is this setback perhaps attributable to the same difficult combination of themes? Was La Mort d'Annibal less than a complete success because, like Britannicus ("Ma tragédie n'est pas moins la disgrâce d'Agrippine que la mort de Britannicus" - second Preface), it appeared to have two centres of interest, Prusias and Annibal? The question one should ask is this: could the story of an aging, victimised refugee, could the dramatisation in 1669 of an act by "un très méchant homme" who, in the author's words, is still only "un monstre naissant", afford to have less?
It is interesting to compare Thomas Corneille's procedures in *La Mort d'Annibal* with those of Racine when, some three years later, he came to write his *Mithridate*. Or his *Mort de Mithridate*, one might say, for the author, in his Preface, calls the title character's death "l'action de ma tragédie" and the simple title may be no more than an attempt to distinguish his play from La Calprenède's, following the normal seventeenth-century practice. Racine is at the height of his career, and yet in an odd situation. *Bérénice* in 1670 is an attempt to "faire quelque chose de rien", or so he will say in that vital preface of the following year. And while the play is a masterpiece, perfect in itself and recalling so much of Racine elsewhere, it is a wager that only just comes off. Nothing has indeed become something; but the dramatist will not go so far on so little again. His next play, *Bajazet*, is different, but again something of an exception. The second preface, dating from 1676, brings out the difficulties of a modern subject: "À la vérité, je ne conseillerais pas à un auteur de prendre pour sujet d'une tragédie une action aussi moderne que celle-ci, si elle s'était passée dans le pays où il veut faire représenter sa tragédie, ni de mettre des héros sur le théâtre, qui auraient été connus de la plupart des spectateurs. Les personnages tragiques doivent être regardés

21. A few examples among many: Claude Boyer's *La Porcie romaine* following on Guérin de Bouscal's *La Mort de Brute et de Porcie*; Chapoton, distinguishing his *Le Véritable Coriolan* from Urbain Chevreau's *Coriolan*; Chevreau again, with *La Lucrese romaine*, distinguished from Du Ryer's *Lucrèce*. 
d'un autre œil que nous ne regardons d'ordinaire les personnages que nous avons vus de si près." To this extent, then, Mithridate is fairly orthodox. Yet, like Thomas Corneille, Racine has had to change considerably the historical details to make his play about Mithridates' death succeed.

Now, in addition to the historians (principally Appian and Plutarch), Racine had to contend with, and if necessary diverge from, La Calprenède's dramatisation of the story, published in 1637. In his preface, La Calprenède declares that he has a scrupulous respect for historical detail. "Quelqu’un s’estonnera peut estre que i'aye changé & adiousté quelque chose à l'histoire. Mais ie le priroy de croire, que ie l'ay leuë, & que ie n'ay pas entrepris de descrire la mort de Mitridate, sur ce que i'ay ouy dire de luy à ceux qui vendent son baume sur le Pont-Neuf." As he admits candidly, the historical accounts of the death are brief enough; hence, some new "incidents" are needed to alleviate "la sterilité du subiect". He recognises that Mithridates was in fact killed with the help of Bituitus, an officer of the Gacls, "mais outre qu'à la representation de deux Cleopatres, nous auions desia veu la mesme chose: i'ay iugé plus conuenable à la generosité qu'on a remarquée dans toutes les actions de sa vie, de le faire mourir de la sienne". He has included the king's wife because "il y a beaucoup d'apparence, que celle qui ne l'abandonna iamais dans les combats, & de qui la fidelité a acquis vne si grande reputation, ne l'abandonna point aux derniers moments
de sa vie". Turning to Pharmace, La Calprenède describes how he has made him feel remorse for his father's death, but that, "quelque soin que i'aye pris à le rendre plus excusable & plus honneste homme qu'il estoit, ie n'ay peu empecher que ses deportemens ne donnassent de l'horreur à tout le monde". Finally, he mentions a major change: "I'ay donné vne femme à Pharmace, plus genereuse qu'il n'estoit lasche. Mais outre qu'il est certain qu'il a esté marié, cet incident est assez beau, pour meriter qu'on luy pardonne. Et ie ne mentiray point, quand ie diray que les actions de ceste femme ont donné à ma Tragedie vne grande partie du peu de reputation quell a ..."22.

Certainly, the historical accounts are limited enough. Appian's is the fullest, telling of Pharnaces, the most esteemed son of Mithridates and his named successor, being moved by self-interest to form a conspiracy against his father. Mithridates spares him when he is discovered, but Pharnaces raises fears about the planned invasion of Italy and manages to persuade most of his father's forces to desert, and support him as king. Appian then describes Mithridates' reaction, the suicide which his young daughters ask to share, and the action of the officer who stabs him when the poison takes effect too slowly:

Nec vero illi cunctantur, sed fugientis regis equum confodiunt; jamque Pharmacem, quasi voti com¬petes, regem appellant: et raptam aliquis e proximo templo latam papyrum, instar diadematis, capiti

22. La Calprenède, La Mort de Mitridate, Paris, A. de Sommeville, 1637, Au Lecteur.
ejus imponit. Ita conspicatus senex e superiori porticu, alios post alios misit ad Pharnacem, qui tudem abitur sō eo paterenti: sed quum horum nemo rediret, veritus, ne Romanis dederetur, collaudatos satellites et amicos, qui adhuc apud eum persisterant, ad novum regem dimisit: quorum nonnulli, dum accedunt, praeter opinionem interfeci sunt a militibus. Ipse Mithridates, examum ex involucro venenum, quod semper juxta gladium gestare consueverat, miscuit. Ibi duae liliae ad aucta puellae, quae apud ipsum educabantur, Mithridatis et Nyessa, Aegypti Cyprique desponsae regibus, rogabant patrem, ut ante illum potionem venenatam sumere ipsis liceret; et exihe instabant, vetabantque eum bibere, donec ipsae priores hauserunt. Et has quidem veneni via penetravit continuo: in Mithridatem vero, quamvis data opera ambulantem concitatius, nihil agebat, propter quotidiam pharmacorum consuetudinem, quibus se contra veneficos assidue praemuniverat; quae nunc quoque vocantur Mithridatica pharmaca. Itaque conspicatus ducem quemdam Callorum, Bituitum: Multum, inquit, tua dextra mihi profuit in praedictis; sed hoc erit vel maximum tuum meritum, si nunc me interemeris, periclitantem ad triumphi pompam abduci; qui tanto tempore tam ample regno praeful, et nunc veneno nequeo emori, contra quod stultus me praemunivi remediis; neque praecavere potui tristissimum et domesticum regibus omnibus venenum, liberorum amicorumque et exercitus perfidiam; quum, quae ad victum pertinents, praecaverim omnia. Hie permutus Bituitus, postulantis regi officium praestitit.

This account takes care of La Calprenède's Pharmace, Mithridate and his two daughters, Mitridatie and Nise.

Hypsicratée, the beleaguered king's wife, is suggested in Plutarch's Life of Pompey, where she is given sufficient manly qualities to justify the play's description of her (II.1) as "l'inuincible Amazonne", but is just a concubine, not wife of Mithridates. Bérénice, the wife of Pharmace,


may have been suggested by another passage in Plutarch. But here Berenice is one of the king's numerous wives, not wife of Pharnaces and daughter-in-law of Mithridates. This description of her death is all that appears in Plutarch.

Appian and Plutarch between them, then, can be said to provide the five main characters in La Calprenède's tragedy. The dramatist has explained the inclusion of Mithridate's wife and the major rôle played by Bérénice, made Pharnace's wife, in adding to the grandeur and popularity of the play. Certainly Hypsicratée provides a sturdy, much needed contrast to the weak Mithridate, bemoaning his fate and unhelpfully saying that he would not mind being besieged if his wife, daughters and daughter-in-law did not have to suffer along with him ... Bérénice, too, is a happy creation, underlining the characteristics La Calprenède has given his Pharnace and providing a very human study as she abandons her traitor husband (act I), then admits that she still loves him (II.2) but finally breaks with him after an inconclusive interview (III.3).

If these details are on the credit side in La Mort de Mitridate, much must fall, alas, on the debit side, too. Despite the changes he has obviously tried to make (largely to satisfy the bienséances, one feels), La Calprenède still fails to achieve a proper balance between the pro-Roman and anti-Roman forces in the play. The introduction of Bérénice,

who comes out strongly against Pharnace, and Hyspicratée, who complements Mithridate, leaves Pharnace to bear the brunt of many attacks, and this despite the presence of Pompey in two scenes (I.1, II.3), and the prince's remorse, first formulated in II.4 and then pouring out in V.4, where he calls himself, inter alia, a "monstre sans pitié", an "infame", "un tigre", "un inhumain". In itself, this repentance is not badly conceived, but it cannot be fully appreciated in the context of such varied, often absurd opposition.

But this imbalance, is as nothing compared to other defects. The play is badly structured, with a weak first two acts, involving an unlikely change of fortune. It is announced at the end of act I that the Roman invaders ("le demon latin", as Mithridate picturesquely calls them) are at the city walls. Nothing, except the king's illusions, suggests that this situation can be tackled, yet at the close of act II the Romans have been surprised, Hyspicratée is slaying on all sides, the small Pontine force is having a field day: "Bref, tout n'est plus que sang, qu'horreur, que funerailles", cries a Roman soldier (II.5). In rather underhand fashion La Calprenède swings the pendulum back during the interval, so that by the following scene (III.1) Mithridate and his entourage are again in the slough of despond. It is into this second half of the play that are concentrated the major interviews, the meetings between Pharnace and his wife (III.3), between Mithridate and Pharnace (IV.3) and a touching but hopeless meeting between
Pharnace and Hypsicratée, Nise and Mitridatie (IV.4).
Within these two central acts, then, the siege is discussed, the two sides meet in various ways, and ultimate deadlock is reached. The fifth act contains the mass suicide pact and Pharnace's arrival.

Love as such plays little part in La Calprenède's tragedy; perhaps in the circumstances its absence is to be welcomed, for what there is is hilarious rather than moving, more comic than tragic. Mitridate, his stalwart wife and his two daughters say little on this score; the king, echoing a common refrain in Roman tragedies of the 1630s, would wish to spare his family suffering, but this is all. Yet having purposely included a wife for the villain of the piece, Pharnace, La Calprenède gives this couple a necessary minimum of contact. In act II, Pharnace, in his early remorse scene, does express affection for his absent wife, when he says of her:

I'aymay ce que la terre auoit de plus aymable,
Et pour moy mon soleil sut un amour semblable ...
Le Ciel me l'enuia; la terre fut ialous ...
Sa vertu surpassoit une vertu commune ... (scene 5).

He must indeed be missing her, because he drafts a missive asking her to join him on the Roman side and, impaling it on an arrow, shoots it on to the ramparts, where it is happily recovered by Mitridatie (III.1). His wife replies in similarly unorthodox fashion, and they meet shortly afterwards (III.3). Their positions are irreconcilable, however, and they part, never to see each other again alive.
When Racine came to write his *Mithridate*, several features of *La Calprenède*’s tragedy clearly needed to be improved. The material to be included in the five acts could only be better chosen, for *La Calprenède*’s *Mithridate* is a weak character all along, unrealistic even in his small sortie beyond the city walls. The title-character’s defeat, or acceptance of defeat, must come later, to avoid the *précieux* haverings and self-pity of *La Calprenède*’s king.

*Hypsicraté*, too, needed changing, for although very different from her husband in strength of character, she adds little but a masculine touch to the resistance movement. Unless some new side to her could be developed, her characteristics would be better given fairly and squarely to *Mithridate* himself. And this would allow some of the more grotesque features of *La Calprenède*’s *Mithridate* to be dispensed with - his concern for regal dignity, for example.

*Appian*’s *Pharnaces* presents difficulties, whether or not he is given a wife to disagree with him. If fully committed to Rome, as he must be, he needs a foil, someone less obviously involved with him than his wife, someone with whom he can more readily and credibly disagree. His commitment, too, must rule out the feelings of remorse (heightened to some extent in *La Calprenède* by his having a wife), for the two positions are difficult to reconcile. *Mithridate*’s daughters, whom *Appian* describes, are touching.

26. *La Calprenède, La Mort de Mithridate*, V.3, where, having stabbed himself, the king orders his corpse to be placed on the throne, telling his cavalry commander: "Conserve dans ma mort ma dignité première".
but undifferentiated, and take little active part in La Calprenède's tragedy.

All in all, the cheerful family scene portrayed in 1635 is far from satisfactory, if only because it allows little initiative, and what initiative there is is stifled by the need to think always in terms of father, mother, daughters and daughter-in-law. Racine happily keeps only Mithridate and Pharmace, and completely alters both rôles. He tells us as early as 1673, in the first preface, that he has telescoped historical events but has remained faithful to history. The second preface, three years later, is more candid about the portrayal of Mithridate. Racine prefaces his justification of the march on Rome by more general remarks about the character:

En effet, il n'y a guère d'actions éclatantes dans la vie de Mithridate qui n'ait trouvé place dans ma tragédie. J'y ai inséré tout ce qui pouvait mettre en jour les moeurs et les sentiments de ce prince, je veux dire sa haine violente contre les Romains, son grand courage, sa finesse, sa dissimulation, et enfin cette jalousie qui lui était si naturelle, et qui a tant de fois coûté la vie à ses maîtresses.

Mithridate, indeed, occupies a major part of the play from act II onwards. Pharmace, on the other hand, appears in only a fifth of the scenes, three in act I, one in act II, and two in act III. Racine has little to say about him, claiming that his historical rôle is already well known.

28. Ibid., p. 603.
On to this bare framework of father and rebel son, Racine has grafted Monime and Xipharès. Monime, "accordée avec Mithridate, et déjà déclarée reine", he claims to have taken from Plutarch, in Amyot's famous translation of the Lives dating from 1559. There, in the thirty-second chapter of the Life of Lucullus, Plutarch describes Mithridates' two maiden sisters, Roxane and Statira, both forty years old, adding

"... et deux de ses femmes épousées, toutes deux du pays d'Ionie, l'une appelée Bérénice, native de l'île de Chio, et l'autre Monime, de la ville de Milet. Celle-ci était fort renommée entre les Grecs, parce que, quelques sollicitations que lui fit faire le roi en étant amoureux, et qu'il lui eût envoyé quinze mille écus comptant pour un coup, jamais ne voulut entendre à toutes ses poursuites, jusques à ce qu'il y eût accord de mariage passé entre eux, qu'il lui eût envoyé le diadème ou bandeau royal, et qu'il l'eût appelée reine. La pauvre dame, tout le temps auparavant depuis que ce roi barbare l'eut épousée, avait vécu en grande déplaisance, ne faisant continuellement autre chose que de pleurer la malheureuse beauté de son corps, laquelle, au lieu d'un mari, lui avait donné un maître, et, au lieu de compagnie conjugale, et que doit avoir une dame d'honneur, lui avait baillé une garde et garnison d'hommes barbares, qui la tenaient comme prisonnière, loin du doux pays de la Grèce, en lieu où elle n'avait qu'un songe et une ombre des biens qu'elle avait espérés, et au contraire avait réellement perdu les véritables, dont auparavant elle jouissait au pays de sa naissance ..."

Plutarch finishes his account by telling of Monime's unsuc-

29. We know that Racine possessed, in addition to the original texts, at least three copies of Plutarch's Lives in the Amyot translation: the Paris 1559 edition, the Paris 1567-1574 edition contained in the 13-volume Œuvres and another edition of the Vies et Morales also published in Paris by Vascosan. See R.C. Knight, Racine et la Grèce, Paris, 1950, p. 418.

cessful attempt to hang herself when a eunuch brought news
that Mithridates required her death, and how in the end
she got the eunuch to cut her throat. In transcribing the
story, Racine remains on the whole faithful to Amyot's
translation, but moderates the character of Mithridate,
omitting the incident of the fifteen thousand écus and
deciding to describe him as "barbare". He may also have
read the description of Monime in Le Moyne's famous Gallerie
des Femmes fortes, published in 1647. But if he took any¬
thing from it, it was largely the general idea, the in¬
spiration, rather than precise details.31.

The fidelité with which Racine claims to have followed
history extends no more to Xipharès than it does to Monime.
If the latter becomes a fiancée rather than a wife of Mithri¬
date, so Xipharès is shown to be in love with her, whereas
in fact they could never have met. "Il y a des historiens
qui prétendent que Mithridate fit mourir ce jeune prince,
pour se venger de la perfidie de sa mère", says Racine in
the Preface. And although mention is made by Xipharès in
the play of Stratonice's crime, the outcome is quite diffe¬
rent from that shown in Appian.

Very much like Thomas or Pierre Corneille, then,
Racine feels able, in Mithridate, to alter significantly

31. Cf. G. Rudler in his edition of Mithridate, Oxford,
1960 reprint, p. xiii: "La Gallerie a très bien pu
inspirer à Racine l'idée d'élever Monime, mais fine¬
ment, d'âme et non d'esprit, jusqu'à cet idéal de
dignité, de vertu et de force qui s'y vêt d'oripeaux
si étonnants."
quite important details, compressing events that occurred over a much longer period of time - common seventeenth-century tragic practice -, toning down certain characteristics to aid both the dramatic structure of the play and the contemporary public's sensibility, and adding, if not entirely new characters, at least new relationships, again in accordance with his audience's taste. It is quite unfair to assume that while, say, Thomas Corneille pandered to his public (and hence deserved to be forgotten by later generations), Racine rode rough-shod over his audience. As much as his less gifted contemporaries, he wrote to live, and had to balance innovation against popularity, the claims of content and thematic originality against dramatic structure. Why does his play succeed, then, where La Calprenède's is a rather dismal failure?

Like the earlier dramatist, he limits himself to two or three major events in the course of his five acts. La Calprenède has shown the final defeat of Mithridate between acts II and II and his death in act V; Racine includes the unexpected return of the king in act II, Pharnace's revolt in act IV and Mithridate's death, again, in the closing scene of the play. Even this detail shows that Racine has happily delayed the king's acceptance of defeat, for La Calprenède's version, although perhaps historical, leaves too much room for too little action or psychological analysis; there is no evolution. In the 1673 tragedy, however, Racine has turned his attention to love, showing Mithridate in love with Monime, who is also sought after by Xipharès
and Pharnace, and who in turn feels both a duty to Mithridate and real affection for the younger son, Xipharès. But it is love linked to politics, and the clash of interests is different in each case. Politically, Xipharès is in league with Mithridate in opposing the pro-Roman sympathies of Pharnace; sentimentally, he is the old king's rival for the hand of Monime.

Now, much of Racine depends on a triangular structure, where A loves B and is loved in return, while B is loved unsuccessfully by C (and there may be a second person along with C, loving B but, like him, unsuccessful). The main exception is *Andromaque*, where Orestes loves Hermione, who loves Pyrrhus, who loves Andromaque, the last devoting all her attention to her son Astyanax and the memory of her dead husband, Hector. With the usual pattern, B is the woman, and in *Andromaque* Andromaque is at the end of the linear pattern, so that in each structure the development of the love-plot, the sentimental plot *as such*, depends on the woman. This is true of *Mithridate*, too, where as far as the mechanics of the love-plot go, the three men's fates depend on Monime.

But is this a really helpful perspective to adopt, especially when Racine seems, in his preface, to be drawing our attention away from this situation to a rather different dilemma? The action is set in motion by the death of Mithridate reported in the second line of the play, although we learn later, but only after his re-appearance, that these rumours have been deliberately spread by Mithridate himself.
So for most of the first act - the first three, long, important scenes in particular - he is assumed to be dead, and this gives time for important meetings between Xipharès and the king's confidant, between Xipharès and Monime and between these two and Pharnace. The two young men can thus take this opportunity to declare their love to Monime - a declaration which is dependent on the piece of false news, for neither would, for various reasons, have gone ahead with "cet amour criminel", as Xipharès calls it, had they thought their father was still alive. Monime reserves her position before the news of Mithridate's return; but it is clear from the opening scene of act II, where she talks to her confidante Phaedime, that her feelings for Xipharès are as strong as his for her. To this extent, the fact that she has not confessed this openly to him is not of much importance for the character-analysis, although it is vital from the strictly dramatic viewpoint.

The opening scenes of Mithridate are thus not so very different from those in Annibal, in effect if not in actual presentation. The return of Mithridate in II.2 corresponds to the presence of Prusias in act I of Thomas Corneille's play: the third person interested in Monime's hand is now present, and neither Pharnace, who is too afraid, nor Xipharès, who is too full of respect, can stand up to his father and claim Monime for his own. The situation therefore appears clear-cut, with no effective opposition on hand. Even Monime, ruled by her sense of duty, of obedience, is willing to play fair and, accepting the terms which her
father has laid down, marry whoever is chosen for her.
Stalemate can only be avoided if Mithridate acts - for he
alone can, in the situation that Racine has created. He
is driven on by his suspicions, by his jealousy and, after
having Pharmace imprisoned at the beginning of act III, he
finds out, in his interview with Monime at the end of that
act, not only that she loves Xipharès but that he loves
her in return:

Ils s'aient. C'est ainsi qu'on se jouait de nous.
Ah! fils ingrat. Tu vas me répondre pour tous.
Tu péris. (III.6).

Yet this climax in Mithridate's control of the situ-
atation, marked by the second of his two monologues, coin-
cides with the beginning of his decline. Jealousy leaves
him with only two possibilities: either he steps down and
gives Monime to his younger son, or he kills her. The
major scene in act IV between the king and Monime (scene 4)
leaves us, and him, in no doubt about who has the upper
hand. Monime is forceful and direct: "Je vous connais .../
Le dessein est pris; rien ne peut m'ébranler", whereas
Mithridate is on the verge of collapse:

Elle me quitte! ...
Qui suis-je? Est-ce Monime? Et suis-je Mithridate? ...
De ce trouble fatal par où dois-je sortir?

Events overtake him: Pharmace, the Romans, even the presence
of Xipharès. In the end, he is left with only Monime and
with but one choice, that of renouncing her. The change in
Monime's attitude to duty, this internal change, is surely
as important as the external actions of the king himself -
for in the end, the two are very closely linked. The em-
phasis in this tragédie-crise must finally return to Mithridate himself; after all, only for him is the story complete, his failure at one level (the political sphere) being matched by defeat on the level of love and personal relations. The other minor details of the dénouement are trivial in comparison, and nothing would be gained if Monime and Xipharès' futures had been made clear, even less had these two figures been put to death by Mithridate, for this is just not what the play is about.

Racine has been criticised on account of the arbitrary juxtaposition of two different actions within the one play. The author, as we have seen, claims in his preface that the protagonist's death forms the subject-matter of his tragedy. And indeed, even at the height of his jealousy, the king of Pontus never forgets his wish to see Rome in ruins. Less committed, perhaps, than Thomas' Annibal, Mithridate does not underestimate the support that Xipharès can offer him in his struggle. At the critical moment when he has to envisage putting to death his favourite son ("Je veux bien distinguer Xipharès de son frère", II.3), Mithridate comes to realise the small extent of his own power as an independent Asian king:

Tu vas sacrifier ... qui? Malheureux! Ton fils! Un fils que Rome craint? qui peut venger son père? Pourquoi répandre un sang qui m'est si nécessaire? Ah! dans l'état funeste où ma chute m'a mis, Est-ce que mon malheur m'a laissé trop d'amis? (IV.4)

Equally, Racine has been at pains to avoid the difficult situation of Monime loved by Xipharès, Pharnace and an aging Mithridate at the same time. We are told that when the king
revealed his feelings for the Greek refugee, Xipharès avoided doing likewise (I.1). On the other hand, Xipharès, although younger than his step-brother, is convinced that he saw and loved Monime before Pharnace did (ibid.), and with the presumed death of Mithridate he feels confident about asserting his rights. The father's return alters both sons' plans. But Monime is not yet Mithridate's wife, as she insists on two occasions (I.2; II.1) and the king's expressions of love for her are rare in the play.32

The dramatist was faced with a difficult problem in portraying Mithridate as he does. He is 70, as old as Hannibal in Thomas Corneille's play, and with a past where violence was not absent. Having already dispatched two of his sons, he certainly lives up to Pharnace's classic understatement: " Ses propres fils n'ont point de juge plus sévère" (I.5). Xipharès' mother's crime, the source of such torment to her son, indeed pales in comparison ... Racine, however, is careful to play down the image of Mithridate cruel. Like the emperor in La Mort de Commode, he becomes devious, practising dissimulation with Monime (III.5) in an attempt to arrive at the truth: both Xipharès and Pharnace, in the opening act, recognise his violence and his cunning. Yet there is the good side to him, too. He is prophetic, optimistic, idealistic even, as in the great projet scene of act III. But the idealism which carries him away does not

32. His love comes out clearly in his early dialogue with Arbate, II.3, lines 457-460.
exclude a lucid understanding of the dangers, of his own weakness, of the need for reliance on Xipharès. Racine has made him into an essentially active character, a feat that La Calprenède could not have envisaged. His love, hence his suspicion and finally his jealousy push him on from stage to stage, like Phèdre four years later. Commanding in II.3, he becomes the tortured, self-questioning man of IV.5, able to reach a decision only with the help of Arbace in the following scene, and plunged into further fury by the extra news of scene 7.

La Calprenède's king had lollèd around the communal poison table, putting a merciful end to his and the audience's agony with a well-placed blade. Racine's Mithridate dies more neatly, but less tragically perhaps, than Thomas' Annibal, who goes unobtrusively and yet all the more significantly to his death. The Carthaginian's political defeat becomes a political and sentimental death for Mithridate. Yet, like Annibal, does he not rise, paradoxically, to a double victory? As he quite rightly points out, he has yet once again conquered the Romans:

Ennemi des Romains et de la tyrannie,
Je n'ai point de leur joug subi l'ignominie ...
J'expire environné d'ennemis que j'immole ... 
Et mes derniers regards ont vu fuir les Romains. 
(V.5)

His victory is so very close to that which personal gloire procures for the Cornelian hero. He overcomes the Romans in death; he overcomes the disappointment of his rejected love, as well. This is what makes Mithridate great; and given his greatness, it is not surprising that, in the space of a hundred and fifty lines or so, he can ask Monime,
force Monime to contemplate suicide (V.2) and then yield her to Xipharès: "Mais vous me tenez lieu d'empire, de couronne; / ... / Vous seule me restez: souffrez que je vous donne, / Madame" (V.5). It is here that the military or political and sentimental plots really fuse: Mithridate's jealousy, so strong in acts III and IV, can now safely dissipate itself. His hatred of Rome is stronger than that, and he knows that Xipharès, whom he has always held in admiration, will protect and honour his name. Thomas Corneille's Annibal does not himself have this double victory to win, but perhaps the half of him that is Elise has, at least for the duration of the play, to overcome real passion. A perspective exists at the end of both plays, for the Roman threat is still there, just as Rome is present at the end of Bérénice, or Nero at the end of Britannicus, to worry and finally kill off Agrippine. But it is a living death, and behind Mithridate's double victory through death — victory over outer forces and over his inner self — there lies, as in La Mort d'Annibal, the tragedy of the character having to die to escape.

Love, then, in Mithridate, plays a rather different rôle from that in Annibal. It is more prominent, perhaps, there more for its own sake. But in the end it is a necessary corollary to the military or political plot, just as in Thomas Corneille. Both Xipharès and Pharnace are guilty because of their love for Monime, as they admit to each other in the last scene of act I. But they are also guilty on another level: "Princes, quelques raisons que
vous me puissiez dire", says Mithridate (II.2), "Votre devoir ici n'a point dû vous conduire". In addition, Xipharès feels himself responsible for his mother's crime (I.5), and this personal assumption of guilt may be a further attempt by Racine to balance the two half-brothers, Xipharès being burdened by a variety of minor lapses, while Pharmace has to account for his allegiance to Rome.

Racine, like Thomas Corneille, is careful to differentiate and at the same time to counterbalance his characters. Take, for instance, the two young men. Combining in some ways the rôles of both a Flaminius and a Prusias, Pharmace, like the Bithynian king, disappears, anonymously, and in the middle of the play at that. Whereas in Thomas Corneille the presence of Rome has been expressed through a whole series of family and sentimental relationships, in Mithridate things are handled differently. There is no all-powerful ambassador pacing the shores of Racine's Bosphorus, but rather a man who appears in six scenes, speaks 130 lines or so, and, except in his call to Mithridate (III.1), draws little active comment from others about his support for Rome. Yet he is not out-and-out villain; his appearances in the first act betray an anxiety behind the bustling vigour, he relies on the Romans, the "secours que je ne m'explique pas" (I.5) and, while condemning Xipharès, he does not hide his own guilty love from Mithridate (III.2). Xipharès, obedient, concerned for Monime as a person, suspected by Mithridate after Pharmace's accusation, but strongly anti-Roman, is not as easy to accept as the
varied but essentially unfavourable picture of Pharnace might lead us to expect. He is a foil to Monime, bringing out the character, but also surely, by his superficial resemblance to Mithridate, managing to tone down the excesses of his father.

Between Xipharès, Pharnace and their father comes Monime, exemplifying the difficulty of introducing a woman into what is essentially a male world. Elise had supported, even stood in for Annibal; Hypsicratée had done likewise for her husband in La Calprenède’s early version of the Mithridates story, and there had been Bérénice, too, resolutely renouncing the treacherous Pharnace. Monime, on the other hand, has no such strong position. As a Greek, she is an outsider. Her young love, as it is revealed in her conversation with Phaedime in II.1, seems ill-assorted with the claims of Mithridate or Pharnace: why, even her naïvely confident assertion "Phaedime, si je puis, je ne le verrai plus", is contradicted before the end of that same second act. She seems to walk into the traps set by Mithridate, arriving unsummoned by him in II.4 and in the much more important scene 5 of act III. His dissimulation gets the better of her guile - but in the end she has the upper hand, for her duty to him is thereby at an end:

33. It is true that Mithridate, although technically alone in III.4, says (line 1025): "Qu’on appelle la Reine". Here, he may well be talking to himself rather than to an off-stage minion; but even the latter would have to be fleet-of-foot to fulfil the command in exactly seven lines, for Monime appears in line 1032. It seems clear that Monime’s arrival of her own accord merely coincides with the king’s wishes.
Vous seul, Seigneur, vous seul, vous m'avez arrachée
A cette obéissance où j'étais attachée ...
Vos détourls l'ont surpris (my love for Xipharès),
et m'en ont convaincue. (IV.4)

Echoing Pharnace's words ("Le Roi, toujours fertile en
dangereux détours", I.5), this undramatic but resolute
character is released from Mithridate's grip and can join
Xipharès.

It is clear that Racine's Mithridate bears little
resemblance bar the historical source to La Calprenède's
La Mort de Mitridate. Not that the 1673 tragedy is perfect:
Xipharès, in particular, remains a difficult character to
accept, and perhaps Thomas Corneille was right to restrict
the appearances of Nicomède, his equivalent in La Mort
d'Annibal. For patriotism, especially youthful patriotism,
goes uneasily with strongly-felt love, as Corneille's
Horace proves. Structurally, Racine's play probably has
the edge on Thomas Corneille's. It is particularly good
on the juxtaposition of scenes and on the forward prepara-
tion of events. When news of Mithridate's survival comes
through (I.4), Monime departs, because she is and must be
seen to be stronger than Pharnace and Xipharès, who require
the following scene (I.5) to state their surprise and agree
on action. In the next act, the meeting between Monime and
Mithridate (II.4), in which she speaks only half a dozen
general, even ambiguous lines, seems of little avail, unless
we see it in context, almost immediately preceding and
forming a contrast with the great scene 6, in which for the
first time she confesses her love to Xipharès. Or again in
act III: Xipharès pulls himself up during the sons' meeting with Mithridate with the words: "J'irai ..., j'effacerai le crime de ma mère" (III.1). But this drawing back from the brink is perhaps in the end not worthwhile, for Mithridate's suspicions are aroused by what Pharnace will tell him in the very next scene. Lastly, there is the contrast between the joy of Monime at the end of IV.1, itself coming perhaps rather too soon after the doubts about her "treachery" a few lines earlier and in III.5, and Xipharès' departure, announced as soon as he comes in in IV.2.

The preparation early in the play of major events which come later has been fully undertaken by Racine. The benefits are many, even if some will only be perceived by the reader and not by the theatre-going public. Unfamiliar events, such as the one that Racine himself indicates, can be made more acceptable; features of characters which in themselves are unimportant but which play a part in later stages can be mentioned in passing for the record; changes of opinion are heightened by a clear statement which later has to be contradicted; even characters' blindness can be shown by warnings unheeded. Thus in Mithridate the great consultation scene of act III, which the Preface deals

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34. But then Racine makes allowance for the former category, as a significant sentence at the end of the first paragraph of the 1673 and later prefaces suggests. He mentions the surprise perhaps caused by inclusion of Mithridates' intention to march on Rome, and adds: "Comme ce dessein m'a fourni une des scènes qui ont le plus réussi dans ma tragédie, je crois que le plaisir du lecteur pourra redoubler, quand il verra que presque tous les historiens ont dit ce que je fais dire ici à Mithridate".
with, is foreshadowed in the king's first words to his sons after his return:

Je médite un dessein digne de mon courage.
Vous en serez tantôt instruits plus amplement.
Allez, et laissez-moi reposer un moment. (II.2)

His opinion of Xipharès undergoes a radical change in the course of the play. But even the confident "Je veux bien distinguer Xipharès de son frère" (II.3) is followed immediately by words later borne out by Pharnace's revelation (III.2) and Monime's confession (III.5): "Et je ne puis encor ni n'oserais penser", says Mithridate, "Que ce fils si fidèle ait voulu m'offenser". Not yet, indeed, for the thought is repugnant; but he can later condemn his son to death (III.6) and only come full circle and forgive when Xipharès acts heroically on his behalf. The occasion for this, too, the Roman invasion facilitated by Pharnace (IV.7), is hinted at on three earlier occasions, by Pharnace in an aside in I.5 ("Les Romains que j'attends arriveront trop tard") and again in the projet scene ("Comptez-vous vos soldats pour autant de héros?"); and indirectly by the confident Mithridate of IV.4: "Tanlis que mes soldats, prêts à suivre leur roi ...").

The masterly timing is helped by other features of the Racinian play. As some of the most perceptive post-war criticism of Racine has shown, the dramatist draws great effect from his use of sight, time, sound and so on. In

Mithridate, it is particularly time, sight and movement that he concentrates on, achieving by it not only a greater opposition of character, the visual underlining and translating the psychological, but also an internal progression which goes far in refuting the claim that Racine's tragedies lack movement and action. The timespan here is wider than in *La Mort d'Annibal*; it is also more relentlessly insisted upon. Mithridate's long service arouses comment from Xipharès in the very first scene ("Ainsi ce roi qui seul a durant quarante ans / Lassé tout ce que Rome eut de chefs importants") and this insistence on the past and the king's solitariness, brought up by other characters later, together with reference to his cheveux blance, throws light on the present in the play. The future, too, opens up, not just at the end, with the prophecy about Pharnace (V.5) but in the middle of the play, in the great visionary scene, with its

> Je vous rends dans trois mois au pied du Capitole ... 
> Brûlons ce Capitole où j'étais attendu,
> Détruisons ses honneurs, et faisons disparaître
> La honte de cent rois, et la mienne peut-être.
> (III.1).

Forward movement of the action is provided, then, certainly from outside, by the various péripéties, but also internally, by reference to the past, present and future, and by the compressing and extension of time, too. Against the vast panorama of Mithridate's life, given during the course of the first 150 lines or so, Racine draws an as it were slow-motion picture of the king's death. Act V scene 4 tells us "Le Roi touche à son heure dernière", and between
this and his arrival, 100 lines later, in V.5, we have an account of his attempted suicide, in the récit of Arbate. Only after this long récit does Mithridate arrive and he lasts for fifty lines, the final scene of the play. Time, compressed earlier, is now expanded, to allow a full and fitting climax to the characterisation of Mithridate. Thomas Corneille, as we saw, provided an equally neat ending to his play, with the gradual departure of Bithynian and Roman characters, concentration on those favourable to Carthage and the delayed, almost passing reference by Annibal to his suicide, followed by the briefest of comment.

Visual references complete the range of devices by which Racine seeks to enliven from the inside a rather static historical episode. The king's impetuousness and lack of reason are underlined by his words in the monologues at the end of act IV:

Je ne veux que les voir; je ne veux qu'à leurs yeux Immoler de ma main deux fils audacieux. (IV.7).

But sight of him has a different effect on others:
"A l'aspect de ce front ... / Vous les eussiez vu tous, retournant en arrière, / Laisser entre eux et nous une large carrière" (V.4). Conversely, avoidance or flight play a large part in Mithridate, conveying not only the urgency of the action but also the feeling of suspicion, of treachery that is at the backbone of the play. Repressed feelings and deceit or pretence, typified by Mithridate's handling of Monime, are not only indicative of the breakdown of communication that explains the difficulties
of so many Racinian characters; they represent what Racine and his public of the 1670s have made of disguise in earlier seventeenth-century tragedy, the deliberate or unconscious physical disguise, the idea of mistaken identity.

The immediately preceding paragraphs, as is right, point up an aspect of seventeenth-century tragedy of which Thomas Corneille, it seems, was very largely unaware. Much has been made of the small extent of Racine's vocabulary and the masterpieces of expression which he achieves by it. Few, if any, would wish to deny this, and in comparison Thomas Corneille's poetry is often flaccid indeed. But a recent study, based admittedly on a very incomplete survey, suggests that Thomas Corneille's vocabulary, and that of his contemporary Pradon, may well have been more, rather than less, restricted than Racine's. Whatever conclusions

36. Avoidance, flight, as in Monime, II.6: "Je ne reconnais plus la foi de vos discours/ Qu'au soin que vous prendrez de m'éviter toujours" and "Je fuis. Souvenez-vous, Prince, de m'éviter"; Mithridate, III.5: "Je régnais; et je fuis". Hidden feelings, as in Xiphanès, I.3: "J'ignore de son cœur les sentiments cachés"; Pharnace, I.5: "Vous savez sa coutume, et sous quelles tendresses / Sa haine sait cacher ses trompeuses adresses". Pretence, as in Mithridate, III.4: "Feignons; et de son cœur, d'un vain espoir flatté, / Par un mensonge adroit tirons la vérité"; Monime, IV.1: "Mais il feignait peut-être: il fallait tout nier. / La Roi feignait? Et moi, découvrant ma pensée ... ".

can be drawn from this, it would seem unfair to per-
petuate the idea that Thomas Corneille penned largely
derivative plays, unoriginal in content, unexciting in con-
struction and loose in versification. Much more research
requires to be done on his language at least, before he
can be justly accused under the last of these three headings

If however, as at present it seems safe to claim, the
younger Corneille had little notion of the advantages
which imagery of various kinds could have for his plays
(or possibly preferred not to concentrate on this
aspect), one must not underrate his skills as a dramatist.
The juxtaposition of La Mort d'Annibal and Mithridate,
virtually contemporary tragedies dealing with similar sub-
jects, helps to bring this out. Much of Racine's fame, it
seems to me, rests on his powers of suggestion and evoc-
cation, his use of language, his penetrating character
psychology; he is too little examined as a constructor of
plots, of stageable rather than (or as well as) readable
plays. As far as psychological insight goes, he is prob-
bably no more gifted than some of his contemporaries, such
as Quinault, while the general lack of interest in him as
a structural craftsman probably stems from his prefatory
material, in which the question is given little attention.
The assumption that structure was of little concern to
Racine is much too glibly made, however, for silence on the

38. This despite Peter France's remarks on Stilicon and
matter, far from betraying indifference, could simply indicate that the dramatist considered that battle already won.

Neither La Mort d'Annibal nor Mithridate is perfect; the hesitations, or worse, of the contemporary public are proof enough of this. But both are interesting and on the whole successful tragedies, and in some respects Thomas Corneille succeeds where Racine only just avoids difficulty. The episodes treated have obvious similarities and equally important differences. The Mithridates story gave Racine a seemingly stronger base on which to build: the king of Pontus, despite or indeed because of his past crimes, his illusions, his intention to march on Rome, has great dramatic potential. If, on several occasions, Racine's Mithridate does not hesitate to proclaim his own defeat, this awareness is used as a springboard to launch him into even more grandiose projects. "Les grandes âmes", says La Rochefoucauld, "ne sont pas celles qui ont moins de passions et plus de vertu que les âmes communes, mais celles seulement qui ont de plus grands desseins. The desseins of Mithridate, outlined magnificently in Racine's central act and mirrored in the frustration or jealousy of the king's three monologues, are to be compared, them, with the plans of Hannibal, Rome's immortal enemy, in Livy's words — if


plans they be. For death here comes after frustrating exile at the court of an indecisive minor Asian potentate. Was Thomas to show the game of hide-and-seek in and out of the seven-doored fortress, and the final imprecations which Livy's hero launches against the Roman ambassador and Prusias? "Could he have been better to take Saint-Evremond's hint, and show the meeting between the Carthaginian and Scipio before Zama?"

In the end Thomas Corneille decides to play it in a lower key, more in keeping with the end of the 1660s, less reminiscent of some of his brother's self-imposing protagonists of twenty-five or thirty years before. A pre-battle conference might have led him into the difficulties which Pierre Corneille foresaw eight years previously in drafting _Sertorius_, with its great third act encounter between the two opposing generals. "J'y fais un entretien de Pompée avec Sertorius que les deux premiers (actes) préparent assez", Pierre writes to the abbé de Fure on 3 November 1661, "mais je ne sais si on en pourra souffrir la longueur. Il est de deux cent cinquante-deux vers. Il me semble que deux hommes tels qu'eux, généraux de deux armées ennemies, ne peuvent achever en deux mots une conférence si attendue durant une trève."

Indeed, but this discussion (III.1) and the one just previous to it between Sertorius and Viriate (II.2) alone accounted for more than a sixth of the

play. Thomas Corneille chooses to dramatise the immediate circumstances surrounding the death of Hannibal, and the atmosphere is inevitably different from that of Racine's later play.

Paradoxically perhaps, but by its very nature, tragédie-crise does not really allow sole attention to be focussed on one character, especially an underdog. While the twenty-four hour period most usually chosen by dramatists allows for a character's past and to some extent future (if any) to be mentioned - the exposition and the closing perspective -, most of the play must necessarily concentrate on the present; and an inactive present supposes additional characters, historical or invented, to people it and give it life and shape. We have seen how both dramatists resort to this practice, Thomas Corneille through Elise in particular, Racine through a manipulation of historically attested characters, different, however, from those used almost forty years earlier by La Calprenède. If Thomas has been accused of a double action, it is because of the existence of Prusias, not of Hannibal's daughter. But Annibal without Prusias is no more possible than a Mithridate completely dominated by another character; the flamboyance of the king of Pontus and his authority, underlined by the presence of two guilt-ridden sons and a fiancée, are to be contrasted with the stand taken by Annibal and Elise against Bithynia and Rome, an opposition as solid as it is logical and restrained.
If Racine gaily interprets Appian and ends up with Monime, loved by Mithridate and his two sons by different marriages, Thomas Corneille is careful to avoid showing Annibale in love. But he goes almost as far, instilling a sincere deep-rooted affection in Elise, an invented character. Both tragedies, as we have noted, include love, but neither has it as its sole or even dominating interest. The truth is that by 1670 it could hardly have been omitted. Thomas Corneille and Racine are more or less obliged to use it, although able to do so to their own ends. Firstly, it was popular, and neither dramatist could afford, in terms of public success, if not financially, to pass it by. But its inclusion serves other purposes, more strictly dramatic. Both Hannibal and Mithridates are difficult characters to present to a seventeenth-century theatre public. In the former's case, a weak Prusias, if not balanced by a resolute opponent, would not sufficiently offset the Carthaginian general, formerly victorious but now cornered. As for the king of Pontus, his criminal past would weigh too heavily against his present ideals. To take but one relevant comparison, Thomas Corneille in 1657 had to alter his Commode radically to rid him of his homosexuality and fondness for gladiatorial combat, both unacceptable to a French audience. Now, all three men — Prusias, Mithridate and Commode — are in positions of power, actual or theoretical, and both Thomas Corneille and Racine see that love, with its power over the person, is a means of translating on the stage the effect of political power. In all three cases, however, the passion
is incongruous: Helvie and even Marcia reject Commode, Prusias is mocked by Flaminius and Elise, Mithridate has to stand down in favour of a son. For them, the impossibility of love translates the impossibility of the political situation in which they find themselves.

But thirdly, love, even in essentially political tragedies like La Mort d'Annibal and Mithridate, encourages and facilitates the introduction of other compatible characters into historical episodes and thereby makes for quite considerable internal movement, keeping the audience's interest alive. Love between representatives of rival systems - Roman and Asian, Asian and Carthaginian and so on - is good dramatically, and the crises of conscience that this can provoke are often more stimulating and even more permanent than are points of political convenience. If invented but remaining within the bounds of general vraisemblance, such feeling is difficult to fault, too, and both Thomas Corneille, who rejects the "passions tumultueuses", and Racine try to ensure that the love they show in these two plays, if at times expressed in précieux terms, does not get out of hand. It is first and foremost a means, not an end.

Finally, it is clear that each dramatist pays considerable attention to the construction of his particular Roman tragedy. Despite the deus ex machina intervention in La Mort d'Annibal (but it is fair to say that Eumène himself does not appear on stage), Thomas Corneille seems to me to have done as well as, if not better than, Racine in
this respect. The situations are not exactly parallel, certainly, but he has managed to provide a good expository act, with plenty of atmosphere, and space the first appearance of major characters well. In addition, he has been at pains to arrange the meeting and non-meeting of characters throughout the five acts and to provide a suitable ending to each of his acts, not least the last. All in all, this fast-moving plot stands up well to comparison with Racine's, which is more prosaic in some ways, with the early disappearance of Pharmace and the absence of Xipharès (from IV.2) and Mithridate (from IV.7) until both re-appear in the closing scene. Perhaps the intricate pattern of interweaving scenes in *La Mort d'Annibal* more adequately translates the quiet, dogged insistence of the Carthaginian couple, those symbols of Roman repression, on whom one's whole attention finally falls and who, through the next generation, will seek to continue the impossible struggle:

> Vivez pour haîr Rome, & maîtres de vos vies,
> Si d'un jaloux destin elles sont poursuivies,
> Envisageant toujours sa rigueur sans effroy,
> Bravez la Tyrannie, & mouriez comme moy.

*(Annibal, V.9).*
Conclusion.
Conclusion

When, in the course of his remarks on French classical tragedy, Schlegel came to examine Thomas Corneille, he chose, as most commentators have done, to single out for attention Ariane and Le Comte d’Essex. It matters little that he sees Ariane as an imitation of Racine’s Bérénice, or even that he finds the atmosphere of the play largely artificial, that of a salon. What is significant, and typical not just of the Romantic critic but of so many others before and since, is the approach he makes to the problem and in particular the antithesis with which he sums up Thomas’ achievements. "The younger Corneille deserves to be mentioned", he writes, "who sought less to excite astonishment by heroism, like his brother, than to gain over the favour of the spectators by 'those tendernesses which give so much pleasure', in the words of Pradon."¹

There is much here that calls for comment. Can we talk of the supremacy of "tender passions" in the Roman tragedies? Are there no "admirable" heroes in the Roman tragedies? Is there, above all, no interaction of "heroism" and "tender passion"? Must it be one or the other and never, to some extent, both? Is this any way to "please" an audience over twelve years, much less over the thirty to thirty-five of his active dramatic career?

If what the previous chapters have tried to show is a true picture, then Schlegel's comment is at best only a very partial view of Thomas Corneille's qualities as a dramatist. Or of Thomas Corneille as a writer, perhaps, for Schlegel and others consider him essentially from the thematic angle rather than as a playwright concerned to a greater or lesser degree with the demands of the stage, with the restrictions it imposes and the corresponding privileges it grants. If Thomas has no obvious concern for dramatic form, so be it; but he is then a poor dramatist, if still a tolerable author, competent in his choice and handling of historical subjects.

A major difficulty, as some of the more patronising critics almost inadvertently point out, is the presence of Pierre Corneille and the immediate links which it is tempting to make between the older and the younger brother. This is a fairly rare situation in literature, and certainly in the field of seventeenth-century drama, so perhaps it is not surprising that Thomas is almost inevitably seen as a largely derivative author. Yet, as I have attempted to stress, this is a dangerous field to operate in at the best of times. Pierre tells us quite a lot about his choice and subsequent treatment of subjects in the various prefaces and Examens to his plays, and in addition we have the vital Discours of 1660 by which to judge him. But both the examens and the Discours are retrospective examinations of what critics tend to look on as his "best" plays, the tragedies of the late 1630s and the 1640s, and Pierre's
comments here have the value of re-appraisals, self-justifications, sometimes self-criticisms, but are at least comments benefiting from hindsight. Now the same is not true of Thomas Corneille, as far as we can judge; there is less room here for tampering with initial responses.

From our examination of the dating of his plays (chapter 1), it appears that his brief prefaces and Au Lecteur were all written before first publication, that is, generally only a space of months after first performance. In them, especially at the beginning of his career, he expresses doubts about his plays' merits when read as works of literature. But rather than see these statements as admissions that what he has got away with on stage will not stand the test of a reading public, it seems more probable, more true to character, too, to look on them as genuine, modest recognition that such youthful work, largely adapted from foreign originals, does not, in the first instance, claim to be more than what it is.

It is true, of course, that the general tone of Thomas' Roman tragedies is not unlike that of Pierre's. But one could say the same of plays like Tristan's La Mort de Sénèque, Du Ryeur's Scévole, Magnon's Séjanus or Cyrano's La Mort d'Agrippine, to name but some of the better tragedies that appeared between the mid-forties and the mid-fifties. Equally, the seven-year gap that separates Pierre's withdrawal after Pertharite and his return with Oedipe in 1659 happily coincides with Thomas' formative years as a dramatist, the appearance, if not of his first plays, at least of his
pastorale burlesque, one or two comedies, the highly successful Timocrate and the beginnings of his Roman cycle with La Mort de l'empereur Commode. But here again, how much is due to Pierre's absence from the stage and how much to the decline and death of other notable dramatists, Rotrou, Tristan, Du Ryer? Why, if he is so influenced by his brother, does Thomas wait until the end of 1657 - over a year after Pierre's main intervening occupation, the Imitation de Jésus-Christ, has been completed and fully published - before following him into the field of Roman tragedy? How do we explain the performance gap between Thomas' Le Berger extravagant (late 1652) and his Illustres ennemies (April 1655)? Was the younger brother helping the older with his Imitation or with the series of 12º editions of Pierre's Œuvres that came out in 1654, 1655 and 1656? Was he busy rebutting the rumours that circulated towards Christmas 1654 that Pierre Corneille had died? All in all, the notion that Thomas leaps into the breach made by Pierre's temporary withdrawal does not bear close examination², and La Mort de Commode and subsequent straight

2. On Pierre's supposed demise, see Loret, Muse historique, 2 January 1655, lines 151-174 (ed. Ch.-L. Livet, Paris, 1877, vol. II, pp. 2-3). Cf. V. Conrart's letter to Constantin Huygens, dated Paris, 23 May 1655 (in l'Amateur d'autographes, 6e année, no. 121, 1 January 1867, pp. 1-3) and in particular the following (pp. 2-3): "Pour M. de Corneille, il s'est jeté dans les compositions pieuses, et a laissé le soin du Théâtre à un de ses frères. Vous ne devez pas vous étonner s'il n'est point soigneux de vous escrire, puisqu'il n'écrivit pas seulement à ses amis d'icy, dont il n'est éloigné que de trente lieues."
tragedies might be as much attributable to d'Aubignac's *Pratique du théâtre* of June 1657 as to any more direct influence of Pierre himself.

For it is too easy to jump to conclusions in this area where reasonably scientific judgements are well nigh impossible to make. What, for example, was the effect on Pierre and the teenaged Thomas of the visit of Molière and his newly formed Illustre Théâtre band of players to Rouen for the fair in October and November 1643? While waiting for the Jeu de paume des Métayers to be prepared, did Madeleine Béjart and Molière meet the Corneilles? Did the latter "influence" Thomas Corneille, only three and a half years younger? Yet we must remember that the early plays put on by the Illustre Théâtre were tragedies, not comedies: Magnon's *Artaxerces*, Tristan's *La Mort de Chrispe*, Du Ryer's *Scévole*. What effect, too, did the Fronde have on dramatic production? Does it really and primarily account for the success of *Nicomède* and explain the failure of *Pertharite*? If Molière presents *Nicomède* at his first court performance in 1658, is it because it is a suitably political play or (as Corneille will implicitly recognise by the favour in which he holds it) because it is well-constructed, or both? Is *Pertharite* not a failure mainly because of the outlandishly named characters Grimoald, Garibald, Unulphe, Rodelinde, EduIge? There are many imponderables, and the wisest course would seem to be to divorce political influences from theatrical affairs unless and until a clear link between the two spheres is seen to be not just possible but necessary.
If then, as I would suggest, Thomas Corneille comes naturally to the theatre, helped practically by his brother, who sees to the publication of his early plays, but not replacing Pierre or openly benefiting from his absence, we must approach the question of composition, sources and debts accordingly. Thomas starts having his plays performed at the same age as Pierre; later, Timocrate is Thomas' counterpart to Le Cid, for he is just 31 and Pierre was thirty and a half when Le Cid was first played. From comedies through tragi-comedy to Roman tragedy: the careers are parallel but not necessarily more connected than the close family relationship makes inevitable. Attempts to trace a theme, a scene, a line indeed, back from a given dramatist to a predecessor are fraught with difficulties and prove in the end, I suspect, largely pointless. Studying Camme and its dagger scene, for example, one thinks automatically of the similar melodramatic moment in Quinault's Amalasonte. November 1657 and January 1661 - perhaps a source, and that Thomas has once more copied from his famous contemporary. But no: it is all already in Jean Le Royer de Prade's Aresace, performed after both these plays and only published in 1666, but completed around 1650, read to several other dramatists between then and 1653 and especially in the presence of Quinault and Thomas Corneille around 1656-1657 at the house of the comte de La Serre.  

Even so, does this really tell us much about Quinault or even Thomas Corneille? If we move from a small but memorable detail to a reputedly wider influence, can we agree that in *La Mort de Commode* Thomas Corneille was harking back to *Cinna* or to *Pertharite*, that when Grimoald, in the latter play, pretends to renounce his rights over Rodelinde (II.3), he is a forerunner of Thomas' emperor? Or does the Sévere of *Maximien* owe his inclusion and rôle to the character of the same name in *Polyeucte*? The analogies are numerous, but most (not all) are based on what seems to me a highly dubious idea of the playwright's craft. Just as it is easy to find fault with, say, Bernard Weinberg's interpretation of Racine, with the notion that as an author's career progresses, later works are inevitably influenced by earlier ones and (maybe) get progressively "better", so with literary borrowings. Both the "chain-effect" approach adopted by Weinberg or the "patchwork" system preferred by a wider range of critics - a scene here, a character or even just character's name there and we have a new play - both methods seem a denial of an author's integrity and uniqueness.

This is not by any means to exclude scissors and paste from the seventeenth-century French dramatist's armoury but to suggest that there are other equally (or, I would claim, more) important points to consider as well. Ancient historians, at times supplemented by seventeenth-century

moralistes, are there to provide a solid foundation for writers of Roman or otherwise historical tragedies; and it is not beyond the bounds of most people's imagination to doctor the account of an historical event or character to suit non-narrative purposes. Or again, still treating the playwright as a person rather than a machine, can we not imagine that characters or situations may be invented for no other purpose than to repeat a success, to fill a structural slot? Does Sèvère not figure in Maximian primarily because he is needed as a parallel to Euchérius in Stilicon? The plays, as we have seen, have much (but not all) in common, and few would deny that Euchérius adds much to the merit of the 1660 tragedy and to the stature of the title-character. Severus existed in history, featuring in earlier events with Maximian. He is not the only character to be thus compressed into Thomas' episode; the procedure was commonplace at the time; recourse to Polyeucte seems unnecessary.

At no point, except in his formal Académie Française speech in 1685, does Thomas mention active help being given to him by his brother, nor does Pierre recount any tutoring he gave Thomas or any debts he owed him. We are, thankfully, forced to turn to the younger man's prefatory writings and in particular to the plays themselves. Now it has been pointed out that Thomas Corneille has left little in the way of comments on dramatic art, but what there is is worth evaluating. His early comedies, with their dedicatory Epitres, may seem unimportant, but the hesitation which
Thomas regularly feels about publishing these plays shows not only that he considers them the youthful exercises of the apprentice dramatist he was, but that he feels that there is a difference between a performed and a printed play, between the possibilities afforded by an audience and the limitations imposed by readers. Thomas' modesty thus coincides with his writing of comedies and, as he says, surely justifiably, "ces sortes de Poèmes ne pouuant estre soutenus ny par la maisté des vers, ny par la beauté des pensées, l'on en voit fort peu qui ne perdent presque tous leurs avantages hors de la bouche de ceux qui açauent en releuer la simplicité du style". By the time he comes to write tragedies, he is an established author, and, in the absence of any evidence, it would be interesting to know whether he thought that tragedy could stand printing more easily than comedy could.

In 1658, when he came to publish both Le Charme de la voix and Timocrate, Thomas Corneille took the opportunity of their prefaces to set down some thoughts about composing a play and in particular handling the dénouement. In the Epistre to Monsieur in front of Le Charme, he recounts the play's failure due to over-adherence to his model, Moreto's Lo que puede la apprehension, mentions that Monsieur and he, together read the Spanish play at an early stage, and continues: "Vous vous souviendrez en mesme temps que l'en

5. Thomas Corneille, Le Feint Astrologue, Epistre.
In both cases, then, the dramatist is concerned with accuracy, with relating what he has seen or has or wants to tell, with as few concessions as possible.

The same Au Lecteur discusses the particular problem of the "tragedy's" structure and the place in it of the last act. Acts I to III, says Thomas, "ne servent que d'acheminement à mettre la Reyne dans l'obligation de deux serments qui la forcent de faire espouser sa fille à celuy mesme qu'elle ne peut se dispenser de perdre". Although she learns in the last scene of act IV that Cléomène is Timocrate, act V is not superfluous. Quoting d'Aubignac's statement in book II of the Pratique, published some six months before, that the audience must know what has happened
to all the main characters introduced, Thomas concludes that the queen of Argos could not suddenly give in on hearing Timocrate's news. "Je laisse à juger suivant cette doctrine aussi judicieuse que véritable, s'il n' estoit permis de finir Timocrate par un sentiment de générosité qui aurait porté la Reyné incontinent après sa reconnaissance, à violer les sermens qu'elle avoit faits de venger la mort de son mary, en faveur de ce qu'elle doit à Cléomène ..." In addition, says Thomas Corneille, Eriphile's and Nicandre's positions have to be resolved. His comment is helped, but not necessarily prompted, by d'Aubignac's work; it shows a greater awareness of the significance and usefulness of a fifth act than does Pierre's self-criticism when, two years later, in the Examen, he seems to regret the inactive nature of act V of Horace. It is not really a question of action or lack of action; that will, pace Pierre, depend on the individual play. There is nothing undramatic about the judgement of Horace; it is a necessary conclusion to the previous events, eloquent in its very ineffectiveness, and it serves the same rôle both for the characters and the audience as does act V of Timocrate.

6. Corneille, Horace, Examen, in M.-L., vol. III, p. 279: "Il (act V) est tout en plaidoyers, et ce n'est pas là la place des harangues ni des longs discours; ils peuvent être supportés en un commencement de pièce où l'action n'est pas encore échauffée; mais le cinquième acte doit plus agir que discourir. L'attention de l'auditeur, déjà lasse, se rebute de ces conclusions qui trainent et l'ent la fin en longueur."
These comments, however fragmentary, suggest that Thomas Corneille will be both liberal in the interpretation and development of what historical sources he uses and thorough in working his characters through to the end, and this has been confirmed by our study of source-material and structure. In his Roman tragedies he almost invariably chooses to treat unknown or at least untreated subjects, a procedure which has several advantages. Among these I would single out two. Firstly, it allows Thomas Corneille to embroider fairly freely on the historian's tale, compressing events to help the play's construction and the needs of tragédie-crise, but also inserting new characters, creating new relationships, either at variance with what we know of the historical character's actions or, more subtly, adding a dimension which we cannot say could not have existed, but which is unrecorded. Secondly, and equally important, the depiction of reasonably new topics allows Thomas to present his public each time with a fresh picture of a protagonist carrying out, as it were, his first and only crime. The strength and activeness of his characters, which is commented on later, is helped in no small measure by their novelty on stage; he has no need to look over his shoulder at how X or Y has treated them before, and can make of them what he wants.

Or at least what he wants and what he feels the public can accept. As far back as what is now considered the first "regular" tragedy, Mairet's Sophonisbe of 1634, dramatists are at pains to reconcile propriety with Aristotle's veri-
similitude and necessity and the writer's need to please his public. As the Au Lecteur to Sophonisbe puts it:

... Il est vray que i'y ay voulu adjoindre pour l'embellissement de la piece, & que i'ay mesme change deux incidents de l'Histoire assez considerables, qui sont la mort de Siphax, que i'ay fait mourir à la bataille, afin que le peuple ne trouvât point estrange que Sophonisbe est deux maris vivants; à celle de Massainisse, qui vescut jusques à l'extrême vieillesse. Les moins habiles doiencnt croire que ie n'ay pas alteré l'histoire sans sujet, & les plus delicats verront, s'il leur plaist en prendre la peine, la defence de mon procedé dans Aristote. Sane constat ex his non Poetes esse ipsa facta propria narrare, sed quemadmodum geri quiuerint, vel verissimile, vel omnino necessarium fuerit, etc.

In November 1639, in the important preface to his Innocent malheureux, François de Grenaille develops the problem facing the serious dramatist, and ends with a useful definition:

... On peut dire encore, que la difficulté qui se rencontre à bien faire vne piece de Theatre, vient aussi-tost de la nature de l'objet, que de l'insuffisance de l'Auteur. Il est certain, que comme vne Tragedie a divers visages qui n'ont pourtant qu'vnne vision, il faut estre bien clairvoyant pour luy donner toutes ses postures raisonnables. Ce beau corps comprend vne infinité de beaux membres. Il embrasse la Politique pour faire tenir les Conseils, à prendre de bonnes resolutions aux grands Monarques. La Morale y est employée pour emmouvoir les passions, à dispenser bien à propos l'esperance & le desespoir, l'amour & la haine. L'eloquence y regne pour produire tous les sentimens du coeur, à faire voir son ame dans ses paroles. La Logique y est necessaire pour ne faire jamais de mauvais raisonnemens sur un bon sujet, à employer plustost les termes dans leur sens que dans la rime. La connoissance de l'art Militaire s'y mêle, par les duels ou les combats qui font soucoup le tristes evenemens, & qui contienent ces belles intrigues qui sont suiules d'vn admirable desamouur. La Musique mesme est requise à vn couragw qui consiste tout en nombres, qui est aussi bien fait pour l'oreille que pour le coeur, à qui doit rauir l'ame par l'odie. Le ne parle point icy de l'Histoire, car tout le monde voit que pour prendre de beaux sujets il faut scouoir de belles choses, à bien remarquer la substance à l'accessoire d'vnne action, pour bien reconnoistre les veritez qu'il faut suire, & ce qu'on peut feindre dans vn Poeme ...

"La substance" and "l'accessoire", "les vérités qu'il faut
suivre" and "ce qu'on peut feindre": this in a nutshell is what the dramatist must define before he can proceed with his play. The bienséances remain, surely, one of the most important and yet one of the least easily defined requirements with which the seventeenth-century tragic playwright has to cope, for concern for his public's sensibility will have an important part to play in shaping the tragedy's form. In general terms, Thomas Corneille has removed much that might offend a Parisian audience; but on occasion he has added new character defects (to make his stage characters more consistent) or has kept the original ones but passed over them - in the exposition, for example - more rapidly than the historical accounts might suggest. Thus Laodice is given added vices, while Commode's many failings are hushed up. Similar considerations apply to the dénouements, where the suicides of Commode and Maximian, for example, while consistent with the new characterisations and helpful to the play's movement, are more easily accepted by a seventeenth-century public.

Thomas Corneille has ranged widely in his search for Roman themes, using a selection of fairly standard historians and probably modern writers like Coëffeteau or Le Moyne in his choice of Imperial and Republican subjects. But the seventeenth-century novel plays little direct part in his search. Yet, as we have seen, he inverts the main preoccupations of the Roman empire and the Republic, taking his subject where he can find it and in general seeking to concentrate on active plotting. As in the case of Timocrate
or Bérénice or, later, Circe and L'Inconnu, he will try and follow up a success (Stilicon) with a very similar play (Maximian), altering internal details to do so. In every case the source material has been treated freely but properly. Prior or subsequent events are brought into the few hours of the stage action and characters, mostly but not exclusively historical, introduced in similar fashion.

His characters, especially those in the Imperial plays, are given a variety of features which makes them in the end essentially very human. Commodus, Stilicon and Maximian all practice deceit, and they continue to believe that their hypocritical assurances are being believed long after the audience and most of the other characters have seen through them. The procedure is less successful in Persée et Démétrius. But this confident hypocrisy goes hand in hand with incomprehension, misunderstandings between parents and children, as in Stilicon, Maximian, Persée et Démétrius, Laodice or the non-Roman Antiochus, and the problems caused by this generation-gap are well used by Thomas Corneille to convey the message common to many of those in positions of power in seventeenth-century Roman tragedy, that success and rank are but an illusion, that kings and emperors are as human and fallible as anyone else. Thus Stilicon comes to realise the worthiness of Buchérius and his own tragic plight, while Laodice, even if, like Maximian, unpentant, acknowledges the moral uprightness of "Oronte":

Ce refus d'un forfait dont il me sçait le prix,
Après ce qu'il me doit joint l'injure au mépris,
Et par un sentiment qu'en vain je desavoué
Contre mes interests moy-mesme je l'en loué ...
Plus Oronte du crime a rejeté l'amorce,
Plus mon amour pour luy semble avoir pris de force.
(Leodice, IV.1)

So the blindness of a Honorius or a Constantin is not singled out; the contrast between them and those conspiring against them is less clear-cut, even at characterisation level. And, as we shall see, further structural devices are used to bring the two sides, despite their differences, closer together. Thomas Corneille's heroes are first and foremost human characters.

This humanity is brought out in other ways. Certainly, his characters seek their independence - this is the prime force behind their actions and the ultimate reason for the plays' success as plays. The admiration we feel for them is no longer that which we felt for the hero of the 1640s. What is to be admired is less a person whose fixed characteristics receive our approval from the beginning of the action, but rather the ambitious desire for freedom which haunts them and the means they adopt to achieve it. The tragedy's five acts are needed for the various sides to the characters and their methods to be revealed. The author shows them at crisis point and already in a self-imposed solitude; it is the development and resolution of this crisis that constitutes the play. Ambition, then, is a key concept in all first five of Thomas' six Roman tragedies, although less obviously present in Persée et Démétrius, while revenge, a popular theme in Roman plays earlier in the century, is limited to Persée, especially its dénouement, where Erixène foresees acts of revenge after the action.
is complete, and more especially to *La Mort d'Annibal*.

But this self-seeking, if hidden behind a mask of national concern, does not succeed in hiding the characters' basic dependence. To take but the example of *Laodice*, we see that Ariarate is dependent on Phradate and Phradate on Ariarate, while Laodice herself is doubly indebted to "Oronte": he has secured her political position and she is irresistibly in love with him. On a lower level, she relies on Anaxandre, but secures her release from this debt by his death and from her debt to "Oronte", revealed to be Ariarate, by her suicide and the very ineffectiveness of the crowd which is clamouring for the privilege of killing her. The progression from dependence (even when, as it usually does, it entails death) is a leitmotiv of Thomas Corneille's Roman tragedies and makes of them, in a sense, tragédies heureuses.

I have mentioned progression in characterisation and this is an important element in virtually all Thomas' Roman plays. It takes various forms. Firstly, if in *La Mort de Commodo* the emperor has no regrets, Stilicon three years later will become a much more tragic hero because of his repentance, based on recognition of error. The process is continued the following year in the non-Roman *Camma*, where Sinorix is shown to have doubts, while in *Maximian* the title-character, although unrepentant, is dependent on Sévère and affected accordingly by Sévère's action in the middle of the play. This gradual recognition of error serves to point up the essentially internal action of Thomas' Roman
plays and the self-contained momentum they possess, unlike some of his non-Roman contemporary tragedies and others by rivals which we have examined. Secondly, there is the question of disguise. We saw the pride which Thomas took in its use in *Timocrate* and the difficulty the audience experienced in penetrating the double rôle of Timocrate/Cléomène. A good deal, but by no means all, of the success of the 1656 tragedy must depend on this identity confusion. *Bérénice* and *Darius*, which precede and follow *La mort de Commode* respectively, still hinge on the problem of physical identity, but even in *Darius* the audience knows Darius' real identity as early as the beginning of act II. Physical disguise thus gives way to lack of communication or disguised feelings, in both the Roman and non-Roman tragedies of Thomas Corneille in the early sixties. Stilicon and Maximian remain silent about their plans— or if they talk, it is only to people whom they know can do nothing to stop them; Gamma is silent over Sostrate. Such disguised feelings are the ideal medium in plays dealing with ambition and jealousy. After a certain lack of success with *Maximian* and especially *Perseé et Démétrius*, Thomas comes back with *Pyrrhus* and the confusion there of Pyrrhus and Hippias and introduces disguise into a Roman tragedy, *Laodice*, for the first time. Yet here the effect of Ariarate's double identity is felt more by the other characters than by the audience. It is a justified disguise, not a mere titillation.

Thirdly and lastly, allied to the question of disguise is that of love. We have seen that, in Thomas' six Roman
plays, love is almost exclusively a means to an end and not included for its own sake. It is present in Commode and Stilicon, but played down in Maximian, where the Sévère-Feuste and Licine-Constance affairs definitely take second place to the overthrow of the emperor by Maximian. Even before Racine gets under way to any extent, Thomas is providing plays where love plays a much greater part, but they are not Roman tragedies: Antiochus, in January 1666, includes self-analysis by Stratonice and expressions of love by Antiochus which, even if conveyed by means of a portrait, are to be taken for what they are. Quinault, in his Astrate of the previous year, is doing the same thing. But even after Andromaque, love is subservient, unfashionably so perhaps, to the depiction of a grande criminelle in Laodice and to the struggle for freedom from tyranny in La Mort d'Annibal. It is the particular nature and function of love in Thomas' Roman tragedies which has misled so many critics who complain about Placidie in Stilicon or Elise in Annibal. One cannot judge their rôle either in terms of Quinault or Racine, although, as it happens, they and others in the Roman tragedies help to effect the vital transition from précieux love to Racinian amour-passion. But their importance is elsewhere, in the delicate balance of characters and structuring of the plays themselves, in the difficult task of altering source material to provide both a dramatic framework and a play acceptable to the seventeenth-century public.
For it is in this aspect of his craft - an understanding of *la marche du théâtre* - that I believe Thomas Corneille excels. It may be fortuitous that, after his apprenticeship in comedy, most of his tragedies in the twelve or so years from 1657 treat Roman themes, or he may have chosen to concentrate on these, not just because of Pierre's earlier example, but because such subjects provide as good material as any for dramatic presentation. Of all the early critics it was, surprisingly perhaps, the frères Parfaict and the much-maligned Voltaire himself who were most sensitive to where Thomas' greatest skill lay. With the *recul* provided by the generation following the dramatist's death in 1709, both the Parfaict brothers and Voltaire in the 1730s and 1740s could see that, as the latter picturesquely puts it, "il intriguait ses pièces comme un Espagnol". Later commentators are no doubt justified in attacking at least some of the versification; but it, like love, is surely a means to an end, and few of them have taken the trouble to consider what that end is.

Thomas Corneille was not always successful as regards structure, even in his Roman tragedies, which I believe to be among his very best and more consistently dramatic than either his non-Roman plays of the time or tragedies by his contemporaries, examples of both of which we have examined in previous chapters. *La Mort de Commode* suffers from a change of direction in mid-stream (or rather after four acts); *Persée et Démétrius* fails even more obviously because, like earlier Roman plays, it tends to concentrate on one character
per act and crosses the important borderline separating
the clear from the mechanical. But in neither case is the
result a complete disaster, and Thomas at least avoids the
progressive stalemates which he runs into in, say, Antiochus,
and which other dramatists of the time incur as well.

The overriding impression one gains from a close
study of Thomas Corneille's Roman tragedies is one of ac-
tivity. Indeed it would seem that as his plots simplify -
and they do over the years between Commode and Annibal -
his stage characters stand out more clearly and act with
ever-increasing strength. Right from the start of the
cycle, in 1657, we see how the dramatist has, if necessary,
altered details with this aim in view. It is not Commode's
past actions that result in his plan to kill Helvie, Marcia,
E lectus and Laetus, as history recounts, for this would be
difficult to dramatise sufficiently powerfully. Rather it
is the invented assassination attempt by Helvie which is
the direct cause of the tablettes in Thomas' play. Stili-
con's activity is conveyed in quite different fashion, by
the three levels on which the drama is enacted and not least
by the fleeting but dramatic references to the plot itself
in the brief scenes with his confidant, Mutian. It is not
the popular clamour that leads to Laodice's death. It makes
it more theatrical and hastens it on, but it is a suicide
that would have had to occur in the end. Even in Annibal
there is activity - or perhaps we should say especially in
Annibal, for just as d'Aubignac was right about the need
for activity in Antiochus, so the impasse that exists from
start of the 1669 tragedy needs considerable compensating
action to make the play succeed. Prusias is subservient to Rome and in love with Elise; neither state will change, but Thomas Corneille manages to make his Mort d'Annibal anything but a static play of lamentation.

This constant movement, both internal and, where appropriate, external, leaves little room for monologues. The constant clash of interest between characters carries the plays along, with little sign of the structural pattern that Racine will employ, with a fourth act serving as a moment of repose, of recapitulation, a chance for a character to commit himself finally to one course of action or another. This is not to say that Thomas Corneille's characters do not discuss or resolve. Indeed they do. But if we examine the structure of La Thébaïde, for example, we can see that, although it is no better than, or very different from, a corresponding play by Thomas, it includes a number of general scenes, moments when matters of concern to characters are discussed in more general terms. Thomas Corneille has little, if any, of this in his Roman or even non-Roman plays of the period; his characters' individualism and antagonisms are left unsullied for all to see.

We have noted, in their place, his constant use of other means of satisfying his public: his consummate timing, his skill in distributing tension at the beginning and particularly the ends of acts, his delaying of the resolution of the plot until the last possible moment, and the completion of his task by showing what becomes of characters, as in La Mort de Commode, where the story is followed through
until the succession of Pertinax. There is little one can fault in this respect, and what may seem misplaced or superfluous often turns out, on closer examination, to be dramatically necessary.

Having chosen to use love largely as a dramatic force in order the more successfully to stage situations which in themselves are difficult to portray, Thomas Corneille requires to maintain a careful balance, not only between love and ambition or its equivalent, but between the various characters who represent these different forces. Previous chapters have tried to show how, if necessary by freely adapting his source material, Thomas has very largely succeeded in this delicate task. To take but two examples, in Stilicon the conspirator must not so dominate his son that Euchérius is seen to have no chance at all against him, yet Euchérius must appear sufficiently guilty for the play to have any existence at all. Placidie seems an exaggerated character. I have tried to show that this is not so, and whatever extreme features she does possess are part of Thomas' counterbalance to the force of Stilicon himself. It is Thermantie, not Euchérius, who saves Honorius in the end - a subtle point, this, perhaps, but it strengthens Thermantie's rôle in the plot and, more importantly, makes Euchérius an all the more tragic character. In Laodice, Thomas Corneille is at pains, as we have seen, to carefully balance Laodice and "Oronte", giving "Oronte"/Ariarate considerable power over Laodice but re-establishing the historical situation when she takes the initiative and beats
him to the post by revealing her love for him before he can disclose his identity. The two strands of love and ambition meet but momentarily in her declaration and then part again, for Ariarate’s revelation must lead to her renouncing him and to her suicide.

A similar weighting of characters occurs in La Mort d’Annibal, where Annibal is joined by Elise in his struggle against Prusias and Flaminius, and where Attale, too, is built up to rival Prusias in stature. But there seems no point in insisting upon Thomas’ very careful craftsmanship; the previous chapters of this study will, I hope, have borne out my contention that we have here, at least, in the years between the mid-fifties and late sixties, a dramatist of very great competence. A dramatist—and a tragic author, too? The question is a difficult one, for we are tempted to impose twentieth-century critical standards in a field where, it would appear, the seventeenth century did not theoretically plough. Is the tragic element missing? Is Thomas Corneille concerned only with keeping the audience guessing, with love, with feminine orgueil? Is it all too impossible to be tragic? The difficulty of tragedy, as we saw seventeenth-century commentators like Scudéry realise, is that the outcome is either known to the audience in advance or is foreseeable in the course of five acts. So the dramatist must alter, if not the conclusion (to any extent), at least the means by which he arrives at that conclusion. But are we interested only in those means, in the surprise element which forestalls the foreseen and
allows for additional péripéties and further action? If we are, then the plays may be dramatic but they are little else. With the exception of La Mort d'Annibal Thomas' Roman tragedies are really tragédies heureuses, in the crude sense that the villains lose, the virtuous win or at least survive. Yet this is but a rough-and-ready description. In the end we must ask ourselves whether, in these plays where — with the possible exception of Annibal — fate or the Gods have little or no part, the tragic character comes to recognise his error. This is why Stilicon, for example, appears to me to be a great play, and why Laodice is almost as great. For Euchérius never knows of his father's plotting — he dies defending the emperor Honorius — and Stilicon need probably never have revealed his crime, for both Palcidie and Honorius have only vaguely glimpsed the possibility of his guilt before and are quite taken aback on hearing of it. It is against these two facts that we then must judge Stilicon's confession and his realisation that "Seigneur, mon Fils est mort; la Nature effrayée / N'ose voir de quel prix votre vie est payée" (V.6). Similarly Laodice, amidst all her blustering, is forced, if only by the revelation that "Oronte" is Ariarate, to recognise her previous error and, like Stilicon, to take the consequences. La Mort d'Annibal is a rather different case, as I have tried to argue; but even there the predestined death is held off as long as possible, counterbalanced by the forcefulness of Elise. Within the range of even these six Roman tragedies, we can see that Thomas Corneille provides a variety of situations and that, as I would claim,
he achieves on occasion, from inside the characters and their actions, without the help of *le destin* or *le sort*, the image of a truly tragic figure.

Thomas Corneille, says a recent writer on seventeenth-century France, "was without doubt the most successful author of the century". It is by no means clear what he may mean and on what basis he has made this apparently flattering judgement. But it seems obvious now that Thomas Corneille was regarded as a very competent dramatist (sic) and was well known, even to his critics. When Poisson writes his *Poète basque*, performed in June 1668, we find the poet criticising a number of now well-known plays, including three by P. Corneille, one each by Quinault and Racine and two by Thomas Corneille. *Laodice*, the most recent of all those mentioned, had only just been performed; but *Stilicon* was over eight years old by then. Behind the veiled references in prefaces, we can detect a pattern of accepted plays, intermingled, for sure, with less successful ones, as was the case with Pierre and will be with Racine. Of course, it is valid to ask what guarantee of quality is


8. "J'ay veu tout ce qu'ont fait ces auteurs admirables: C'est un chaos pour nous de choses déplorables. Rodogune, Cinna, l'Astrate, Agésilas, Stilicon, Laodice, et l'Andromaque, hélas! Toutes ces pièces-là mériteraient, je jure, Et berne, et double berne, en une couverture. Comment a-t-on gagné de l'argent à cela? Le monde est une beste, on le voit bien par là."

(scene 6)
given by public success. If Thomas' Roman tragedies are
good, enjoyable theatre, with relatively simple plots, and
prove readily assimilable, are they no more than that? Are
they no different from (I avoid saying "better than") Timo-
crate, which has equally sunk without trace? What is there
in Commode or Stilicon, Leodice or Annibal that makes these
tragedies no longer read? Is it not simply, as I suggested
in the opening pages of this study, that the French view
of their own grand siècle is more outdated than foreign
opinion of the seventeenth century in France, and that even
this requires a thorough re-investigation before the pre-
judice of decades can be swept away?

If it seems unhelpful to work forward directly from
Pierre to Thomas Corneille, forgetting the possible influ-
ence of other contemporary dramatists or writers in other
forms, omitting to notice that many of the precise ideals
of Pierre's heroes and heroines are not exactly mirrored
in Thomas' and that the younger brother has, at least after
ten years of play-writing, little need of direct help as
far as dramaturgy goes, what about Racine, that other pole
of seventeenth-century French tragedy? Is the problem here
not largely the same? Hindsight has its great advantages,
certainly: it enables us to check facts and sources, to
compare dispassionately, to see influences which escaped
contemporaries caught up in the business of writing and
living. But paradoxically it has one great defect - that
of establishing the genius and giving an unfair deal to the
lesser man of talent, who did not only imitate or plagiarise
but often led the way. This greatly distorts our understanding of how the seventeenth-century public must have viewed its playwrights and what it thought of the plays. Instead of looking back from and around Racine to Thomas Corneille, Quinault, Rotrou and so on, they would look forward and make their own demands on any new author. To this extent we can agree with Maurice Descotes when he says — and it is an important point to establish — that "l'on en revient à se demander si Racine n'a pas réussi auprès de son public dans la mesure où il lui rappelait Thomas Corneille"9.

But reminding in general terms only, perhaps, for closer parallels or reputed borrowings raise considerable problems. Let us take one relevant example. Both French and foreign critics have attempted to see, in the structure, if not in the themes, of La Mort de Commode, a forerunner of Racine's Andromaque. Carrington Lancaster maintains that, like Commode, Pyrrhus suffers from his relationship with two women: he wants to marry one while being engaged to the other. And the great American scholar quotes a whole list of structural and other parallels, including even the fact that in each play it is the king who dies and not the woman he wanted to marry. In his later book on Racine, Daniel Mornet shows that the situation in Andromaque can be found in no fewer than four of the younger Corneille's tragedies (Commode, Camma, Maximian and Pyrrhus), without mentioning

Quinault's dramatic productions. One begins to wonder after this where such an ill-defined study of "sources" and "influences" can end. H.T. Barnwell, in an article which appeared some eight years after Hornet's work, sees in *Commode* the same character-pattern as in the later Racinian play: the relations between Oreste, Hermione, Pyrrhus and Andromaque are, he would claim, those that existed between Electus, Marcia, Commode and Helvie, except that in addition Marcia is filled with ambition. But Oreste is not Electus: he is, as Picard puts it, "asservi à l'amour". As for Marcia, we have seen earlier that she does not love Commode very deeply; is she the model for Hermione? Or again we could examine how far Helvie reacts at the end of act II in order to protect the life of her father, Pertinax. In fact, Pertinax, who would correspond roughly to Racine's Astyanax, is of little importance at this juncture. Helvie shows little interest in him, certainly far less than Andromaque will show in her son and her late husband, Hector. Why, even Emilie in *Cinna* feels a greater urge to avenge her father's death; Helvie is more concerned with her country, with freeing Rome from the tyranny of Commode's rule.

In short, by the late 1660s, the fund of dramatic structures is so great that it is very difficult to make


parallels of this sort. Certainly, as I have suggested, the structure may often come before the story in the dramatist's mind, and it would be rash to forget this. But then the search becomes even wider, for there are surely more similar structures than plays on similar themes, and confusion reigns. In the end, for lack of anything approaching proof, we must rest content with more general developments like simplification of plot, the rôle of ambition, vengeance and love, points of dramaturgy and so on. This is surely at the heart of the matter, and it is here that we can see Thomas Corneille as a very important link between the generation of Pierre Corneille and that of Racine in the field of tragedy. Modern criticism, for example, tends to discount the influence of Jansenism on Racinian tragedy, and indeed much of what Racinian characters ascribe to fate, le destin or le sort, seems to me to be much more probably the result of personal inadequacies, character defects or, at worst, chance circumstances. To that extent, Racine's characters are as concerned with ambition and revenge as those of Thomas Corneille which we have examined in preceding chapters. It is time that other secondary figures emerged from the gloom which essentially thematic studies tend to cast on them and took their rightful places, as dramatists, on the seventeenth-century tragic stage.

12. Since completing this chapter in draft, I have read J. P. Short's excellent paper "The concept of fate in the tragedies of Racine", Studies in French literature presented to H.W. Lawton, Manchester, 1968, pp. 315-329, in which the author comes to virtually the same conclusion about the rôle of fate in Racine.
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"Ceux qui ont eu soin des différentes réimpressions qu'on a faites de ce premier recueil, ont jugé à propos de retrancher les épîtres dédicatoires que l'auteur y avait mises à la tête de chaque pièce; mais pour nous conformer à son intention, nous avons pris le parti de les rétablir."

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