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GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE IDYLLIC ARCHETYPE IN THE PLAYS OF PIERRE CORNEILLE
(MÉLITE THROUGH POLYEUCTE). AN INSPIRATIONAL OBSESSION.

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
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BY
DONALD CLAY HATTON

Norman, Oklahoma

1972

THE IDYLIC ARCHETYPE IN THE PLAYS OF PIERRE CORNEILLE
(MÉLITE THROUGH POLYEUCTE). AN INSPIRATIONAL OBSESSION.

A DISSERTATION

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF MODERN LANGUAGES

By

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INTRODUCTION

A. Preliminary Remarks

This dissertation is an outgrowth of my interest in three subjects: the plays of Pierre Corneille, Platonic love, and the psychology of artistic creativity. By Platonic love I mean a feeling which the lover has that he and the beloved possess, actually or potentially, a single soul. This kind of love is erotic in the broad sense, in that the lover yearns to become one with the beloved, spiritually or both spiritually and physically. Through union with her he hopes to reach a higher state of existence--perhaps even divinity. Of course Platonic feelings may be experienced by both members of the couple.

The term may also denote a strong sympathetic attraction to another living being, accompanied by the impression of a continuing concurrence of wills. Thus a sailor may feel Platonic love for his ship, if he is inclined to regard "her" as a living being; and one could call the relationship between Antiochus and Séleucus in Rodogune Platonic, even though the two are not lovers but brothers.

We will be concerned here only with intersexual love, however, in which context the term is no doubt most properly used to designate a sensation erotic in not only the broad but

also the narrow sense. That is, to denote an impression of transcendent oneness (broad sense of eroticism) occurring between a man and a woman who are attracted to each other by physical desire (narrow sense of eroticism).

Most people now regard Platonic love as non-sexual (narrow sense), but in Renaissance Italy only a few theoreticians believed, with Ficino, that it should completely ignore man's animal nature. The majority--Bembo, Leone Ebreo, Equicola, Varchi--held that the union should be both spiritual and physical.¹ When I first began to think about Corneille's theater, I was struck by the fact that, although he seemed to have a penchant for the latter viewpoint, his lovers often tended, for one alleged reason or another, to avoid the physical consummation of their will to unite.

I saw what appeared to be strong elements of Platonic love in Corneille's theater, but could not determine their inspirational role. At times they almost seemed to be nothing more than ornaments in the work of a self-sufficient superman. Then, quite by chance, I made a discovery which led to two significant conclusions: first, that what I supposed to be Platonic love, in Corneille, was in reality the ancestral form of all kinds of romantic love, and second, that this ancestral form profoundly influenced the poet's genius.

1

A.J. Smith, "The Metaphysic of Love," in A Mirror for Modern Scholars, Essays in Methods of Research in Literature ed. Lester A. Beaurline (New York: The Odyssey Press, Inc., 1966), pp. 140-155.

While collecting examples of Platonic union in literature, I came across four fifteenth- and sixteenth-century illustrations for the story of Pyramus and Thisbe, which is found in Ovid. At the time I was especially curious about this story because of my increasing interest in the theme of union in death. Thanks, perhaps, to a recent reading of Erwin Panovsky's Studies in Iconology,² I soon realized, upon comparing the pictures to each other, an obvious fact which my hurried reading of the story had not revealed: namely, that its different phenomenological elements--the tomb, the fountain, the lion--were parts of a symbolic complex whose meaning transcended that of the written narrative.

I set about the task of deciphering those symbols, using as principal tools the collected writings of C.J. Jung, J.E. Cirlot's Dictionary of Symbols,³ and what I knew of Corneille's psychological history. Long before I had fully understood the symbolic lesson of the story, it was clear that I had stumbled upon an archetype. By this term I mean

a coherent pattern of beliefs and feelings so widely shared at a level beneath consciousness that there exists no abstract vocabulary for representing it, and so 'sacred' that unexamined, irrational restraints inhibit any explicit analysis. Such a complex finds a formula or pattern story, which

2

Erwin Panovsky, Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance, Harper Torchbooks, The Academic Library (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).

3

J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, trans. Jack Sage (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962).

serves both to embody it, and, at first at least, to conceal its full implications. Later, the secret may be revealed, the archetype 'analyzed' or 'allegorically' interpreted according to the language of the day.⁴

What caused me to recognize the archetypal nature of the Pyramus story was the frequency with which its symbols recur in other stories dealing with the theme of union in death. I also noted that many of these stories, like the original myth, may be interpreted either as rites de passage or as rites avortés, depending on whether one stresses the idea of union (as Wagner does in Tristan und Isolde) or the idea of death (as Shakespeare does in Romeo and Juliet). Ovid's history goes as follows.

The lovers lived in Babylon, the "brick-walled city"⁵ of Semiramis. Pyramus was very handsome, Thisbe the "loveliest of all those Eastern girls."⁶ They inhabited neighboring houses separated by a high garden wall and, apparently, encircled by another wall. At night, through a chink in the first wall, they held whispered conversations--for their parents had forbidden them to speak to each other. Eventually they decided to flee together from their homes and from the city. Each would steal

4

Leslie Fiedler, "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!" in Five Approaches to Literary Criticism, an Arrangement of Contemporary Critical Essays, ed. Wilbur S. Scott (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 307.

5

Ovid, Metamorphoses, trans. Rolfe Humphries. A Midland Original (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1960), p. 83.

6

Ibid.

away from his house at night, and they would meet at the tomb of Ninus, in the shadows of a white-fruited mulberry tree which stood there beside a cool spring.

Thisbe arrived at this place before Pyramus. As she sat waiting for him, she saw a lioness approaching in the distance. The beast's jaws were red with the blood of the cows that she had feasted upon that night. Thisbe ran into the woods and hid in a cave, dropping her veil as she fled. The lioness did not seem to notice the girl, but, after quenching her thirst at the fountain, she came across the veil and mauled it in her bloody jaws.

No sooner had the lioness slunk away than Pyramus arrived at the fountain. Seeing the blood-stained veil and the tracks in the dust, he concluded that Thisbe had been devoured. That he had not arrived first at the meeting-place made him responsible, he thought, for her death. In despair he cried out: "Come, lions, all of you, whose lairs lie hidden / Under this rock! . . . Drink my blood too!"⁷ And drawing his sword, he plunged it into his body. His blood sprayed on the white berries of the mulberry tree, turning them crimson.

Thisbe soon ventured out of her hiding place. She went to the mulberry tree, fearful of the lioness but happily anticipating the arrival of her lover. There she discovered him dying. She embraced him in tears, called his name. Hearing her voice and

7

Ibid., p. 85.

seeing her face, Pyramus raised his head, but at that moment death overcame him, and he closed his eyes forever. Thisbe resolved to follow him:

Death shall not keep you from me. Wretched parents
Of Pyramus and Thisbe, listen to us,
Listen to both our prayers, do not begrudge us,
Whom death has joined, lying at last together
In the same tomb. And you, O tree, now shading
The body of one, and very soon to shadow
The bodies of two, keep in remembrance always
The sign of our death, the dark and mournful color.⁸

So saying, she threw her body on Pyramus' blade and died.

Thisbe's prayers touched her parents and the gods; her ashes and those of Pyramus rest in the same urn, and, since that sad night, the mulberry tree has borne red fruit.

This story no doubt had a great influence on attitudes toward love in medieval courtly circles, for Ovid was of course well known in that period. Chrétien de Troyes compares the love of his chevalier de la charette for Guenevere to that of Pyramus for Thisbe:

Lanceloz qui plus ama que Piramus,
S'onques nus hom pot amer plus ...,⁹

while a fabliau stresses the youth of the lovers, an appreciation of which is essential to a proper understanding of the story's symbolic content:

8

Ibid., p. 86.

9

Georg Hart, Ursprung und Verbreitung der Pyramus- und Thisbe-Sage, Beilage zum Jahresbericht der k. Kreisrealschule in Passau pro 1889 (Passau: J. Bucher, 1889), p. 19.

Ençois qu'il éussent sept anz,
 Toucha amors les deuz enfanz,
 Et navra plus à cel endroit
 Que lor aez ne requeroit.¹⁰

According to this version the lovers were separated by their apprehensive parents at the age of ten and eloped at fifteen. In the illustrations previously mentioned, the most frequent way of depicting the death of Thisbe, a manner which departs from Ovid but underlines the Platonic aspect of the lovers' relationship, is to show her falling on Pyramus' sword which has pierced his prone body to the hilt and is pointing upward from his back. Thus Thisbe will die at the moment her body falls upon his, the sword passing through her and locking them physically together. Another interesting departure from Ovid is the appearance, in one of the illustrations, of the sea in the background and a ship with furled sails. This ship is most probably waiting to take Pyramus and Thisbe aboard and spirit them away from the parents, the City in the right background, and the conventional existence which these two forces represent. For one of the unspoken premises of the story is that society is right not to countenance the marriage of passionate childish lovers but only that of adults capable of assuming a productive role within its framework. Pyramus and Thisbe want none of this. On the open sea they will be isolated and protected from the outside world (society) as they were by the wall around their

10

C. de Boer, ed. Piramus et Tisbé, poème du XII^e siècle (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1921), p. 1.

two houses, but there will be no wall separating them from each other.¹¹

This wall with its chink is like a confessional where the guilty pair can hide their faces while conspiring to escape from the City and to unite sexually as childish, or as I would call them, idyllic lovers. Their plan miscarries when one of them, Thisbe, arrives at the meeting-place before the other, for this precedence signifies a fatal departure from the relationship of absolute parity which characterizes idyllic union: it implies that she is superior to her partner. The moment she set foot beyond the protective wall surrounding the houses and enclosing her with Pyramus in an Edenic garden, and entered the fields, she stepped into the social world where distinctions of relative worth are all-important.

In this regard it will be remembered that the lovers were to meet at the tomb of Ninus, a legendary king whose wife, Semiramis, founded the City (Babylon), surpassed her husband in

11

The illicit-journey theme occurs with some frequency in literature: Tristan's voyage with Isolde, the escape of Chactas and Atala, Don José's flight with Carmen. This theme may be considered as a perversion of the idea that newlyweds set out on a journey into maturity, for it represents, rather than a forward movement into the future, a refusal to grow up or, in older persons, an attempt to move backward and downward into the "buried" (unconscious) past, where the innocence and fervor of childish love may be recaptured. In Paul et Virginie the heroine's forward voyage to Paris and social maturity so corrupts her that she is unable to make the regressive trip back to her childhood lover, and this situation is presented as an indictment of the modern world--an example of the romantic reversal of traditional values.

bravery and glory, and had him put to death. Thisbe's superiority is fatal to her partner also, albeit against her will. The question is, how will she react upon perceiving this?

The lioness that Thisbe sees coming toward her across the field is Semiramis herself, or a potentiality within Thisbe to become what Semiramis represents: the supreme matriarch, the invincible warrior-queen. Thisbe flees into the forest, an analogue of the time- and growth-arresting sea,¹² and into the cave, that is, into the very home of the lioness, the maternal bosom. Has the beast seen Thisbe? I am inclined to think so, but that she bears her no ill will. She pauses to drink at the fountain and then, says Ovid, she "mangles" and "mouths" the veil.¹³

In performing these two acts--drinking the cool, refreshing water and mauling the symbol of the maiden's spiritual virginity which was to be preserved in her marriage to Pyramus--the lioness is not behaving in an automatic, beastly fashion but, on the contrary, using her speechless mouth to reason with Thisbe, to demonstrate something to her, and to persuade her to follow a certain course of action. The interlude at the fountain, whose subterranean waters lead, like those of the spring

¹²

Fiedler, "Come Back," p. 309, observes a correspondence between the "virgin forest" and the "forever inviolable sea." Forest and sea also figure as symbols of the unconscious. Cir-
lot, Dictionary of Symbols, pp. 107, 345-347.

¹³

Ovid, Metamorphoses, p. 84.

in Pelléas et Mélisande, to the "land of infancy,"¹⁴ reveals to Thisbe (who is watching through our eyes) that the lioness is able fully to satisfy her idyllic yearnings, while the desecration of the veil argues that there is only one sensible course for the girl to follow if she wishes to survive among the wild beasts of the social world to which she has been abandoned. That is, she must renounce her childish dreams of fulfillment through isolation and assume the domineering solar¹⁵ identity which is her birthright as a superior animal. She must not attempt to flee from the father-king figure who stands between her and her sexual goal, for flight is impossible, but must overthrow him and take his place, as Semiramis replaced Ninus.

Thisbe might have accepted this argument if, upon leaving the cave, she had not found her lover dying. But she realizes, then, that if she can prevail through rebellion, he cannot. The reasoning of the lioness is false, for to enter into competition against the father is to alienate the son who reveres him and his precepts, not the least important of which asserts that a man who cannot protect a woman, or who allows her to defeat him, is not worthy of the name:

14

This is a Jungian interpretation of fountain-symbolism. Cirlot, Dictionary of Symbols, p. 108.

15

The lion is traditionally a symbol of masculine consciousness, or the sun, as opposed to the feminine, unconscious, intuitive side of human nature. Ibid., pp. 180-182.

I am the murderer, poor girl; I told you
To come here in the night, to all this terror,
And was not here before you, to protect you.¹⁶

Thisbe understands that Pyramus' identity as her sexual opposite is a function of his belief in the superiority of the sword he inherited from his father. Thus, in a gesture of submission to this sacred object and of rejection of the lioness, she thrusts the weapon through her body, and it joins her and her lover together again like the two equal halves of Plato's sorb-apple,¹⁷ in a union transcending not only death but also one of the chief temptations of life.

Yet theirs remains a guilty love. Thus when the gods, who tend to remain indifferent to the deserved sufferings of mortals, turn the mulberries red, it is no doubt to commemorate the perennial passing away of a beautiful transpersonal impulse whose doom is foreordained in the nature of things, rather than to display any sympathy for those two lovers as individuals: for it may be said that Pyramus and Thisbe die every time a human being progresses from childhood to maturity.

Now I come to the question of what all of this has to do with Corneille; and the answer, in a word, is everything. He

16

Ovid, Metamorphoses, p. 84.

17

In the Symposium Aristophanes tells us that the primeval humans were round hermaphrodites with two faces and four arms and legs. To punish the rebellious pride of these creatures Zeus cut every one in two "like a sorb-apple which is halved for pickling." Since that time each of the numerous separate halves has sought to reunite physically and spiritually with its original opposite.

would probably have never written a single play of any note if his fantasy-life had not been dominated, on the one hand, by an intense desire to return to the world of the idyllic lovers--a world which he considered shameful--and, on the other hand, by an equally strong need to prove himself, despite that desire, eminently worthy of the highest respect. In his theater he is continually trying to reconcile these two impulses or attempting, in vain, to establish once and for all the ethical superiority of one over the other.

This dialectical struggle, whose influence may have something to do with the lawyer-author's generally relativistic frame of mind,¹⁸ would seem to be the result of an ambivalent childhood history. We may attribute the idyllic side of Corneille's personality to the fact that he spent the first five years of his life as an only son and the first three as an only child, whereas during the remainder of his formative period he was obliged to assume the role of older brother. One can assume that at some time in his early life his mother conveyed to him the message that he would no longer be her pampered favorite: henceforth, if he were to retain her affection and that of his father (amour-estime), he would have to accept a protective, paternal role with regard to his younger brothers and sisters. Although he acquiesced to this demand in an exemplary fashion,

18

A dissertation on Le Relativisme chez Pierre Corneille has been written by Jacques G. Benay (Dissertation Abstracts, XX, No. 6 (1959), 2282-2283.).

eventually becoming a true paterfamilias, he continued to nourish, throughout his life, a pronounced nostalgia for the idyllic state which he had enjoyed in his mother's company (or possibly in that of his nurse) during those first years. His outward personality was that of an older brother, but he secretly longed to be an only child--or at least a younger brother.¹⁹ Hence, perhaps, his special affection for Thomas, his junior by nineteen years, whom some say he allowed to influence him too much.²⁰

His idyllic tendencies may have been strongly reinforced when, sometime before his sixteenth year, he and a young girl named Catherine Hue met and fell in love. It seems that Catherine's parents, finding his fortune insufficient, compelled them to separate and eventually married her to someone with five times his income. Couton attributes to this unfortunate affair the frequent occurrence, in Corneille's theater, of the mal

19

Corneille's father was an older brother in a family of eight children. Corneille had five brothers and sisters. Records of the family go back only two generations from the playwright, but we know that the custom was to transmit the name Pierre to the oldest son of the oldest branch. Thus the author was not only the inheritor of a tradition of older-brother behavior but also, it would seem, the designated focal point of the whole clan's sense of identity and honor. This may largely account for his heroes' strong feeling of self-importance, responsibility to father and king, and for their desire to demonstrate their perfection and glorieuse supremacy in love and war.

20

Louis Herland, Corneille par lui-même, Écrivains de Toujours (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1956), p. 51: "Il eût sans doute mieux valu, pour Corneille, ne point vivre avec ce frère dans une aussi étroite union de coeur et de pensée."

mariée theme,²¹ and it is apparently the socially superior pretender to Catherine's hand who reappears in numerous plays in the figure of the noble Rival. As in Corneille's real life, this figure has the preference of the heroine's Evil Parents over the hero. He undergoes numerous transformations: in Mélite he appears in his classical form as Éraсте, the rich noble suitor favored by the heroine's mother; in Polyeucte he is represented, at the beginning of the play, by the hero himself; in Théodore he changes sex, becoming the Evil Mother's daughter Flavie, who, when the lovers are united in death, withers away and dies like a sickly plant. Being closely associated with the Evil Parents, the Rival is one of a set of key symbols and themes which link Corneille's works to the Pyramus archetype. The other symbols and themes are the idyllic garden; the Underworld as unconsciousness or the past (and conversely, the upper regions as Olympian consciousness); the Evil Parents in league with evil society; nocturnal elopements; journeys forward or backward in life; Platonic oneness; union in death; reincarnations of Semiramis (the "lion-woman"); and the king-Good Parent as her spiritual adversary. The purpose of this dissertation is not to call the reader's attention to the presence of all of these symbols and themes every time they appear in each work studied, but to utilize them, as no previous analyses have, in a

21

Georges Couton, Corneille, *Connaissance des Lettres*, No. 52 (Paris: Hatier, 1958), p. 19.

documentation of the struggle within Corneille's mind between the two halves of his personality: the idyllic and the paternal, the desire to return to the lost childhood paradise and the need to assume an adult social identity whose brilliance will blind the beholder to the stigma of that ineradicable yearning.

Even in the present post-Freudian era, critical writings on Corneille (to which my findings owe a great deal) are usually based on the tacit premise that the poet's unconscious mind is a closed book whose existence may as well be ignored.²²

22

Jean Starobinski, for example ("Être et paraître," Monde nouveau, No. 93 (October, 1955), 62-71) attempts without success to explain away the continuing influence of unconscious pressures on Corneille's heroes. These latter, he gives us to understand, are two-dimensional projections of the superego. They exist in a void which they themselves created when they magically destroyed the "être naturel" (a term of Gide's) which was their own past. But this "être naturel" cannot be known because, since the heroes are only characters in a play, it never really existed; besides, when they overcame it they annihilated it:

"Mais qui serait cet 'être naturel'? Nous ne le savons pas et ne devons pas chercher à le savoir. L'illusion du théâtre nous fait croire qu'il pourrait exister, et Gide lui-même y croit. De fait, l'être naturel n'existe ici que pour être refusé: le héros cornélien se construit sur cette négation. ... Sans doute dira-t-on que, pour qu'un sur-moi vienne mobiliser les énergies de l'âme, il faut que préexiste un moi premier, inventeur de ce sur-moi, et bientôt victime de celui-ci. ... Mais que pouvons-nous dire de cet être premier? Qu'il n'a de cesse qu'il n'ait disparu pour faire place à un être plus grand et plus glorieux. ... En effet, ... le succès de la création de soi par soi se marque par l'oubli absolu de la personnalité première, son abolition totale, sa condamnation à mort." Pp. 70-71.

Doubrovsky declares in a similar vein that

"Le critique, contrairement au biographe ou à l'historien, n'a à s'inquiéter que de la pensée, de l'oeuvre dans sa

This attitude has tended to perpetuate the widely held belief that Corneille's works are of little contemporary interest, since they were written principally to exalt conscious values now more or less outmoded: maîtrise, vertu, gloire.²³ That the author of so varied a theater worked from a more extensive and universal psychological framework will be demonstrated here.

B. Further Observations

Pyramus and Thisbe flee from the walled garden in defiance

signification, non dans sa genèse. Que le héros cornélien ait été pour Corneille, comme Camille pour Horace, un 'alter ego' démoniaque, et l'acte d'écrire une opération d'exorcisme; ou que ces créatures d'orgueil aient été l'incarnation de ses aspirations les plus profondes, et l'écriture le seul moyen, pour ce bourgeois, d'atteindre, à défaut de royauté réelle, la royauté littéraire; en un mot, que le théâtre ait été, en ce qui concerne Maître Pierre Corneille, activité d'évasion, de compensation, de sublimation ou de combat, nous ne le saurons jamais--et, de notre point de vue, peu importe. Il s'agit de faire l'analyse de l'oeuvre, non la psychanalyse de l'auteur." (Serge Doubrovsky, Corneille et la dialectique du héros, Bibliothèque des Idées, NRF (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), p. 226.

The critical approach of Charles Mauron departs happily from this viewpoint. See "Le menteur et le héros dans le théâtre de Corneille," in Des Métaphores obsédantes au mythe personnel; introduction à la psychocritique (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1964), pp. 243-269. The present study may be considered, in part, as an elaboration of Mauron's remarks on Corneille, despite certain points of disagreement.

23

"Today's undergraduates," writes a professor in Foreign Language Annals, "recoil from Corneille's aristocratic supermen and their notions of sacrifice, renunciation, and heroism." Edithe J. Potter, "Revitalization of Foreign Language Programs in Higher Education," Foreign Language Annals, V (1971), 208.

of their parents and society. It seems that all should be well after they have gotten away from the city and are safely ensconced, so to speak, in the bosom of nature, but then unexpected events occur which cause a tragic ending. We have seen that one reason for which they die is to escape the threat of the lioness; but there are others.

Most obviously, each lover dies in order to be with the other. Does not Thisbe say: "Death shall not keep you from me"? Apparently we are to imagine them joined in an unspecified beyond, or in some ever-present transcendent symbol of human desire. But why then, if they have triumphed, does the story end in such a heavy atmosphere of sadness? And if they are not victorious, by what have they been defeated--by an avoidable coincidence (the late arrival of Pyramus, the apparition of the beast), or by some agent in league with inescapable Fate?

The brevity of the original myth makes any interpretation difficult, but fortunately, later variations are more explicit. Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, in particular, contains some fairly clear indications of its meaning. The play stresses that the lovers' death was fated; here we learn that their tragedy came about because of a flaw in the world and in their image of themselves;²⁴ here not only the heroine, but also the hero,

24

The existence of these two flaws is pointed out by J. A. Bryant in his introduction to William Shakespeare, The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, ed. J. A. Bryant, Jr. The Signet Classic Shakespeare. General Editor: Sylvan Barnet (New York: New American Library, 1964), p. xxxiii.

actually sees the "lifeless" body of the beloved; and it is in a tomb that he will "shake the yoke of inauspicious stars / From this world-wearied flesh":²⁵

Eyes, look your last!
Arms, take your last embrace! And, lips, O you
The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss
A dateless bargain to engrossing death!
Come, bitter conduct; come, unsavory guide!
Thou desperate pilot, now at once run on
The dashing rocks thy seasick weary bark!²⁶

In both stories the girl is not really dead: she only seems dead. Now, returning to the question of Fate, we must ask ourselves what event would inevitably have occurred if Pyramus and Thisbe, sailing away together on the ship, had fully consummated their desire for physical union. And the only possible answer, the one thing of which we can be sure, is that their passion would have greatly diminished, and perhaps even completely disappeared. Thus the meaning of Thisbe's false death becomes apparent: it represents the death of passion, or rather, the fear of that death.

After the hero dies the heroine is submitted to a trial like his: she can either die or make the mature decision to "forget" Pyramus or Romeo (that is, forget her passion), continue living, and eventually, as such a course would imply, marry some other suitor. By ending her own life she signifies her desire to rejoin the hero forever in the maternal-protective milieu from

²⁵ Ibid., p. 152 (V, iii).

²⁶ Ibid.

which they had both escaped but to which they now return, having realized the ultimate consequence of their flight. They decide to be eternally separate, but passionate, rather than joined in a union of mediocre intensity. That life gives man only these two unhappy alternatives is the flaw in the world. It is a flaw in nature, not in society, hence the Friar's words, "A greater power than we can contradict / Hath thwarted our intents"²⁷ seem profoundly true, and the mulberry, which I take to be a symbol of the human race because it actually feeds on the blood of Pyramus,²⁸ is a sad tree indeed.

The Pyramus story, then, describes the perennial failure of man's search for a love at the same time passionate, permanent, and satisfied. It is perhaps the most perfect literary expression of an archetype from which originate all other expressions of romantic love. I would define this last as the passionately intense desire, on the part of an individual, to establish a permanent, fuller, and more beautiful self-identity, by means of a sexual union transporting him beyond himself. This desire involves a figurative return to the mother-child relationship insofar as it is characterized, when love is

²⁷

Ibid., p. 153 (V, iii).

²⁸

"The fruit of the tree, from that red spray, turned crimson,
And the roots, soaked with the blood, dyed all the berries
The same dark hue."

--Ovid, Metamorphoses, p. 85.

requited, by naive trust, candor, mutual dependence, physical intimacy, tender instinctive regard, and an inclination to consider one's blissful union with the beloved as the only significant reality.²⁹

The Pyramus story is the myth; romantic love in general, the reality. The love which the myth describes--archetypal-
idyllic love--is simple; innocent; all-absorbing; enduring; and, paradoxically, doomed. Romantic love tends to "debase" this complex through addition and subtraction. Often romantic love is not all-absorbing. It may be temporary--a shipboard romance, for example. It may be complicated rather than simple, depending partly on the lovers' feelings about such things as war, nature, society, or the meaning of life. It may, and often does, deny that the lovers' passion must radically diminish after they have been united; thus they may seek a comic ending to their courtship, a coming-together not in death (total regression), but in life.

This optimistic attitude is embodied in the day side of Corneille's personality, which strives to suppress the night in three principal ways: by removing the obstacles between the lovers, by demonstrating that the hero is mature, and by bringing him together with the heroine in a permanently intense

idyllic relationship.³⁰

Most formidable among the obstacles which he must overcome is the lion-woman. As we shall see, this figure is often treated by the hero as a kind of demon who has taken possession of the idyllic mistress and must be driven out. Acting through Chimène, Émilie, Pauline, and others, the lion-woman attempts to unman the hero, enslave him, and cause him to rebel against the heroic Good Parent. The very violence of the lover's desire to escape from her implies a contrary temptation not to escape.

Another obstacle is the Evil Parent or Parents. These are generally protective but unheroic, Machiavellian figures who obstruct the lover's union with their daughter because they consider him unworthy. The foiling of Evil Parents is a standard comic theme going back to the Renaissance (Odet de Turnèbe, Les Contens) and antiquity (Terence, Andria). Everyone remembers Monsieur Jourdain's "Touchez là, Monsieur: ma fille n'est pas à vous"³¹ and Argan's "Je ne suis point bon, et je suis méchant quant je veux."³²

30

When I say that he strives principally to do these things, I do not mean that he always strives to do them or that when he does strive he always succeeds, but that his work seems generally, though imperfectly, directed toward these goals.

31

Molière, Oeuvres complètes, ed. Robert Jouanny. 2 vols. Classiques Garnier (Paris: Éditions Garnier Frères, 1962), II, 484 (Le Bourgeois gentilhomme III, xii).

32

Ibid., p. 778 (Le Malade imaginaire, I, v).

It may be that Corneille's experience with Catherine Hue taught him that the Evil Parent is a figure sufficiently diabolical to serve as the antagonist in a tragedy. Like the lion-woman, this adversary is usually overcome, but Rodrigue is the only hero (aside from Médée) who actually puts an Evil Parent to death, Corneille perhaps being carried away in this one instance by the idea of removing the Count and elevating Rodrigue to the position of the Good Father, don Diègue, with a single stroke. Ordinarily the Evil Parent is gotten rid of by some third party or in some manner other than execution (See pp. 167-168, below.). Even when, through the use of violence, he succeeds in preventing the lovers' terrestrial union, they come together in death (Polyeucte, Théodore, Suréna).

The Evil Parent supports the Rival. In Corneille's earliest works--Mélite, Clitandre, La Veuve--the Rival is a beleaguered rebel against the norm, while in La Place Royale and other later plays (especially Polyeucte) it is the hero himself who at least to some degree assumes this role, taking on attributes which approach the Promethean.

The fourth and last main obstacle to the lovers' happiness is society.

When idyllic love ends unhappily, as it does, for example, in the stories of Tristan and Isolde, Calisto and Melibea, and Romeo and Juliet, most readers or spectators tell themselves, I suppose, that the fault lies with Fate, or indifferent

Nature, or with some Satanic principle that permeates everything. "The earth," one commentator remarks, ". . . has no place for a passion like Romeo and Juliet's."³³ But another group of observers, composed of optimists, dreamers, and primitivists, will argue that the lovers' failure is due chiefly to social conditions, and that it could have been avoided. Corneille, one of the champions of this second group, takes the classical heroic-idyllic point of view, according to which it is possible for the lovers to achieve all they desire by moving to a world where virtue receives its proper reward. By virtue is meant strength of arm and will, courage, energy, obedience, honesty, and candor.

A perfect hero in a perfect heroic-idyllic society is bound to acquire great wealth, a high social rank, a beautiful spouse, and a glorious reputation. But in an imperfect society it is often the oil, not the cream, that rises to the top. The "oil" in Corneille's universe is Evil Parents like King Créon, Governor Félix, and Queen Cléopâtre; and Rivals like Lord Adraste and Prince Pacorus (Suréna)--cowards and cutthroats in high places whose crimes may be regarded as magnifications of the iniquities of the everyday bourgeois world that Corneille knew firsthand. Thus I would suggest that his particular approach to history betrays the rancor of an underling who

blames neither his stars nor himself for his condition, but powerful "tyrants" who mistreated him in his innocent youth, when he still believed that virtue would receive an earthly reward. And surely the reward of which he felt cheated was Catherine.

Besides this principal objection to society--that it places power in the hands of monsters who separate the idyllic lovers--Corneille conceived a special dislike for amour-service or social-idyllic love. This dislike crystallizes in La Place Royale, when Alidor rejects Angélique because he cannot tolerate the thought that she has enslaved him.

Amour-service regards the lover's enthrallment as a desirable sign of the beloved's divinity, its ultimate goal being the complete absorption of his will into hers:

Savez-vous bien que c'est qu'aimer? C'est mourir en soy pour revivre en autrui, c'est ne se point aimer que d'autant que l'on est agréable à la chose aimée, et bref c'est une volonté de se transformer, s'il se peut, entièrement en elle.³⁴

In order to escape from Angélique, Alidor very impolitely declares her ugly and therefore powerless,³⁵ and after a second

34

Honoré d'Urfé, L'Astrée (Extraits), ed. Maurice Magendie. Classiques Larousse (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1935), p. 23.

35

In the famous scene where he holds a mirror to her face. See Pierre Corneille, Théâtre complet, ed. Maurice Rat, 3 vols. Classiques Garnier (Paris: Éditions Garnier Frères, n.d.), I, pp. 397-400 (II, ii). Most references in the present study will be to this edition.

rejection she wonders:

que peux-tu faire au monde,
Si ton ardeur sincère et ton peu de beauté
N'ont pu te garantir d'une déloyauté?³⁶

And so the hero wins out, or thinks he wins, in the first of a long series of struggles during which he must steel himself against his own emotions in order to overcome those forces whose victory would render him unworthy of possession of the beloved in a heroic-idyllic context.

The Janus-faced Cornelian hero succeeds where Pyramus failed because he is both doux and terrible, idyllic and heroic, nocturnal and solar. His manly solar side not only earns him the right to claim the beloved as a just social reward, but also forestalls those suicidal tendencies fostered by the nocturnal side, encouraging him to seek union in life rather than death. He must be on guard against union in death in both the figurative sense (absorption of his will by that of the beloved) and the literal sense (absorption of both lovers, like Pyramus and Thisbe, into the idyllic archetype or childhood past).

Curiously, it is a comic figure, Matamore, who foreshadows the two-sided hero and who, in his ravings, reveals the secret of his power. A Poussinesque chiaroscuro alternates in his soul. In anger he is darkly terrible, like Jove's thunderclouds; in love one imagines him as proto-Sun-king, radiant and matinal.

36

Ibid., p. 428 (IV, viii).

"O dieux!" exclaims Clindor, "en un moment que tout vous est possible!"

Je vous vois aussi beau que vous étiez terrible
Et ne crois point d'objet si ferme, en sa rigueur,
Qu'il puisse constamment vous refuser son coeur.³⁷

Matamore reassures his "awed" domestic, explaining that he has acquired a special kind of self-mastery:

Je te le dis encor, ne sois plus en alarme:
Quand je veux, j'épouvante; et quand je veux, je charme;
Et, selon qu'il me plaît, je remplis tour à tour
Les hommes de terreur, et les femmes d'amour.³⁸

He goes on to say that he developed this extraordinary self-control as a protection against the hordes of passionately enflamed women who used to assail him--among them the world's most desirable:

Mille mouraient par jour à force de m'aimer:
J'avais des rendez-vous de toutes les princesses;
Les reines, à l'envie, m'enviaient mes caresses;
Celle d'Éthiopie, et celle du Japon,
Dans leurs soupirs d'amour ne mêlaient que mon nom.³⁹

We may interpret the exotic places in this symbolic confession to represent the world of childhood, and those princesses lointaines as memories of the idyllic mistress which used to besiege the hero.

Matamore continues:

De passion pour moi deux sultanes troublèrent;
Deux autres, pour me voir, du sérail s'échappèrent:
J'en fus mal quelque temps avec le Grand Seigneur.⁴⁰

³⁷ Ibid., p. 513 (II, ii).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 513-514 (II, ii).

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 514 (II, ii).

Feigned nonchalance. The harem symbolizes the Evil Parent's house, while the Grand Seigneur is the Good Parent and also (as Polyeucte will indicate) God, who frowns upon any diversion of the hero from his Grand Design:

Ces pratiques nuisaient à mes desseins de guerre,
Et pouvaient m'empêcher de conquérir la terre.⁴¹

And so, finally, Matamore extorted from Jupiter the power of maîtrise, "Et depuis, je suis beau quand je veux seulement."⁴²

It is not, however, only the amorous side of the hero's double nature which he must hold in check, but also the côté terrible, for self-mastery is either complete or non-existent. Thus in Attila, for example, anger and subjugation to the senses are virtually synonymous. The very passion with which the angry man lashes out at his enemies is a sign of his weakness. It is perhaps for this reason, and not just because he is a coward, that the basically dispassionate pretender Matamore seems to prefer to reign with the beau nonchaloir of a divine monarch. His statements that

Je couche d'un revers mille ennemis à bas.
D'un souffle je réduis leurs projets in fumée.⁴³

remind us of the following lines which Corneille wrote to Louis XIV:

Les rois savent agir tout autrement que nous:
Souvent sans être en vue ils frappent de grands coups.
Dieu lui-même, ce Dieu dont ils sont les images,
De son trône en repos fait partir les orages
Et jouit dans le ciel de sa gloire et de soi,

⁴¹

Ibid.

⁴²

Ibid.

⁴³

Ibid., p. 513 (II, ii).

Tandis que sur la terre il remplit tout d'effroi.⁴⁴

The hero must likewise be able to put on a face of effortless self-mastery and confident control over circumstance--the "male assurance"⁴⁵ of Horace--if he is to possess that gloire which, along with the côté doux that Horace lacks, justifies his union with the beloved.⁴⁶

Let us consider now another subject related to both the establishment and perpetuation of the heroic-idyllic relationship: amour-estime.

Amour-estime is not necessarily an outgrowth of long acquaintance with another person. Corneille observes that "On s'estime, on se cherche, on s'aime en un moment,"⁴⁷ and that

De certains mouvements que le ciel nous inspire
Nous font aux yeux d'autrui souvent choisir le pire.
C'est lui qui d'un regard fait naître en notre coeur,
L'estime ou le mépris, l'amour ou la rigueur.⁴⁸

⁴⁴

Herland, Corneille, p. 136 (Quoted from Corneille's poem to the "ennemis de mon Roi, Flandre, Espagne, Allemagne.").

⁴⁵

Corneille, Théâtre Complet, I, 672 (II, ii).

⁴⁶

The question of how Corneille's lovers succeed or fail as nonchalant demigods whose wish determines the course of destiny does not lie beyond the scope of the present study but is mentioned only briefly for reasons of economy. A fuller discussion of the question would be of interest, especially in an analysis of the works composed after Polyeucte, when the power of the lover's wish tends to deteriorate.

⁴⁷

Ibid., II, 285 (La Suite du Menteur, IV, i).

⁴⁸

Ibid., I, 529 (L'Illusion comique, III, i--variant, 1639-1657).

The poet seems to believe in the magnet-theory exposed in L'Astrée,⁴⁹ according to which le ciel predestines lovers for each other before their birth:

Il attache ici-bas avec des sympathies
Les âmes que son ordre a là-haut assorties.⁵⁰

Physical beauty is of course essential, but the hero cannot truly love either his mistress or himself unless he perceives traits in their characters which are worthy of love. The love of character traits is esteem, and it can be something even more important in the Cornelian system: admiration.

What the hero esteems in himself is that heroic virtue whose elements I enumerated earlier, and what he admires in himself is his côté terrible, that gift which causes grim Fate to come to his aid in adversity, the way that Rodrigue's friends joined him when (with a "mâle assurance") he went down to the sea to do battle with the Moors:

Sous moi donc cette troupe s'avance,
Et porte sur le front une mâle assurance.
Nous partîmes cinq cents; mais, par un prompt renfort,
Nous nous vîmes trois mille en arrivant au port.⁵¹

What the hero esteems in the beloved are those same

⁴⁹

See Albert Schinz and Helen Maxwell King (eds.), Seventeenth Century French Readings (2nd. ed. rev.; New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1931), pp. 32-35.

⁵⁰

Corneille, Théâtre complet, I, 529 (L'Illusion comique, III, i).

⁵¹

Ibid., p. 635 (IV, iii).

elements of heroic virtue (minus physical strength), and what he admires is her complete devotion to him. She, meanwhile, admires his devotion to some cause transcending their love, such as the honor of his family, country, or God. Each of the lovers is, in relation to the other, a distinct entity with his own impenetrable mystery--that which the other admires--, and this distinctness is essential to the preservation of their passion. If Pauline stops loving Sévère and starts loving Polyeucte, it is because she completely understands the psychology of the former, whereas the latter has become an unknown. In an ideal situation the heroic-idyllic lovers can never be fully united because neither one can ever fully know the other. Thus their passion endures.

The discussion which follows studies Corneille's progress toward the discovery of these principles, along with his treatment of the various figures in the idyllic complex.

I. Mélite

Primarily, Mélite depicts three kinds of love relationships: that of Éraсте and Mélite (the lover subjugated to the mistress), that of Chloris and Philandre (the mistress duped by the lover), and that of Mélite and Tircis (a relationship of parity). In some respects and to a degree which varies during the course of the play, Mélite and Tircis may be considered as archetypal idyllic lovers. They are both innocents, having disdained love until Éraсте introduced them to each other. Their relationship begins with love at first sight. Tircis is brave, impetuous, faithful (except in one respect), a good swordsman, and a poet. The dazzling Mélite, "Vénus marine, entourée des Grâces et de l'Amour,"¹ has a strong, well-balanced personality. Her honesty and good judgement shine forth in the following exchange, in which Tircis persuades her to confess her love despite her mother's preference for the wealthy Éraсте, whom for two years Mélite has been trying to discourage:

¹ Octave Nadal, Le Sentiment de l'amour dans l'oeuvre de Pierre Corneille, Bibliothèque des Idées (4th ed.; Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1948), p. 102.

Tircis

Mais afin qu'il reçut un entier déplaisir,
 Il faudrait que nos coeurs n'eussent plus qu'un seul désir,
 Et quitter ces discours de volontés sujettes,
 Qui ne sont point de mise en l'état où vous êtes.
 Vous-même consultez un moment vos appas;
 Songez à leurs effets, et ne présumez pas
 Avoir sur tous les coeurs un pouvoir si suprême,
 Sans qu'il vous soit permis d'en user sur vous-même.
 Un si digne sujet ne reçoit point le loi,
 De règle, ni d'avis, d'un autre que de soi.²

Is Tircis on the verge of proposing an elopement? Méliste
 replies:

Ton mérite, plus fort que ta raison flatteuse,
 Me rend, je le confesse, un peu moins scrupuleuse.
 Je dois tout à ma mère, et pour tout autre amant
 Je voudrais tout remettre à son commandement;
 Mais attendre pour toi l'effet de sa puissance,
 Sans to rien témoigner que par obéissance,
 Tircis, ce serait trop; tes rares qualités
 Dispensent mon devoir de ces formalités.³

Here Corneille tells us that Méliste is neither a rebellious daughter, like Médée, obsessed with the idea of sensual union, nor one of those frigid coquettes who, like Phylis in La Place Royale, encourage a swarm of suitors, quite content with the knowledge that they will eventually marry whomever their parents select; Méliste seems to have been born under the sign of the Scales.

In his madness and in the Mannerist tradition, Éraste sees this perfect flesh-and-blood woman as a destructive Venus, a

²Corneille, Théâtre complet, I, pp. 38-39 (II, viii).

³Ibid., p. 39.

monstrous force of evil and ensnaring Nature. Tircis speaks for him when he tells Mélite, who disdains love, that

Si le coeur ne dédit ce que la bouche exprime,
Et ne fait de l'amour une plus haute estime,
Je plains les malheureux à qui vous en donnez,
Comme à d'étranges maux par leur sort destinés.⁴

Venus as agent of destiny. (Mélite and Tircis have just met).

Mélite replies:

Ce reproche sans cause avec raison m'étonne:
Je ne reçois d'amour et n'en donne à personne.
Les moyens de donner ce que je n'eus jamais.⁵

This last remark is not just a pointe. Mélite insists that Éraste cannot love her, because his heart cannot have been enflamed by her love for him, which is nonexistent. According to Cornelian psychology, it is normally impossible to love someone who doesn't love you.⁶ But Éraste retorts:

Ils vous sont trop aisés; et par vous désormais
La nature pour moi montre son injustice
A pervertir son cours pour me faire un supplice.⁷

Of course, Éraste feels all the more wronged when Tircis betrays him, an act which, the author's numerous excuses notwithstanding, was just as serious a breach in that age of exemplary friendships as it would be today. Moreover, the would-be lover,

⁴
Ibid., p. 16 (I, ii).

⁵
Ibid.

⁶
"Un visage jamais ne m'aurait arrêté
S'il fallait que l'amour fût tout de mon côté."
--Ibid., p. 30 (II, iv).

⁷
Ibid., p. 16 (I, ii).

whom more than one experience has inclined to expect the worst from others, regards the union of Tircis and Mélite as nothing more than a vulgar escapade, the predictable infatuation of "cette volage"⁸ for "un suborneur."⁹ Therefore he writes the false letters and has his revenge which, incidentally, tends to further disculpate Tircis.

The news of the lovers' death shocks Érase into sanity long enough for him to realize that he has "mis dans le tombeau / Ce que le monde avait de parfait et de beau,"¹⁰ and this realization makes him madder than ever. His hallucinations plunge him into the Underworld, that is, into the childhood past where the lovers' souls are happily joined: "C'est là-bas que leurs âmes / Aux champs Élysiens éternisent leurs flammes."¹¹ But for him the Infernal Regions become a place of judgement and expiation. He encounters Minos, the Furies, Pluto's "officiers."¹² At last, thinking that he has found the heroine, he is on the point of killing himself at her feet when the mysterious old Nurse, who had assumed Mélite's form in Érase's imagination, restores him to sanity and this world.

Meanwhile, the lovers find each other alive and their union all the more closely cemented. Each one has "died" for

⁸Ibid., p. 25 (II, i).

⁹Ibid., p. 27 (II, ii).

¹⁰Ibid., p. 60 (IV, vi).

¹¹Ibid., p. 61 (IV, vi).

¹²Ibid., p. 64 (IV, ix).

the other, while Mélite's great distress has softened "la rigueur d'une mère obstinée."¹³ Éraste pardoned, Tircis and Mélite plead with Chloris to accept him as a replacement for her lost finacé Philandre. Chloris at first protests that "Je n'ai reçu de lui ni devoir, ni services."¹⁴ In other words, she requires a conventional simulation of the idyllic environment: let Éraste prove his seriousness in the usual way, and she will consider his offer. But Corneille would like to end the play shortly and on a more positively optimistic note, and so Chloris, further pressed, decides to refer the question to Mélite's mother, who, being a long-time partisan of the highborn suitor, will doubtless have nothing very bad to say about him, and whose authority will lend an air of permanence to their new engagement.

Chloris' caution may be partly due to a distrust awakened in her by Philandre's recent betrayal. Like many conventional lovers, Philandre behaves as though he were trading in a pawnshop. That is, he habitually compares people to each other as though the value of any single one were relative rather than intrinsic, a non-idyllic attitude and one especially distasteful to a man of Corneille's small social charm. Thus the best Philandre can wish Chloris is "Qu'elle puisse gagner au change autant que moi."¹⁵ He abandons her not because something she has

¹³

Ibid., p. 72 (V, iv).

¹⁴

Ibid., p. 78 (V, vi).

¹⁵

Ibid., p. 40 (III, i).

done has changed his feelings toward her, which, judging from other plays,¹⁶ would be the only acceptable reason, but because the richer and more beautiful Mélite has suddenly become attainable. And he would not hesitate to forsake the latter under similar conditions:

Mélite a des attraits qui savent tout dompter:
Mais elle ne pourrait qu'à peine t'arrêter:
Il te faut un sujet qui la passe ou l'égale.¹⁷

Ironically, Philandre himself does not compare favorably to other human specimens. Morally, intellectually, and physically he is rather weak: tout d'une pièce, insipid in love and ineffectual in anger, but still attractive enough to enamor so discerning a young lady as Chloris. His most ridiculous trait is his presumption, his willingness to believe that a near-goddess would solicit his "criminal" attentions with passionate love letters.

Philandre and Éraste both see Mélite as a goddess rather than a woman, and it is the goddess in her, not the woman, that they both love. Éraste declares "Que le souverain bien n'est qu'à la posséder,"¹⁸ that

Le jour qu'elle naquit, Vénus, bien qu'immortelle,
Pensa mourir de honte en la voyant si belle,¹⁹

16

In La Galerie du Palais, II, vi, 511-516 (ibid., p. 262) and La Place Royale, I, iv, 186-198 (ibid., p. 393), honorable characters who wish to leave their lovers regret that no act of the latter furnishes them a pretext.

17

Ibid., p. 70 (V, iii).

18

Ibid., p. 13 (I, i).

19

Ibid.

And Philandre

... que Mélite, ainsi qu'une déesse,
Est de tous nos désirs souveraine maîtresse,
Dispose de nos coeurs, force nos volontés,
Et que par son pouvoir nos destine surmontés
Se tiennent trop heureux de prendre l'ordre d'elle.²⁰

The misfortunes of these worshippers of the unattainable teach us that the wise lover is he who remains within the bounds of social convention.

This is the lesson brought home at the end of the play, after each of the lovers has been joined with the moitié most suited to his nature: Tircis with Mélite, quasi-archetypal idyllic lovers; Chloris with Éraste, social-idyllic lovers. Philandre not having been provided for, Tircis recommends that the Nurse go and offer him her withered charms. At first this seems like nothing more than a cruel joke designed to put the Nurse and Philandre, both of whom opposed the union of Tircis and Mélite, in their places: Philandre thought himself worthy of Mélite, but all he deserves is this ugly, feeble old woman. More importantly, however, it rounds out the Venus-theme introduced at the beginning of the play: although the Nurse was once beautiful and powerful and worshipped like a goddess, see what she is today. All earthly "Venuses"--even Mélite--are in reality mere women such as this. Let the Philandres of the world pursue them as goddesses, worshipping their ever-receding, ever-beckoning vénusté; Tircis and Éraste will be content with

²⁰Ibid., p. 40 (III, i).

possessable flesh and blood.

But Corneille, apparently more concerned with expressing the truth than arriving at a neat conclusion, does not let the matter rest here. Unexpectedly the Nurse, a fallen idol resonant with awesome symbols--Venue, Proserpine, Evil Mother, Time and Death--utters a troubling prophesy:

Allez, quelle que soit l'ardeur qui vous emporte,
On ne se moque point des femmes de ma sorte;
Et je ferai bien voir à vos feux empressés
Que vous n'en êtes pas encor où vous pensez.²¹

Consternated, the spectator reassesses the union of Tircis and Mélite: just how solid is it? Does it succeed in replacing the transitory archetypal idyll with a durable variation? To what degree is it spiritual, eternal, and to what degree based on the perishable flesh?

The signs are not good. Although it is true that Mélite attributes her "death" and "resurrection" to her soul's impulse to rejoin Tircis,²² and although she believes that God has destined them for each other,²³ the "mélancholie,"²⁴ "rage,"²⁵ and "excès de douleur"²⁶ that cause Tircis to plan suicide after

²¹Ibid., p. 79 (V, vi). ²²Ibid., p. 72 (V, iv).

²³"Voyez comme le ciel a de secrets ressorts
Pour se faire obéir malgré nos vains efforts."
--Ibid., p. 76 (V, vi).

²⁴Ibid., p. 48 (III, iv). ²⁵Ibid., p. 47 (III, iii).

²⁶Ibid.

her supposed betrayal reveal nothing more than keen resentment and the violence of great desire suddenly frustrated (the obstacle-phenomenon). To be sure, this desire is more than physical. Tircis hopes for a permanent union ("Fassent les puissants dieux que ... / Nos ans puissent couler avec plus de douceur!"²⁷) and delights in the possession "D'une maîtresse / ... honnête, ... et dont l'esprit charmant / De son seul entretien peut ravir un amant."²⁸ And he is familiar with the Platonic idea that "il bascio si po più presto dir congiungimento d'anima che di corpo"²⁹:

Il faut un aliment plus solide à nos flammes
Par où nous unissions nos bouches et nos âmes.³⁰

But these few brief allusions to spirituality and permanence seem far outweighed by the very force of Méliete's sensual appeal, by the Nurse's demonstration that love passes with beauty, and by Tircis' own argument

Que bien qu'une beauté mérite qu'on l'adore,
Pour en perdre le goût, on n'a qu'à l'épouser.
Un bien qui nous est dû se fait si peu priser,
Qu'une femme, fût-elle entre toutes choisie,

²⁷

Ibid., p. 78 (V, vi).

²⁸

Ibid., p. 41 (III, ii).

²⁹

Baldesar Castiglione, Il Cortegiano, Classici Italiani, Novissima Biblioteka Diretta da Ferdinando Martini, Serie 3, Vol. LIII (Milan: Istituto Editoriale, n.d.), p. 361.

³⁰

Méliete, pièce comique. Texte de la première édition (1633), eds. Mario Roques and Marion Lièvre, Textes Littéraires Français, vv. 1803-1804 (Lille: Giard, 1950), (V, vi).

On en voit en six mois passer la fantaisie.³¹

Thus, while applauding Éraсте's escape from Venus, an idea, we are forced to conclude that, for the lack of an idea, a principle upon which to reconstruct the idyllic environment or sense of oneness, the story of Tircis and Mélite may well lead to a sequel like that of Le Barbier de Séville.

This lack of close identification between Tircis and Mélite is due to the fact that Tircis is not a real character experienced emotionally but a kind of artificial creation with whom Corneille is unable strongly to sympathize. And this is because the young author, in his timidity and lack of self-knowledge, fails to address himself in a direct fashion to the central problem besetting him, which is that of establishing a relationship of parity with a woman felt to be vastly superior to him and terribly imposing. Instead of having his hero, Tircis, deal with this problem, he relegates it to the Rival, Éraсте, who, because he is not the hero, must fail so that the play can have a happy ending. Éraсте is purged of his desire to possess the goddess, and Philandre, the coureur who may spend the rest of his life pursuing her avatars, is dismissed with ridicule. Meanwhile the author attempts to play the role, in Tircis, of the "normal" lover, in hopes that the problem will go away. He will not attain maturity as an artist

31

Corneille, Théâtre complet, I, 13 (I, i).

until, after making the vain boast in La Place Royale that "Je cesse d'espérer et commence de vivre"³² he discovers, in L'Illusion comique, a way to continue to hope and to live simultaneously. This discovery will occur with the realization that it is possible for a man and a woman to be, like Pyramus and Thisbe, both equal and superior to each other, that is, equal in worth but unequal in the nature of what makes them worthy.³³

32

Ibid., p. 437 (V, viii).

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Pyramus is superior to Thisbe in strength of arm, Thisbe probably superior to him in cleverness, since she preceded him to the rendez-vous and presumably could have dominated him as Semiramis dominated Ninus.

II. Clitandre

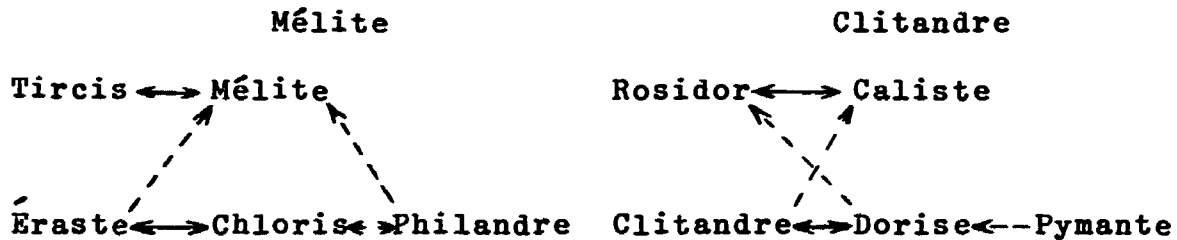
Corneille's first six plays, all comedies, exhibit schematic similarities. As he explained in his Discours du poème dramatique, "j'ai ... établi deux amants en bonne intelligence; je les ai brouillés ensemble par quelque fourbe, et les ai réunis par l'éclaircissement de cette même fourbe qui les séparait."¹ The first three plays, Mélite, Clitandre, and La Veuve, resemble one another contextually and structurally more than they resemble the next three, La Galerie du Palais, La Suivante, and La Place Royale, which also form a block. Each of the first three presents a character who seems to be a villain or at least the villain's unwitting helper but who turns out to be the hero, another character who is the real villain, and a pair of lovers.

The false villain, real hero of the second play is Clitandre, whose initial situation and final disposition resemble those of Éraсте: he loves Caliste, who loves and is loved by Rosidor; he will marry Dorise, who has had a disagreeable experience with Pymante, the real villain. Pymante is jealous

¹

Pierre Corneille, Oeuvres, ed. C. Marty-Laveaux (12 vols.), Les Grands Écrivains de la France (Paris: Hachette, 1862-1868), I, 30.

of Rosidor, just as Philandre was jealous of Tircis, but for a slightly different kind of reason: he loves Dorise, and Dorise to no avail loves Rosidor. The two plays may thus be diagrammed similarly:



Pymante sends a cartel to Rosidor in Clitandre's handwriting. They are to meet near a cave in the forest, where, with the help of two of Clitandre's domestics whom he has bribed, Pymante plans to murder his rival, who is also the rival of Clitandre. From this we may anticipate that Pymante will appear as an agent of the latter, someone who carries out his unconscious desires, just as Philandre was a kind of degenerate, unrestrained Éraste. A closer study of the text and brief interpretation of its symbols verifies this supposition.

The most prominent symbol in the play is the forest, which stands for the world of unconscious desires or illicit passions unleashed.² When Rosidor tells Lysarque, his squire, that he is going for a walk in the woods, Lysarque immediately assumes that his master has an amorous rendez-vous there, and with someone

²

Cirlot, Dictionary of Symbols, p. 107.

other than the person he is supposed to love:

L'heure et le lieu suspects font assez deviner
Qu'en même temps que vous s'échappe quelque dame.
Vous m'entendez assez.³

Believing the same, Caliste falls easy prey to Dorise, who wants to lure her into the forest to kill her. The two women wander through the wood, Caliste hoping to surprise Rosidor and his mistress, until they come to the place where Dorise has hidden the sword with which she intends to slay her rival. Just as she is raising the weapon, however, Rosidor erupts onto the stage, hard-pressed by his assailants. He runs one of them through, accidentally shatters his blade, snatches Dorise's sword away from her, and with it kills another of Clitandre's servants. The only remaining attacker, Pymante, flees. While this is going on Dorise also escapes and Caliste, overcome by the thought of her lover's peril, swoons.

There follows a passage somewhat reminiscent of the death-scene in the Pyramus story. Recognizing Caliste and thinking that she has been murdered, Rosidor attempts suicide. But his wounds have so weakened him that he is unable to get a sufficiently firm grip on his sword, which is slippery with blood. Caliste, however, begins to revive, and Rosidor, perceiving that "Les roses de son teint n'ont plus tant de paleur,"⁴ rejoices

³
Corneille, Théâtre complet, I, 92 (I, i).

⁴
Ibid., p. 101 (I, ix).

in love's triumph over the unjust gods:

Voyez, dieux inhumains, que, malgré votre envie,
L'amour lui sait donner la moitié de ma vie,
Qu'une âme désormais suffit à deux amants.⁵

Caliste is a kind of patient into whom love has transfused
soul-strength from the hero's fainting body. Upon awakening,
she cries out:

Hélas! qui me rappelle à de nouveaux tourments?
Si Rosidor n'est plus, pourquoi reviens-je au monde?⁶

And, mistaking her lover for one of the assassins, she demands
that he slay her:

Dépêche comme à lui de me percer le flanc,
Prends de lui ce qui reste.⁷

Thus we see that in Clitandre, and in Mélite, the efforts
of the persons bent on separating the lovers have only driven
them closer together, causing them to cling to each other like
Siamese twins who cannot be parted without killing them both.
This is a characteristic of the archetypal myth. But in the
Pyramus story the lovers actually die, each thinking that death
has separated them. Like Tristan and Isolde, they overcome this
threat to their relationship, preserving in their deaths their
identity as figures of archetypal union; that is, they overcome
fate, the natural development (growing up) which would lead to
their relationship's death: a possible interpretation of the
myth is that, for good or evil, idyllic love may conquer the
death which is life. Accepting literally Thisbe's statement

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

that "Death shall not keep you from me,"⁸ it is also possible to interpret the myth as an illustration that the lovers will be united in some future world like the one in which Éraсте pictures Tircis and Mélite. Corneille, who of course believes in a full-bodied afterlife, would naturally be inclined to regard the myth from such a viewpoint, and this would make it all the more seductive to him.

When a person persists in regarding himself as a character from a myth or habitually views reality through the rose-colored glasses of a myth's aura, we may say that the myth has swallowed him. The Pyramus archetype has, in a sense, devoured Corneille, although throughout his career he struggles against it. In Cli-tandre he reenacts the myth as though to purge himself of it; he exploits it at the same time that he ~~exploits~~ and rejects it.

The relationship between Caliste and Rosidor begins on a highly archetypal plane. Their love is opposed by a Queen-Evil Mother whose heart, like that of Mélite's mother, will be softened or at least changed by the lovers' "death."⁹ From its very

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Ovid, Metamorphoses, p. 86.

9

... l'excès de ma douleur sincère
A mis tant de pitié dans le coeur de ma mère,
Que, cette occasion prise comme aux cheveux,
Tircis n'a rien trouvé de contraire à ses vœux.
--Corneille, Théâtre complet, I, 76 (Mélite, V, vi).

La Reine, qui toujours fut contraire à nos feux,
Soit du piteux récit de nos hasards touchée,
Soit de trop de faveur vers un traître fâchée,

beginning their relationship transcends the purely physical, as Rosidor explains in a monologue describing its course:

Mais, hélas! mes penses, qui vous vient diviser?

 Retournez, retournez vers mon unique bien:
 Que seul dorénavant il soit votre entretien;
 Ne vous repaissez plus que de sa seule idée;
 Faites-moi voir la mienne en son âme gardée.
 Ne vous arrêtez pas à peindre sa beauté,
 C'est par où mon esprit est le moins enchanté;
 Elle servit d'amorce à mes désirs avides;
 Mais ils ont su trouver des objets plus solides:
 Mon feu qu'elle alluma fût mort au premier jour,
 S'il n'eut été nourri d'un réciproque amour.¹⁰

The first four lines of this passage express Rosidor's devotion to the idea of Caliste: like Aucassin, he wants to think only of his mistress. In the fifth line he asks his thoughts to show him his "idée" kept in her soul in much the way, it seems, that prehistoric insects are preserved in amber.¹¹ Thus his love is highly narcissistic, an idyllic trait. Caliste's physical beauty, Rosidor says, was merely the "amorce" that led him to the contemplation of "objets plus solides."

À la fin s'accommode aux volontés du Roi,
 Qui d'un heureux hymen récompense ta foi.
 --Ibid., p. 140 (Clitandre, V, iii).

¹⁰
Ibid., pp. 136-137 (V, ii).

¹¹
 The idea that the loved one's image enters through the eyes into the lover's heart (soul) and is imprinted there comes from the stilnovisti. See Maurice Valency, In Praise of Love, an Introduction to the Love-Poetry of the Renaissance (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1958), pp. 220-221, and, for another expression of this idea in Corneille, his Théâtre complet, I, 21-22 (Mélie, I, iv).

Then comes a colon, and, apparently in explanation of the identity of these "objets," he states that the continuation of his love depended upon its return, thus repeating the theme that what he loves most in her is her love for him. In L'Illusion comique this delight in the contemplation of the self reflected in the beloved will be transfigured by the hero's realization that the scope of her love, and hence the beauty of his portrait in her mind, transcends his powers of comprehension. This realization allows him to appreciate the sublimity of woman, which the heroic-idyllic lover will try to match by demonstrating that the grandeur of his will is equally limitless.

The passage continues:

Oui, Caliste, et je veux toujours qu'il m'en souviennne,
 J'aperçus aussitôt ta flamme que la mienne:
 L'amour apprit ensemble à nos coeurs à brûler;
 L'amour apprit ensemble à nos yeux à parler;
 Et sa timidité lui donna la prudence
 De n'admettre que nous en notre confidence:
 Ainsi nos passions se dérobaient à tous;
 Ainsi nos feux secrets n'avaient point de jaloux,
 Tant que leur sainte ardeur, plus forte devenue,
 Voulut un peu de mal à tant de retenue.
 Lors on nous vit quitter ces ridicules soins,
 Et nos petits larcins souffrirent les témoins.¹²

Rosidor feels an almost Proustian longing to recall affectively that supreme moment of mutual recognition (self-recognition), whose memory he preserves as a talisman: "je veux toujours qu'il m'en souviennne." Since this moment constitutes the apogee of his idyllic experience, what he subsequently describes as the

¹²

Ibid., p. 137 (V, ii).

growth of his relationship with Caliste appears as an anticlimax when considered from the idyllic standpoint.

For a while after the divine, simultaneous, and unprecedented ignition of their two hearts, the lovers, afraid of the outside world, remained in the Garden:

Et sa timidité lui donna la prudence
De n'admettre que nous dans notre confidence.

Eventually, however, they began to show their affection publicly: "Lors on nous vit quitter ces ridicules soins." This transition, caused by an increase in their "sainte ardeur," may be regarded as a kind of Fall and Expulsion. Among other evils, it introduced the possibility that some "jaloux" would try to disunite them. Dorise made just such an attempt, even persuading Caliste that Rosidor loved someone else and nearly taking her life.

The descent into society further debased their love by turning passion into a kind of game. They do not seem inordinately distressed by the fact that their union has not received official sanction, nor are they physically separated, as Ovid's lovers were by the wall: they themselves restrain their desire. And meanwhile they exploit the aphrodisiac value of their situation to the utmost:

Nous ne respirons plus qu'un heureux hyménée,
Et, ne touchant encor ses droits que du penser,
Nos feux à tout le reste osent se dispenser;
Hors ce point, tout est libre à l'ardeur qui nous presse.¹³

¹³
Ibid. (Variant).

Around 1660 the "pudibonderie des précieuses"¹⁴ demanded the deletion of these lines, which unintentionally satirize amour-service, along with extensive revision of the similarly embarrassing bedroom scene in act five.

Corneille will realize sometime before Le Cid that conventional love is too far removed from the archetype to be acceptable, while already in Clitandre he reveals a dissatisfaction with the antisocial and irreligious aspects of the archetype itself. He makes Rosidor the soutien de L'État¹⁵ so that the rebellious element in his union with Caliste, which the Queen (Evil Mother) opposes, will be outweighed by the approval of the king:

Elle a l'âme trop haute et chérit trop la gloire
Pour ne pas s'accorder aux volontés du roi,
Qui d'un heureux hymen récompense ta foi.¹⁶

At first accusing the "dieux inhumains" of injustice, Rosidor finally concludes that his adventure in the forest demonstrates "du ciel l'occulte providence,"¹⁷ by which he means God's desire that he and Caliste be united. He is at peace with the worldly and divine orders.

Pymante, the most vividly alive character in the play

¹⁴Pierre Legouis, "Le Thème du rêve dans le Clitandre de Pierre Corneille et The Dreame, de Donne," Revue d'Histoire du Théâtre, III (1951), 166.

¹⁵Corneille, Théâtre complet, I, 115 (III, i).

¹⁶Ibid., p. 142 (V, iii). ¹⁷Ibid., p. 114 (III, i).

despite the tortured rhetoric Corneille often places in his mouth, is Rosidor's opposite, an ancestor of Attila and a product of the author's beleaguered Christian superego. Like Macbeth, another regicidal Scottish "hell-hound,"¹⁸ Pymante in his fury disturbs the very balance of nature.¹⁹ The cave in which he plans to commit first murder, then rape, leads to the unconscious-as-domain-of-Satan.²⁰ Nevertheless, like Macbeth and like Phèdre, Pymante is in the last analysis no agent of hell but a naked and tortured human being who sins knowingly, though ignorant of the odds against success, and who, unregenerate, can hope neither for the Devil's aid nor God's mercy, still less for the compassion of his fellow man whose conventions he rejects:

Dedans mon désespoir, tout me fuit ou me nuit:
La terre n'entend point la douleur qui me presse;
Le ciel me persécute, et l'enfer me délaisse.²¹

18

The Complete Works of Shakespeare, ed. Hardin Craig (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1961), p. 1070 (V, vii).

19

The disturbance of nature in Clitandre (IV, ii and iii) is, however, less sinister and uncanny than the topsy-turvy wonders described in Macbeth (II, iii and iv).

20

Pymante and Géronte apparently put on their murderer's disguises in the cave; V, i has them "sortant d'une grotte, déguisés en paysans." (Corneille, Théâtre complet. I, 95.) The stage direction for Pymante when Dorante has blinded him is "prenant son épée dans la caverne où il l'avait jetée au second acte." Ibid., p. 126 (IV, i).

21

Ibid., p. 103 (II, i).

The energy source into which this machine à se détruire is tuned, Clitandre, remains in suspended animation in the royal dungeon while his alter ego runs rampant; suspected of having attacked Rosidor, he takes no direct part in any important action of the play, yet it is rightfully named after him. He duplicates the Prince the way Rosidor repeats the king²² and Theseus copied Hercules. Thus when the Prince returns to free him after rescuing Dorise from Pymante, Clitandre exclaims that

Ainsi qu'un autre Alcide, en m'arrachant des fers,
Vous m'avez aujourd'hui retiré des enfers.²³

A very appropriate reference to Hercules' rescue of Theseus from the Underworld, where he had gone to rape Proserpine.

Clitandre then accuses himself of a minor form of Pymante's most serious crime, lèse majesté, regretting his servitude to Caliste:

J'ai honte que mon coeur auprès d'elle attaché
De son ardeur pour vous ait souvent relâché,
Ait souvent pour le sien quitté votre service:
C'est par là que j'avais mérité mon supplice.²⁴

Clitandre's enthrallment to Caliste outlasted that of Éraсте to

22

The Prince asks the thundering gods:

"De Clitandre ou de moi lequel menacez-vous?
La perte m'est égale, et la même tempête
Qui l'aurait accablé tomberait sur ma tête."
--Ibid., p. 128 (IV, iii).

Similarly, the King declares "Qu'attaquer Rosidor c'est se prendre à moi-même." Ibid., p. 115 (III, i).

23

Ibid., p. 135 (V, i).

24

Ibid.

Mélite by one year;²⁵ Pymante likewise pursued Dorise foolishly and according to the conventional rules, but her coldness finally exasperated him:

... ici la raison n'est que ce que je veux
Et, ployant dessous moi, permet à mon envie
De recueillir les fruits de vous avoir servie.
Il me faut des faveurs malgré vos cruautés.²⁶

Almost seeming to recognize his kinship to Pymante, Clitandre, in his self-accusation, half alludes to the storm which arose in the forest after Dorise stabbed her attacker's eye, the inciter of his lust:

Et pour m'en faire naître un juste repentir,
Il semble que les dieux y voulaient consentir;
Mais votre heureux retour a calmé cet orage.²⁷

And he declares that henceforth no "objets"²⁸ will be able to touch his heart, be they "doux ou cruels."²⁹ More experienced, the Prince observes that

L'amour dompte aisément l'esprit le plus farouche;
C'est à ceux de notre âge un puissant ennemi.
Tu ne connais encor ses forces qu'à demi;
Ta résolution, un peu trop violente,
N'a pas bien consulté ta jeunesse bouillante.³⁰

Submission to love is a correlative of immaturity, whereas obedience to the king signifies growth. The sovereign, a symbol of the conscious mind, rewards his faithful subjects with honor,

²⁵ Ibid., p. 108 (II, iv).

²⁶ Ibid., p. 125 (IV, i).

²⁷ Ibid., p. 135 (V, i).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 135-136 (V, i).

power, and security, incidentally increasing their sexual appeal to other persons whose emotions are governed by reason.³¹ The idyllic archetype, however, promises freedom and a return to the dawn-pure universe of childhood love, a Peaceable Kingdom where submission to laws is not a matter of will but part of the natural order. Rooted in the Underworld of the buried past and uncongenial to reason, archetypal idyllic love easily becomes associated (especially in the Mannerist conscience) with the other Underworld, the satanic realm of suppressed passions ever threatening to burst forth and reduce the planet to chaos. With respect to these two contrary impulses, one leading toward mature socialization, the other longing for a childish idyll, and both possessing attractive and repellent aspects, it seems most proper to speak of a Cornelian conflict between love and duty.

Rosidor and Caliste choose duty, thus resembling Tircis and Mélite. But Clitandre goes beyond Mélite in that, introducing the royal figures as ideals and allowing evil invaders (Dorise, Pymante, Clitandre's servants) to turn the Garden into a jungle, the Cave into a Christian hell's mouth, it somewhat more strongly urges abandonment of the archetypal configuration.

31

One such person is Dorise! She scornfully tells Pymante that

C'est la raison, c'est elle à présent qui me guide
Au mépris que je fais des flammes d'un perfide.

--Ibid., p. 125 (IV, i).

The description of the development of the lovers' relationship from selfish isolation to existence in the City is in harmony with this unspoken admonition. Nevertheless, Clitandre's attitude toward both conventional marriage and idyllic love is equivocal. The play preaches maturity while illustrating, in the description just mentioned and in the lovers' dialogue which follows it, that "growth" is a kind of decadence. This central passage shows how Caliste and Rosidor were beautifully united in an Eden which in time they abandoned ("Lors on nous vit quitter ces ridicules soins"), and how, by "progressing" in the conventional way, they robbed their love of its idyllic bloom. Of course, Corneille does not consciously intend to disparage this process, but, as in Mélite, his portrayal has that effect. In vain he insists that the sensual delights which await the lovers will be more than ample recompense for their loss: we simply do not believe it. Again, as in Mélite, he makes the mistake of creating a hero, Rosidor, with whom he cannot closely identify because this character considers himself the heroine's equal, whereas it is the villain (Éraste-Pymante) who reflects the author's real feelings of inferiority, frustration, and incessant guilt.

In Mélite this relationship of inferiority was overtly established by Éraste's abject attitude toward the heroine, the "souveraine maîtress"; in Clitandre it is expressed more indirectly. That Pymante is below Dorise socially is indicated by his remark when they meet in the forest, one disguised as a villager, the other as a peasant:

Voyez comme le ciel égale nos fortunes,
 Et comme, pour les faire entre nous deux communes,
 Nous réduisant ensemble à ces déguisements,
 Il montre avoir pour nous de pareils mouvements.³²

Here the villain expresses, rather pathetically, his desire to unite with the woman who loves Rosidor, in a relationship of parity. Pymante's inferiority is further implied by the fact that, as the supposedly traitorous Clitandre's surrogate, he is the favorite of the Prince, while Rosidor, the successful suitor, is the protégé of the King. That the play really deals with a conflict between father and son becomes clear when lightning from the storm aroused by Pymante's rebellion strikes the horse of the Prince, who is hunting in the forbidden forest, dead beneath him. Apparently this dire warning from the father does not go unheeded, for in the next scene the Prince rescues Dorise and arrests Pymante.

Thus, just as in Mélite Éraсте transferred his allegiance to the camp of Tircis while Philandre and the Nurse, scapegoats, remained as the only representatives of the idyll, so in this play the Prince and Clitandre finally reconcile themselves to the marriage of Rosidor and Caliste under the auspices of the King, leaving Pymante to take the blame for their rebellious impulses. Once again Corneille has tried to reject the idyllic side of his personality by demonstrating his preference for a type of love based on more socially approved feelings, and once again he has written an unbelievable play.

32

Ibid., p. 121 (III, v).

III. La Veuve

Like his predecessor Éraŕste, Pymante, a would-be idyllic lover, indirectly attacks society by breaking the rules of conventional courtship, not to mention those of God and the king. But neither Mélite nor Clitandre can be considered as works of conscious social criticism, for both present the lovers as faultless and the antagonist as a person clearly in the wrong, whether because he is a madman (Éraŕste) or a thoroughgoing scoundrel (Pymante). But suppose Éraŕste were a better man than Tircis, or Pymante superior to Rosidor, and suppose society fostered attitudes leading to the triumph of the inferior individual over the more deserving. Would not the rejected lover then be justified in seizing the beloved by force, in committing an antisocial act in order to gain what is rightfully his? This question is approached, then adroitly sidestepped, in La Veuve.

The story of Alcidon's abduction of Clarice bears important similarities to Corneille's two preceding plays. Céŕlidan, the villain's temporary accomplice, resembles Clitandre and Éraŕste as he appears after his rehabilitation; Alcidon is like Pymante and like Éraŕste before his rehabilitation. The Philiste-Clarice couple corresponds to Rosidor-Caliste and to Tircis-Mélite. The general plan of the action in the three plays is also similar. Just as the happy outcome of Evil Éraŕste's

attempt to separate Tircis and Mélite is their reunion and Good Érase's acceptance by Chloris, and just as the end result of Pymante's attempt to assassinate Caliste's lover Rosidor is the engagement of these two and the pairing of Clitandre and Dorise, so Alcidon's intervention between Clarice and Philiste cements their relationship while bringing together Doris and Célidan. Further, as was the case with Pymante and Clitandre and with the two Érastes, Alcidon and Célidan are like the light and dark halves of a single personality.

Célidan, noble châtelain and "coeur généreux,"¹ is attached to Alcidon by the bonds that link friends, fellow-conspirators, the powerful to the weak, and the deceiver to his dupe. Alcidon, the false friend who will become the evil counselor of later plays, goes to Célidan with the story that Philiste, who had promised Alcidon the hand of sister Doris, is negotiating to marry her to a certain Florange. In order to prevent this, he proposes that he and Célidan kidnap Clarice, whom Philiste loves, and then offer her back to him in forced exchange for his sister. But Alcidon's story is only partly true, a pretext designed to win Célidan's aid in an ignoble enterprise: in reality it is not Philiste but his mother who would like to see Doris marry Florange (because he is rich), and in any case Alcidon's interest in this matter is only feigned, for he secretly loves Clarice and intends to keep her for himself. Thus the real purposes of

¹
Ibid., p. 231 (V, x).

the kidnapping will be to prevent her marriage to Philiste and to place her in Alcidon's power.

After reasoning away some pangs of conscience,² the misinformed Célidan decides to enter into Alcidon's plot on the grounds that it represents a legitimate exercise of baronial force in behalf of honor:

Prends mon bras pour second, mon château pour retraite.
Le déloyal Philiste, en te volant ton bien,
N'a que trop mérite qu'on le prive du sien:
Après son action la tienne est légitime;
Et l'on venge sans honte un crime par un crime.³

Here Célidan advocates the kind of antisocial act I have just mentioned: an admittedly criminal attack upon an unjust person who is nevertheless working within the law; an act which, in essence, affirms the right to rebel against social inequity. In kidnapping Clarice, both Célidan and Alcidon claim this right, the only differences being that Alcidon's disagreement with society goes far deeper than Célidan's and that he plans to commit a far more scandalous offense.

It may seem that I am reading revolutionary ideology into

2

Ibid., p. 187 (III, i):

Lorsque tu m'as parlé d'enlever sa maîtresse,
L'honneur a quelque temps combattu ma promesse:
Mes sens, embarrassés dans cette vaine erreur,
N'avaient plus la raison de leur intelligence.
En plaignant ton malheur je blâmais ta vengeance,
Et l'ombre d'un forfait amusant ma pitié,
Retardait les effets dus à notre amitié.

3

Ibid.

a work of lighthearted fancy, but the fact is that throughout La Veuve Corneille purposely contrasts social usage with ideal behavior, and that the play has serious overtones. All the characters are tainted, like Racine's, but by society rather than original sin. They have degenerated not so much from the Golden Age of childhood as from the "good old days" of an imaginary heroic past which Corneille will someday seek to recapture in Castille and Rome. Thus Alcidon, the traitor and trickster, complains that he lives in a time of disloyalty:

Oh! qu'il [Célidan] n'est pas de ceux dont l'esprit à la mode
 À l'humeur d'un ami jamais ne s'accommode,
 Et qui nous font souvent cent protestations,
 Et contre les effets ont mille inventions!⁴

and dissimulation:

Je revais que le monde en l'ame ne vaut rien,
 Du moins pour la plupart; que le siècle où nous sommes
 À bien dissimuler met la vertu des hommes;
 Qu'à peine quatre mots se peuvent échapper
 Sans quelque double sens afin de nous tromper;
 Et que souvent de bouche un dessein se propose,
 Cependant que l'esprit songe à toute autre chose.⁵

And Doris' mother Chrysante, while deploring "ce maudit usage / Qui n'a d'égard qu'aux biens pour faire un mariage,"⁶ acknowledges that "Le bien est en ce siècle une grande douceur,"⁷

⁴

Ibid., p. 190 (III, ii).

⁵

Ibid., pp. 190-191 (III, iii). Italics added.

⁶

Ibid., p. 224 (V, vi).

⁷

Ibid., p. 197 (III, vii). Italics added.

for "Étant riche, on est tout."⁸

These then are the salient degenerate traits of the modern bourgeois character: duplicity, infidelity, and an adoration of wealth as the supreme object of a human being's desire and ultimate measure of his worth.

Modern society also tends to ignore the Christian precept forbidding the abuse of authority. Thus Chrysante's parents, like those of Catherine, forced her to abandon her sweetheart for a richer suitor ("divisèrent nos coeurs"⁹); thus Philiste insists that Doris marry Alcidon; and thus Alcidon plans to extort marriage from Clarice¹⁰ while outrageously browbeating her lover over the Doris-Florange affair.

Alcidon figures as both victim and aggressor, hero and villain.

His tyrannical behavior is somewhat different from that of the other characters, for he is attempting to goad Philiste into challenging him. The death of this rival by his hand in a duel would simultaneously clear the path to Clarice and provide

⁸ Ibid. ⁹ Ibid., p. 224 (V, vi).

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 220 (V, iii):

Nous pourrons feindre alors que par ma diligence
Le concierge, rendu de mon intelligence,
Me donne un accès libre aux lieux de sa prison;
Que déjà quelque argent m'en a fait la raison,
Et que, s'il en faut croire une juste espérance,
Les pistoles dans peu feront sa délivrance,
Pourvu qu'un prompt hymen succède à mes désirs.

him an honorable excuse for discontinuing his charade with Doris: "Alas! I've killed your brother. Adieu." Judging from the acridity of his insults, the prospect of a duel with Philiste holds no terrors for him, even though his adversary must be a skilled swordsman.¹¹

Alcidon is no coward, as some would claim.¹² To a certain extent he is what he wants to be and what he thinks and says he is: a superior individual, brave, energetic, and imperious. If he could speak to us openly, he would probably justify his use of deception on the grounds that it is impossible to remain candid and succeed amorously in the social world. He honestly believes himself to be a better man than Philiste, and, at least insofar as he refuses to bow to the silly conventions of this world, he is.

His conversation with Philiste at the beginning of the play contrasts the old-fashioned self-assured baron to the modern lover, timid and sly. The latter, Philiste, expresses his reluctance to approach Clarice with an honest declaration of his love:

11

When Alcidon accuses him of lacking courage, he retorts:

On n'a point encor vu que ce manque de coeur
M'ait rendu le dernier où vont les gens d'honneur.
--Ibid., p. 193 (III, iii).

12

See, for example, Robert J. Nelson, Corneille, His Heroes and Their Worlds (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963), p. 45.

Usons, pour être aimés, d'un meilleur artifice,
 Et sans lui rien offrir, rendons-lui du service;
 Réglons sur son humeur toutes nos actions,
 Réglons tous nos desseins sur ses intentions,
 Tant que, par la douceur d'une longue hantise,
 Comme insensiblement elle se trouve prise.¹³

Alcidon's response implies that the current social-idyllic
 fashion in courtship is unmanly and ridiculous:

Suive qui le voudra ce procédé nouveau:
 Mon feu me déplairait caché sous ce rideau.

 Ce n'est pas là mon jeu. Le jolie passe-temps
 D'être auprès d'une dame, et causer du beau temps,
 Lui juer que Paris est toujours plein de fange,
 Qu'un certain parfumeur vend de fort bonne eau d'ange

 Qu'Aglante avec Philis dans un mois se marie!
 Change, pauvre abusé, change de batterie,
 Conte ce qui te mène, et ne t'amuse pas
 A perdre innocemment tes discours et tes pas.¹⁴

Here Corneille sympathizes with the villain, who speaks for vir-
 tue in the old sense of the word: "manly worth."¹⁵

It might perhaps be said that an appearance of rectitude,
 coupled with a masterful physical presence and a burning desire
 to prevail, endows Alcidon with that elusive quality known as
 animal charm. In any case Philiste, "trop chaud ami,"¹⁶ and

¹³
 Corneille, Théâtre complet, I, 160 (I, i).

¹⁴
Ibid.--

¹⁵
 Although Alcidon later tells the Nurse that he offered
 this advice in bad faith (Ibid., p. 163, II, 114-117), it is
 still good advice from the heroic standpoint.

¹⁶
Ibid., p. 223 (V, vi).

Célidan, who tells Alcidon that "un ami tel que toi m'est plus que cent maîtresses,"¹⁷ display a remarkable eagerness to please him.¹⁸

It is when Alcidon learns of the engagement of Clarice and Philiste¹⁹ that his mind snaps and he begins indulging in the extravagant behavior which will eventually alienate his two friends from him. Before this moment he sins only by pretending to love Doris (who is not deceived), by giving her brother what he hopes will prove to be bad advice, and by bribing Caliste's nurse to further his suit. After learning of the engagement he begins to provoke Philiste and plans the kidnapping and forced marriage--much graver actions.

Yet his personality after the traumatic revelation remains consistent with what it was before. His unrealistic confidence that the kidnapping scheme will succeed is the symptom of a

¹⁷
Ibid., p. 189 (III, i).

¹⁸
Their fondness for Alcidon can sometimes resemble a lover's extravagant devotion to his mistress. Thus when he threatens Philiste, the latter exclaims:

Eh bien! tu veux ma vie, et je te l'abandonne;
Ce courroux insensé qui dans ton coeur bouillonne,
Contente-la par là, pousse; mais n'attends pas
Que par le tien je veuille éviter mon trépas.

--Ibid., p. 193 (III, iii).

This scene precursus the famous passage where Rodrigue offers his sword to Chimène.

¹⁹
Ibid., p. 186 (II, vi).

pathological egotism of which there were already indications in the fondness with which he dwelt on the contrast between "des gens faits comme moi"²⁰ and "des amants ordinaires,"²¹ just as his underestimation of Célidan's intelligence repeats his misappraisal of Doris. A precursor of Clindor in Le Men-teur, he suffers from the illusion that he can manipulate others, hence his destiny, almost at will. Quos vult Jupiter perdere. . . .

Alcidon's intention to live idyllically with Clarice after tearing her away from her lover and her world seems particularly unrealistic, especially when one considers the strength of her attachment to both. It may at first appear that he has no such intention at all, but, as we shall see, his harsh insensitivity is only a façade underneath which lies the hope of establishing just such a tender spiritual relationship with his captive. We shall see, in other words, that his jealousy of Philiste, transcending the mere desire to possess a certain body or even to subjugate a certain will, reflects a longing for the kind of rapport which his rival enjoys with the beloved. More specifically, he hopes to refine this impure social relationship into something more beautiful while substituting himself for the "amant ordinaire."

From the outset the relationship between Clarice and Philiste is presented as social-idyllic. Both lovers play the game

²⁰

Ibid., p. 162 (I, ii).

²¹

Ibid., p. 185 (II, vi).

according to the established rules (which allow some deception), acting out roles perhaps more than they realize. Thus Philiste, instructing Alcidon on the celestial mechanics of the je ne sais quoi, reveals himself to be a partisan of the conventional Neo-platonic theory elucidated in L'Astrée:

Le ciel, qui nous choisit lui-même des partis,
A tes feux et les miens prudemment assortis:
Et comme à ces longueurs t'ayant fait indocile,
Il te donne en ma soeur un naturel facile,
Ainsi pour cette veuve il a su m'enflammer,
Après m'avoir donné par où m'en faire aimer.²²

The almost Japanese concern with ritual and face-saving which preoccupies the timid lover and the eager widow increases their passion and reinforces the impression of an idyllic concurrence of wills. Philiste is so much in love with Clarice that he can scarcely believe that such a beautiful person loves him in return,²³ and her feeling for him is similarly intense. "Ce cavalier parfait," she tells her mother (evaluating him according to his social merit),

... de qui je tiens le coeur
A tant fait que du mien il s'est rendu vainqueur.²⁴

And elsewhere the Nurse, perhaps a believer in the black arts, advises Alcidon that

Philiste assurément tient son esprit charmé;
Je n'aurais jamais cru qu'elle l'eût tant aimé.²⁵

Alcidon receives this troubling information just after

²² Ibid., p. 161 (I, i). ²³ See especially II, iv.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 176 (II, ii). ²⁵ Ibid., p. 185 (II, iv).

learning that it is Doris who is making a fool of him, instead of the opposite, and just before the news of the lovers' engagement. This last report, coming on the heels of the others, causes the would-be master of his fate and worldly-wise lover who "n'en sait guère in amour"²⁶ to doubt himself for a terrible moment. He cries out "C'est donc fait d'Alcidon!"²⁷ and entreats the Nurse to rescue him.

And so she suggests the kidnapping. But in reality the plan is all Alcidon's, for its symbolic elements reflect the dialectical struggle within his mind between the ideal self, or baronial master, and the "real" but suppressed idyllic self which partially re-emerges as a result of the fact that the validity of the ideal has been seriously questioned. That is, the mental blow which Alcidon's conscious has sustained causes certain unconscious material to leak into it, as subterranean waters filter into an unstable landscape, and threaten to submerge it completely. Alcidon bravely attempts to save the situation by effecting a compromise or synthesis between this unconscious material, which is the regressive longing for a childish archetypal-idyllic world, and the supposedly mature conscious ideal which it endangers.²⁸ This struggle reveals itself in the way in which Corneille integrates the symbolic

²⁶

Ibid., p. 194 (III, iv).

²⁷

Ibid., p. 186 (II, vi).

²⁸

By "conscious ideal" I mean, in Alcidon's case, the persona, for he believes that he is what he would like to be.

constituents of his plot.

We note, for example, that Clarice is abducted from a walled garden--the natural habitat, so to speak, of idyllic lovers. It is there that she is accustomed to stroll "tous les soirs, rêvant à ses amours."²⁹ On the evening of the abduction, which occurs just after her engagement to Philiste, her garden-thoughts are ecstatic. Love and fate, she tells us, have overcome fortune (the difference in the lovers' wealth and station), joining together what had seemed irrevocably separated:

Mon sort en ma faveur change sa dure loi,
Et pour dire en un mot le bien que je possède,
Mon Philiste est à moi.

En vain nos inégalités
M'avaient avantagée à mon désavantage.
L'amour confond nos qualités,³⁰
Et nous réduit tous deux sous un même esclavage.
L'aveugle outrecuidé
Se croirait mal guidé
Par l'aveugle fortune;
Et son aveuglement par miracle fait voir
Que quand il nous saisit, l'autre nous importune,
Et n'a plus de pouvoir.³¹

²⁹
Ibid., p. 186 (II, vi).

³⁰
The reference here may be to alchemical qualities as well as to social rank. If so, Corneille wishes us to infer that love has combined the unequal stations of Philiste and Clarice the way the alchemist combines the opposing qualities of mercury or water (cold, wet) and sulphur or fire (hot, dry) to produce the Philosopher's Stone--which is symbolized by the androgyne, a figure sometimes associated with Platonic union.

³¹
Ibid., p. 199 (III, vii).

She concludes:

Que le plaisir se goûte au sortir des supplices!
 Et qu'après avoir tant duré,
 La peine qui n'est plus augmente nos délices!
 Qu'un si doux souvenir
 M'apprête à l'avenir
 D'amoureuses tendresses!
 Que mes malheurs finis auront de volupté!³²

As Clarice dreams of future bliss, the abductors pass through the wall surrounding the garden, almost as if by magic, for the Nurse has left a secret door open for them; in a moment they have seized their victim and carried her off.

There is something funereal about this "action si noire,"³³ something hearse-like about the carriage which speeds Clarice through the night, and something preternaturally foreboding about the castle where the journey is destined to end. One normally associates journeys and conveyances with the idea of growth, whereas here, as in many other stories inspired by an obsession with the idyllic archetype,³⁴ the lovers' flight carries them into the "buried" past, or Underworld. And Célidan's estate, which he must personally consider to be the abode of justice and light, assumes, under the influence of Alcidon, the appearance of a "black castle":

The "black castle" has been interpreted as the alchemists'

³² Ibid. ³³ Ibid., p. 186 (II, vi).

³⁴ Alcidon's carriage may be equated with the coach that takes Manon and Des Grieux to Paris, with Humbert-Humbert's automobile, and with numerous other infamous and delightful conveyances.

lair, as well as a rain cloud poised above a mountain-top [possibly representing hell or the unconscious supreme over a domineering personality, such as one of Corneille's "terrible" rulers]. Its significance as the Mansion of the Beyond, or as the entrance to the Other World, would seem obvious enough. In a great many legends, the Castle of Darkness, inhabited by a "Black Knight," is symbolic of the abode of Pluto; this is confirmed by Theseus' mythic journey into hell. Charon had his abode in a similar castle which is inaccessible to living men (the "castle of no return" of folktales). . . . Melwas, the abductor of Guinevere, dwells in a castle surrounded by a deep moat.³⁵

As the "castle of no return" Célidan's house would be a prison for Alcidon as well as Clarice--not a Christian hell peopled by ghosts and demons but a gloomy netherworld in which the personality remains confined by its own inability to develop. The castle, then, is also the cave or tomb of the Pyramus-story,³⁶ and as such it both attracts and repels, just as the cave-like mansion of Baudelaire's Vie antérieure³⁷

35

Cirlot, p. 37.

36

Likewise, the cave of Montesinos in Don Quijote is a prison for famous idyllic lovers.

37

Charles Baudelaire, Les fleurs du mal; les épaves; bribes; poèmes divers; amoenitates belgicae (Paris: Éditions Garnier Frères, 1959), p. 20.

J'ai longtemps habité sous de vastes portiques
Que les soleils marins teignaient de mille feux,
Et que leurs grands piliers, droits et majestueux,
Rendaient pareils, le soir, aux grottes basaltiques.

Les houles, en roulant les images des cieux,
Mêlaient d'une façon solennelle et mystique
Les tout-puissants accords se leur riche musique
Aux couleurs du couchant reflété par mes yeux.

C'est là que j'ai vécu dans les voluptés calmes,

appears as a place of both delight and languishment. And just as Poe's admirer rebelled, in his life and work, against the insuperable attraction of the childhood past, so Corneille's career may be regarded as a never-ending struggle against la belle dame sans merci, the fascinating sister-figure of the archetype.

But Corneille, unlike Baudelaire, goes into battle armed with the vision of an all-good father whom he reveres and desires to imitate. In La Veuve this image finds imperfect expression in Célidan, Philiste, and Alcidon himself, all of whom represent the Good Father to a degree which varies during the course of the action, but none of whom consistently appears as the masterful généreux, innately superior, unafraid, and entirely free from imposture, who is his complete reincarnation. All make concessions, rather, to the ignoble world in which they exist, although one of them attempts to overcome it, however ignobly.

It is now time to define the three worlds of Corneille's mental universe. Occasional reference will be made to these worlds throughout the remainder of this study. They correspond to three types of love and follow one another in a chronological order which may be designated as that of Corneille's spiritual development.

Au milieu de l'azur, des vagues, des splendeurs
Et des esclaves nus, tout imprégnés d'odeurs,

Qui me rafraîchissaient le front avec des palmes,
Et dont l'unique soin était d'approfondir
Le secret douloureux qui me faisait languir.

First World	Second World	Third World
idyllic Platonic tomb-like sheltered childish sensual asocial, or perhaps antisocial, sedi- tious, impious world of Pyramus and Thisbe; often appears as the mysterious East	social comic bourgeois mercenary practical legalistic tyrannical Machiavellian world of Rouenais and Parisian society world of the Evil Parents	heroic tragic <u>généreux</u> Roman (as Rome ap- pears, for example, in <u>Horace</u>) world of the Good Father

The form which Alcidon's rebellion takes shows us that Corneille already senses, if only in a vague unconscious way, that there is only one course open to the generous soul who wishes to retain a maximum degree of mastery over events without becoming denatured by a corrupt society: exile to a world where his noble perfection will be an advantage rather than a handicap. If he cannot find such a world--heroic, violent, aristocratic--he will have to invent it, perhaps resurrect it from a real or imaginary past. This third world, the last to appear in Corneille's interior universe after his expulsion from the first, idyllic world and his disillusionment with the second, everyday world, will be his ultimate place of refuge. Like Alcidon he will flee to it in the hope of possessing there a variant form of the first world, a heroic-idyllic love. For in Alcidon's mind, as in Corneille's, the castle represents both the idyllic past and the heroic future, the old life and the new

existence which will recapture it, the pays lointain and the dream-kingdom of the child become man.

The castle rightly belongs to the Good Father and those like him. For Alcidon to take possession of it would be a usurpation and a profanation, for he is not ready to grow up; and he is not ready to grow up because he is unwilling or unable to renounce his incestuous infatuation with Clarice.

The castle's legitimate inheritor is Alcidon's other half, Célidan, the clever righter of wrongs, the ideal self partially embodied in the faithful friend. It is he who eventually marries the "consolation prize" that Alcidon refused, Doris. But Célidan is neither a perfect hero, because he is not perfectly honest, nor a perfect second-world figure, because in helping Alcidon he revolts against the established social order. When he realizes that he has been tricked he finds himself in an ethical quandary. He must either play the role, in retrospect, of généreux, in which case he will be defining himself as a lawbreaker and a dupe ("Je jouerais, à ce compte, un joli personnage!"³⁸), or he must claim that Alcidon had never deceived him, which will be an unjustifiable lie. Let us briefly review the action insofar as it directly involves this character.

(A) Célidan agrees to help Alcidon. While so doing he impresses us with his purity of soul. He asserts (with almost too much pride) his devotion to high standards of fidelity and

38

Corneille, Théâtre complet, I, 209 (IV, v).

self-sacrifice, identifies his own interests with those of his friend, honestly admits his love for Doris, and deplores Philiste's supposed treachery:

Après sa trahison, vois ma fidélité;
 Il t'enlève un objet que je t'avais quitté.
 Ta Doris fut toujours la reine de mon âme;
 J'ai toujours eu pour elle une secrète flamme,
 Sans jamais témoigner que j'en étais épris,
 Tant que tes feux ont pu te promettre ce prix:
 Mais je te l'ai quittée, et non pas à Florange.
 Quand je t'aurai vengé, contre lui je me venge,
 Et je lui fais savoir que jusqu'à mon trépas,
 Tout autre qu'Alcidon ne l'emportera pas.³⁹

(B) Célidan assists in the kidnapping.

(C) After the kidnapping, it occurs to him that he may have been duped: Alcidon seems surprisingly eager to marry their prisoner. Célidan decides to use trickery to find out if his comrade has been lying. The monologue in which he makes this decision is pivotal in that it marks the turning-point from Heroic Célidan to Crafty Célidan and the beginning of a Fall which will carry him deeper and deeper as he frustrates Alcidon more and more completely:

Si mon soupçon est vrai, je lui ferai connaître
 Que je ne suis pas homme à seconder un traître.
 Ce n'est point avec moi qu'il faut faire le fin,
 Et qui me veut duper en doit craindre la fin.⁴⁰

(D) With skillful lies he extracts the truth from the Nurse: Alcidon is indeed in love with Clarice and has thus dishonored his "ami trop simple"⁴¹ by making him play the infamous

³⁹ Ibid., p. 188 (III, i).

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 209 (IV, v).

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 218 (V, ii).

role of "ravisser."⁴² A duel would be the true hero's simplistic means of escape from a predicament such as this, but Célidan, now wearing the comic mask, intends to extricate himself with subterfuge, boasting that "Un trompeur en moi trouve un trompeur et demi."⁴³

(E) He frees Clarice and returns her to her lover, allowing them to believe that he took no part in the abduction.

(F) He informs Alcidon that all is going well and encourages the poor fellow to believe that Clarice is disposed to accept his suit. This is his revenge.

(G) Philiste having offered to repay him for his service ("un tel bienfait"⁴⁴), he requests the hand of Doris.

(H) At this point Alcidon appears, confesses his crime, and accuses Célidan of sharing in it. The latter attempts to excuse himself as follows:

Il est vrai qu'en ce coup je lui prêtai la main:
La peur que j'eus alors qu'après ma résistance
Il ne trouvât ailleurs trop fidèle assistance...⁴⁵

Célidan seems about to utter a barefaced lie, apparently because he is unwilling to admit to Doris' brother that he had allowed himself to be duped into believing him a traitor. That is, it seems that he is going to claim that he helped abduct Clarice in order to restore her to Philiste. By preventing him from

⁴²

Ibid.

⁴³

Ibid., p. 214 (IV, vii).

⁴⁴

Ibid., p. 227 (V, vii).

⁴⁵

Ibid., p. 230 (V, x).

making this statement, Corneille saves Célidan's bourgeois honor, for while the comic social code permitted him to lie to the Nurse and Alcidon, deceivers, in order to right a wrong, it forbids him to lie to the honorable Philiste for a purely selfish reason, whether this be that he is loath to publicize his own gullibility, that he desires to preserve Philiste's friendship for its own sake, or that he wishes to avoid offending the person who disposes of Doris' hand.

Like a magnanimous king, Philiste interrupts Célidan before he can definitely incriminate himself:

Quittons là ce discours, puisqu'en cette action
La fin m'éclaircit trop de ton intention.⁴⁶

This hasty pardon opens for Célidan the possibility of taking refuge in a kind of restriction mentale. Now he can perhaps convince himself that he was going to explain that he had entered into the plot believing (as he did) that Philiste had not kept his promise, and incidentally with the intention of preventing Clarice from falling into the hands of an over-zealous jailor--someone who might, for example, advocate threats of violence against her as a means of forcing Philiste to marry his sister to Alcidon. At the same time, however, Célidan allows Philiste to assume that he was going to justify his act on the grounds that he intended to frustrate the kidnapping.

Although La Veuve is not generally known as one of

⁴⁶

Ibid.

Corneille's more complicated plays, the supposed purposes for which Célidan took part in the abduction, the different characters' adherence to a belief in one purpose or another, and the real possibility of these purposes' existence form a skein difficult to unravel. Perhaps the situation can be clarified with the aid of a table.

Supposed Goal	Character's Opinion	Degree of Real Likelihood
To prevent Alc. from marrying Clar.	Phil. thinks this was Cél.'s real purpose.	Not possible, because Cél. thought Alc. loved Dor.
To help Alc. marry Clar.	Phil. believes Alc. thought this was Cél.'s goal.	Not possible, for the same reason as above.
To help Alc. hold Clar. in ransom for Dor.	Alc. thinks this is Cél.'s intention.	Highly probable. Cél. believes, at first, that Alc. loves Dor. and seems to accept his story about Phil.'s disloyalty.
To protect Clar. while holding her for ransom	It seems quite possible that Cél. himself came to view the affair in this light. (See p. 76, above).	Unlikely that this was Cél.'s real intention but possible that Corneille wants us to think so. Discussion follows.

In the original version of the play (1634-1657) Corneille has Alcidon threaten suicide when Célidan tells him that his

proposal at first inspired him with "horreur"⁴⁷:

Mais c'est trop désormais survivre à mon honneur;
C'est trop porter en vain par leur perfide trame
La rougeur su le front et la fureur en l'âme:
Va, va, n'empêche plus mon désespoir d'agir;
Souffre qu'après mon front ce flanc puisse en rougir,
Et qu'un bras impuissant à venger cet outrage,⁴⁸
Reporte dans mon coeur les effets de ma rage.

It seems safe to assume that this speech was intended to furnish heroic Célidan with another good reason for cooperating in a plan which shocked Corneille's respect for law and order: he must defy the second world not only to right a wrong but to save his friend's life. But in subsequent editions Alcidon's flamboyant but no doubt empty threat is deleted, perhaps because Corneille now (that is, after meditating his own text) wants to emphasize the possibility that Célidan was not a complete dupe by weakening the argument that he acted in the heat of a passionate concern for the deceiver's welfare. In both versions the hero's acquiescence is the result of offstage deliberations taking place over a period of time which may be considered to be more or less protracted depending on whether one prefers Célidan-héros or Célidan-fourbe: the hero acted hastily; the trickster, with more caution.

The theory that Corneille revised his work to strengthen the possibility that Célidan did not enter into the pact in a

⁴⁷
Ibid., p. 187 (III, i).

⁴⁸
Corneille, Oeuvres, I, 439 (III, i).

completely sincere frame of mind tends to support my impression that the opposite was originally the case. Moreover, if this was his intention the revision is not completely effective, for in both versions Célidan appears as a two-dimensional, almost saintly figure until the point, subsequent to the kidnapping, where he begins to doubt Alcidon's sincerity, so that even after this point, and even after his enigmatic statement near the end of the play, I remain strongly inclined to suppose that he had no ulterior motive for helping Alcidon. The only reasons for his assistance which seem psychologically valid, given his presentation as a highborn généreux, are his friendship for Alcidon and the fact that he has come to realize that the plan is a good one by heroic standards--the reasons which he himself alleges while excusing his seemingly disloyal, unheroic hesitation:

Lorsque tu m'as parlé d'enlever sa maîtresse,
L'honneur a quelque temps combattu ma promesse:
Ce mot d'enlèvement me faisait de L'horreur;
Mes sens, embarrassés dans cette vaine erreur,
N'avaient plus la raison de leur intelligence.
En plaignant ton malheur je blâmais ta vengeance,
Et l'ombre d'un forfait amusant ma pitié,⁴⁹
Retardait les effets dus à notre amitié.

Although this speech has the ring of truth, after what Célidan tells Philiste at the end of the play we may question its complete sincerity. The later statement turns his earlier, prelapsarian self into a kind of optical illusion which appears now as one thing, now another. Why does Corneille leave the

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Corneille, Théâtre complet, I, 187 (III, i).

spectator in this uncomfortable state of doubt? Probably because he has to, for any definite choice between Célidan the deceiver of the supposedly honest Alcidon and Célidan the doubter of Philiste's integrity would only place the hero in a clearly unfavorable light.

To sum up the history of Célidan's decline, we may say that it begins with the noble desire to justly, though unlawfully, force a supposed wrongdoer to behave properly. From here Célidan progresses to tricking dishonest persons (Alcidon and the Nurse) for a good cause, to tricking Alcidon for revenge,⁵⁰ and finally to tricking honest persons (Philiste, Clarice, Doris) for personal gain, first by keeping silent and then--apparently--by lying. His statement that "Un trompeur en moi trouve un trompeur et demi" expresses a comic morality rather than a heroic one. The true hero, the généreux, rejects subterfuge as beneath him, and with it he rejects the second world in which subterfuge is a practical necessity. He is one in whom "appearance and reality have always to coincide,"⁵¹ whose "every act has to manifest the very bottom of his heart,"⁵² and for whom "duplicity is meaningless because there exists no

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His lie that Clarice feels tender sentiments for Alcidon and wishes to see him also serves the purpose of getting the latter out of the way. Now Célidan can tell Philiste his own story of the abduction without fear of contradiction.

51
Nelson, p. 223.

52
Ibid.

difference between ends and means."⁵³

That Corneille had any philosophical interest in degrading Célidan from his high estate seems out of the question. Rather, his descent to the second world was a theatrical necessity. In order to save the play as a comedy, Corneille had to destroy Célidan as a tragic hero. He could not let him react to his discovery of Alcidon's deceit in the normal généreux way by challenging him to a duel, nor could he allow him to offend Philiste at the end by telling the truth.

Despite his decline, which of course is only partial and relative, Célidan remains the hero of the play. He is the most active character Corneille has created thus far. He shapes events instead of merely reacting to them in the more or less automatic fashion of his predecessors. The reward for his skill at controlling destiny is Doris, a spirited but submissive girl who might be said to prefigure Sabine (Horace) and thus to represent, embryonically, the perfect young hero's ideal spouse.

Intelligent, somewhat haughty and ironic, Doris sees through Alcidon, laughs at Florange's affected manners, and bitterly criticizes forced marriages while being prepared to submit to one. For Célidan she is the half-real, half-idyllic princess whom he has always loved but who had seemed out of reach because his friend had spoken for her:

Ta Doris fut toujours la reine de mon âme;
J'ai toujours eu pour elle une secrète flamme.

It is fitting that these noble souls should finally be united.

The pairing of Clarice and Philiste is equally appropriate, for both are parent-figures. As we have seen, Clarice also represents the idyllic mistress. But her social condition adds an extra dimension to her identity, widowhood having conferred upon her the double privilege of wealth and disponibilité. "Qui pourrait des mortels troubler notre alliance?" she asks her hesitant lover,

Quelqu'un a-t-il à voir dessus mes actions,
Dont j'aie à prendre l'ordre de mes affections?
Veuve et qui ne dois plus de respect à personne,
Ne puis-je disposer de ce que je te donne?⁵⁴

Both Alcidon and the awed Philiste see Clarice as the inaccessible Queen to whom, through a miracle, they can now attain. To the villain her wealth represents the magic passport to a fairy-tale world where he can flee with her and live, free from cares, forever.

But Alcidon misjudges her, for, besides not loving him, she is not the sort of person who would long for a permanent honeymoon in some isolated retreat. Like many beautiful, mature women high in rank and fortune, she regards the social world itself as the appropriate setting for the fulfillment of her idyllic aspirations. Thus no sooner is she restored to Philiste than she invites all of the main characters (except Alcidon) to supper.

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Corneille, Théâtre complet, I, 181 (II, iv).

Apparently her marriage with Alcandre was a May-December union which left her spiritually virgin. In any case she greatly prefers her lover to her deceased husband:

S'il précéda Philiste en vaines dignités,
Philiste le devance en rares qualités.⁵⁵

When the Nurse, Alcidon's agent, suggests that she stop seeing Philiste for a while and compare him to "quelque autre,"⁵⁶ she furiously conjures up an idyllic metaphor:

Trahir tous mes désirs! Éteindre un feu si beau!
Qu'on m'enferme plutôt toute vive au tombeau,⁵⁷

and orders that Philiste be brought into her presence at once, so that she may settle the matter:

Fais venir cet amant: dussé-je la première
Lui faire de mon coeur une ouverture entière
Je ne permettrai point qu'il sorte d'avec moi
Sans avoir l'un à l'autre engagé notre foi.⁵⁸

Ironically, Clarice is attracted to Philiste because he appears to be idyllically childlike and controllable, although there is reason to suppose that in marriage he may become a tyrant, whereas she might have found the blustering Alcidon much easier to tame. But it is just that this strong-willed, rather spoiled society lady should be assigned to a male whose character grows more regal as the play progresses. Our heightened esteem for him at the work's conclusion is due to the fact

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 176 (II, ii).

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 177 (II, ii).

⁵⁷ Ibid. ⁵⁸ Ibid.

that he has ceased to be an uncertain lover, that he has asserted his dominance over the women in his family, and that he has twice rebuked Alcidon, with whom he will no longer hesitate, for the sake of friendship, to cross swords. Though harsh, his attitude toward Doris and Chrysante is justifiable as an effect of his généreux principles. Chrysante encourages Florange's suit for purely mercenary reasons, and Philiste, duped by Alcidon, has no idea that his friend wishes to marry someone other than his sister. With herself, Doris has engaged Philiste's honor, and where his honor is concerned he will allow no compromise. At one point he declares that he is ready to undergo a thousand tortures in purgatory "Pourvu que mon honneur ne souffre aucune tache."⁵⁹ This is the key to his character and perhaps the reason for which Célidan prefers to lie rather than admit that he doubted his word.

As we remarked earlier, the play itself does not advocate adherence to the généreux code of honesty, but rather, approves the second-world theory that, although there should be no deceit between honorable men, it is permissible and sometimes even wise to deal dishonestly with the dishonest.⁶⁰ But Philiste, unlike

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Ibid., p. 197 (III, vii).

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The play's subtitle is le traître trahi. The second-world code allows some duplicity between honest persons in affairs of the heart. Thus even Philiste seems willing to depart from candor where his mistress is concerned.

Usons, pour être aimés, d'un meilleur artifice,

Célidan, nowhere states that he considers it proper to deceive any man, nor does he behave as though he thought it were. This makes him a more impressive figure and explains why his interruption of Célidan's excuse seems almost like an accolade.

Although Corneille endows Philiste with superior qualities, it is Célidan whom he most frequently holds up to our admiration. Alcidon sees in him "tous les avantages / Que l'on peut remarquer aux plus braves courages."⁶¹ He is

Beau de corps et d'esprit, riche, adroit, valeureux,
Et surtout de Doris extrêmement amoureux.⁶²

Doris is attracted to him both because of his existential accomplishments, his deeds, and because of his essence, which she inaccurately resumes in the phrase "un coeur généreux":

Réunir les esprits d'une mère et d'un frère,
Du choix qu'ils m'avaient fait avoir su me défaire,
M'arracher à Florange et M'ôter Alcidon,
Et d'un coeur généreux me faire l'heureux don,
C'est avoir su me rendre un assez grand service
Pour espérer beaucoup avec quelque justice.⁶³

Thus the reward of this Machiavellian prince will be a princess who, like him, is a noble deceiver, while to the truly généreux Philiste goes the imperious queen.

Et sans lui rien offrir, rendons-lui du service
Réglons sur son humeur toutes nos actions,
Tant que, par la douceur d'une longue hantise,
Comme insensiblement elle se trouve prise.
--Ibid., p. 160 (I, i).

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 215 (IV, viii). ⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 231 (V, x).

Now that we have somewhat sharpened our focus on the fortunate lovers, it is possible to gain a fuller understanding of what Alcidon is trying to accomplish by abducting Clarice, and why he fails.

His purposes are of course manifold. Basically her imprisonment in the castle expresses his wish to remove her from the world in which she reigns in splendor and where he has failed to compete successfully for her love, to an isolated, walled place resembling the garden of Pyramus and Thisbe or more exactly, the ship (the "desert island" of our modern magazine cartoons). It seems to Alcidon that here, in the atmosphere of a more barbarous and nobler past, he will be able to turn the clock back on his own psychic development while freezing the current of events which threatens to sweep Clarice away from him. Here he can dream himself into a double existence: grand seigneur and idyllic child. Remaining in his abductor's disguise, he can reduce the imposing beauty to the level of captive while raising himself to that of her overlord; then, removing his mask, he can appear as her deliverer, and she will fall in love with him.

Alcidon thinks his dream has come true when Célidan reports that their captive longs for him to take her supposedly dead lover's place beside her:

'J'ai perdu ce que j'aime,
Dit-elle; mais du moins si cet autre lui-même,

Son fidèle Alcidon, m'en consolait ici!'⁶⁴

Nothing could make Alcidon happier than these words, but in believing them he falls victim to poetic justice.

The Cornelian hero will not be able to effect the heroic-idyllic union which Alcidon strives for, the union within himself of the first and third worlds and outside of himself with the beloved, until he has become, to a significant degree, un autre lui-même in relation to the King-Good Father. And he will never perfectly fulfill this ambition. Alcidon's project is doomed from the start, but in La Veuve Corneille takes some critical first steps toward a definition of the perfect hero's needs and capabilities, however unconscious these steps may be. He begins to sense that the hero must be all-good in order to merit the beloved: Célidan is not, and it is not he who wins Clarice or even aspires to her. As in Mélite and Clitandre, Corneille notes the lawlessness of idyllic impulses. He attempts, for the first time, to unite the world of the amorous child to that of the généreux, but only on the symbolic level (meaning of the castle). He annihilates the Evil Parent (Philiste) for a fleeting moment and replaces him with the hero-villain, but unfortunately Philiste then reappears as the Good Parent and, with the help of the superego (Célidan), expulses the child from paradise. It will not be until Le Cid, when this paradise becomes a real world and the child a

64

Ibid., p. 219 (V, iii).

righteous avenger, that Alcidon's dream of union-in-life will be realized.

IV. La Place Royale

After La Veuve it is almost as if Corneille, realizing that he had leaped ahead of himself, decided to return to his starting-place and retrace his steps more carefully. In La Galerie du Palais and La Suivante, rather flat plays, he further discredits social-idyllic love; in La Place Royale, Médée, and L'Illusion comique he continues to study this and other obstacles to paradise, and the means, fantastic or real, whereby they may be circumvented.

La Galerie du Palais is about a girl, Célidée, who loses interest in her lover, apparently because her father approves of him and because he has no faults. Their relationship lacks spice. Hippolyte, a would-be rival for Lysandre's attentions, persuades Célidée to "test" him to see if he really loves her. The test consists of a declaration that she has fallen out of love. In order to regain Célidée's affection through jealousy, Lysandre begins to court Hippolyte, as she hoped he would. Célidée is publicly humiliated. Further troubles ensue, but finally the lovers forgive each other and are reunited. In III, vi Corneille enunciates, for the first time, the principles of amour-raison, a love based on the senses (sight) and increased or decreased by a supposedly objective and presumably continual evaluation of the beloved's mérite. La Galerie

foreshadows La Place Royale, which also portrays, with a certain sympathy, the misdeeds of a lover who wishes to free himself from a too-perfect partner.

In La Suivante a quiproquo drives the hero and heroine to thoughts of murder and suicide, but when the misunderstanding is resolved their troubles evaporate. Numerous are the references to Platonic union, e.g., "Nous n'avons plus qu'une âme et qu'un vouloir nous deux."¹ Etched over the play's idyllic background, however, is a cold satire of second-world egotism and duplicity. The elderly Evil Parent, G raste, is especially base. As his confidante observes,² he would be happy to marry three daughters like Daphnis to someone they did not love, if by so doing he could acquire Florise, a young girl whom he passionately desires. And the person who trades Florise for the heroine is none other than the hero, Florame. This last had insinuated himself into Daphnis' life by paying court to her souvante, Amarante, whom he then quickly abandoned. Failing in her underhanded attempts to win him back, Amarante places a curse on the lovers similar to the Nurse's prophesy in M lite, and the strange "comedy" ends.

La Place Royale is a work of greater interest. It relates

¹
Ibid., p. 355 (III, ix).

²
Ibid., p. 368 (IV, ix):

Et s'il pouvait donner trois Daphnis pour Florise,
Il la tiendrait encore heureusement acquise.

the story of Alidor's rejection of Angélique, an act whose significance goes beyond the hero's own oversimplified statement of objectives and whose final Gestalt, Angélique's relegation to a convent, expresses a situation quite different from that which Alidor claims to enjoy.

His first explanation of his motives for rejecting her appears in a conversation with Cléandre in I, iv. He wants to control his passion à la Matamore ("Que je puisse à mon gré l'enflammer et l'éteindre."³), but Angélique is "trop belle"⁴ and her beauty enslaves him. Also he fears that his love for her will die after marriage: she will grow ugly, or his tastes will change.

As the action progresses, a somewhat different and more complete view of Angélique's threat to Alidor emerges. She is not merely the passive flower that lures the unsuspecting bee, not just an idol, but an "idole mouvante"⁵ who uses her power consciously: "Ce n'est que me venger d'un an de servitude,"⁶ says Alidor when she replaces him with Doraste,

Que rompre son dessein, comme elle a fait le mien,
Qu'user de mon pouvoir, comme elle a fait du sien.⁷

By creating an Angélique who is not just a symbol of the hero's overpowering desire but a human being with designs, Corneille

³ Ibid., p. 393 (I, iv). ⁴ Ibid., p. 394 (I, iv).

⁵ Ibid., p. 398 (II, ii). ⁶ Ibid., p. 418 (IV, i).

⁷ Ibid.

authorizes the raising of several questions: What were her designs for Alcidon? How and why did these designs differ from his own? What was her attitude toward him when he resisted, and how did he react to this attitude? We can perhaps best answer these questions after a brief excursion outside of La Place Royale.

It will be remembered that in my discussion of La Veuve I mentioned that Clarice and Philiste are like the two elements sulphur and mercury, which in alchemy are combined to form the Philosopher's Stone, a kind of super-gold. Sulphur is the male element, Yang in the Taoist system, and mercury, or water, is Yin, the passive, dark, instinctual, feminine principle. The alchemical symbol for sulphur, or fire, is a lion, and the lion traditionally represents the king. In the Pyramus archetype the lioness represents the ruthless female who believes that her solar consciousness, and thus her ability to control events and her right to rule, transcend those of the male; Cléopâtre (Rodogune) belongs to this species of bisexual monster.

Now, what is interesting about La Veuve is that the king-figure makes his first appearance as a passive, feminine shrinking-violet, whereas the Widow plays the masculine role, threatening even to compel him to remain physically present in her chamber until he has proposed to her. Clarice's subsequent reduction to the role of vulnerable female seems to have a tonic or perhaps purgative effect on Philiste, for after the kidnapping his inferiority complex vanishes.

As we shall see, there are numerous female characters in Corneille's works who, like Clarice, behave in a domineering fashion toward males who love them but lack authority, the acquisition of which becomes, in La Place Royale, Le Cid, and elsewhere, their principal life-goal. These males are reluctant to unite with the aggressive females because they feel that to do so would be to enslave themselves and offend the Good Father, and they feel this way because the females, whom I call lion-women, represent the mother conceived as idyllic mistress.

Angélique is one of these lion-women. Her name is deceptive only if we overlook Corneille's reference to the Orlando furioso in the second act.⁸ The task of Angelica, a princess allied with the Moors and thus with Satan, was to destroy Orlando by making him fall in love with her. She drove him mad. Similarly Angélique's beauty threatens to damn Alidor by forcing him to marry her even though he regards her as an object of taboo. Their love affair is structured along strict idyllic lines. Each is completely faithful to the other by inclination, so that when Phylis criticizes Angélique for not encouraging a throng of suitors, she protests:

Simple! tu ne sais pas ce que c'est que tu blâmes,
Et ce qu'a de douceur l'union de deux âmes.⁹

The leonine side of Angélique's double nature first appears when Alidor visits her after having had a letter delivered to her

⁸ Ibid., p. 403 (II, vi). ⁹ Ibid., p. 389 (II, ii).

declaring that his heart belongs to a certain Clarine and asserting that he now finds Angélique unattractive. In this first of four essential scenes involving the two lovers, Angélique's rage is terrible:

Ciel, tu ne punis point des hommes si méchants!
Ce traître vit encore, il me voit, il respire;
Il m'affronte, il l'avoue, il rit quand je soupire.¹⁰

Yet, even though he is in the wrong, Alidor answers her violent and piteous complaints with further insults, never relenting. Like a lion-tamer he whips her into a corner with his words, and when she can only gasp: "Insolent! ôte-toi pour jamais de ma vue,"¹¹ he twists the knife once more and saunters out, cruelly exulting in his freedom:

Me défendre vos yeux après mon changement,
Appelez-vous cela du nom de châtiment?
Ce n'est que me bannir du lieu de mon supplice;
Et ce commandement est si plein de justice,
Que, bien que je renonce à vivre sous vos lois,
Je vais vous obéir pour la dernière fois.¹²

Alidor gone, Angélique indulges in fierce fantasies of revenge, pacing about, it would seem, in her room:

Ah! que n'ai-je eu des bras à suivre mon courage!
Qu'il m'eût bien autrement réparé cet outrage!
Que j'eusse retranché de ses propos railleurs!
Le traître n'eut jamais porté son coeur ailleurs;
Puisqu'il m'était donné, je m'en fusse saisie.¹³

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 399 (II, ii).

¹¹ Ibid., p. 400 (II, ii).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid. (II, iii). Lionesses are not always raging, and Angélique-as-Queen has her quieter moments. Thus when, on the

Alidor humiliates Angélique to prove himself more powerful than she, and he needs to do this because she has threatened his self-esteem by challenging him, as Cornelian heroines--frondeuses thirsting for gloire, queens who cannot reign alone--continually challenge the men who love them, to act maturely or at least in a way which they construe to be mature: "Enfin je veux un roi: regardez si vous l'êtes."¹⁴ Alidor wants to dominate the lion-woman so that she will not force him into the mature but sacrilegious act of marrying her. Through him Corneille moves toward the discovery that, by demonstrating to this figure the superiority of his power, virtue, and resolve over hers, the hero can cause her to lose enough of her queenliness to appear as a legitimate object of desire. The Cornelian hero always stoops to conquer or else does not conquer at all, for he is afraid to reach in any direction but downward.

night before her proposed wedding to Doraste, he justly accuses her of planning to elope with someone else, she replies haughtily:

Eh bien, c'est te trahir. Penses-tu que mon feu
 D'un généreux dessein te fasse un désaveu?
 Je t'acquis par dépit, et perdrais avec joie.
 Mon désespoir à tous m'abandonnait en proie,
 Et lorsque d'Alidor je me vis outrager,
 Je fis armes de tout afin de me venger.
 Tu t'offris par hasard, je t'acceptai de rage;
 Je te donnai son bien, et non pas mon courage.
 --Ibid., p. 425 (IV, vii).

¹⁴Honorie says this to Valamir in Attila. (Ibid., III, 451 (II, ii)).

One of the ways in which the hero may assert his dominance over the beloved is by placing her in his debt. "Je ne me résoudrai jamais," says Alidor, "à l'hyménée"

Que d'une volonté franche et déterminée,
Et celle à qui ces noeuds m'uniront pour jamais
M'en sera redevable, et non à ses attraits.¹⁵

Another way to assert dominance is to fuir en Parthe by giving the beloved to someone else. Thus when Alidor has reduced Angélique to the point where she sighs:

Use sur tout mon coeur de puissance absolue:
Puisqu'il est tout à toi, tu peux tout commander;
Et contre nos malheurs j'ose tout hasarder,¹⁶

he arranges to deliver her to Cléandre.

Let us look again at the speech just quoted. This is what the perfect lover ordinarily says to his mistress, rather than his mistress to him. And if the lover were Alidor and the mistress Angélique, she would reply: "I order you to take the place of Doraste, the father-figure to whom I am betrothed." But in the existing situation all Alidor can truthfully say to the magnificent Angélique is: "I yearn to elope with you but cannot; therefore I shall trick you into fleeing with my surrogate":

À moi ne tiendra pas que la beauté que j'aime
Ne me quitte bientôt pour un autre moi-même;¹⁷

The abduction by Cléandre, an Alidor minus Alidor's

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 419 (IV, i).

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 415 (III, vi).

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 395 (I, iv).

obsession with the archetype and his fear of the lion-woman, thus an Alidor at the same time more debonair and more généreux, fails when he inadvertently carries off Phylis instead of Angélique. After his departure each of the two principals is astonished to find the other still at Doraste's ball. Though Alidor manages to improvise an acceptable explanation of why he did not intend to accompany Angélique in the carriage, he still finds himself faced with the calamitous necessity of personally carrying out his promise to elope with her; for, when he attempts to postpone their flight, the terrible side of her nature again surges to the fore:

Tu manques de courage aussi bien que d'amour,
Et tu me fais trop voir, par ta bizarrerie,
Le chimérique effet de ta poltronnerie.
Alidor (quel amant!) n'ose me posséder.¹⁸

Alidor, who must be trembling from the shock of this perfectly-aimed blow to his self-esteem, is about to descend with Angélique into the dark labyrinth of the streets of Paris, when he is saved by a deus ex machina: Doraste, suddenly arriving with some armed men, detains the lion-woman, and her victim is able to slip away.

The symbolism of these events requires some elaboration. Were it not for the complication of the incest-motive, abduction and elopement would no doubt ordinarily appear to the Cornelian mind as praiseworthy courses of action. To take the beloved

¹⁸
Ibid., p. 424 (IV, vi).

away from the parent against his will is to act heroically, whereas to accept her from the parent is to remain under his tutelage in a kind of deactivated, lobotomized idyllic environment. Thus one of the things wrong with Polyeucte's marriage will be that, since Félix has chosen him for Pauline, the couple cannot pretend to be idyllic lovers who have heroically overcome the resistance of an Evil Parent. Neither the abduction nor the elopement in La Place Royale, however, appears under a favorable light. They are similar to each other in some respects and different in others. The elopement is obviously a far more sinister event than the abduction, although it is a voluntary act on the part of the female, while for Phylis the abduction is involuntary. In the elopement it is in fact the female, the lion-woman, who virtually abducts the inferior male, Alidor. She is stopped on the point of plunging with him deep into her perilous lair, nocturnal Paris, which is the cave in Clitandre or idyllic love in its hellish, incestuous aspect. (Alidor is more vulnerable to temptation at this late hour, his heroic solar consciousness being "de nuit plus faible que de jour."¹⁹)

The abduction and elopement constitute a flight from Doraste and his celebration, which, being the preface to a conventional wedding, represents the second world. What strikes us about the abduction is that the carriage which bears Phylis

¹⁹Ibid., p. 422 (IV, v).

away has no stated destination. Nor does it really go anywhere. It makes a circle, beginning and ending in the second world. This trip to nowhere may be interpreted as a sign that Corneille feels spiritually trapped in the social environment. The carriage cannot journey into the past, for there the lover will "die" like Pyramus; nor can it travel into the future, because the future, that is, heroic-idyllic love, has not yet been invented. Consequently we may say that Alidor, who in the name of freedom also rejects the present, or amour-service, is not merely a man without a mistress but also a man without a world. Cléandre, however, benefits from the abortive kidnapping, for during this adventure he falls in love with his captive, Phylis, and subsequently they become engaged.

Phylis furnishes the play's comic relief by carrying the principles of amour-service to an almost monstrous extreme:

J'aime des serviteurs qui pour une maîtresse
Souffrent ce qui leur nuit, aiment ce qui les blesse.²⁰

In the second world she is like a fish in water, and the perfection of her adaption to its cruel and silly customs makes us all the more aware of their inhumanity. She and Angélique resemble each other despite their differences, for both tend to tyrannize their suitors: one enjoys being a tyrant and the other cannot avoid it.

Phylis' brother, Doraste, assuming a role similar to that

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Ibid., p. 404 (II, vi).

of Philiste in La Veuve, dispenses justice at the end of the play. Cléandre he forgives, having perceived in him an echo of his own généreux character:

Quand j'aurais sur ce point des avis différents,
Je ne puis contredire au choix de mes parents;
Mais, outre leur pouvoir, votre âme généreuse,
Et ce franc procédé qui rend ma soeur heureuse,
Vous acquièrent les biens qu'ils vous ont accordés,
Et me font souhaiter ce que vous demandez.²¹

But Doraste refuses full pardon to Angélique. Although she says she will enter a convent if he breaks their engagement, he does so, recommending that she yield to Alidor's renewed protestations.

Alidor has now become attracted to Angélique, as he says, "par pitié."²² In other words her humiliations have transformed her for him into a legitimate object of desire. He considers her less exciting, no doubt, than she used to be, but also less dangerous, and he makes his proposal in earnest.

But when, with a quiet resolve more disdainful than pious, she declines his offer, thereby raising herself once more above his level, he changes his colors as quickly as a chameleon, rejoicing in the thought that she is going to bury herself in a convent:

Que par cette retraite elle me favorise!
Alors que mes desseins cèdent à mes amours,

²¹
Ibid., p. 434 (V, vi).

²²
Ibid.

Et qu'ils ne sauraient plus défendre ma franchise,
Sa haine et ses refus viennent à leur secours.²³

Alidor counts his blessings. He imagines himself free from Angélique, but the truth is that the convent represents the author's own unconscious, and that by entombing her there he enthrones her as inviolate Queen of the Underworld, the source of his own poetic inspiration and of his prestige as a solar hero in the supposedly Apollonian kingdom of letters.

Let us consider for a moment the distance covered by Corneille from the beginning of his career to this point. His first two plays, Mélite and Clitandre, represent efforts to denounce idyllic love in its genuine asocial form rather than to seek a meaningful accommodation of this childish impulse to the demands of a superego patterned on the image of an all-good, all-powerful father. The author is still young, unsure of himself, and in fact terrified by the principal obstacle to his dream's fulfillment: the feeling that idyllic union means incest. The relationship between his heroes and heroines, social-idyllic, seems inauthentic because he is unable emotionally to conceive that such a relationship could be satisfying. For this he blames himself rather than society, identifying with the more or less guilty Éraste, Philandre, Pymante, Clitandre, and Prince Floridan while wishing he could be more like Tircis, Rosidor, or the King. In La Veuve he begins to understand that

²³Ibid., p. 437 (V, viii).

if he is not perfect, neither is the second world, and he starts to look for ways of altering his viewpoint of women by changing the social circumstances. Alcidon is Corneille's first creative lover. Still being guilty, this character fails in his project, but Philiste, on the other hand, manages to pass from inferiority to a relationship of parity with the mighty Widow, who is somewhat degraded or humanized by her adventure.²⁴ That the final union of these two is emotionally acceptable to the author constitutes an advance whose importance can scarcely be overemphasized.

In La Galerie du Palais and La Suivante the damning social criticism continues while Corneille's heroes grow more accustomed to treating women (Célidée and Daphnis) as malleable human beings rather than idols. Although these fallible heroines are not of the same divine race as Mélite and Clarice, they are beautiful and desired, and one of them, Daphnis, bears the mark of superior wealth which distinguished the Widow and Corneille's first heroine. After La Suivante it would seem that the stage has been set for a serious attempt, on the part of the hero, to synthesize in some ingenious way his idyllic impulses with his urge to replace the Father. But if the actors are ready the author is unable, at this early moment, to provide

24

Here we see an example of a kind of sympathetic magic which is sometimes operative in Corneille's theater: what one character (Alcidon) does influences the attitude of another (Philiste) almost as if he had done it himself.

them with a suitable script. La Veuve, the longest of the plays from Mélite to Pompée, runs for 1980 lines; La Place Royale, the shortest, measures only 1525--a difference of approximately 500 lines or well over the average length of an act (about 350). The reason for this brevity is that when Alidor is confronted with a perfect woman who desires a speedy marriage, the author can only have him reject her as quickly as possible. Thus, in the absence of any strong subplot or major personality changes, the play is almost bound to be short. However La Place Royale is one of Corneille's more significant efforts, for in this work the hero-villain and the goddess speak to each other as lovers for the first time. Alidor and Angélique resemble Rodrigue and Chimène in that even their fiercest quarrel is still an amorous dialogue. One has the feeling that to place these two characters on the stage together and to let them argue about their love, in the absence of any obstacles to its fulfillment except the hero's desire for freedom, must have caused the playwright considerable emotional strain. This testing of the will, that part of the masculine character which will someday make him the beloved's equal, is no doubt salutary, but the action of the play remains inconclusive and Alidor's final claim of victory over the lion-woman is just so much wishful thinking. Thus in Corneille's next work, Médée, she will reappear and once again tear her victim spiritually in half.

V. Médée

One of the first impressions that we receive, upon mentally comparing the tone of Corneille's Médée with that of its principal sources, the tragedies of Euripides and Seneca and Ovid's Metamorphoses, is that the seventeenth-century writer has somehow become more deeply involved than his predecessors in the symbolic meaning of the conflict between the two protagonists, Jason and Médée. This impression is created partly by Corneille's structural changes, whose esthetic shortcomings suggest the presence of a strong compensating psychological raison d'être, and partly by the very fervor and richness of his poetic expression. Corneille admitted that the style of his version is "fort inégal."¹ But despite its technical flaws, and however much it departs thematically from Seneca and Euripides, it remains a powerful and moving piece of work. To discover why this is so will be the object of our inquiry.

Let us consider first the personality of the heroine. The most spectacular side of Médée is the awful:

Oui, tu vois en moi seule et le fer et la flamme,
Et la terre, et la mer, et l'enfer, et les cieux,
Et le sceptre des rois, et la foudre des dieux.²

¹ Ibid., p. 445 (Examen). ² Ibid., p. 457 (I, v).

This superhuman Médée complements Médée the idyllic mistress and faithful wife of at least six years.³ It was the latter who abandoned her exotic childhood home on the far shores of the Black Sea, escaped the Evil Parent Aetes, and eventually settled with Jason, her first and only love, in Corinth, a second-world port city not unlike Rouen or Paris. Médée tends to think of herself as Jason's partner in crime.⁴ She believes, as the protégé of Hera and Athena perhaps does not, that his life's work, the quest for the Golden Fleece, would have ended in failure had she not repeatedly assisted him with her magic. She imagines that her "immuable amour"⁵ for him is shared, and

3

According to Corneille (*Ibid.*, p. 449 (I, i).), Jason and Médée had spent six years in Thessaly when the sorceress rejuvenated Aeson. This act was followed by her murder of Pélie and their flight to Corinth. Seneca tells us that the couple spent "ten happy years" in that city before the disintegration of their happy marriage (Samuel Lieberman, ed., *Roman Drama, The Library of World Drama* (New York: Bantam Books, 1964), p. 351.). Corneille does not mention this but emphasizes that Acaste, Pélie's successor, is hot in their pursuit. The implication is that they have but recently arrived in Corinth. Corneille apparently wishes to create this impression in order to make his heroine more sexually appealing. And indeed, the symbolic import of his version cannot be fully appreciated unless we envisage her as an attractive young woman: not stunningly attractive, like Créuse, but beautiful in a subtle way which becomes more and more apparent as the play progresses. Thus makeup and costuming would be extremely important elements in the staging of this work.

4

When Jason asks her what "forfaits" he could be accused of, she replies: "La trahison, le meurtre, et tous ceux que j'ai faits." Corneille, I, 473 (III, iii).

5

Ibid., p. 458 (II, i).

she can scarcely conceive that he might prefer Créuse:

Je crois qu'il m'aime encore, et qu'il nourrit en l'âme
Quelques restes secrets d'une si belle flamme,
Qu'il ne fait qu'obéir aux volontés d'un roi
Qui l'arrache à Médée en dépit de sa foi.⁶

In rebelling against Créon, Médée acts as an agent of celestial order. Jason's desertion is an impious act, for when he married her he swore by all the gods of Olympus to remain faithful to her forever.⁷ Médée, for her part, is wisely solicitous in her dealings with the gods. Thus when she asks her ancestor Helios to lend her his chariot, she assures him that she will not use it to disturb the order of the universe, but on the contrary to set things right in one corner where the time is out of joint:

Je veux choir sur Corinthe avec ton char brûlant:
Mais ne crains pas de chute à l'univers funeste;
Corinthe consumé garantira le reste;
De mon juste courroux les implacables vœux
Dans ses odieux murs arrêteront tes feux.⁸

Like Alidor, Médée is especially concerned about repose, of which she has enjoyed little since meeting Jason. She requests of Égée a retreat where she will no longer be harried by her enemies:

Non pas que je les craigne; eux et toute la terre
À leur confusion me livreraient la guerre;

6

Ibid.

7

Robert Graves, The Greek Myths (2 vols.; Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1955), II, 238.

8

Corneille, Théâtre complet, I, 455 (I, v).

Mais je hais ce désordre, et n'aime pas à voir
Qu'il me faille pour vivre user de mon savoir.⁹

Innocence, error, faithful love for Jason, respect for the gods, desire for peace: these are some of the more human attributes of Médée. Although not divine according to legend, she possesses numerous godlike qualities, and principally those of an Earth-Moon goddess. Like her aunt, Circe, "The daughter of the shining Sun, the mistress / Of charms and herbs,"¹⁰ she appears as the Moon in both its aspects: the virgin, untamed Diana and the terrible Hecate. She marries Jason¹¹ and prepares her poisons¹² in a cave. But as a descendant of the Sun she partakes of the upper realm also. She came from the East and from the nether world, rising like la Belle Matineuse, and thus perfectly embodies Corneille's idea of absolute beauty: "Je vous vois aussi beau que vous étiez terrible." The most striking symbol of her double jurisdiction is of course the Sun-chariot drawn by serpents, creatures who since prehistoric times have been thought to communicate with the Underworld.

Médée strongly resembles Corneille's lion-woman. She has a violent temper and knows exactly how most painfully to wound

⁹
Ibid., p. 486 (IV, v).

¹⁰
Ovid, Metamorphoses, p. 339.

¹¹
Graves, Greek Myths, I, 245.

¹²
Corneille, Théâtre complet, I, 476 (IV, i).

her glory-seeking husband with words as well as deeds. She calls him "déloyal,"¹³ "parjure,"¹⁴ "impie."¹⁵ She accuses him of "lâcheté."¹⁶ From a balcony, after slaying his children, she defies and belittles him:

Et que peut contre moi ta débile vaillance?
Mon art faisait ta force, et tes exploits guerriers
Tiennent de mon secours ce qu'ils ont de lauriers.¹⁷

Bereft of wife, fiancée, sons, power, and honor, it is no wonder that he finds the thought of suicide sweet. Nevertheless, despite this ferocious and quite successful endeavor to humiliate Jason as a Master, Médée cannot be called a lion-woman. The latter is essentially an idyllic mother-mistress who attempts to direct the hero's love for her, which is involved with his wish to see himself as the Good Father, toward an act of usurpation which in itself will preclude the fulfillment of that wish. In other words, she holds up to the hero an unflattering mirror-image of himself, says: "Enfin je veux un roi: regardez si vous l'êtes," and then urges him to become king by behaving in an unkingly fashion. He realizes that this cannot be done, and often, as in Cinna, this realization causes him to assume a seemingly timid posture which soon exhausts the lion-woman's short supply of patience. Jason feels the weight

¹³ Ibid., p. 474 (III, iii).

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 494 (V, vi).

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 473 (III, iii).

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 475 (III, iii).

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 495 (V, vi).

of Médée's fury, however, not because he refuses to overthrow a father-figure, but for the opposite reason. The father-figure is Égée. By challenging him for the princess Créuse, Jason is simultaneously reaching above himself, offending a king, and breaking his promise to Médée and the gods. It is this last act which dooms him, for his clever wife knows how to appeal to the deities' acute sense of honor:

Souverains protecteurs des lois de l'hyménée,
 Dieux garants de la foi que Jason m'a donnée,
 Vous qu'il prit à témoin d'une immortelle ardeur
 Quand par un faux serment il vainquit ma pudeur,
 Voyez de quel mépris vous traite son parjure,
 Et m'aidez à venger cette commune injure:
 S'il me peut aujourd'hui chasser impunément,¹⁸
 Vous êtes sans pouvoir ou sans ressentiment.

This speech, for which a near-parallel may be found in the version of Euripides,¹⁹ reiterates one of the oldest themes in Greek tragedy: the gods' vengeance against a man who, challenging their vigor, threatens to diminish the amount of sacrifices which mortals offer to them and thus, presumably, the degree of well-being enjoyed by the hierophantic producers of tragedies. Euripides' Bacchoi, for example, tells the story of Dionysos'

18

Ibid., p. 453 (I, iv).

19

Ten Plays by Euripides, trans. Moses Hadas and John McLean, The Bantam Library of World Drama (New York: Bantam Books, 1966), p. 43.

"Do you believe that the gods of the old days are no longer in office? Do you think that men are now living under a new dispensation? For surely you know that you have broken all your oaths to me."

revenge upon a king, Pentheus, who tried to outlaw his rites.

Another device which may be found in both the Bacchoi and Médée is that of the incredibly-foolhardy victim. Just as Pentheus, hypnotized by Dionysos, dared approach the place where the maenads raged, so Jason illogically assumes that he can betray his sorceress-wife with impunity, even after she has pointedly reminded him of her numerous uncanny and sometimes gruesome services.²⁰ More exactly, he thinks that he can placate her and is willing to take the risk of failure, even though that failure may entail his complete destruction, for he believes that there is much to be gained and very little to be lost. In his present state he is quite miserable. It is not that Médée repels him, but that his love for her is mainly an effect of gratitude:

Je dois tout à Médée, et je ne puis sans honte
Et d'elle et de ma foi tenir si peu de compte,²¹

and that it is completely overshadowed by the appeal of Créuse:

Mais la princesse vient; l'éclat d'un tel visage
Du plus constant du monde attirerait l'hommage,
Et semble reprocher à ma fidélité
D'avoir osé tenir contre tant de beauté.²²

20

We are also reminded of the Bacchoi when Médée uses her magic wand to free Égée from Créon's prison, for the mysterious Stranger escapes from Pentheus' stable in a somewhat similar fashion. He then causes an earthquake to destroy the palace, whereas Corneille's heroine declares that she need but give the word, and "La terre offre à s'ouvrir sous le palais du roi." (Corneille, Théâtre complet, I 468 (III, i).)

21

Ibid., p. 452 (I, ii).

22

Ibid.

Jason does not say "Créuse vient," but "la princesse vient." In his mind, as in Domitie's (Tite et Bérénice), "La personne et le rang ne se séparent point."²³ To him Créuse represents respectability, distinction, gloire. This is what Médée keeps him from possessing and why he must dissociate himself from her. As Créon will explain,

Ton Jason, pris à part, est trop homme de bien:
Le séparant de toi, sa défense est facile.²⁴

The no-longer-young adventurer completely understands the de-meaning quality of his situation. "J'ai honte de ma vie," he argues, "et je hais son usage, / Depuis que je la dois aux effets de ta rage."²⁵ But for him to escape from Médée alone is not enough. He insists on taking their two sons with him, so that when he dies his glory will be perpetuated by a race of kings. Thus he explains to the sorceress, as tactfully as possible (But how can he avoid offending her?), that, while she has to leave Corinth, the children will stay, even if their staying should cost him his life:

M'enlever mes enfants, c'est m'arracher le coeur;
Et Jupiter tout prêt a m'écraser du foudre,
Mon trépas à la main, ne pourrait m'y résoudre.
C'est pour eux que je change; et la Parque sans eux,
Seule de notre hymen pourrait rompre les noeuds.²⁶

Jason's situation is desperate. If his life is ever to count for anything in his own eyes, he must once and for all

²³ Ibid., III, 550 (V, iv).

²⁴ Ibid., I, 461 (II, ii).

²⁵ Ibid., p. 473 (III, iii).

²⁶ Ibid., p. 475 (III, iii).

affirm his heroic essence, that is, he must establish his identity as the Good Father's peer in the two areas where mérite is defined: the amorous and the socio-political. And he has a rare chance to do this, an opportunity which would not occur in the lifetime of most persons, but which has presented itself in his thanks to a seemingly miraculous conjunction of circumstances. These circumstances are: (1) the apparition of a sufficiently reasonable pretext for deserting Médée (Her enemies are closing in. She will go into exile while he stays behind and devotes his "unhappy" life "au bien de nos enfants";²⁷ (2) the occurrence of a possibility to accede to a kingdom (through the love of a princess who will inherit the throne and whose father approves of Jason); and (3) the arising of an opportunity to demonstrate his superiority to a rival who happens to be a généreux Good-Parent figure, Égée.

The amorous conflict between Jason and the Athenian king is Corneille's invention. In Euripides Aegeus is an uninvolved spectator who happens to be passing through, while in Seneca we find no mention of him whatsoever. Some modern critics have roundly condemned Corneille's addition of the Créuse-Égée subplot. They have "judged" the play instead of trying to live

²⁷

Ibid., p. 473 (III, iii).

it. They have called Égée "senile"²⁸ and a "love-sick swain,"²⁹ when in reality he is the perfect hero, at the same time noble and idyllic. Perhaps it is to his discredit that he does not understand the second world, but this may be disputed.

Is Egee, who sails his fleet against Corinth when Créuse breaks their engagement, as great a fool as Jason, who tells her that

Il doit vous témoigner par son obéissance
Combien sur son esprit vous avez de puissance?³⁰

Certainly not in Corneille's judgement. One of his main reasons for including Égée in the plot was clearly to use him, by contrast, as a foil to the anti-hero. Another reason is that Jason, whom Seneca compares to Phaëthon,³¹ cannot be content unless he steals his bride from a father-figure, whereas he also wants to be a legitimate king, not a usurper: the Égée subplot allows him to have his cake and eat it. He defeats Égée on the amorous front when Créon and Créuse decide that he is the better match:

L'un me veut pour son gendre, et l'autre pour mari.
D'un rival couronné les grandeurs souveraines,
La majesté d'Egée, et le sceptre d'Athènes,

28

Claude K. Abraham, "Corneille's Médée: A Tragedy?" South Atlantic Bulletin, XXXII, No. 2 (1967), p. 7.

29

William L. Wiley, "Corneille's First Tragedy: Médée and the Baroque," Esprit créateur, IV (Fall, 1964), p. 145.

30

Corneille, Théâtre complet, I, 463 (II, iii).

31

Lieberman, Roman Drama, p. 365.

N'ont rien, à leur avis, de comparable à moi,
Et banni que je suis, je leur suis plus qu'un roi.³²

And he bests Égée on the socio-political front by overcoming his forces in battle. But Médée, the agent of celestial order, will avenge the "généreux vieillard,"³³ along with herself, in a very complete way.

The transgression of the Corinthian ruler and his daughter is an effect of temerarious pride, poor judgement, and bad faith. Over-impressed by Jason's appearance of worth and power, they insult a king who is truly worthy and a demigoddess who is truly powerful. The instrument of their punishment will be, like Jason, an object of which they take unrightful possession and which is not what it seems. Créuse regards Médée's dazzling garment as a treasure of inestimable price:

... jamais éclat pareil
Ne sema dans la nuit les clartés du soleil;
Les perles avec l'or confusément mêlées,
Mille pierres de prix sur ses bords étalées,
D'un mélange divin éblouissent les yeux;
Jamais rien d'approchant ne se fit en ces lieux.³⁴

Créuse is like Jason in that she does not go beyond appearances. She thinks that if she wears the divinely beautiful dress, she will be as good as divine. He thinks that if he overthrows Égée, he will be as good as the Father. He fails to realize that what makes Égée glorious is his essence, not his title, and

³²

Corneille, Théâtre complet, I, 450 (I, i).

³³

Ibid., p. 478 (IV, i).

³⁴

Ibid., p. 465 (II, iv).

she fails to understand that the origin of Médée's transcendence is her wisdom, not her dress.

Égée's title is a function of his virtue; Médée's dress, a function of her art. Because she respects the gods and knows which words to chant and herbs to gather, she holds easy sway over the most awful powers of heaven, hell, and earth:

Un mot du haut des cieux fait descendre le foudre,
Les mers, pour noyer tout, n'attendent que sa loi;
La terre offre à s'ouvrir sous le palais du roi;
L'air tient les vents tout prêts à suivre sa colère.
Tant la nature esclave a peur de lui déplaire;
Et, si ce n'est assez de tous les éléments,
Les enfers vont sortir à ses commandements.³⁵

Médée in the serpent chariot of Helios, like the playwright at his desk and the alchemist before his furnace, may be considered as an emblem for the individual who has obtained absolute power over the middle world by uniting the upper and the lower:

Ascend with the greatest sagacity from earth to heaven, and then again descend to earth, and unite together the powers of things superior and inferior. Thus you will obtain the glory of the whole world, and obscurity will fly away from you.³⁶

Médée's raiment, originally a gift from Helios, may therefore be regarded figuratively as the spontaneous flowering of her

35

Ibid., p. 468 (III, i).

36

The eighth precept of the Emerald Table of Hermes, cited in John Read, Through Alchemy to Chemistry, a Procession of Ideas and Personalities (London: George Bell and Sons, 1957), p. 23. This precept "adumbrates the circulation of the proximate materials within the sealed Vessel of Hermes, in the last stages of the Great Work of preparing the Philosopher's Stone." (Ibid., p. 24.)

deep science, and a near-equivalent to the Philosopher's Stone.

Médée has special powers over time. She can make the old young, a gift which stems from her affinities with the waning and waxing moon. She rejuvenated, among others, Jason's father Aeson.³⁷ She herself is destined to become an immortal,³⁸ and in Euripides she bestows a kind of immortality on childless Aegeus when she promises him descendants in exchange for sanctuary. In all versions she deprives Jason and Créon of this vicarious afterlife, along with their hopes for perpetual honor, by putting to death her sons and Créuse. Thus when Créon sees his daughter ensnared and perishing, like himself, in the invisible flames of the magic garment, he cries out:

Ah! rage, désespoir, destins, feux, poisons, charmes,
Tournez tous contre moi vos plus cruelles armes:
S'il faut vous assouvir par la mort de deux rois,
Faites en ma faveur que je meure deux fois,
Pourvu que mes deux morts emportent cette grâce
De laisser ma couronne à mon unique race,
Et cet espoir si doux, qui m'a toujours flatté,
De revivre à jamais en sa postérité.³⁹

It is fitting that ambitious, overbearing Créon and his grasping, callous child should be punished by the mysterious object upon which they lay their unworthy hands, and it is likewise ironically appropriate that Médée should obtain a kingdom,

³⁷ Corneille, Théâtre complet, I, 449 (I, i).

³⁸ Graves, Greek Myths, II, 257.

³⁹ Corneille, Théâtre complet, I, 490 (V, iv).

that of Athens, while denying her unfaithful husband the political glory that he so ardently desires. Médée, who loses as a second-world lover but wins as a sorceress, may be compared to the future author of L'Illusion comique and Le Cid, who was also defeated by society (in the Catherine-affair) but went on to gain worldly honors and immortality through his ability to conjure up marvelous places of retreat. Considered from this standpoint, Médée's dress becomes the symbol of his genius or inspiration, or more exactly, the sign of the rule of the unconscious over the everyday world through the good offices of Apollo, a kind of alchimie du verbe.

Besides being a patron of the arts, the Sun-god is a law-giver. We have noted Médée's respect for order. Jason and Créuse offended Helios when they broke their promises, respectively, to Médée and Égée, and are thus suitably punished by fire. There can be no doubt that Corneille sides with the heroine despite her cruelty. In his Examen he states that she "attire si bien de son côté toute la faveur de l'auditoire, qu'on excuse sa vengeance après l'indigne traitement qu'elle a reçu de Créon et de son mari; et qu'on a plus de compassion du désespoir où ils l'ont réduite, que de tout ce qu'elle leur fait souffrir."⁴⁰

Despite this preference, however, a definite awakening of sympathy for Jason and Créuse occurs toward the end of the

⁴⁰

Ibid., p. 445.

play. This is due not only to our pity for their horrible suffering, but also to the fact that Médée's persecution has a sublimating effect (in the alchemical sense) on the relationship between the two lovers. Here again there is some danger of being led astray by critics. Corneille himself, for example, is over-apologetic about the onstage deaths of Créon and Créuse,⁴¹ the pathos of which he handles quite effectively by causing the two sufferers to realize that their punishment is deserved and by having each one show more concern for the other than for himself. Perhaps the worst that can legitimately be said about the fifth act is that Créuse, who bids farewell to two persons separately, is a little long in dying.

Some commentators would have us believe that the parting emotions of Créuse and Jason lack seriousness because they are expressed in précieux language.⁴² In order to realize how untrue this is, one need only read the text. The closing dialogue between the two lovers, like much of the remainder of the work, is obviously charged with strong feeling. Médée's separation of the two lovers imparts to their relationship a genuinely idyllic dimension, allowing them, as Corneille might say, to show who they are. When she murders Créuse she becomes

⁴¹

Ibid.

⁴²

The myth of an absurd Médée is an exaggeration of the work's comic traits already somewhat overemphasized in a fine article by Albert Thibaudet ("Un Tricentenaire"), appearing in the September 1, 1935 number of the Nouvelle Revue française.

the wall which Pyramus and Thisbe will never scale, the Evil Parents who doom Shakespeare's teenage lovers. Yet Jason and Créuse do not react to their situation like children. To be sure, the narcissistic theme of Platonic union, muted during the earlier scenes, now becomes dominant. Thus, for example, Jason makes a futile attempt to unite with Créuse in death by embracing her in her flaming garment. But at the same time the transports of the lovers are overlaid with a kind of heroic stylization revealing the strength of their dedication to principles considered to be nobler and more mature. Créon dead and Créuse dying for her love of Jason, she is, in his eyes, no longer just "la princesse" whom he desires but "ma reine" whom he is on the point of spiritually possessing:

Ma reine, si l'hymen n'a pu joindre nos corps,
Nous joindrons nos esprits, nous joindrons nos deux morts.⁴³

These lines, a prelude to the physical embrace, have erotic overtones, and Jason's disappointment when the poison refuses to burn him is not at all a mere expression of galanterie précieuse: he deserves to be burned and punished for possessing a queen, and this punishment itself, were it forthcoming, would constitute a soul-satisfying proof of the authenticity of their union:

Quoi! ce poison m'épargne, et ces feux impuissants
Refusent de finir les douleurs que je sens!
Il faut donc que je vive, et vous m'êtes ravie!

⁴³

Corneille, Théâtre complet, I, 492 (V, v).

Justes dieux! quel forfait me condamne à la vie?⁴⁴

Jason then has the idea of taking his own life, but Créuse will not let him. Dying, in a sense, for his honor, which in their view largely coincides with his ambition, she urges him to avenge himself in the middle world, so that he will not be dishonored by her descent to the lower:

Vis pour sauver ton nom de cette ignominie
Que Créuse soit morte, et Médée impunie;
Vis pour garder le mien en ton coeur affligé,
Et du moins ne meurs point que tu ne sois vengé.⁴⁵

With this rather imperious demand for blood, Créuse, whom Jason had always been inclined to consider as the inhabitant of a sphere higher than his own,⁴⁶ reveals herself as the play's lion-woman, the one adversary truly worthy of the sorceress who represents Égée and the gods. Though easily eliminated as an individual, she will continue to act through Jason as an archetype:

Adieu: donne la main; que, malgré ta jalouse,
J'emporte chez Pluton le nom de ton épouse.⁴⁷

⁴⁴

Ibid., p. 493 (V, v).

⁴⁵

Ibid.

⁴⁶

Thus, sounding something like Philiste in the early scenes of La Veuve, he exclaims:

Que ne vous dois-je point pour cette préférence,
Où mes désirs n'osaient porter mon espérance!
C'est bien me témoigner un amour infini,
De mépriser un roi pour un pauvre banni!

--Ibid., p. 464 (II, iv).

⁴⁷

Ibid., p. 493 (V, v).

The battle-lines are now drawn and Médée has won the first skirmish. The question is whether, when the sound of the last shot has faded, Jason will have proven his superiority over the enemy and her camp, thus establishing his right to possess Créuse, or whether, by demonstrating her transcendence, Médée will have forced him to recognize her moral superiority over the lion-woman and so fulfilled her own wish "Qu'il ait regret à moi pour son dernier supplice."⁴⁸ The contest between them will be a sort of jugement de Dieu in which the prize is Jason's soul. Although he would rather die than engage in this struggle, Jason realizes that he can prove himself worthy to replace the Good Father Égée only by successfully upholding his new family's honor:

Mais leur puis-je imputer ma mort en sacrifice?
Elle m'est un plaisir, et non pas un supplice.
Mourir, c'est seulement auprès d'eux me ranger,
C'est rejoindre Créuse, et non pas la venger.⁴⁹

His first thought is to murder his sons, the "instruments"⁵⁰ who brought the poisoned dress to Créuse, in order that "la sorcière en vous commence de souffrir."⁵¹ But Jason hesitates, and it is Médée who brings to fruition Égée's curse on the would-be ancestor of kings: "Qu'il puisse voir sa race à ses yeux égorgée."⁵² Although she suffered in private before

⁴⁸

Ibid., p. 493 (I, iv).

⁴⁹

Ibid., p. 494 (V, v).

⁵⁰

Ibid.

⁵¹

Ibid.

⁵²

Ibid., p. 484 (IV, iv).

committing this terrible deed, in Jason's presence Médée betrays not the slightest sign of regret. She taunts him, laughs at his helpless rage, tells him to go and boast to Créuse of his "rares aventures,"⁵³ and finally she soars away in her eerie chariot: "Adieu, parjure: apprends à connaître ta femme."⁵⁴ Here the story of Jason's overreach truly ends, and what follows is merely a coda.

Médée triumphant, Jason finds himself caught on the horns of an insoluble dilemma. On one hand the leonine-idyllic archetype continues to clamor for the destruction of the obstacle which separates him from his mistress:

Venge-toi, pauvre amant, Créuse le commande;
Ne lui refuse point un sang qu'elle demande;
Écoute les accents de sa mourante voix,
Et vole sans rien craindre à ce que tu lui dois.
À qui sait bien aimer il n'est rien d'impossible.
Eusses-tu pour retraite un roc inaccessible,
Tigresse, tu mourras; et malgré ton savoir,
Mon amour te verra soumise à son pouvoir.⁵⁵

But, upon reflection, Jason concludes that he will never be able to defeat his supernatural adversary. No power on earth can touch her. And so, perhaps in order to avoid the necessity of admitting to himself that he was far more glorious as Médée's husband than he could ever hope to become through marriage to a mere terrestrial queen, he falls upon his sword, nourishing the

⁵³ Ibid., p. 495 (V, vi). ⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 496 (V, vii).

double illusion that Créuse will welcome him to Hades with open arms and that the gods will punish the agent who, in reducing him to less than nothing, has served them well:

Vains transports, ou sans fruit mon désespoir s'amuse,
Cessez de m'empêcher de rejoindre Créuse.
Ma reine, ta belle âme, en partant de ces lieux,
M'a laissé la vengeance, et je la laisse aux dieux;
Eux seuls, dont le pouvoir égale la justice,
Peuvent de la sorcière achever le supplice.
Trouve-le bon, chère ombre, et pardonne a mes feux.
Si je vais te revoir plus tôt que to ne veux.⁵⁶

But who really wins Jason's soul? We cannot say. Besides being manneristic in form (a "comic" tragedy), Médée is manneristic in content. The play creates an unsatisfying emotional effect, because the playwright himself is unsatisfied. At the same time that he declares his fidelity to the idyllic mistress as the energizing source of his controlled, ascetic, Apollonian genius (Médée) and rejects the idea of possessing her in real life, as lion-woman and belle dame sans merci (Créuse), he reveals the persistence of her attraction in this latter form. And it is this attraction which prevents him from languishing, as a writer, the way that Jason languished in his marriage to Médée.

Let us consider briefly, before leaving the subject of Corneille's first tragedy, how this work precurses the comedy which follows it. We have observed that Jason's love for Créuse is closely related to his respect for her worldly station and suggested that he is incapable of divorcing passion from

ambition. His love, like that of Rosidor in Clitandre, may be called selfish in that it is really directed toward himself, that is, toward a vision of himself as Créuse's husband, the glorious ruler of Corinth. It is a symptom, partially, of what we termed his "need to affirm his heroic essence," amorously and politically, through show. But perhaps Jason has no heroic essence. His mistake, and that of Créuse, is that they fail to recognize the superior importance of interior value over exterior appearance (Médée's beauty as opposed to that of Créuse, Jason's gloire as opposed to that of Égée). Jason seeks the only kind of love relationship he can understand, a selfish one, and the only kind of glory he believes matters, exterior glory, in one and the same act: his union with Créuse. Thus we see that the quality of love (unselfish or selfish) may sometimes be related directly to the quality of gloire (interior or exterior).

One of these terms is particularly troublesome to define. Everyone knows the difference between exterior gloire, that visible display with which Jason hoped to compensate for his sense of inadequacy, and interior gloire, whose universe "est celui de l'âme attentive à ne pas se trahir."⁵⁷ Likewise we can easily understand what is meant by the term selfish love, in both its simple, narcissistic connotation (the beloved as the lover's mirror) and its more varied social senses (the

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Nadal, Sentiment, p. 312.

beloved as an object in some way improving the lover's position vis-à-vis third parties). What tends to elude our materialistically oriented analytical faculties, however, is unselfish love, a mystical phenomenon whose effects may be described but whose causes defy detection. The Fates deemed that Jason, the arch-opportunist, should live out his life in ignorance of the beauty of this phenomenon; but the hero of L'Illusion comique, his descendant, will have better fortune. In a kind of initiatory exercise, on the stage of a theater, the mysteries of unselfish love will be revealed to him, and he will come away from this revelation transfigured.

VI. L'Illusion comique

Like Médée, L'Illusion comique illustrates that those who betray their marriage vows to pursue lion-women are likely to come to a bad end. This is Clindor-Théagène's only serious crime, his other transgressions being either minor or justifiable. He steals an insignificant sum from his father; leaving home, he pursues, out of necessity, numerous demeaning occupations sometimes bordering on the illegal but never quite crossing the line (soothsayer, patent medicine vendor, owner of a dancing monkey); he changes his name; he dupes Matamore and half-dupes Lyse; he kills Adraste who attacks him unfairly; he escapes from prison; and he elopes with Isabelle, much to the displeasure, we may be sure, of her evil father.

The betrayal itself is not real but a kind of might-have-been which occurs during the course of a play in which Clindor and Isabelle are actors. His punishment for this crime, his death at the hands of Prince Florilame's agents, is likewise unreal. In reality the story of his life is one of virtue rewarded: he is obviously clever, but he also demonstrates, in his dealings with Matamore, a certain good-humored kindness and, in those with Adraste, courage and généreux self-restraint, not to mention good swordsmanship.

Though nobly born and potentially wealthy,¹ he is, for all practical purposes, a poor commoner. Yet he does not marry Isabelle for her money, even though the rejected Lyse is inclined to believe him when he insincerely protests the opposite. Thus she sighs:

Tu m'aimes, mais le bien te fait être inconstant:
Au siècle ou nous vivons, qui n'en ferait autant?

Clindor is serious in his courtship of Isabelle. He realizes that her father will disinherit her when they marry,³ and surely he agrees with her statement that

Qui regarde les biens ou la condition
N'a qu'un amour avare, ou plein d'ambition,
Et souille lâchement par ce mélange infâme
Les plus nobles désirs qu'enfante une belle âme.⁴

It is this idyllic devotion to love, along with the fact that he is a self-made man, or more exactly, one who has expressed his noble essence through existential deeds, which causes us to prefer Clindor to his double, Doraste. The latter, after

¹
Ibid., p. 526 (II, viii): "Il se dit gentilhomme, et riche."

²
Ibid., p. 537 (III, vi).

³
Ibid., p. 561 (V, iii):

J'étais lors peu de chose, oui; mais qu'il te souvienn
Que ta fuite égala ta fortune à la mienne,
Et que pour t'enlever c'était un faible appas
Que l'éclat de tes biens qui ne te suivaient pas.

⁴
Ibid., p. 523 (II, vi).

several amorous adventures of no real consequence, eventually settled down in a comfortable marriage to a lady with an impressive dowry.⁵ Though somewhat dull, he is quite likable, and both Pridamant and the omniscient Alcandre deem him worthy of their paternal affection.

It is Isabelle's father, G ron te, who considers money and rank to be the prime desiderata in a spouse. But, although Clindor is not interested in these things in the same way that G ron te is, his love for Isabelle still does not exclude them, nor can it be called innocent. At first he reminds us of Philiste and Jason. He casts himself, with a secret, almost hypocritical pleasure, in the role abject inferior, scarcely daring to take possession of the splendid mother-queen figure who has placed herself within his upward reach:

Dieu! qui l'e t jamais cru que mon sort rigoureux
Se rend t si facile   mon coeur amoureux!
Banni de mon pays par la rigueur d'un p re,
Sans support, sans amis, accabl  de mis re,
.
Ce pitoyable  tat de ma triste fortune
N'a rien qui vous d plaise ou qui vous importune,
Et d'un rival puissant les biens et la grandeur
Obtiennent moins sur vous que ma sinc re ardeur.⁶

5

Ibid., p. 507 (I, i):

Depuis que j'ai quitt  le s jour de Bretagne
Pour venir faire ici le noble de campagne,
Et que deux ans d'amour, par une heureuse fin,
M'ont acquis Sil rie et ce ch teau voisin,

6

Ibid., p. 523 (II, vi).

Isabelle replies to Clindor's self-abasing transports with an impatience approaching irritation, almost as though she perceives that they express a love for what she symbolizes in the private regions of his mind rather than a concern for what she really is, or for what she would like to be in his eyes: the other half of their beautiful soul, neither more nor less glorious than the half which he himself represents:

Épargnez ces propos superflus;
Je les sais, je les crois: que voulez-vous de plus?
Je néglige à vos yeux l'offre d'un diadème;
Je dédaigne un rival: en un mot, je vous aime.
C'est aux commencements des faibles passions
A s'amuser encore aux protestations:
Il suffit de nous voir au point où sont les nôtres;
Un coup d'oeil vaut pour vous tous les discours des autres.⁷

That Clindor's feelings for Isabelle, like Philiste's for Clarice, subsequently become healthier and more virile is indicated by the following speech, made shortly before his fight withAdraste:

Vous me rendez confus, et mon âme ravie
Ne vous peut, en revanche, offrir rien que ma vie;
Mon sang est le seul bien qui me reste en ces lieux,
Trop heureux de le perdre en servant vos beaux yeux,
Mais si mon astre un jour, changeant son influence,
Me donne un accès libre au lieu de ma naissance,
Vous verrez que ce choix n'est pas fort inégal,
Et que, tout balancé, je vaud bien mon rival.⁸

It is precisely because he does valoir bien son rival, the princely but evil Adraste,⁹ that Clindor is able to succeed

⁷ Ibid. ⁸ Ibid., p. 539 (III, viii).

⁹ Adraste is supported, like some other noble Cornelian

where the less virtuous Jason, whose rival was Égée, failed, and where adulterous Clindor-Théagène will also fail.

At the time that he slaysAdraste, however, vestiges of sinful desire continue to cling to the hero. His prison soliloquy leaves no doubt that he is to be executed not only for slaying that intruder into the idyllic garden, but also for attempting to possess Isabelle as mother-mistress. Like Jason, Clindor reached, he fears, too high, and like Jason he faces poetic justice in the form of a humiliating death:

Aimables souvenirs de mes chères délices,
Qu'on va bientôt changer en d'infâmes supplices,
· · · · ·
Redites-moi l'excès de ma témérité;
Que d'un si haut dessein ma fortune incapable
Rendait ma flamme injuste, et mon espoir coupable;
Que je fus criminel quand je devins amant,
Et que ma mort en est le juste châtiment.¹⁰

But if he dies, Clindor's punishment is likely to take on the complexion of a moral victory similar to the one which Jason sought to gain when he flung himself on Médée's lethal gown, that is, a victory for evil:

Quel bonheur m'accompagne à la fin de ma vie!
Isabelle, je meurs pour vous avoir servie;
Et de quelque tranchant que je souffre les coups,
Je meurs trop glorieux, puisque je meurs pour vous.¹¹

A rebellious queen-figure's intention to unite with her guilty

rivals, (e.g., Pacorus in Suréna), by an evil parent. The odious King in Théophile de Viau's Amours tragiques de Pyrame et Thisbé may be considered as one of his spiritual predecessors.

¹⁰

Ibid., p. 554 (IV, vii).

¹¹

Ibid.

lover in death increases the potentiality of a scandalous dénouement:

Je veux suivre ta mort, puisque j'en suis la cause,
Et le même moment verra par deux trépas
Nos esprits amoureux se rejoindre là-bas.
Ainsi, père inhumain, ta cruauté déçue
De nos saintes ardeurs verra l'heureuse issue.¹²

To avoid writing another tragedy which tends to contradict one of Western culture's principal moral tenets, Corneille must somehow rescue Clindor and desensitize his incestuous relationship with Isabelle. These goals he achieves through character elaboration and the introduction of a deus ex machina.

In the interval between Clindor's imprisonment and his escape, the personality of Isabelle's servant Lyse becomes more domineering while that of her mistress undergoes an inverse development, a kind of de-lionization. Corneille juxtaposes the two women for contrast: strong Lyse, weak Isabelle. In I, iv, Isabelle is tearful, helpless, despairing. Lyse enters, smiling and confident, and chides her:

Quel fruit espérez-vous de vos douleurs frivoles?
Pensez-vous, pour pleurer et ternir vos appas,
Rappeler votre amant des portes du trepas?¹³

The servant then discloses that she has instigated a conspiracy to save Clindor. It seems that his jailor, the brother of the prison warden, has fallen in love with her. The story of their

¹² Ibid., p. 544 (IV, i).

¹³ Ibid., p. 545 (IV, ii).

relationship, whose telling requires only about fifty lines,¹⁴ is a complete résumé of what happens, ideally, between the lion-woman and her victim. Through amorous douceurs which have placed the dazzled jailor "en état de ne m'oser rien dédire,"¹⁵ by promising him wealth, by urging him to rise above his lowly station in the childish "underworld" of the prison, and by angrily threatening to reject him when he hesitates, Lyse persuades him to rebel against authority (the absent warden) and flee into maturity with Clindor, Isabelle, and herself. There is even a shadowy reappearance of the noble-rival figure (Égée in Médée) in the person of Clindor, with whom, incidentally, the jailor rightly suspects Lyse of being in love, but whom he will "replace."

Thus in L'Illusion we see the same action carried out three times: once by Clindor and Isabelle; once by Lyse and the jailor; and once, abortively, by Théagène and the princess. It is an extremely dangerous action because it represents, symbolically, the fulfillment of a desire to replace the Father, by force, sexually and as a figure of authority.

It seems reasonable to assume that, after Clindor's escape from jail, Isabelle continues to reign over his amorous world with some authority, even though she has been de-lionized, possessed, and reduced to his social level. But it is probably

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 457-458 (IV, ii).

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 457 (IV, ii).

not very long until her appeal fades. A new opportunity to go lion-hunting then presents itself, and Clindor-Théagène cannot resist:

Mon âme est trop atteinte, et mon cœur trop blessé
 Pour craindre les périls dont je suis menacé.
 Ma passion m'aveugle, et pour cette conquête
 Croit hasarder trop peu de hasarder ma tête.¹⁶

Clindor's life is in danger because his new mistress is the wife of a great prince. (Since one of the laws of his obsession is that he must continually strive upward, it is theoretically inevitable that he should eventually enter the tragic world.)

Florilame's protection and his own military prowess have made Clindor-Théagène "Un peu moindre de rang, mais plus puissant que lui."¹⁷ Thus once again he may claim that "je vaudrais bien mon rival." But this time he commits a real crime as well as a symbolic one, betraying the solemn duties of marriage and friendship, and so we may expect him to receive a real punishment.

Florilame being, like the warden in the Lyse-jailor episode, elsewhere, Clindor has arranged a nocturnal rendez-vous with the Princess in the "grand jardin"¹⁸ of her residence. When he passes into this forbidden place through a door in the wall separating their adjoining property, like the wall in the Pyramus-story, he finds that the person waiting for him is not

¹⁶

Ibid., p. 564 (V, iii).

¹⁷

Ibid., p. 562 (V, iii).

¹⁸

Ibid., p. 559 (V, ii).

Rosine but his wife, who has somehow learned of their plan. The conversation which then occurs between the offender and the injured party is of the utmost consequence.

During the course of this dialogue Isabelle-Hippolyte demonstrates that she is, in some very significant ways, the hero's moral superior. The principal misconception of Clindor's which she overcomes is that her love for him is like his for her before their marriage, or for Rosine presently. In her initial argument she attempts to establish that it is attached to his person only; it has nothing to do, she explains, with his worldly station:

L'amour que j'ai pour toi m'a fait tout hasarder
Non pas pour des grandeurs, mais pour te posséder.¹⁹

And later she repeats:

Je te l'ai déjà dit, que toute ta grandeur
Ne fut jamais l'objet de ma sincère ardeur.
Je ne suivais que toi, quand je quittai mon père.²⁰

But Clindor resists the idea that Isabelle loves him "for himself alone," that is, in a way which transcends self-interest: "tu me suivais moins que tes propres désirs."²¹ To prove his point, he equates the feelings which drew them together to his present attachment for Rosine, whose nature he grossly oversimplifies. This attachment is merely a "brutale ardeur"²²

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 561 (V, iii).

²⁰ Ibid., p. 562 (V, iii).

²¹ Ibid., p. 561 (V, iii).

²² Ibid., p. 565 (V, iii).

which will soon consume itself, a kind of madness inspired by Eros:

C'est un feu que le temps pourra seul modérer;
C'est un torrent qui passe et ne saurait durer.²³

Simultaneously, however, he advances the illogical argument that the "feux sacrés"²⁴ which join Clindor and Isabelle have conserved their "première vigueur"²⁵ and will continue to burn brightly long after his infatuation with Rosine has been forgotten, for those fires are the sign of a love founded on virtue and honor:

L'amour dont la vertu n'est point le fondement
Se détruit de soi-même, et passe en un moment;
Mais celui qui nous joint est un amour solide,
Où l'honneur a son lustre, où la vertu préside;
Sa durée a toujours quelques nouveaux appas,
Et ses fermes liens durent jusqu'au trépas.²⁶

Thus he requests her indulgence:

Souffre une folle ardeur qui ne vivra qu'un jour,
Et qui n'affaiblit point le conjugal amour.²⁷

Although these protestations ring hollow, Isabelle, seeming to realize that she cannot divert Clindor from Rosine any more than Médée, with all her power, could turn Jason away from Créuse, accepts them at face value. Her only concern is that Florilame will discover the affair and punish Clindor as he deserves. She urges him to be cautious:

²³ Ibid., p. 564 (V, iii). ²⁴ Ibid., p. 563 (V, iii).
²⁵ Ibid. ²⁶ Ibid. ²⁷ Ibid.

Puisqu'à ces passe-temps ton humeur te convie,
 Cours après tes plaisirs, mais assure ta vie.
 Sans aucun sentiment je te verrai changer,
 Lorsque tu changeras sans te mettre en danger.²⁸

Here Corneille establishes that Isabelle does indeed love Clindor rather than "ses propres désirs," for we may infer that, if the opposite were true, those desires, or in other words her wish to possess him entirely, would be transformed by frustration into jealous rage. Clindor realizes now that her love for him is stronger than her sense of honor, but apparently he continues to doubt that she loves him exceptionally well. Perhaps he suspects that her sense of honor is simply less highly developed than it should be. (After all, he himself is no paragon.) This would explain why he remains seemingly unmoved by her generosity:

Mon âme est trop atteinte, et mon coeur trop blessé
 Pour craindre les périls dont je suis menacé.²⁹

But then Isabelle makes an éblouissante revelation. Taking the rashness of this loco amor as a sure sign that her husband has not long to live, she tells him that she must kill herself as soon as possible, for surely, after Clindor has been executed, the Prince will complete his vengeance by assaulting her sexually, and this her honor could not bear:

Non, je n'attendrai pas que ta perte certaine
 Puisse attirer sur moi les restes de ta peine,
 Et que de mon honneur, gardé si chèrement,

28

Ibid., p. 564 (V, iii).

29

Ibid.

Il fasse un sacrifice a son ressentiment.³⁰

The message is clear, and Clindor immediately understands it: his person means more to Isabelle than her honor, and her honor means more to her than her life. Instantly he goes to his knees, again subordinated to his queen, but no longer in the same way as when she represented the lion-woman. Her superiority, far from crushing him and inspiring him to crime in order to escape from it, now infuses in him a sense of power, a joy emanating from a realization of the scope and helplessness of her love, and of his own freedom and superiority in the erotic realm, while her god-like nobility calls forth in him a desire to emulate her. And this he does by renouncing the fatal passion for the hunt which he said he could never resist:

Je ne sais qui je dois admirer davantage,
Ou de ce grand amour, ou de ce grand courage;
Tous les deux m'ont vaincu: je reviens sous te lois,
Et ma brutale ardeur va rendre les abois;
C'en est fait, elle expire, et mon âme plus saine
Vient de rompre les noeuds de sa honteuse chaîne.³¹

Not only has Isabelle saved him from Rosine, but also from all other leonine incarnations, and thus from the purgatorial existence of the coureur:

Que les plus beaux objets qui soient dessus la terre
Conspirent désormais a me faire la guerre;
Ce coeur, inexpugnable aux assauts de leurs yeux, 32
N'aura plus que les tiens pour maîtres et pour dieux.

In the person of Théagène, Clindor, the prodigal son, has fully atoned for the symbolic crime he committed and for the

³⁰ Ibid., p. 565 (V, iii).

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

real crimes of which he was potentially guilty. He has found salvation in the theater, which has allowed both him and Isabelle to achieve their entelechy in a perfect union. Now it is necessary, for the sake of completeness, that he be reconciled with the old man who has attentively watched this history unfold in Alcandre's magic cave. Therefore the magician shows Pridamant the comedians counting their plentiful receipts and preaches a little sermon on the honors and glory of the theatrical profession, with the result that the prodigal son receives full paternal absolution: "Clindor a trop bien fait"³³ and all ends happily.

L'Illusion comique stands at the summit of an uneven evolutionary process during which the Cornelian hero-villain, with the help of an increasing insight into himself and the world, progresses toward the fulfillment of his contradictory aspirations: idyllic union with the beloved-as-superior and legitimate succession to the mantle of the All-Good Father. In Mélite he rebelled against fate, hoping to gain possession of the idyllic mother-mistress unfairly with the counterfeited letters. In Clitandre he rebelled more violently, challenged God, father, and king, and refused to repent: "Je ne suis criminel sinon manque d'effets."³⁴ Again rebellious and unrepentant in La Veuve, he offered more cogent criticism of

³³

Ibid., p. 569 (V, v).

³⁴

Ibid., p. 146 (V, iv).

society and devised a rather ingenious plan for overcoming it and possessing the beloved. This plan failed but helped Philiste, the nominal hero, establish a sense of equality with Clarice. In La Place Royale the heroine calls the hero-villain's bluff and becomes the lion-woman, whereas previously he had played the seditious role alone. Taken aback by this counter-challenge, Corneille pauses to review, in Médée, the reasons why his desire for union should remain frustrated. What these reasons amount to is a feeling of guilt and unworthiness due to (1) the fact that Créuse, being Jason's superior, rightfully belongs to a better man than he, Égée, and (2) the fact that Jason has already proved, in two previous marriages, that even if he were Créuse's husband and equal, he would soon tire of her and seek to unite with a woman he regarded as his superior. And no doubt he would then tire of this successor to Créuse, and of the successor's successor, and so forth. In order to escape the lion-woman, Jason would have to become equal or superior to the Good Father while establishing dominance over the beloved, and to avoid the disappearance of passion he would also have to recognize her superiority over himself.

All this Clindor-Théagène does in L'Illusion comique. His merit wins him the friendship of the Prince and the gratitude of the King, and his power is greater than that of the former. Thus is partially removed the first reason for not taking possession of the ideal female (the hero's sense of inferiority).

This reason and the second cause (his inconstancy) completely disappear when he discovers a motive for eternally loving one person. It is customary to refer to the sentiment aroused by this motive as amour-estime, although that term is somewhat inaccurate.

When we speak of esteem as a source of passion, what we are really talking about is admiration:

Nous sommes hors du temps de cette vieille erreur
 Qui faisait de l'amour, une aveugle fureur.

 C'est par les yeux qu'il entre, et nous dit vos appas;
 Lors notre esprit en juge; et, suivant le mérite,
 Il fait croître une ardeur que cette vue excite.

 Et la même raison qui vous rend admirable
 Doit rendre, comme vous, ma flamme incomparable.³⁵

Esteem is approving admiration with the elements of surprise and mystery attenuated. The danger, for a person who loves "reasonably," is that passion will cool to affection and indifference as admiration cools to esteem and familiarity. If the mistress of such a lover wishes him to remain eternally faithful, she must find some way to continually renew his admiration.

Admiration is "the emotion we feel when confronted with extremes in behavior."³⁶ Admirable behavior also has to be

³⁵

Ibid., pp. 276-277 (La Galerie du Palais, III, vi).

³⁶

Pierre Corneille, Polyeucte and Le Menteur, ed. Georges May, The Laurel Language Library, (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1963), p. 20.

mysterious, for "we admire people to the extent that we cannot explain what they do."³⁷ Clindor-Théagène admires Isabelle-Hippolyte because she confronts him with an extreme in human behavior--a love surpassing her fear of dishonor and attachment to life--and also because he cannot explain this love. It is a great and mysterious emotion which lies beyond his powers of comprehension. He knows this because he has cross-examined Isabelle on the subject: he has no choice but to admire.

Meanwhile his love for her is automatically renewed (love being necessarily automatic and never a matter of will, even in Corneille) by two realizations. First, that this arcane emotion which she can feel and he cannot makes her his superior; and second, that it redefines him, bespeaking the existence, in her mind, of a dominating and transcendently beautiful image which he identifies as his own: "Tu vois dans mes yeux / Un portrait que mon coeur conserve beaucoup mieux."³⁸

The hero's love remains largely narcissistic and inferior in quality to that of the beloved. Again he must realize this, but the realization does not cause him to regard himself as inferior to Isabelle in absolute worth, for love is the natural

37

B. F. Skinner, Beyond Freedom and Dignity (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), p. 58.

38

Corneille, Théâtre complet, I, 267 (La Galerie du Palais, II, ix).

province of women. It is only when the beloved outdoes the hero as a "lion" that he feels his self-esteem threatened. Rather than alarming Clindor, his new understanding inspires him to demonstrate to Isabelle that, if she excels him in her feminine ability to love unselfishly, he surpasses her in the masculine art of self-control--that, if she is the supreme female ("loveliest of all those Eastern girls"), he is the indomitable male ("maître de moi comme de l'univers"³⁹).

Thus, in a relationship which takes into account the necessity that the hero mature and replace the Good Father, Pyramus and Thisbe are reborn: each equal to the other in absolute worth but each superior to the other intrinsically and incomplete without him. Like Yin and Yang, Clindor and Isabelle now constitute a single entity made up of two complementary and mutually dependent halves; her cry: "Vous ne l'avez massacré qu'à demi" is no figure of speech, and the coincidence of her death with his, no accident.

The inner play ends pathetically because, Clindor's newly acquired gloire being interior, only he and Isabelle are aware of its existence. The Prince and his agents would perhaps relent if they understood that this is not the same Clindor who was determined to seduce Rosine at any cost, but a new man and the conqueror of the lion-woman who, as early as Mélite, had

³⁹
Ibid., p. 776 (Cinna, V, iii).

cast a pall over Corneille's universe:

On ne se moque point des femmes de ma sorte;
Et je ferai bien voir à vos feux empressés
Que vous n'en êtes pas encore où vous pensez.

In the poet's next work the hero's interior gloire will become a matter of public record, adding to his exterior gloire and thus to his credentials as a worthy successor to the King-Good Father. However it is not true, as we shall see, that Rodrigue has no private (unconscious) life.

VII. Le Cid

What is going on in Le Cid? What hidden meanings can be found in the struggle between Rodrigue and Chimène? How do the secondary characters fit into the symbolic context, and what, particularly, is the role of that "superfluous"¹ figure, the Infanta? Perhaps we can find answers to these questions by approaching the play as a sequel to L'Illusion comique.

If the emphasis in that work was on Clindor's discovery of a quality in the heroine, her mysterious capacity for love, which raises her above him, then it seems logical to assume that Le Cid may have been written to demonstrate that the hero likewise transcends his partner through the possession of a gift foreign to her identity but intrinsic to his. It also seems natural that Corneille should wish at this particular moment to stress the transcendence of the male over the female, and to convince the heroine that she has been transcended,

1

Scudéry, Voltaire, and many other early critics argued that the Infanta, whose role Corneille invented, had no dramatic raison d'être. Apparently most people agreed with this view during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for in those periods the play was usually performed with her lines deleted. Although today scholars generally recognize that her role is significant structurally, its exact psychological nature has remained a mystery.

because he did not do either very noticeably in L'Illusion: no sooner had Clindor declared his heroic resolve than Florilame's servants killed him. Thus the work ended rather one-sidedly with emphasis on the sublimity of Isabelle's love, whereas, if the couple is to exist as an idyllic pair, each member must fully appreciate the absolute, unshakable nature of the other's superiority.

Just as Isabelle awed Clindor when she stated her intention to commit suicide, Rodrigue will dazzle Chimène by urging her to kill him. In both cases the willingness to die is a kind of Greenwich Meridian from which transcendent values are measured against one another. Isabelle was the supreme lover because she valued love more than self-respect, which meant more to her than life; Rodrigue is the perfect hero because he values love more than life and honor more than love. His sense of relative worth, unlike Chimène's, is clear and undeviating. Thus, when he plans to let Don Sanche kill him, it is not because he has momentarily forgotten the supremacy of honor but to reaffirm the position of love above life:

Non, non, en ce combat, quoi que vous veuillez croire,
 Rodrigue peut mourir sans hasarder sa gloire,

 On dira seulement: 'il adorait Chimène;
 Il n'a pas voulu vivre et mériter sa haine;

 Pour venger son honneur il perdit son amour,
 Pour venger sa maîtresse il a quitté le jour,
 Préférant (quelque espoir qu'eût son âme asservie)
 Son honneur à Chimène, et Chimène à sa vie.'²

²Corneille, Théâtre complet, I, 643-644 (V, i).

Le Cid is both a struggle and a test. Rodrigue will pass the test by winning the struggle; Chimène will pass the test by trying to win the struggle and losing. To a certain extent their relationship resembles that of the matador and the bull. Being an animal, the bull is expected to lose in his struggle with the man. The spectator hopes that he will lose beautifully, that is, while displaying certain traits of character associated with human virtue--principally bravery and stamina. The good bull is one who charges straight and with his head down. Perhaps he is not as intelligent as the bad or cowardly bull, who is less predictable, but he behaves more as a bull should and is admired for this. He will die with honor. The perfect matador is as brave and strong willed as the best bull but better adapted, with his sword, maneuverability, and superior intelligence, to bullfighting. He is expected to kill the bull with imagination, grace, and self-control.

The first and second acts of Le Cid--the défi and the duel--acquaint us with Rodrigue's excellent qualifications as a bullfighter: his intelligence and sense of honor, "haute vertu,"³ "ardeur magnanime,"⁴ and self-control, and his ability to lead an adversary, with words, where he wants him to go. In overcoming the Count he reveals that he disposes of a special weapon, great skill in arms. His sword may be taken as the symbol of all the natural, yet unfair, advantages of the matador

³ Ibid., p. 606 (II, ii). ⁴ Ibid.

over the bull. Used against the Moors, this weapon will guarantee the hero's ultimate victory over Chimène. But it is the heroine herself who gives this victory its meaning and the play its happy ending, by behaving, throughout the action, as a "good bull" (though one confused by his wounds). Thus when, toward the end of act two, she bursts onto the stage, charging head down ("Sire, sire, justice!"⁵), a feeling of satisfaction and festivity spreads over the audience: we can be reasonably sure that all will go as planned.

Rodrigue's initial goading of the bull, his slaying of the Count, is the necessary response to a challenge of his right to happiness. This challenge takes the outward form of the slap delivered to Rodrigue's father by Chimène's father, but in reality it is the heroine who makes the challenge, and to the hero. The slap defines her as a threat to his manhood in the way that the fearsome aspect of a bull might designate that animal, to a small boy destined for a career in the ring, as his divinely-chosen adversary. The slap proclaims that Rodrigue is the Count's inferior ("Te mesurer à moi!"⁶), hence unworthy of replacing him and possessing his daughter. And if Rodrigue is congenitally inferior to the Count (for this, not age differences, is the real issue), then he is also inferior to Chimène. The slap shocks him into an awareness of the

⁵ Ibid., p. 614 (II, viii).

⁶ Ibid., p. 605 (II, v).

danger threatening him and of the necessity that he undergo the test, measuring his worth against that of the beloved.

Again it should be noted that she is at a natural disadvantage, for worth is defined in the noble Castilian world of the play (the third world) as (1) possession of those predominantly masculine qualities which together constitute Rodrigue's heroic nature: générosité, will to power, strength of arm, wit, luck; and (2) a personal preference for heroism over impulses which Corneille thinks should be stronger in women, notably love, pity, and sentimentality: "La tendresse n'est point de l'amour d'un héros."⁷ Chimène is handicapped by the fact that she must meet Rodrigue on his own terms. For example, when she thinks of finding a champion to kill him for her, he objects:

Ta générosité doit répondre à la mienne,
Et pour venger un père emprunter d'autres bras,
Ma Chimène, crois-moi, c'est n'y répondre pas.
Ma main seule du mien a su venger l'offense,
Ta main seule du tien doit prendre la vengeance.⁸

Rodrigue, a warrior, was allowed to "kill" Chimène in a surrogate of his own sex, the Count, who was in the wrong and arrogantly aggressive. Now to show herself "equally généreuse," she, a woman, must kill her innocent lover with her own hand and in the flesh. The cards have been stacked against her. But we overlook this because she is not supposed to win anyway.

⁷Ibid., III, 755 (Suréna, V, iii).

⁸Ibid., I, 624-625 (III, iv).

If she did win, it would be because there was something wrong with her: she would be a bad bull, that is, one who, like a faithless woman, defeats the man by not fighting according to his rules. All bulls are bad, however, in the sense that they challenge man. Even the good ones deserve their fate, for they enter the struggle with the foolish notion that they can win, regarding themselves as man's equal on the heroic plane. Thus Chimène says:

Ma générosité doit répondre à la tienne:
 Tu t'es, en m'offensant, montré digne de moi;
 Je me dois, par ta mort, montrer digne de toi.⁹

But of course, she never comes close to killing Rodrigue or to demonstrating heroic superiority over him in any other way: he is always at least a step ahead of her, out of reach and master of the situation.

There is some truth in Nadal's argument that Rodrigue sets out, with "mépris,"¹⁰ "acharnement,"¹¹ and "implacable cruauté,"¹² to spiritually annihilate Chimène, for, where her leonine aspect is concerned, he knows no pity. The purpose of his cruelty--and he is willfully cruel--is to transfigure her. Her misfortunes are like those of Lucius in The Golden Ass: they teach her that her view of herself in relationship to the world is ridiculous, and they purge her of that view in

⁹
Ibid., p. 624 (III, iv).

¹⁰
 Nadal, Sentiment, p. 171.

¹¹
Ibid.

¹²
Ibid.

preparation for her admittance into the sublime mysteries of masculine and feminine identity. To concentrate our attention on her suffering is to consider only what she loses during this process of soul sublimation while ignoring all that she simultaneously gains. Each defeat that Rodrigue inflicts upon her honor is a victory for her love over his narcissistic soul, each sign of her growing "weakness" a visible proof of his irresistibility and her femininity. She must lose to win, and the more she loses the more she wins. And the more she wins by losing, the more Rodrigue wins by winning. And the harder she tries to win, the more glory both obtain through her defeat. Thus the play depicts, through their struggle, an increasingly purified encounter of male and female essences, or, we may say, of demigods.

The highest point of this union is reached at the moment when Chimène has been most completely defeated, that is, in the last scene of the last act when, after her Don Sanche fiasco, Rodrigue throws himself at her feet to implore that she either kill or pardon him, and the Infanta says calmly:

Sèche tes pleurs, Chimène, et reçois sans tristesse
Ce généreux vainqueur des mains de ta princesse.¹³

To me these lines are the most beautiful in the play. They ordain, unfortunately without immediate effect, a new and happier dispensation, through the purifying of the love of

¹³Corneille, Théâtre complet, I, 652 (V, vii).

Rodrigue and Chimène.¹⁴ The mood which they produce is something like the one which dawns after the storm in Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony: a feeling of serenity, power, and joy--the mood of the Golden Age as seen by Poussin, who discovered the secret of its evocation in the marriage of brilliant daytime colors with the mysterious shadows of night: Yin with Yang.

The Infanta plays the role of divine Reconciliator. She represents a possibility of the hero's surrender to the lion-woman which, resisted, becomes a preference for the heroic-idyllic mistress. She is not a static symbol but stands for both the lion-woman and her opposite, or transcendent femininity. As lion-woman she exists to reject and be rejected by Rodrigue. Not once during the entire play does he speak to this object of taboo, or she to him. That he does not aspire to marry her, even though she would be willing, advertises that his love for Chimène is idyllic and not a recurrence of the ambition which plagued Corneille's previous heroes. For if he loved Chimène for her leonine qualities, then surely he would love the princess even more.¹⁵

14

Rodrigue and Chimène are not purged of their love, but their love itself is purged of its leonine element and made more purely childlike and idyllic, just as in Greek tragedy pity and fear are not washed away but ennobled--purified of their selfish content and extended to comprise all mankind, which for its own good must learn to know the terrible ways of the gods.

15

Eric B. Leadbetter ("Corneille's Infante: an Explanation of her Role," Romance Notes, XI (1970), 581-585) observes that

The history of the Infanta has a beginning, a middle, and an end. At first she rejects Rodrigue because in appearance he is beneath her, but this rejection causes her a "tourment incroyable."¹⁶ She and Rodrigue were meant for each other; he is perfectly heroic, she perfectly loving and self-sacrificing: "Dans le bonheur d'autrui je cherche mon bonheur."¹⁷ Her dilemma is that of the author himself, torn between his sense of duty to father and king, on one hand, and his idyllic impulses on the other: "Je sens en deux partis mon esprit divisé."¹⁸ When Léonor, her governess, criticizes her for loving an inferior, she replies that, if she wished,

Je te répondrais bien que dans les belles âmes
Le seul mérite a droit de produire des flammes.¹⁹

In other words, as far as the Infanta is concerned, Rodrigue is not her inferior. But she has given him to Chimène because she recognizes the patriotic necessity of preserving her exterior gloire: she is concerned about "que dirait le roi, que dirait la Castille."²⁰ Chimène, meanwhile, acts in exactly the opposite manner: she accepts Rodrigue while considering him her

"The Infanta's reticence . . . prevents any possible temptation of Rodrigue to spurn Chimène in favor of the Princess." (P. 582.)

¹⁶

Corneille, Théâtre complet, I, 594 (I, ii).

¹⁷

Ibid., p. 595 (I, ii).

¹⁸

Ibid., p. 594 (I, ii).

¹⁹

Ibid., p. 593 (I, ii).

²⁰

Ibid.

inferior. Thus she, not the princess, is the true lion-woman.

The second part of the Infanta's history, that in which her hope of possessing Rodrigue is renewed, begins when she learns that he is fighting a duel with the Count. What if he wins? Then his worthiness will be known to all, and "je puis l'aimer sans honte."²¹ Léonor, representing conscience and reason, still regards her mistress' love as "cette lâche flamme,"²² but the Infanta is now less inclined to suppress it:

Ne la nomme point lâche, à présent que chez moi
Pompeuse et triomphante elle me fait la loi,²³

and, allowing her imagination full play, she sees Rodrigue rising to greater and greater heights in an orgy of conquest:

Que ne fera-t-il point, s'il peut vaincre le comte!
J'ose imaginer qu'à ses moindres exploits
Les royaumes entiers tomberont sous ses lois;
Et mon amour flatteur déjà me persuade
Que je le vois assis au trône de Grenade,
Les Maures subjugués trembler en l'adorant,
L'Aragon recevoir ce nouveau conquérant,
Le Portugal se rendre, et ses nobles journées
Porter de là des mers ses hautes destinées,²⁴
Du sang des Africains arroser ses lauriers.

All of this the Infanta hopes Rodrigue will do so that her love will appear to be what she thinks it already is: legitimate. The one thing which is unthinkable for her is that he would rebel against her own rather weak father, the King, overthrow him as he overthrew the Count, and take possession of her along

²¹ Ibid., p. 610 (II, v).

²² Ibid., p. 609 (II, v).

²³ Ibid., p. 610 (II, v).

²⁴ Ibid.

with the kingdom. This is the kind of thought, however, which would occur to Chimène.

For the latter, patriotism stops where self-interest begins. To be sure, in her first exhortation to the King she alleges that Rodrigue must die for the public good:

Immolez, dis-je, sire, au bien de tout l'État
Tout ce qu'enorgueillit un si haut attentat,²⁵

but she changes her tune when it becomes established that the obstacle to her gloire is also Castille's "unique appui,"²⁶ the sole "espérance ... d'un peuple qui l'adore."²⁷ Then, asked by the Infanta to discontinue her pursuit, she can only exclaim--seditiously, impiously--"Ah! ce n'est pas à moi d'avoir tant de bonté."²⁸ Exactly. And this lack of "bonté," a word which probably means stupidity to Chimène, the daughter of the man who boasted that "Tout l'État périra, s'il faut que je périsse,"²⁹ is what differentiates her from the Infanta. I do not mean to gloss over the fact that the latter, being the daughter of the King, naturally identifies the welfare of the state with her own gloire, whereas Chimène does not. Nor should it be ignored that the interests of gloire and love are identical in the Infanta but separate in Chimène: the first wants to keep Rodrigue alive so that the state will be preserved and

²⁵ Ibid., p. 616 (II, viii). ²⁶ Ibid., p. 633 (IV, ii).

²⁷ Ibid. ²⁸ Ibid. ²⁹ Ibid., p. 603 (II, i).

she can marry him; the second intends, by killing him, to sacrifice her love to her gloire. Thus the infanta has two selfish reasons for urging Chimène to renounce her gloire for the good of the state; and in fact, in the same speech she also advises her to stop loving Rodrigue: "Ote-lui ton amour, mais laisse-nous sa vie."³⁰ But still it is one thing to preserve the state and a good man's life for reasons which may be completely selfish, and quite another to do the opposite for a motive which is clearly such. Moreover, if the Infanta's desire to possess Rodrigue is selfish (as any desire for possession must be), this does not necessarily mean that her love for him is also selfish. I would strenuously deny it to be so, for my principal thesis is that Corneille initially regards the Infanta, and wishes us to regard her, as the self-sacrificing, womanly opposite of egocentric, leonine Chimène.

The two causes for the renewal of this unselfish beauty's hope of possessing the hero are his slaying of the Count and defeat of the Moors. The moment she learns that Rodrigue is fighting Don Gomès, she imagines him victorious and estranged from Chimène:

Et d'un si fol espoir mon coeur mal défendu
Vole après un amant que Chimène a perdu.³¹

And when he defeats the Moors she justifiably concludes that her daydreams of social inferiority (in the sense that a queen is

³⁰Ibid., p. 633 (IV, ii).

³¹Ibid., p. 610 (II, v).

inferior to a king) will become realities:

Bien qu'aux monarques seuls ma naissance me donne,
Rodrigue, avec honneur je vivrai sous tes lois.
Après avoir vaincu deux rois,
Pourrais-tu manquer de couronne?³²

She is perhaps further encouraged by an emotional realization, relayed to her by the author, that Rodrigue's victory over the Moors symbolizes his refusal to be seduced--dazzled--by her rival's leonine behavior, and that it conversely represents a preference for her own modest attitude. Defeating the Moors is Rodrigue's way of showing the King that he is a better man than the Count as a warrior and as a subject, thus worthy of replacing him. He does not even appear before his sovereign until he has in this manner erased any shadow of guilt.

Not only were the Moors a real threat to the kingdom but also, as symbols of uncontrolled passion, a potential threat to Rodrigue's honor. The whole drama of Le Cid, like that of Pyramus and Thisbe, can best be appreciated as one of potentialities, or as a struggle within the mind of a single individual. The Moors come from the unconscious, figured by the nocturnal sea:

L'onde s'enfle dessous, et d'un commun effort
Les Maures et la mer montent jusques au port.³³

Although Rodrigue, being a solar hero, no doubt feels "plus faible de nuit que de jour," he engages them when they are at their strongest, just as he defied Chimène at the very moment that he was about to receive the Count's permission to marry her.

³²
Ibid., p. 645 (V, ii).

³³
Ibid., p. 636 (IV, iii).

Surprise at first throws them into confusion: "Ils couraient au pillage, et rencontrent la guerre,"³⁴ but soon they rally and a spectacular carnage ensues. The issue is in doubt until daybreak. Then the Moors, seeing their disadvantage, attempt to retreat, as Chimène will retreat from her aggressive position when the fact of her own relative weakness is brought home to her. But the tide, le flot des passions, prevents the Moors from breaking off the engagement entirely, and eventually they are forced to surrender.

So we see that Rodrigue's combat with the Moors to a certain extent recapitulates, in microcosm, his struggle with Chimène. By subjugating, taming them, he demonstrates that he did not kill the Count, the Father-as-Rival, in order to give free reign to his passion for the lion-woman, but rather, to support the Father himself, conceived in Don Diègue as Ally and Model, and in the King as Judge. Both of these figures are feeble; Rodrigue could ignore the former and replace the latter if he wished, taking possession of both Chimène and the throne. And she, for all her feigned aversion, would then be no more reluctant to give herself to him than Angélique was to flee with Alidor. It is what she secretly wants. But Rodrigue's love, like the Infanta's, is subordinate to a sense of gloire which is not simply a kind of vanity but an inner compulsion. Both of these characters, unlike Chimène, achieve sublimity

34

Ibid.

through self-sacrifice and the very force of the impulses which they succeed in mastering.

It may be assumed, then, that the defeat of the Moors increases the Infanta's hopes of possessing Rodrigue, in that it implicitly represents a rejection of what Chimène stands for and a glorification of her own, opposite identity.

In considering the third and last stage of her history, we must remember that she exists as both a character in a play and the incarnation of an attitude. As a character she loses, in this phase of her development, the contest with Chimène for Rodrigue, but as an attitude she wins. She absorbs her rival, or is absorbed by her, in that Chimène takes on the Infanta's identity. At least this is the direction in which the play is moving when it somewhat prematurely ends.

As a character the Infanta's hopes are dashed by Chimène's evolution away from the lion-woman and toward what she, the Infanta, already is. This evolution is revealed by a series of increasingly "shameful" displays of "weakness." Chimène's occasional desire to conceal her love for Rodrigue is connected with a stronger wish to hide the fact that she does not want him dead: "Mon unique souhait est de ne rien pouvoir."³⁵ Her interior gloire as a leonine descendant of the Count requires that she suppress this guilty "souhait," and her exterior

³⁵
Ibid., p. 626 (III, iv).

gloire demands that she betray its existence to no one. But eventually she allows it to become publicly known. The first person to learn of it is Rodrigue himself, to whom she speaks the previously cited verse. Her next setback occurs just after the defeat of the Moors. In the presence of the King and four other witnesses (not counting Elvire) she faints when Don Ferdinand pretends that Rodrigue has succumbed to wounds received in the battle. But when he tells her the truth she saves face by claiming that her emotion was caused by the thought that her victim had escaped:

Son trépas dérobaît sa tête à ma poursuite;
S'il meurt des coups reçus pour le bien du pays,
Ma vengeance est perdue et mes desseins trahis:
Une si belle fin m'est trop injurieuse.
Je demande sa mort, mais non pas glorieuse.³⁶

Then, the King having made known his decision not to punish Rodrigue for defending his honor against the Count, Chimène demands that she be allowed to choose a champion to represent her in a kind of rematch. But whom does she select? Don Sanche, who, young and inexperienced, is almost bound to lose. She accounts for this choice on the grounds that "je l'ai promis,"³⁷ recalling her distracted previous acceptance of the rash suitor's offer to avenge her le cas échéant:

C'est le dernier remède; et s'il y faut venir,
Et que de mes malheurs cette pitié vous dure,³⁸
Vous serez libre alors de venger mon injure.

³⁶Ibid., p. 638 (IV, v).

³⁷Ibid., p. 641 (IV, v).

³⁸Ibid., p. 619 (III, ii).

But it is doubtful that anyone is deceived by this excuse.
Thus Léonor advises the Infanta that she should give up all
hope of ever possessing Rodrigue,

Car Chimène aisément montre, par sa conduite,
Que la haine aujourd'hui ne fait pas sa poursuite.
· · · · ·
Et sa facilité vous doit bien faire voir
Qu'elle cherche un combat qui force son devoir,
Qui livre à son Rodrigue une victoire aisée,
Et l'autorise enfin à paraître apaisée.³⁹

Though the Infanta insists that "le valeureux Cid"⁴⁰ is now her
equal socially, she concedes that it would be futile for her to
attempt to extinguish a love like that of Rodrigue and Chimène
("une si belle flamme"⁴¹) and withdraws from competition:

Puisqu'en un tel combat sa victoire est certaine,
Allons encore un coup le donner à Chimène.⁴²

After this decision the Infanta has no more lines except the
two in which she admonishes Chimène to dry her tears and accept
Rodrigue "sans tristesse."

These final words owe much of their beauty, of course, to
the context. Chimène has but a few moments ago reviled Don
Sanche for killing Rodrigue, even though in so doing he would
only have been obeying her. Mercifully, no one witnesses this
scene but Elvire. It is interrupted by the arrival of the King
and the same four courtiers who were present when the duel was
arranged. Chimène tearfully implores Don Fernand's permission

³⁹ Ibid., p. 646 (V, iii).

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 647 (V, iii).

⁴¹ Ibid. ⁴² Ibid.

to retire to a convent, admitting to him for the first time that she loved Rodrigue.⁴³ In so doing she also tends to verify the supposition that, if she did not object more strongly to the King's decision to marry her to the winner of the combat, it was because she fully expected, and hoped, that the winner would be the person who killed her father. When Don Sanche explains that Rodrigue is indeed the victor, she finds herself in a more difficult position than ever. If she rejects her lover despite the fact that everyone knows she has been unable to quell her passion, she will gain neither happiness nor exterior gloire. At the same time her interior gloire, her sense of identification with the Count, requires that she avenge him by causing his enemy to die, thereby proving herself to be Rodrigue's superior, or at least his equal, in heroic resolve. But this gloire of Chimène's is only vainglory, for in Corneille's view a true woman cannot outdo a true man in solar heroism and is a fool to think that she can.

Returning once again to the Infanta's last speech, we now see that it may be interpreted to say: "Chimène, it is time for this nonsense to cease. Open your eyes: you have been defeated; but that is no misfortune. Your old personality was defective.

43

Returning to the bullfight analogy, it might be said that here the matador kills his adversary recibiendo: Chimène jumps to a false conclusion and, unable to keep quiet like the more passive Infanta, simultaneously publicizes her true feelings, thereby destroying the last vestiges of her own gloire (vain-glory).

Now you must assume a new and more beautiful one. Here is your victorious lover [The Infanta and Rodrigue have just come onstage together.]. Admit his transcendence, become a true woman, and live happily ever after." Common sense obliges Chimène to acknowledge Rodrigue's excellence as a hero just as, in L'Illusion, Clindor was forced by reason to admire Isabelle's superiority as a lover. The King, referring, it would seem, not only to Rodrigue's most recent trial but to all of his victories, states the obvious when he declares that their quarrel must now end because it has been proven that God is on the hero's side:

Ton père est satisfait, et c'était le venger
Que mettre tant de fois ton Rodrigue en danger.
Tu vois comme le ciel autrement en dispose.⁴⁴

After this, Chimène's silence when the King suggests an eventual marriage may seem disappointingly like a sign of her descent from the Count-as-Proud-Lucifer. But she can hardly say: "Yes, I shall no doubt feel more inclined to marry my father's slayer in a few months." As Corneille observes in his Examen and Discours du poème dramatique, it is a matter of bienséance. A consideration of the deeper meaning of the action nevertheless brings to light a more compelling reason for the lovers' continued separation, along with the realization that it is Rodrigue, not Chimène, whose innermost self rejects the thought of union.

⁴⁴

Ibid., pp. 651-652 (V, vi. Italics added.).

Chimène is psychologically fit for marriage because through her actions she has admitted herself to be Rodrigue's inferior on the heroic plane, renouncing her identity as the lion-woman. In other words, she no longer (except in his imagination) challenges him to act seditiously, as she did when he decided that he had to kill the Count in order to prove himself worthy of her:

Je me suis accusé de trop de violence;
Et ta beauté, sans doute, emportait la balance,
A moins que d'opposer à tes plus forts appas
Qu'un homme sans honneur ne te méritait pas.⁴⁵

Chimène's womanly side, her "beauté," inclined Rodrigue to avoid battle with the Count, but her masculine side, that side which would cause her to look upon him with contempt if he did not slay her father, urged him to commit this crime. Since, as her subsequent attitude proved, the masculine side then tended to dominate in Chimène, Rodrigue had little choice: if he did not kill the Count, she would reject him both physically and spiritually; but if he did kill the Count, she would reject him only physically:

Allons, mon bras, sauvons du moins l'honneur,
Puisqu'après tout il faut perdre Chimène.⁴⁶

But of course Rodrigue's decision was not based solely on his concern for what Chimène would think of it. He was even more interested in establishing himself as a hero in his own eyes.

In slaying the Count he proves himself the Father's peer

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 623 (III, iv).

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 602 (I, vi).

in physical strength and courage. But in order to be fully worthy of replacing him, he must also prove himself his equal in heroic resolve. He must demonstrate that for him honor is the supreme value. He must establish that he did not perform his heroic deed for the sake of love but ("quelque espoir qu'eût son âme asservie") for the sake of honor--not in order to possess Chimène but to avenge Don Diègue. He must "defeat the Moors," the forces of the unconscious which tempt him to use his heroic skills seditiously. He must neither overthrow Don Fernand nor marry Chimène, even though he is completely free to do both. For this reason it is not so much Chimène's objection to Rodrigue which prevents the play from ending on a firmly optimistic note, but Rodrigue-Corneille's fear of what she continues to represent to him symbolically, despite the success of his efforts to divest her of that identity.

Rodrigue-Corneille is like a high priest who refuses to acknowledge the conversion of a neophyte whom he himself has initiated. The reformed Chimène is his creation, and, in a sense, if he cannot believe in her reality it is his fault as much as hers. Of course the audience must not be allowed to realize that the hero, like Alidor, is afraid to take possession of the woman he loves. Therefore at the end of the play she is required to shoulder complete responsibility for their continued separation. But the responsibility is in reality also his, as the very similarity between the two characters

would suggest. Both, for example, have everything to gain, amorously speaking, by "renouncing" love for honor. Chimène's purest opposite is not Rodrigue but the "guerrier trop magnanime"⁴⁷ of Corneille's next play, *Horace*, who acts heroically even though to do so makes him unlovable.

Rodrigue is more like Chimène and less like the slayer of Camille in that there is something of the usurping Count in him: an impulse to rebel which he smothers but does not completely extinguish. If he could overcome this impulse altogether, he and Chimène would be able to marry. Because he cannot overcome it, he feels an insatiable need to prove to Don Diègue and the King and himself--and perhaps to Chimène and her dead father also--that he killed the Count because he was evil, not because he possessed a prize which could not be wrested from him in any other way. Surely this is the principal reason for which the King finally postpones the lovers' union pending further demonstrations of the hero's complete invincibility (worthiness) on one hand, and complete loyalty (innocence) on the other:

Prends un an, si tu veux, pour essuyer tes larmes.
Rodrigue, cependant il faut prendre les armes.
Après avoir vaincu les Maures sur nos bords,
Renversé leurs desseins, repoussé leurs efforts,
Va jusqu'en leur pays leur reporter la guerre,
Commander mon armée et ravager leur terre.
A ce nom seul de Cid ils trembleront d'effroi;
Ils t'ont nommé seigneur, et te voudront pour roi.

⁴⁷

Ibid., p. 718 (Horace, V, iii. *Italics added.*).

Mais parmi tes hauts faits sois-lui toujours fidèle;
 Reviens-en, s'il se peut, encor plus digne d'elle;
 Et par tes grands exploits fais-toi si bien priser,
 Qu'il lui soit glorieux alors de t'épouser.⁴⁸

This passage suggests that Chimène's destiny, her figurative transformation into the Infanta, has been virtually fulfilled. For the prophesied "hauts faits" which the princess earlier regarded as a necessary prelude to her union with Rodrigue have now become the visible signs of his right to marry Chimène--whom he once considered to be, like the Infanta, unattainable. Now pacified, the leonine daughter of the Count has little choice but to quietly await her deliverer-attacker's overthrow of the last "Moorish" obstacles lying between them, as Andromeda, chained to her rock, could only remain charmingly helpless while Perseus slew the dragon.

In conclusion it may be said that, insofar as Le Cid describes the redemption of Chimène and Rodrigue's self-definition as her superior, it depicts the coming-together of the lovers in a new, heroic-idyllic context. Their union is their struggle: "Rodrigue, qui l'eût cru?...--Chimène, qui l'eût dit?..."⁴⁹ From this standpoint it appears that Corneille has solved those two aspects of the problem represented in Médée by Égée and Créuse--the Good Father and the lion-woman. He has succeeded in growing up without renouncing idyllic love. But, insofar as the play also describes the hero's flight from

⁴⁸

Ibid., p. 653 (V, vii).

⁴⁹

Ibid., p. 626 (III, iv).

Chimène, it depicts a failure of union similar to the failure portrayed in La Place Royale. Rodrigue offers to let Don Sanche kill him and marry Chimène for the same reasons that Alidor arranged to have Angélique abducted by Cléandre: to fuir en Parthe from a mistress who threatens his self-image, while continuing to possess her through a surrogate. The admirable thing about Rodrigue was that he sacrificed love. How can he now completely reverse his position by marrying Chimène, without ceasing to appear admirable? And what about his responsibility for her father's death?

The Count, like Créon in Médée, was an Evil Parent, but a parent nevertheless. He was a protective, childhood parent, as distinguished from the mature, heroic parent Don Diègue, who corresponds to Égée. When the hero comes of age he transcends this first parent, who would keep him in a state of unheroic dependency and subordination. He "kills" him. Of course when a real person passes from childhood to maturity the transition is not normally regarded as a literal parricide; but in Corneille's theater, which personifies psychic forces, there is a danger that it will appear as such. In future works Corneille will avoid this danger by having someone other than the hero attack the Evil Parent: Phocas (Héraclius) and Galba and Vinius (Othon) will be killed by minor characters; Cléopâtre (Rodogune) and Marcelle (Théodore) will kill themselves; Attila--Evil Parent and hero-villain--will be struck down by God. Auguste (Cinna), Félix (Polyeucte), and Arsinoé and Prusias (Nicomède) will be

"destroyed" by miraculous conversions.

But nothing of this kind takes place in Le Cid. The best Rodrigue can hope for is pardon, and that is what he works toward from the moment of his crime on to the end of the play and beyond. By demonstrating his fidelity and martial skill he easily obtains this pardon from Don Fernand and his suite, who, along with Don Diègue, represent the heroic world. Chimène, who attaches to the insulted idyllic world, will naturally be less tractable: "Pourriez-vous à vos yeux souffrir cet hyménée?" she asks the King,

Et quand de mon devoir vous voulez cet effort,
Toute votre justice en est-elle d'accord?
Si Rodrigue à l'État devient si nécessaire,
De ce qu'il fait pour vous dois-je être le salaire,
Et me livrer moi-même au reproche éternel
D'avoir trempé mes mains dans le sang paternel?⁵⁰

Time may even prove that, like an arch-précieuse, Chimène will never consent to marry Rodrigue but expect him to court her forever, displaying his constancy and merit in innumerable battles.

Thus the ending of Le Cid would seem rather saturnine, were it not for the fact that the King himself suggests a terminus for Rodrigue's period of trial: "Prends un an, si tu veux."⁵¹ And this period will not be one of suffering for the hero, but of play, in the sense that all of life assumes an aspect of play in the devout Baroque mind. Rodrigue's conquests, prophesied by

⁵⁰
Ibid., p. 653 (V, vii).

⁵¹
Ibid.

his sovereign, will occur with a kind of sublime effortlessness, like the final movements of a great symphony:

Pour posséder Chimène, et pour votre service,
Que peut-on m'ordonner que mon bras n'accomplisse?
Quoi qu'absent de ses yeux il me faille endurer,
Sire, ce m'est trop d'heur de pouvoir espérer.⁵²

Rodrigue has grace enough and knows it; and Don Fernand knows it too: "Laisse faire le temps, ta vaillance et ton roi."⁵³

⁵² Ibid., p. 654 (V, vii).

⁵³ Ibid.

VIII. Horace and Cinna

Although Corneille tells us in his Examen and in his Discours du poème dramatique that he purposely left the outcome of Le Cid uncertain in order to satisfy simultaneously the demands of bienséance and historical truth,¹ the Academy in its Sentiments assumed--and, I think, with good reason--that the final scene portrays a kind of betrothal. Upon this assumption, in part, was based the accusation that Corneille had shown too little respect for both propriety and vraisemblance:

Mais si nous estimons qu'on l'ait bien repris pour la multitude des actions employées dans ce Poeme, nous croyons qu'il y a eu encore plus de sujet de le reprendre pour avoir fait consentir Chimene à espouser Rodrigue le jour mesme qu'il avoit tué le Comte. Cela surpasse toute sorte de créance, et ne peut vray-semblablement tomber dans l'ame, non seulement d'une sage Fille, mais d'une qui seroit la plus despouillée d'honneur et d'humanité. ... Elle pouvoit sans doute aymer encore Rodrigue apres ce malheur; puisque son crime n'estoit que d'avoir réparé le deshonneur de sa Maison. Elle le devoit mesme en quelque sorte, pour relever sa propre gloire, lors qu'apres une longue agitation, elle eust donné l'avantage à son honneur, sur un amour si violente et si juste que la sienne. Et la beauté qu'eust produit dans l'ouvrage une si belle victoire de l'honneur sur l'amour, eust esté plus raisonnable. Aussi n'est-ce pas le combat de ces deux mouvemens que nous desapprouvons. Nous n'y trouvons à dire sinon qu'il se termine autrement qu'il ne devoit, et qu'au lieu de tenir au moins

¹

Ibid., p. 548 and Corneille, Oeuvres, I, 26-27.

ces deux interests en balance, celui à qui le dessus demeure, est celui qui raisonnablement devoit succomber.²

That les doctes could thus reprove Chimène for surrendering to love must have greatly distressed the poet, for, in a sense, the main purpose of his work was to justify her behavior by infusing the Spanish legend with his own newly-discovered psychology of heroic-idyllic union. He meant the lovers' betrothal to appear as a kind of crowning miracle, an irresistible coming-together of the perfect man and perfect woman, a reconstitution of the divine androgyn which fate had split asunder. It was this supernatural, larger-than-life aspect of the play, Corneille's unique contribution, which his "reasonable" critics had failed to appreciate.

Perhaps, as he brooded over their dissatisfaction with Chimène, Corneille asked himself how Le Cid might have turned out if she had seriously blamed Rodrigue for killing her father. What if this act, this suppression of the protective, idyllic parent in favor of the mature, heroic parent, had caused Chimène to doubt Rodrigue's love? Suppose she had then urged him to prove his devotion by rebelling against the king or even God--the ultimate symbol of heroic consciousness. And suppose there were other reasons, perhaps valid and strong ones, for his entering into such a rebellion. What might then become

2

Colbert Searles, ed., Les Sentiments de l'Academie Française sur le Cid, The University of Minnesota Studies in Language and Literature, No. 3 (Minneapolis: Bulletin of the University of Minnesota, March 1916), pp. 38-39, 45-46.

of him? Corneille will explore questions of this sort in Horace and Cinna and again, most successfully, in Polyeucte.

In each of these works the heroine appears as a leonine figure who would have the hero renounce vertu and cling with her to an immature love under the aegis of the protective parent (in Horace, Albe; in Cinna, republicanism; in Polyeucte, Félix). But the hero defies her more or less strenuously and even, in the end, comes close to assuming the identity of her natural enemy, the heroic parent (in Horace, Rome; in Cinna, Auguste; in Polyeucte, God). In Horace there also seems to be a partial overlapping between the roles of Horace and Curiace. As the action progresses the former becomes a kind of transfigured or disfigured post-mortem extension of the latter, just as Auguste almost absorbs Cinna and God takes possession of Polyeucte--or vice versa. It is Curiace who, by making the heroic choice and refusing to flee, betrays Camille's love,³ but it is Horace whom she seems to hold responsible not only for her lover's death but also for his defection, the two events perhaps merging into one from her standpoint. She curses Horace and Rome, the heroic ideal which inspired both combatants, and he silences her, as she knew he would, with his sword, the symbol of that ideal.⁴

³ "Quoi! tu ne veux pas voir qu'ainsi tu me trahis!"
--Corneille, Théâtre complet, I, 682 (II, v);

⁴ Camille reminds one a little of Dido and Cleopatra,

It may be said that in this play the two idyllic lovers kill each other, for Curiace dies because Camille (or what she represents) has weakened his resolve,⁵ and Camille considers herself condemned the moment that Curiace agrees to participate in the wretched duel:

Mon insensible amant ordonne que je meure;
Et quand l'hymen pour nous allume son flambeau,
Il l'éteint de sa main pour m'ouvrir le tombeau.
Ce coeur impitoyable à ma perte s'obstine,
Et dit qu'il m'aime encore alors qu'il m'assassine.⁶

Again in Cinna Corneille imagines a heroine who rebels against a personality which has been divided to some extent between two individuals: Cinna and Auguste. Again the heroine regards the lover's heroic "father" (Auguste) as an Evil Parent, Again the lover not only refuses to hate this figure but clearly sympathizes with him, which outrages the heroine:

notorious temptresses who committed suicide because they had failed to subjugate, respectively, Aeneas and Augustus. In this regard it might be observed that Corneille is often inclined to adopt an attitude toward women similar to that of the medieval antifeminists who considered Dido, in particular, as a symbol of enslaving concupiscence and praised Aeneas for deserting her. See W.T.H. Jackson, The Anatomy of Love; the Tristan of Gottfried von Strassburg (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), pp. 8, 19.

5

An alert discussion of the weakness of Curiace, who loses the duel because he is afraid that he will not fight hard enough, can be found in the Pol Gaillard edition of Horace, Les Petits Classiques Bordas (Paris: Les Editions Bordas, 1968), pp. 87, 125.

6

Corneille, Théâtre complet, I, 682 (II, v).

Je ne t'en parle plus, va, sers la tyrannie;
Abandonne ton âme à son lâche génie.⁷

And, at least politically speaking, in both cases it is the lover who is in the right, the heroine who is in the wrong. Cinna is right to love Auguste because he senses in the former tyrant the emergence of a "prince magnanime."⁸ Horace is right to defend Rome because Rome represents heroic maturity, while Albe stands for the dependent idyllic childhood:

Albe, où j'ai commencé de respirer le jour,
Albe, mon cher pays, et mon premier amour.⁹

The question to be settled by the duel is not which of these has greater intrinsic worth, but which should rule over the other: "Que le faible parti prenne loi du plus fort."¹⁰ Rome

⁷ Ibid., p. 755 (III, iv). ⁸ Ibid., p. 751 (III, iii).

⁹ Ibid., p. 666 (I, i).

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 674 (I, iii). Although unnatural, the war between Rome and Albe is not pointless, for, by settling the question of which state should rule over the other, it will bring them together like the two halves of Plato's sorb apple. In Livy, Corneille's source, King Tullus transplants the defeated Alban population to Rome, "that as the Alban state was formerly divided from one people into two, so it may now return into one." (History of Rome 28) It may be that this part of the story appealed to Corneille's unconscious as a parable preaching psychic reintegration, whereas the harshness of Tullus, and the bad end to which he eventually came, suggested the theme of self-destruction through a brutal excess of heroism. After levelling Alba, Tullus attacked and defeated the Sabines. Then, when he was the height of his renown, the abandoned Alban gods avenged themselves upon him. Stones rained on the Alban mount; a pestilence fell upon Rome; Tullus, "who formerly considered nothing less worthy of a king than to devote his mind to religion, suddenly became a slave to every form of

is naturally destined to rule over Albe like the conscious mind over the unconscious; like a king, be he good or bad, over his subjects; and like male over female.

Camille would deny this. She and Émilie incarnate the hero's wish to regress to the idyllic state, and his opposition to the demands of the father-as-heroic-ideal. The idyllic world appears to Émilie as republican Rome, the world of her protective father, whom Auguste murdered. In Cinna the Machiavellian second world is represented by Auguste before his reformation and by the conspirators who plot against him. The heroic third world will come into existence when the emperor pardons these rebels. Émilie and Cinna, leaders of the shabby crew,¹¹ intend to revive the first world with second-world tactics: "La perfidie est noble envers la tyrannie."¹² Although they claim to be patriots they are rebelling for personal, rather than political, reasons, and if they succeed it will be a public misfortune. They represent chaos; Auguste, order. I agree with Doubrovsky when he says that Émilie's cries for vengeance in the name of

superstition." (Ibid., 31.) Finally he was "struck with lightning and burnt to ashes." (Ibid.) Thus in Livy the rejected irrational side of nature destroyed the over-proud warrior-king, just as in Corneille Camille will abase her brother.

¹¹
 "Un tas d'hommes perdus de dettes et de crimes."
 (Corneille, Théâtre complet, I, 770 (V, i).)

¹²
Ibid., p. 754 (III, iv).

freedom express "une absence de politique"¹³ and that her hatred is "un 'republicanisme', reconnu faux, qu'elle abjure."¹⁴ I would however go a step further and define that republicanism as a mixture of frustration, terror, and nostalgia for the pseudo-freedom of the idyllic child.

Émilie is a more fully delineated lion-woman than her predecessor Camille. She plays a more coercive role, disposes of a more pervasive force. Whereas Camille's change from idyllic mistress to fury was sudden, Émilie lowers over Cinna like a huge storm cloud from the very beginning:

Quoique j'aime Cinna, quoique mon coeur l'adore,
S'il me veut posséder, Auguste doit périr.¹⁵

Émilie virtually forces Cinna to continue in the conspiracy even though he has come to realize its absurdity and to admire Auguste. Bound to her by his infatuation and by an oath, goaded by her accusations of cowardice and bad faith, he finally declares that he will go through with the assassination but kill himself immediately afterward:

Vous le voulez, j'y cours, ma parole est donnée;
Mais ma main, aussitôt contre mon sein tournée,
Aux mânes d'un tel prince immolant votre amant,
A mon crime forcé joindra mon châiment,
Et par cette action dans l'autre confondue,

¹³

Doubrovsky, Dialectique, p. 210.

¹⁴

Ibid., p. 216.

¹⁵

Corneille, Théâtre complet, I, 726 (I, ii).

Recouvrera ma gloire aussitôt que perdue.¹⁶

Like a clairvoyant sinner deprived of grace, Cinna can neither extricate himself from the ties of the first world nor stop wishing that he could do so. The murder and suicide through which he intends to "escape" from this quandary will in fact freeze him for all eternity in a posture of despairing self-condemnation.

Fortunately Maxime rescues him from such a disgrace by having Euphorbe betray the plot to the emperor. This saves the lives of Auguste and Cinna and places Maxime in a clear position of moral inferiority to the latter--a dramatic necessity. While Auguste is confronting Cinna with his guilt, the newly-created villain hastily woos Émilie:

Ouvrez enfin les yeux, et connaissez Maxime:
C'est en autre Cinna qu'en lui vous regardez.¹⁷

He presses her to flee with him, evoking the idyllic pleasure-ship sometimes associated with the Pyramus-story: "Nous avons pour partir un vaisseau sur la rive."¹⁸ But Émilie cuttingly rebuffs him and goes to join her unfortunate lover.

Interrupting what amounts to Cinna's trial, she claims the right to be executed with him on the grounds that she not only participated in the plot but instigated it: she taught

¹⁶
Ibid., p. 756 (III, iv).

¹⁷
Ibid., p. 766 (IV, v).

¹⁸
Ibid., p. 765 (IV, v).

Cinna to hate Auguste; she "seduced"¹⁹ him. But Cinna protests that Émilie's charms had nothing to do with the matter: "J'avais fait ce dessein avant que de l'aimer."²⁰ In a speech remarkable for its Platonic imagery, she compromises:

Eh bien! prends-en ta part, et me laisse la mienne;
Ce serait l'affaiblir que d'affaiblir la tienne:
La gloire et le plaisir, la honte et les tourments,
Tout doit être commun entre de vrais amants.
Nos deux âmes, seigneur, sont deux âmes romaines;
Unissant nos désirs, nous unimes nos haines;
De nos parents perdus le vif ressentiment
Nous apprend nos devoirs en un même moment;
En ce noble dessein nos cœurs se rencontrèrent;
Nos esprits généreux ensemble le formèrent;
Ensemble nous cherchons l'honneur d'un beau trépas:
Vous vouliez nous unir, ne nous séparez pas.²¹

This eagerness to share in the "credit" for murdering Auguste incenses him. He wishes that Cinna, whom he loves, would repent. Then he could forgive him, for "Il n'est crime envers moi qu'un repentir n'efface."²² But the couple is too proud to admit that Émilie's captive lover had persisted in his murderous design only because she would not let him abandon it. "N'attendez pas de moi d'infâmes repentirs,"²³ he warned Auguste earlier.

The emperor has just decided to execute the lovers in

¹⁹ "Si j'ai séduit Cinna, j'en séduirai bien d'autres."
--Ibid., p. 774 (V, ii).

²⁰ Ibid. ²¹ Ibid., p. 775 (V, ii).

²² Ibid., p. 758 (IV, i). ²³ Ibid., p. 772 (V, i).

some astonishingly cruel manner ("Oui, je vous unirai ..."²⁴) when Maxime makes his surprise entrance. Auguste, who thought that this conspirator had been driven by a laudable remorse to throw himself into the Tiber, is at first delighted to find that there still lives one "ami que m'éprouve fidèle."²⁵ But Maxime disabuses him, confessing that Euphorbe's story was a fabrication: "Un vertueux remords n'a point touché mon âme."²⁶ Maxime appears to regret only his betrayal of Cinna, not his role in the plot against Auguste.

The revelation of Maxime's infidelity causes Auguste to pause for a moment and consider his own position, and this brief but all-important interlude leads to the pardon, prepared in IV, iii by the advice of Livie.

In choosing this alternative Auguste declines, unlike Horace, to sever himself from the idyllic past, conceding rather that its demands must somehow be met, even at the expense of his life. The pardon is this very human hero's visceral refusal to separate himself from himself and shake hands with the glorious monster who declared that "D'autres aiment la vie, et je la dois haïr."²⁷ And it is also a reasonable decision: better to fall under the assassin's blade, but to die magnanimous, than to commit this act of self-mutilation. Auguste

²⁴ Ibid., p. 775 (V, ii).

²⁵ Ibid., (V, iii).

²⁶ Ibid., p. 776 (V, iii).

²⁷ Ibid., p. 712 (Horace, V, ii).

plunges, then, into the only acceptable course: he transforms himself from Evil Parent to Good Parent, showers the lovers with gifts (their lives, his favor, the consulship, each other), and in short, simply disappears, having nowhere to turn but inside out.

Thus Émilie's griefs evaporate for want of a cause, and she repents:

Je connais mon forfait qui me semblait justice;
Et (ce que n'avait pu la terreur du supplice)
Je sens naître en mon âme un repentir puissant.²⁸

Cinna likewise acknowledges his guilt:

O vertu sans exemple! ô clémence, qui rend
Votre pouvoir plus juste, et mon crime plus grand!²⁹

The conspirators having made this Act of Contrition, Auguste proceeds from pardon to absolution. That is, he cleans the slate with an "oubli magnanime,"³⁰ to this end dispatching messengers into the city to inform the other plotters also "Qu'Auguste a tout appris, et veut tout oublier."³¹ This is the last and perhaps most beautiful line of the play.

At first glance it would seem that Auguste's pardon transcends even the mercy of God, as that quality is generally understood to function. The Don Juan legend, for example, emphasizes that divine forgiveness hinges upon the sinner's

²⁸ Ibid., p. 777 (V, iii).

²⁹ Ibid. ³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., p. 778 (V, iii).

prior repentance. But just as Auguste pardoned his enemies before they showed any inclination to reform, so God had absolved him when he assumed his ill-gained throne. Thus the murder of Émilie's father

Fut un crime d'Octave et non de l'empereur.
Tous ces crimes d'État qu'on fait pour la couronne,
Le ciel nous en absout alors qu'il nous la donne,
Et dans le sacré rang où sa faveur l'a mis,³²
Le passé devient juste, et l'avenir permis.

For Cinna also, who was going to strangle to death in the seemingly inescapable bonds of idyllic enthrallment, the future is now permitted by the miraculous "oubli" of the père justicier. Both characters can now enter the heroic world if they will to do so, but they must so will. Auguste actualizes his heroic identity by pardoning the conspirators: "Je le suis, je veux l'être."³³ Cinna at this early moment in his new life can only express his resolve with words:

Souffrez que ma vertu dans mon coeur rappelée
Vous consacre une foi lâchement violée,
Mais si ferme à présent, si loin de chanceler,
Que la chute du ciel ne pourrait l'ébranler.
Puisse le grand moteur des belles destinées,
Pour prolonger vos jours, retrancher nos années;
Et moi, par un bonheur dont chacun soit jaloux,
Perdre pour vous cent fois ce que je tiens de vous!³⁴

Cinna had excluded himself from the heroic world by acting unheroically, despite his potential for greatness as a grandson of illustrious Pompée. Curiace, on the other hand, a spiritual

³²

Ibid., p. 774 (V, ii).

³³

Ibid., p. 776 (V, iii).

³⁴

Ibid., p. 778 (V, iii).

descendant of womanly Albe, destroyed himself by engaging in a heroic action for which his natural capabilities were unsuited: the duel with Horace and his brothers. In both instances the problem facing the individual was that of properly defining and fulfilling his own nature. Rodrigue and Chimène solved this problem by demonstrating to themselves and the world that he was a master, not a slave, and she a woman, not a hero. Camille solved it by forcing Horace to kill her, a crime which unmasked him, in a sense, and avenged Curiace while uniting the two lovers in death:

Rends-moi mon Curiace.³⁵

Va dedans les enfers joindre ton Curiace.³⁶

Elle recouvre là-bas tout ce qu'elle a perdu.³⁷

Their burial in a single grave, prophesied by Apollo and comparable to the fate of so many other idyllic lovers--Pyramus and Thisbe, Tristan and Isolde, Anthony and Cleopatra--is the fulfillment of their nature.

At the end of the play the relationship between Camille and Curiace is considerably more appealing than the relationship between Horace and Sabine, even though Horace is a purer

³⁵Ibid., p. 704 (IV, v).

³⁶Corneille, Oeuvres, III, 340 (IV, v. Variant, 1641-56.).

³⁷Corneille, Théâtre complet, I, 707 (IV, vii).

hero than Curiace and Sabine a more perfect woman than Camille. This is largely the fault of Horace, whose refusal to respect feminine values (no doubt the sign of an unmanly fear) has led to an estrangement between husband and wife. His insistence that Sabine "raise herself to his level" reveals a wish to annihilate her through absorption rather than to unite with her as an idyllic equal:

Si l'absolu pouvoir d'une pudique flamme
 Ne nous laisse à tous deux qu'un penser et qu'une âme,
 C'est à toi d'élever tes sentiments aux miens,
 Non à moi de descendre à la honte des tiens.

 Sois plus femme que soeur, et te réglant sur moi
 Fais-toi de mon exemple une immuable loi.³⁸

The leaden seriousness, the impatience of Horace contrast with the almost playful forbearance of Rodrigue, the perfect idyllic lover who, in fighting don Sanche (but not killing him), was really just humoring Chimène--but who believed that to do so was well worth the effort. Unlike Horace, Rodrigue understood that the hero who stifles the idyllic half of his nature dooms himself, and that, even when the idyllic impulse assumes an aggressive, leonine aspect, it should still not be rooted out and destroyed, but converted.

For the hero to convert the lion-woman is for him to make her stop wanting what she wants and start wanting what he wants. What the lion-woman wants is to establish an idyllic kingdom by overthrowing the masculine world of honor and letting in the

jungle of which she is queen. What the hero wants is to establish an idyllic kingdom which will be in harmony with the world of honor. The lion-woman's complaint against this world is that it destroys the possibility of idyllic fulfillment by removing the lovers from the protection of the original parents and teaching the hero to pursue self-sufficiency, political ambition, anti-sentimentality, and other non-feminine values:

Qu'est-ce ci, mes enfants? écoutez-vous vos flammes?
Et perdez-vous encor le temps avec des femmes?³⁹

Furthermore, the hero's passage into the heroic world may be marked by a kind of ritual slaying of the protective parent: Rodrigue kills the Count; Horace defeats Albe; Auguste murders his tutor, Émilie's father. In each of these instances the act leading to the hero's social glorification disrupts the idyllic environment and incites the heroine to retaliate, whether simply to avenge her fallen parent (Chimène) or with the parallel intention of setting things right, of regaining the paradise which the hero has caused to disappear (Camille, Émilie).

Chimène, who is not strongly leonine, expends her aggressive energy in mock persecution of Rodrigue. Camille, however, identifies Horace with the state and attacks both simultaneously:

Rome, l'unique objet de mon ressentiment!
Rome, à qui vient ton bras d'immoler mon amant!
Rome, qui t'a vu naître, et que ton coeur adore!
Rome enfin, que je hais parce qu'elle t'honore!⁴⁰

³⁹
Ibid., p. 685 (Horace, II, vii).

⁴⁰
Ibid., p. 705 (IV, v).

and Émilie similarly sets out to destroy both the emperor and the empire:

Joignons à la douceur de venger nos parents
La gloire qu'on remporte à punir les tyrans.⁴¹

Souviens-toi de ton nom, soutiens sa dignité;
Et prenant d'un Romain la générosité,
Sache qu'il n'en est point que le ciel n'ait fait naître
Pour commander aux rois, et pour vivre sans maître.⁴²

One can placate these furies only by showing them that they have more to gain through acceptance of the heroic situation than through resistance.

In Le Cid this is done by convincing Chimène that on the heroic plane Rodrigue is a worthy replacement for the tutelary parent, and a champion whom it would be futile as well as unpatriotic to oppose; that his love is irreproachably idyllic; and that their union will be fully sanctioned by the king. In the next play the heroine, Camille, cannot be reconciled to the new order, for in establishing it Horace, eager to "S'attacher au combat contre un autre soi-même,"⁴³ has completely destroyed Curiace, and along with him Camille's idyllic hopes:

Éclatez, mes douleurs; à quoi bon vous contraindre?
Quand on a tout perdu, que saurait-on plus craindre?⁴⁴

Émilie is less desperate than Camille but more rebellious than Chimène. Of the three she is the one whose situation most resembles that of the original lion-woman, Semiramis, the

⁴¹

Ibid., p. 728 (I, ii).

⁴²

Ibid., p. 754 (III, iv).

⁴³

Ibid., p. 678 (II, iii).

⁴⁴

Ibid., p. 703 (IV, iv).

Babylonian queen who overthrew her spouse, and, appearing to Thisbe in beastly form, drank from the cooling waters of the fountain that flows up from the childhood past. Adopted daughter and mortal enemy of Auguste, Émilie intends to accomplish the destruction of the heroic world and revival of the Golden Age preached by the lioness as she mouthed Thisbe's veil. What finally causes her to renounce this ambition is her realization that the Golden Age has evolved of itself--or rather, with the help of Auguste's sovereign will.

In Cinna Corneille shows his critics how a heroine even more grievously injured than Chimène, and truly vindictive, might transfer her allegiance in one day from her father to his slayer, without for that reason seeming to be a filie dénaturée or straining the spectator's credulity.⁴⁵ Nevertheless this work, like Horace, is inferior to Le Cid. Perhaps the superiority of the earlier play is due mainly to the fact that its hero and heroine are perfect representatives of the two sexes (as Corneille imagined such perfection), whereas Cinna, Émilie, and the four principals in Horace all fall short of the ideal in one way or another. Corneille seems to have been aware of this deficiency, for in Polyeucte he remedies it. Here the hero is an impeccable super-man of somewhat greater depth than Rodrigue,

45

Thus "Au Cid persécuté Cinna doit sa naissance."
(Nicolas Boileau, "Épître VII, à M. Racine," in Schinz and King, Seventeenth Century, 52.)

and the heroine a remarkable three-dimensional creation. Temptress, innocent, glorieuse, leonine mistress, and finally heroic partner, Pauline by far surpasses Chimène in charm and interest. The problem to be solved by Polyeucte will be the one which the three previous works dealt with: that of moving the lover into the heroic sphere without permanently alienating the beloved--of reconstituting the androgyn on a higher, more mature plane.

IX. Polyeucte

In the four plays which follow L'Illusion comique Corneille attempts to convert the wild leonine mistress into a kind of palace guardian whose devotion will inspire the hero with an enduring narcissistic awe:

Regarde dans mes yeux, et reconnais qu'en moi
On peut voir quelque chose aussi parfait que toi.

The hero is essentially an actor whose impossible roles become real when he gazes into those two admiring mirrors. Ultimately his performance aims at a passage through the looking glass--a transfiguration of the stage reality into an autoerotic land of milk and honey, and of honor too:

Allez, amants, allez sans jalousie
Vivre à jamais en ce brillant séjour,
Où le nectar et l'ambroisie
Vous seront comme aux dieux prodigués chaque jour:
Et quand la nuit aura tendu ses voiles,
Vos corps semés de nouvelles étoiles,
Du haut du ciel éclairant aux mortels,
Leur apprendront qu'il vous faut des autels.¹

More will be said about the lover's final beatific state at the end of this chapter. Here I wish primarily to establish that the heroine's role in the Grand Design is to serve him in two capacities: as talisman and familiar, or as protection against

¹ Corneille, Théâtre complet, II, 603 (Andromède, V, viii).

doubt and gateway to the new world--which will be a re-creation of the old.

In pursuing her he is striving toward stasis; for the beauty and identity of Narcissus reside more in his essence than in his existence, just as a child's beauty seems, to the ideal mother, to originate in what he is rather than what he does: Narcissus, like the child, has only to be, not to act, prove himself, or compete.

The attitude of the lion-woman is diametrical to that of the ideal mother. She measures the hero's beauty or merit against an objective standard and finds it inferior, thereby casting doubt upon his narcissistic identity and causing the idyllic paradise to recede. Catherine (through her parents) judged Corneille insufficiently wealthy, and Chimène (through the Count) disparaged Rodrigue's vertu. The Cornelian hero responds to such challenges by demonstrating his superiority over all rivals on the most rigorously objective scale the playwright knows: that of social worth. Rodrigue proves himself worthy of Chimène by replacing the Count and saving the kingdom from the Moors; Polyeucte transcends Sévère, who has rescued the emperor Décie from the Persians, by saving something more precious than pagan rulers--souls. Polyeucte is more socially useful than Sévère, therefore the lion-woman in Pauline must admit that he is more loveable.²

2

Thus when Alcandre in L'Illusion comique defends the

Pauline's initial preference for Sévère is not only objective and leonine but also passionate and idyllic. Though his newly-won fame objectively validates the "je ne sais quel charme"³ which caused her to fall in love with him in Rome, it does not explain that charm, whose secret lies in the similarity between their situation and that of the archetypal lovers. Pyramus and Thisbe symbolize the childhood past to each other as well as to whoever hears their story. The pathos

theater, he emphasizes the value of the services rendered to society by its more distinguished patrons:

"Et ceux dont nous voyons la sagesse profonde
Par ses illustres soins conserver tout le monde,
Trouvent dans les douceurs d'un spectacle si beau
De quoi se délasser d'un si pesant fardeau."

--Ibid., I, 569 (V, v).

Alcandre then further justifies Corneille's art by another objective standard, that of monetary return; but the nuance of condescension (He is speaking to Pridamant.) leaves no doubt that he does not consider this the supreme criterion:

"D'ailleurs, si par les biens on prise les personnes,
Le théâtre est un fief dont les rentes sont bonnes."

--Ibid.

Corneille's attitude toward wealth may be summed up as follows. First, as the history of Clindor illustrates, one needs money to survive. It is also an important source of credit and power, but it does not necessarily define merit. Wealth and the splendor it can buy are, like feminine beauty, dazzling; they tend to overwhelm and subjugate the beholder, therefore their affect upon him is not always to be trusted. Yet for a wealthy person to create about himself an atmosphere of bedazzling splendor is not evil, unless he himself is evil. The magnificence of a good king, for example, is good, and that of a socially useful theater, likewise good.

³

Ibid., II, 30 (Polyeucte, II, ii).

of their love consists in its innocent intensity and in the impossibility of its consummation. Pauline and Sévère likewise represent, each to the other, the nearly overwhelming memory of a beautiful relationship interrupted by fate. Corneille underlines their innocence by having passionate Pauline nobly reject the returning hero and powerful Sévère nobly accept that rejection without becoming jealous of Polyeucte.

The Pauline-Sévère relationship also recapitulates Corneille's Catherine Hue adventure, with the heroine appearing as the mal mariée, Sévère as the underdog lover (forbidden fruit), Polyeucte as the Rival, and Félix as the Evil Parent who gives his daughter to this last because, unlike Sévère, he is rich and very high-born.

We gather, then, from the first scenes of the play, that if Polyeucte is ever to become the spiritual partner of Pauline he must somehow prove himself superior to Sévère on both levels: heroic and idyllic. At first glance there seems to be little hope that this will occur, but in reality circumstances beyond his control are already turning the tide in his favor. Sévère's return from the "dead," for example, must remind Pauline that the evil fate which pursues idyllic lovers never tore him from her arms but that she, accepting the role of obedient daughter, rejected him of her own free will, however regretfully. And, now married to Polyeucte, she prepares to repeat that rejection. Further, Sévère's very superiority as a hero places Polyeucte in the idyllically favorable position of social underdog. He

unintentionally reinforces himself in this position by becoming a Christian. As such he will not be just disregarded by society, as was the young Sévère, but execrated--which is even better. The Evil Parent, Félix, will transfer his disapproval from Décie's newly ordained favorite to his seditious son-in-law, who will be imprisoned and finally killed, that is, lost to Pauline forever on this earth, as Sévère was supposed to have been lost. All of this persecution will be to Polyeucte's advantage, idyllically speaking, for it tends to convey the impression that he is being separated from Pauline by forces over which he has no control.

Polyeucte's identity as both victor and victim enables him to avoid a pitfall into which Sévère has unwarily stumbled: that of appearing so successful on the heroic plane that his idyllic role loses much of its plausibility. Winning an objective contest can be very dangerous for the lover, as Le Cid illustrates. Sometimes, after having in this manner asserted his worldly transcendence, the hero reaffirms his status as idyllic partner by dying in an atmosphere of pathos (like Romeo) or by undergoing the shame of prison, or both. In his noir cachot (analogue of the Cave) he reestablishes contact with the idyllic ethos, repudiating worldly glory and disgrace alike. Thus Clindor, awaiting execution for having slain his "better" Adraste, allayed his guilt feelings with the thought that Isabelle, not society, was the supreme judge and dispenser of merit:

Isabelle, toi seule, in réveillant ma flamme,
 Dissipes ces terreurs, et rassures mon âme;
 Et sitôt que je pense à tes divins attraits,
 Je vois évanouir ces infâmes portraits.
 Quelques rudes assauts que le malheur me livre,
 Garde mon souvenir, et je croirai revivre.⁴

The situation of Polyeucte, imprisoned after his desecration of the temple, is somewhat different. The woman he loves can serve him neither as talisman nor as familiar. Rather, the Holy Ghost performs these functions, actually protecting him from Pauline, who threatens to bar him forever from the idyllic paradise now designated as heaven:

C'est vous, ô feu divin, que rien ne peut éteindre,
 Qui m'allez faire voir Pauline sans la craindre.⁵

Polyeucte needs God's protection from Pauline because without God he would be enthralled to her--dependent, for his narcissistic self-image, on a figure of supreme authority who regards him as something less than the most desirable male of her acquaintance.

It is impossible for him to continue as her husband under this circumstance. But how did he become her husband in the first place? Did he sin in marrying her? Can we believe that when they were betrothed he had no knowledge of her preference for Sévère? Perhaps he practiced a kind of self-deception worthy of Sganarelle or some other comic hero. We catch a glimpse early in the play of what his previous attitude may

⁴ Ibid., I, 555 (IV, vii).

⁵ Ibid., II, 54 (IV, ii).

have been, when she all but tells him that she prefers his rival:

Depuis qu'un vrai mérite a pu nous enflammer,
Sa présence toujours a droit de nous charmer.
Et, bien que la vertu triomphe de ces feux,
La victoire est pénible, et le combat honteux.⁶

His reaction to this unsettling confession is to fix upon his supposed good fortune, in much the same way that Clindor exulted when Isabelle declared that she preferred him to the socially superior Adraste.

Clindor: Dieu! qui l'eût jamais cru, que mon sort rigoureux
Se rendît si facile à mon coeur amoureux!

Ce pitoyable état de ma triste fortune
N'a rien qui vous déplaît ou qui vous importune;
Et d'un rival puissant les biens et la grandeur
Obtiennent moins sur vous que ma sincère ardeur.⁷

Polyeucte: O vertu trop parfaite, et devoir trop sincère,
Que vous devez coûter de regrets à Sévère!
Qu'aux dépens d'un beau feu vous me rendez heureux,
Et que vous êtes doux à mon coeur amoureux!
Plus je vois mes défauts et plus je vous contemple,
Plus j'admire ...⁸

In both speeches the hero seems almost to be coaxing the heroine to adopt a superior, leonine attitude. And indeed, this is the role she is required to play--in the first instance because Clindor cannot love anyone but a lion-woman, and in the second because Polyeucte's whole struggle against Pauline, and

⁶ Ibid., p. 34 (II, iv). ⁷ Ibid., I, 523 (II, vi).

⁸ Ibid., II, 34 (II, iv).

his martyrdom itself, would lack drama (for Corneille) if she did not represent that figure.

Polyeucte's religious zeal is inseparable from his all-consuming drive toward erotic self-realization, and we must bear in mind that these two motives, together, influence his every act. Corneille is often obliged to conceal the stronger motive, the erotic, because he cannot admit that his hero becomes a saint in order to redeem himself as a lover. He must make the conversion of Pauline from lion-woman to idyllic mistress appear as a kind of bonus, ardently desired by Polyeucte but not at all influencing his prime decisions: to be baptized, to break the idols, and to die. Thus in the passage just quoted Polyeucte cannot be allowed to realize that Pauline loves him less than she loves Sévère--or at least he cannot be allowed to show that he realizes it. Nevertheless I would maintain that he rushes from this interview to the crime in the temple --a glorious improvisation--because he is dissatisfied with the state of both his soul and his love life.

Whereas the Polyeucte of Corneille's source felt unworthy to approach God only because he had not been baptized, the theatrical Polyeucte suffers from a sense of sin like that of his forerunner Cinna--a feeling which results from his enslavement to Pauline and her value judgements. He is especially downcast because he lacks the strength to rebel against her, to tear

off the "robe sale"⁹ which one day he found clinging to him like the shirt of Nessus. Until touched by grace in Félix' prison he will, instead of coming to grips with Pauline, only flee from her toward God. But God will receive him despite his weakness; for did not Jesus absolve the thief who cried out: "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom."¹⁰

Corneille found in Sirius' account, which seems almost tailor-made for adaptation by him, the theme of the "robe sale" and of the deity who, like Auguste, meets the sinner more than half way:

Polyeucte dit à Néarque: 'J'ai vu cette nuit le Christ que vous adorez; il m'a dépouillé d'une robe sale pour me revêtir d'une autre toute lumineuse, et m'a fait monter sur un cheval ailé pour le suivre. ... O Néarque! si je ne me croyais pas indigne d'aller à lui ... , que vous verriez éclater l'ardeur que j'ai de mourir pour sa gloire et le soutien de ses éternelles vérités!' Néarque l'ayant éclairci sur l'illusion du scrupule où il était par l'exemple du bon larron, qui en un moment mérita le ciel, ... aussitôt notre martyr, plein d'une sainte ferveur, prend l'édit de l'empereur, crache dessus, et le déchire en morceaux qu'il jette au vent; et voyant des idoles que le peuple portait sur les autels pour les adorer, il les arrache à ceux qui les portaient, les brise contre terre et les foule aux pieds, étonnant tout le monde et son ami même par la chaleur de ce zèle qu'il n'avait pas espéré.¹¹

Just as the first Polyeucte broke the idols without having been baptized, the second Polyeucte breaks them without having freed himself from Pauline. But this is not to say that baptism

⁹ Ibid., p. 7 (Examen). ¹⁰ Lk. 23:43.

¹¹ Corneille, Théâtre complet, II, 7 (Examen).

has failed to work upon his soul as he had anticipated. In I. i he defined the sacrament as a purgation of original sin and perhaps, through implication, as an uncovering of the eyes which would enable him to perceive the nearness of the heavenly kingdom in the way that a falcon, his hood removed by the hunter, sees the beckoning fields of the sky.¹² Now he is almost savagely eager to mount upward and engage the enemies of God, the idolators who are also the enemies of his own happiness, since it is their objective value system which proclaims him inferior to Sévère. But despite this zeal he still fears Pauline, because he still wants to possess her in her present leonine form. The mythical beast within her, his real enemy, he cannot at this time attack directly, for surely he would be defeated and fall. Thus he wishes only to break the idols,

12

It seems that the word dessillant in v. 47, "Et qui, nous purgeant notre âme et dessillant nos yeux" (Ibid., p. 14 (I, i).) was intended to suggest a hunting bird. The Bordas edition notes that "le verbe dessiller ... s'appliquait aux oiseaux de chasse, dont on décousait les paupières avant de leur donner le vol." (Pierre Corneille, Polyeucte, ed. Pierre Michel, Les Petits Classiques Bordas (Paris: Les Editions Bordas, 1969), p. 36.)

The next line, "Nous rend le premier droit que nous avons aux cieux" (Corneille, Théâtre complet, II, 14 (I, i).), adds to the ideas of catharsis ("purgeant") and realization ("dessillant") those of liberation and elevation, which would more definitely apply to the release of a bird.

I would suggest also that Corneille associates the hunting bird image and that of the "cheval ailé" with the emergence in his hero of a kind of angelic-primitive sensuality (See pp. 212-213, below.).

"montrer qui nous sommes,"¹³ die, and receive his martyr's palm in heaven; otherwise "Mes crimes, en vivant, me la pourraient ôter."¹⁴

Yet by disrupting the sacrifice which honors Sévère and the gods he challenges Pauline symbolically. The original Polyeucte broke several idols in a procession which was taking place out of doors, under the open sky. Corneille's Polyeucte breaks one all-important idol, and to do so he dares enter the temple itself, which represents not only the unconscious, like cave and tomb, but also the influence of the unconscious over our conscious universe. The frontispiece of the original edition shows Polyeucte smashing a nude female deity--probably Venus but in any case a symbol for Pauline. This lovely form is merely the outer shell of the subterranean lion, sphinx, or minotaur which sabotages the hero's ego. The idol's overpowering beauty has caused Polyeucte to assimilate the beast's false objective judgements of his merit, and this assimilation is keeping him from the idyllic paradise whose attainment is "le premier droit que nous avons aux cieux." Now he declares the pagan gods impotent; they neither confer nor withhold merit, either as judges of right and wrong, good and bad, or as masters of human destiny. Rather, this is the unique province of the Christian god:

Sa bonté, son pouvoir, sa justice est immense;

¹³Ibid., p. 36 (II, vi).

¹⁴Ibid., p. 37 (II, vi).

C'est lui seul qui punit, lui seul qui récompense:
Vous adorez en vain des monstres impuissants.¹⁵

With these words Polyeucte proclaims himself "l'ennemi commun de l'État et des dieux."¹⁶ Symbolically his profanation of the temple represents a purification of the unconscious; it is a kind of play within a play, a manner of attacking Pauline while avoiding her. Soon, however, he will have to face the idol in the flesh--and what then? He knows he cannot overcome her through the exercise of character alone, that aspect of générosité which is the determination to do good though tempted to do evil. He must also have grace, for character without grace is like good works without charity.¹⁷

Grace, like charity, may be defined both religiously and psychologically. To have grace in the religious sense is to possess the gift of salvation because one wants what God wants: "Vouloir ce que Dieu veut est la seule science."¹⁸ Psychologically it is to be at peace with oneself because one wants what

15

Ibid., p. 43 (III, ii).

16

Ibid., p. 41 (III, ii).

17

L'espérance, la foi, le reste des vertus,
Sans la charité, sans la grâce,
Pour hautes qu'elles soient, tombent devant ta face,
Ainsi que des épis de langueur abattus.

--Corneille, Oeuvres, VIII, 550 (L'Imitation de Jésus-Christ, III, lv: "De la Corruption de la Nature, et de l'Efficace de la Grâce.").

18

François de Malherbe, "Consolation à Monsieur du Périer, gentilhomme d'Aix en Provence, sur la mort de sa fille," in Les Poésies de Malherbe, eds. Maurice Allem and Philippe Martinon (Paris: Librairie Garnier Frères, 1926), p. 104.

one wants to want, and therefore because one is what one wants to be: "Je le suis, je veux l'être."¹⁹ This is what Phèdre will lack and what Polyeucte prays for in IV, i and ii: the ability not only to say no to Pauline, but to want to say no, that is, the ability to resist the diabolical charm of love inwardly as well as outwardly.²⁰

And his pious wish is fulfilled:

Je la vois; mais mon coeur, d'un saint zèle enflammé,
N'en goûte plus l'appas dont il était charmé;
Et mes yeux éclairés des célestes lumières,
Ne trouvent plus aux siens leurs grâces coutumières.²¹

Henceforth, when he utters sighs and sheds tears for his beloved, they will be sighs and tears of unselfish love, not infatuation. He will no longer consider his former captor, "un obstacle à mon bien,"²² but look upon her as a prisoner in her own right. She has become Andromède, Psyché, Eurydice--all of those fairy-tale beauties waiting for the epiphany of he whose superior magic will break their chains. And Polyeucte's magic, we now know, is the power of great goodness to call forth

19

Corneille, Théâtre complet, I, 776 (Cinna, V, iii).

20

In her relationship with Polyeucte, Pauline can be said to progress from character to psychological grace to divine grace. She loves him first out of duty (character), then sincerely (psychological grace), and finally through God (divine grace).

21

Corneille, Théâtre complet, II, 54-55 (IV, ii).

22

Ibid., p. 54 (IV, ii).

miracles with prayer. Thus he prays again:

Seigneur, de vos bontés il faut que je l'obtienne:
Elle a trop de vertus pour n'être pas chrétienne;
Avec trop de mérite il vous plut la former,
Pour ne vous pas connaître et ne vous pas aimer,
Pour vivre des enfers esclave infortunée,
Et sous leur triste joug mourir comme elle est née.²³

The beast in Pauline dies hard. Only after two harrowing interviews with her savior and the spectacle of his martyrdom will it finally be exorcized.

The first interview takes place immediately after his visitation by the Holy Ghost. During this encounter Pauline behaves, as she does throughout most of the play, as a typical lion-woman, using her charms in an effort to persuade the hero to rebel against the Good Parent (God). She complains that she feels humiliated, cast aside--and no doubt she does. But she also considers herself his superior. Unable to cure him of his "étrange aveuglement,"²⁴ which is a noble way of saying nonsensical fantasy, she is apparently on the point of hurling some threat which will decisively separate them from each other,²⁵ when Sévère enters. Almost immediately Polyeucte

²³ Ibid., p. 58 (IV, iii). ²⁴ Ibid., p. 59 (IV, iii).

²⁵ "Polyeucte

Vivez heureuse au monde, et me laissez en paix.

Pauline

Oui, je t'y vais laisser; ne t'en mets plus en peine;
Je vais..."

--Ibid.

"gives" her to his rival, a gesture which affirms him in her mind as the lost or fast-receding idyllic lover at the same time that it strengthens his will to resist.²⁶ After this scene we learn that to her he is no longer simply "mon époux"²⁷ but "mon Polyeucte,"²⁸ a dearly cherished "malheureux."²⁹ Almost like a mother pleading for an errant child, she exhorts Sévère to rescue him, still unable, in her own blindness, to see in him the holy bird of prey and, of course, even less able to realize that she is speaking on behalf of Satan, since to "rescue" Polyeucte would be to defeat him.

But as he moves ever closer to what Félix in another contresens calls the "honteux précipice où tu vas trébucher,"³⁰ and as her idyllic passion increases, Pauline becomes more sharply aware of his cruel transcendence. I am thinking in particular of their second interview, in V, iii, where it is revealed that Polyeucte understood her perfectly when, just before his departure for the temple, she confessed her continuing passion for Sévère. Now, sole master of her heart, he savors fully the sadistic luxury of repeating her once terrible

26

According to the principle that "Si l'amour vit d'espoir, il périt avec lui." (Ibid., I, 593 (Le Cid, I, ii).)

27

Ibid., II, 41 (III, ii).

28

Ibid., p. 61 (IV, v).

29

Ibid.

30

Ibid., p. 68 (V, ii).

words, urging her, "par pitié,"³¹ to give herself to his no longer victorious rival:

Mon amour, par pitié, cherche à vous soulager;

 Puisqu'un si grand mérite a pu vous enflammer,
 Sa présence toujours a droit de vous charmer:
 Vous l'aimiez, il vous aime, et sa gloire augmentée...³²

The irony of this last line is that, under the new dispensation which is flowering before our eyes, Sévère's gloire does not increase but (by comparison) diminishes--and that it is Poly-eucte who, by leaping off the "honteux précipice," causes that diminution. For

Si mourir pour son prince est un illustre sort,
 Quand on meurt pour son Dieu, quelle sera la mort!³³

Sévère is now below Polyeucte on the scale of objective merit. But note that he undergoes no social degradation, even though to some extent he is a créature de Décie, the hated "tigre altéré de sang."³⁴ If, for example, the Armenians were immediately to recognize Polyeucte's superiority, in a kind of mass conversion, Sévère would automatically reoccupy the position of idyllic lover. In order to forestall any hint of such a turnabout, Corneille preserves the rival's masculine power and dignity, at least on the social level, throughout the entire play.

Although Polyeucte lacks objective merit in the eyes of

³¹ Ibid., p. 69 (V, iii).

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., p. 56 (IV, iii).

³⁴ Ibid., p. 54 (IV, ii).

Pauline, he subjugates her through the display of a superhuman will to avoid his own subjugation. She first seems to intuit his transcendence in the middle of the famous speech which starts out as a tirade ("Que t'ai-je fait, cruel, pour être ainsi traitée?"³⁵) and ends as an aveu:

Fais quelque effort sur toi pour te rendre à Pauline;
Apprends d'elle à forcer ton propre sentiment;
Prends sa vertu pour guide en ton aveuglement;
Souffre que de toi-même elle obtienne ta vie,
Pour vivre sous tes lois à jamais asservie.
Si tu peux rejeter de si justes désirs,
Regarde au moins ses pleurs, écoute ses soupirs;
Ne désespère pas une âme qui t'adore.³⁶

Here Corneille, the enemy of amour-service, causes Pauline to acknowledge her subservience to Polyeucte in the very way that d'Urfé and his partisans would have the lover address his mistress: "Pour vivre sous tes lois à jamais asservie." Thus with a vengeance he restores the male to his naturally dominant position.

To sum up, this restoration results from the interplay of three psychological determinants: Polyeucte's intransigence, his idyllic definition, and Pauline's love, which beautifully transcends the double scandal of her husband's Christianity and his masculinity. She still considers him blind, criminal, mad ("insensé"³⁷) and objectively inferior to Sévère. But no matter: he remains, unlike Sévère, both indomitable and

³⁵ Ibid., p. 69 (V, iii).

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 70 (V, iii).

unfortunate; and therefore she finds him irresistible.

It is now Polyeucte who is not satisfied. He requires that she appreciate his superiority on the objective plane, a thing she cannot do without becoming a Christian. He refuses the role of enchanting maniac. Moreover the touchstone which proves the beloved's freedom from leonine impurities is traditionally her willingness to go where the lover goes, to suffer what he suffers, to become what he becomes.³⁸ Therefore he brutally insists on her conversion:

Vivez avec Sévère, ou mourrez avec moi.

Je ne vous connais plus, si vous n'êtes pas chrétienne.³⁹

Ne suivez point mes pas, ou faites-vous chrétienne.⁴⁰

Pauline cannot comply. Her leonine dross, that is, her adherence to the prevalent généreuse social ethic, is like a weight attached to her feet; it prevents her from soaring upward with Polyeucte to the idyllic kingdom.

Now in itself this ethic is not evil, but presently it

38

Thus Isabelle, only too happy to step down from her leonine pedestal, impoverished herself and fled with Clindor, while on the other hand Molière's Célimène (Le Misanthrope) will decline to join Alceste in his retreat, and Carmen will twice refuse to seek a new life in America with Don José.

39

Ibid.

40

Ibid., p. 72 (V, iii). Polyeucte, Christ-like, also urged Félix to "me suivre." (Ibid., p. 66 (V, ii). Cf. Mat. 16:24, 19:21, and Lk. 18:22.)

happens to function in an evil atmosphere, furthering the interests of false gods and an impious ruler, Décie. The emperor's agent in Armenia is Félix, a cowardly slave to the letter of the law⁴¹ who figures not only as the father of Pauline but also as her evil genius. Yes, Félix-Décie is the leonine beast in Pauline, just as the beast in Chimène was the Count and the beast in Isabelle was Gêronte and the beast in Rodogune will be Cléopâtre. For it is the error of Félix, a blind persistence in idolatry, which almost literally chains Pauline to the earth.⁴²

At first it seems that she will never be able to break that chain and join Polyeucte in paradise. But if she cannot follow him spiritually, she can at least follow him in the flesh--even to the place of execution, where she will experience with him the supreme moment: "elle a suivi ce traître."⁴³ And if she had not performed this act of devotion, moving

⁴¹ "J'aurai fait mon devoir, quoi qu'il puisse arriver."
(Ibid., p. 66 (V, i).)

⁴² Of course, a similar attachment to worldly affections endangers the upward movement of Polyeucte. Their gravitational pull is illustrated emblematically in his crucial final interview with Pauline, when she embraces one of his knees and Félix the other, almost as if to prevent him from taking flight. But he tears himself away from his adversaries, who for a brief moment appear as two sticky, eyeless suppôts de Satan, exclaiming: "Ah! ruses de l'enfer / Faut-il tant de fois vaincre avant que de triompher!" (Ibid., p. 71 (V, iii).)

⁴³ Ibid., p. 73 (V, iv).

toward Polyeucte before her liberation from Félix, just as Polyeucte had moved toward God before his liberation from her, she probably would never have been converted. For it is not only her grief over the loss of "mon Polyeucte" but also a sense of physical horror, the shock of the blade in her own body, which finally effects her divorce from Félix-Décie and all his works:

Mon époux en mourant m'a laissé ses lumières;
Son sang, dont tes bourreaux viennent de me couvrir,
M'a dessillé les yeux et me les vient d'ouvrir.⁴⁴

Polyeucte's execution is a double sacrifice, in the etymological sense ("to make holy"), for the blow which severs his head from his body also severs Pauline from her leonine identity, ending the opposition, in her, between passion and intellect. At last she realizes his objective superiority and the mistake she made in judging him according to society's unchristian standard. Emancipated, she addresses her former captor in a strange tone of affectionate contempt:

Le faut-il dire encor? Félix, je suis chrétienne;
Affermis par ma mort ta fortune et la mienne;
Le coup à l'un et l'autre en sera précieux,
Puisqu'il t'assure en terre en m'élevant aux cieux.⁴⁵

Thus, instead of negating Pauline's sovereign-maternal status, Corneille refines it, so that in all her supernatural glory she may justify the hero and confound his enemies. In other words, he has her perform the talismanic function of the ideal mistress.

⁴⁴

Ibid., p. 74 (V, v).

⁴⁵

Ibid.

But her rebellion, though dramatically satisfying, is, from Polyeucte's point of view, nonessential. He ceased to require her seal of approval when, in prison, he realized that the "flamme toute divine"⁴⁶ which filled his heart left no room for imperfect earthly affections. At that moment the Holy Ghost became his talisman; and when he was baptized, Jesus became his familiar or gateway to paradise, while that paradise itself became the Catholic heaven.

It is now time to consider those points where the playwright's views on heaven and his conception of the idyllic paradise correspond.

The idea of substituting God for the idyllic mistress is of course not original with Corneille. Once the lover's lady becomes his unique source of happiness, as she does in troubadour poetry, it is impossible not to see a correlation between her and the god who is love.⁴⁷ Thus in the Paradiso

⁴⁶

Ibid., p. 54 (IV, ii).

⁴⁷

Polyeucte might be said to literalize one variation of the well-known conceit whereby the poet describes his mundane amorous situation in religious terms. I have in mind the following piece by Thomas Carew (d. ca. 1645), who was not noted for his piety:

"To my inconstant Mistris

When thou, poore excommunicate
From all the joyes of love, shalt see
The full reward, and glorious fate,
Which my strong faith shall purchase me,
Then curse thine owne inconstancy.

Beatrice leads the poet to that God, of whom she is, so to speak, an arm. Normally, however, when religious authors describe the relationship between man and his maker in amorous terms, God is perceived as the lover and man, or his soul, as the celestial bride. Thomas à Kempis, for example, writes:

Adorable Jésus, cher époux de mon âme,

 Qui pourra me donner ces ailes triomphantes
 Que d'un coeur vraiment libre ont les ardeurs ferventes,
 Afin que hors des fers de ce triste séjour,
 Je vole dans ton sein pour y languir d'amour?⁴⁸

And Polyeucte's God is likewise the sovereign lover:

Je n'adore qu'un Dieu, maître de l'univers,
 Sous qui tremblent le ciel, la terre, et les enfers;
 Un Dieu qui, nous aimant d'une amour infinie,
 Voulut mourir pour nous avec ignominie,
 Et qui, par un effort de cet excès d'amour,
 Veut pour nous en victime être offert chaque jour.⁴⁹

Sometimes, on the other hand, Thomas à Kempis comes

A fayrer hand than thine, shall cure
 That heart, which thy false oathes did wound;
 And to my soul, a soul more pure
 Than thine, shall by Loves hand be bound,
 And both with equall glory crown'd.

Then shalt thou weepe, entreat, complain
 To Love, as I did once to thee;
 When all thy teares shall be as vain
 As mine were then, for thou shalt bee
 Damn'd for thy false Apostasie."

--Louis L. Martz, ed., The Meditative Poem, an Anthology of Seventeenth-Century Verse, The Anchor Seventeenth-Century Series (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday and Co., 1963), p. xxv.

⁴⁸

Corneille, Oeuvres, VIII, 371 (Imitation, III, xxi).

⁴⁹

Corneille, Théâtre complet, II, 71 (V, iii).

dangerously close to describing God as a destructive entity of female essence--a Great Mother who both nourishes man with the Eucharistic species and, in that prelude to the Beatific Vision, completely absorbs him. To translate a passage like the following must have been a rude penance for the author of La Place Royale--or was it, instead of a penance, a kind of reversion to a more comfortable mode of being?

Élève tout mon coeur au-dessus du tonnerre;

 Sois l'unique douceur, sois l'unique avantage
 Qui puisse l'arrêter;
 Sois seul toute la viande et seul tout le breuvage
 Qu'il plaise à goûter.

 Fais-y naître un beau feu par ta bonté suprême,
 Et si bien l'enflammer,
 Qu'il l'embrase, consume, et transforme en toi-même
 A force de t'aimer.

 Que par cette union avec joie je devienne
 Un seul et même esprit,
 Et qu'un parfait amour à jamais y soutienne
 Ce que tu m'as prescrit.⁵⁰

This is immersion in divine grace carried to the point of personal annihilation--the very type of nirvana which, in his earlier plays at least, Corneille violently opposes. For who is the lion-woman against whom he hurls his champions, if not a particularly formidable incarnation of the devouring Great Mother? And why else is he so mistrustful of tendresse, so pitiless toward the weak, so drawn to viril dynamism, if not because he secretly fears the temptation, within himself, of her

smothering embrace?

Generally speaking, Christian doctrinarians avoid the danger of this universal impulse by emphasizing the individual quality of heavenly bliss. Many conclude from the Book of Revelation and other biblical texts that the new Jerusalem will be an actual place where the blessed carry on glorified forms of man's present worldly occupations, under the closer tutelage of God.⁵¹ And similarly, Corneille's better-known heroes bask in the favor of paternal figures who encourage them to self-distinguishing action ("Sois désormais le Cid; qu'à ce nom tout cède."⁵²), while the Adversary is often a paralyzing mother-queen. Chimène, Camille, Émilie, and Pauline precurse figures like Cléopâtre in Rodogune or, in Psyché, Vénus, whose rebellious son Amour declares that

Il est temps de sortir de cette longue enfance

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"According to Origen . . . , the cultivation of philosophy, and even of natural science, will be among the principal occupations of the glorified saints of God.

.
The unceasing worship of heaven is not to be taken as implying that there will be no other activity than worship there, but rather that all occupations of every sort, being undertaken for the glory of God and in His service, will partake of the nature of worship. Many NT passages imply that all worthy faculties of individuals and races will find due employment in heaven (Rev 21:24, 26)."

--Charles Harris, "State of the Dead (Christian)," Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. James Hastings, XI, 835.

52

Corneille, Théâtre complet, I, 634 (IV, iii).

Qui fatigue ma patience;
Il est temps désormais que je devienne grand.⁵³

In reality Corneille aspires to "devenir grand" without altogether leaving "cette longue enfance," for he seeks a pleasure analagous to that of the infant at his mother's breast, yet free from overtones of vulnerability and shameful dependence. In pursuit of this beatific state he fashions environments in which the hero replaces, to some extent, God, the one who is most completely "maître de moi-même," or independent of the Great Mother, and "maître de l'univers," or capable of deriving pleasure from existence in a physical world.

For the hero's beatitude, like that of the child, is both psychological and physiological. Its physiological or sensual quality usually finds expression in symbols like the winged horse or in splendid imagery. References to pleasurable tactile sensation in Corneille's theater are rare but not nonexistent,⁵⁴ and in this regard I would again point out that

⁵³
Ibid., III, 596 (III, i).

⁵⁴
For example:

Les rayons du soleil vous baisent trop souvent;
Vos cheveux souffrent trop les caresses du vent:
Dès qu'il les flatte, j'en murmure;
L'air même que vous respirez
Avec trop de plaisir passe par votre bouche;
Votre habit de trop près vous touche;
Et sitôt que vous soupirez,
Je ne sais quoi qui m'effarouche

Pauline's conversion results from knowledge gained partly through that channel. Although the experience of Polyeucte's execution was not pleasurable for her, we must remember that it took place in a context of sadism. Polyeucte awakened her soul by covering her, as she says hyperbolically, with his blood. One can hardly get more physical than this.

But the hero's ability to derive pleasure from his environment is a divine gift whose scope extends far beyond the erotic possession of the beloved, although this is the nucleus of his power. Because he is master of himself, or free from the Great Mother, he may now become Orpheus, or master of the universe.

I use the Thracian singer as a symbol of the hero's perfected self for numerous reasons, but principally because he, like God and many other Cornelian protagonists, has the power to erotize reality. Orpheus not only sings but makes the world sing with him--and to him. He sings to the world and, through the world, to himself. His song is an illusion of movement in rest, a working-out of essence in existential play and display. It impresses his spirit, his joy, his sense of beauty, on all of nature, just as God's love, pouring forth into the universe, evokes a response from every sentient creature:

Craint, parmi vos soupirs, des soupirs égarés.
 --Ibid., III, 603 (Psyché, III, iii).

La prima luce che tutta la raia,
 Per tanti modi in essa si recepe,
 Quanti son gli splendori a che s'appaia.
 Onde, perocchè all'atto che concepe
 Segue l'affeto, d'amor la dolcezza
 Diversamente in essa ferve e tepe.⁵⁵

Rodrigue, Auguste, Dorante (Le Menteur), Persée, Amour--
 these are some of Corneille's Orphic heroes, legendary figures whose very names, like that of, say, King Arthur, suggest a world which, were they to leave it, would cease to exist; for it is because they so will.

Polyeucte belongs to this god-like company. It is he who brings the Orphic spirit to Armenia, vivifying that moribund province in a prefiguration of the conversion of the whole Empire. But what is most interesting about his history is that, in retelling it, Corneille gives the idyllic environment a recognizable and richly meaningful name: Christianity. The members of the early church, living together in harmony and continually praising God on earth as in heaven, recreate the world conjured up by the childish but masterful ur-poet:

Ce n'est qu'amour entre eux, que charité sincère,
 Chacun y chérit l'autre et le secourt en frère.

Although Corneille and his contemporaries realized very well that the Golden Age had ceased to exist as a social

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Dante Alighieri, La Divina Comedia, Paradiso XXIX, in Tutte le Opere di Dante Alighieri, ed. E. Moore (3d ed. rev.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1904), p. 147.

56

Corneille, Oeuvres, III, 553 (Polyeucte, IV, vi., variant included in first editions (1643-56)).

phenomenon, they knew also that it could be recreated through art, and with special force through the most comprehensive medium, the theater. Hence their baroque fondness for elaborate pièces à machines with choruses and ballets; hence also, no doubt, the willingness of certain noble amateurs (such as Louis XIV) to assume some of the more splendiferous minor roles in these spectacles.

Psyché, one of the most magnificent pièces à machines, terminates thus:

DERNIÈRE ENTRÉE DE BALLET

Les troupes différentes de la suite d'Apollon, de Bacchus, de Mome et de Mars, après avoir achevé leurs entrées particulières, s'unissent ensemble, et forment la dernière entrée, qui renferme toutes les autres.

Un chœur de toutes les voix et de tous les instruments, qui sont au nombre de quarante, se joint à la danse générale, et termine la fête des noces de l'Amour et de Psyché.

DERNIÈRE CHOEUR

Chantons les plaisirs charmants
Des heureux amants.
Que tout le ciel s'empresse
A leur faire sa cour.
Célébrons ce beau jour
Par mille doux chants d'allégresse;
Célébrons ce beau jour
Par mille doux chants d'amour.⁵⁷

Here we have another re-creation of the Orphic paradise, the gods with their suites paying court to the super-hero and sharing in the joy of his union with the perfect mistress. Endings such as

57

Corneille, Théâtre complet, III, 633 (V, vi).

this (Saturnalian apotheoses, they might be called.), like the custom of assembling all the characters onstage in the final scene of comedies, or that of bringing them together for a general curtain call, remind us that the theater at its best is essentially an Orphic phenomenon--an act of communion between players and audience in a transcendent atmosphere evoked by the invisible, god-like author.

The true apotheosis is, of course, his, and not that of any character he creates or actor who plays his roles. It is he who reigns as energy source and focal point of the transfigured world. By constructing that magic vehicle which is the play, he demonstrates his thaumaturgic power; he amazes his audience; he proves his objective merit; he earns money and fame. And if, like Corneille, he has been unlucky in love--rejected and belittled--he can substitute the public for the beloved, basing his self-esteem on the judgement of those supreme critics who gather in the theater to wonder at his prowess, like the blessed around the throne of God.

Corneille's feeling of dominion, through the spell of his art, over the real social environment must have been unusually intense. La Bruyère tells us that Le Cid, for example,

n'a eu qu'une voix pour lui à sa naissance, qui a été celle de l'admiration: il s'est vu plus fort que l'autorité et la politique, qui ont tenté vainement de la détruire; il a réuni en sa faveur des esprits toujours partagés d'opinions et de sentiments, les grands et le peuple; ils s'accordent tous à le savoir de mémoire et à prévenir au théâtre les

acteurs qui le récitent.⁵⁸

In other words, Corneille accomplishes as a playwright something very much like what Polyeucte accomplishes as a saint. Thus when we say that the author projects himself into his heroes, we do not mean simply that through them he lives out impossible daydreams, but that Polyeucte, Rodrigue, Dorante, and the others are, in a loose sense, writing plays--doing what Corneille actually does, performing the miracle which he has performed and hopes, through them, to repeat.

This knowledge enables us to form a stronger supposition about the nature of the hero's apotheosis in Polyeucte and other works. For if he is at the same time Corneille the playwright and Polyeucte or Auguste or Persée the savior, then he must be God in all three persons: Creator, Redeemer, and Holy Spirit.

We are also now in a position to appreciate Corneille's psychological situation more fully. He is a dreamer who does great deeds in the world as he dreams of other deeds. His worldly success depends upon his ability to compose from the dream state, that is, to be sound asleep and wide awake simultaneously. He must "sing" with his eyes closed, looking

inward; for, were he to open them, he would lose contact with his unconscious creative sources, and the dream would evaporate: Orpheus must not look at Eurydice as he woos her up from the underworld, and Corneille must not look at his public (the new Great Mother) but write only for himself. After Polyeucte it will be difficult for him successfully to change his principal theme, which is himself as victorious dreamer; most of his better-known works--Le Menteur, Rodogune, Andromède, Nicomède, Psyché--will repeat that theme, while perhaps all of his plays of this period can be said to develop from it in some manner.

There seem to be two principal reasons for which he continues to write after the supreme apotheosis. The first and, I think, most compelling is that he can preserve the Orphic atmosphere only by continually re-creating it, that is, by composing success after success. His situation is like that of the girl in Hans Christian Anderson's tale of the Red Shoes, who, trapped by her own narcissism, must dance forever. The second reason, interrelated with the first, is that he feels compelled to continue exploring the possibilities for earthly happiness because none of his works has yet proposed a real solution to that problem.⁵⁹

Just as he must continue to produce, his heroes must

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That Corneille keeps on writing because he can find satisfaction in neither the historical nor the supernatural solution--in neither Rodrigue nor Polyeucte--is part of Dourovsky's conclusion in Corneille et la Dialectique du Héros. See especially pp. 259-267, 475-482.

continue to conquer. Just as Rodrigue would not be le Cid if he were not forever proving himself to be le Cid campeador, so Polyeucte can find only in death

Un bonheur assuré, sans mesure et sans fin,
Au-dessus de l'envie, au-dessus du destin.⁶⁰

His question, "Pourquoi mettre au hasard ce que la mort assure?"⁶¹ is in keeping with the idea that the hero, no matter how brilliant he may have proven himself to be, must remain ever vigilant, ever fearful (without admitting to fear), ever ready to sacrifice his tranquility, his love, and his life in the reaffirmation of his noble essence. His very greatness, tending to shield itself rather than him against the blows of malicious fate, may necessitate his death (Suréna) or his separation from the beloved (Tite et Bérénice).

Polyeucte in paradise will at last discard the iron mask of the cruel, eternally vigilant falcon, for

Là personne à tes vœux ne viendra résister;
Personne contre toi ne formera de plainte;
Tu n'y trouveras point d'obstacle à surmonter;
Tu n'y rencontreras aucun sujet de crainte.⁶²

Though he will no longer be obliged to struggle, he will not

60

Corneille, Théâtre complet, II, 56 (IV, iii).

61

Ibid., p. 57 (II, vi).

62

Corneille, Oeuvres, IX, 390 (Instructions et Prières chrétiennes tirées de l'Imitation de Jésus-Christ, XL: "De la Gloire éternelle.").

be inactive, nor will he be lonely. Uniting with God, he will become the supreme dramatist, whose effortless wish is heaven itself.

X. Conclusion

We have followed the development of idyllic love in Corneille's works from conformist beginnings in Mélite, Cli-tandre, and La Veuve to La Place Royale, where for the first time the hero sets out aggressively to prove that he, unlike ordinary men, is the master of himself and of the woman he loves. We have seen that the question of mastery is a disruptive element in the struggle for idyllic union: the perfect idyllic lover (Pyramus) had no sense of inferiority or superiority to his female counterpart, whereas value judgements continually intrude into the relationship between social-idyllic lovers. Corneille accepts the social challenge because he must, but never really forgives society for forcing him to compete for the happiness which he thinks is his by divine right.

His heroes are all the more inclined to regard love as a proving-ground for mérite because, following the well-known Oedipal pattern, they repeatedly become enamoured of "objects" who bedazzle, overwhelm, and shamefully enslave them. The truly idyllic lover, on the other hand, is never subservient (that is, he never feels subservient, which is all that matters), even though he too may be infatuated with a mother-image.

Corneille's heroes are unable to escape the world of value judgements, for it is inside them. Thus Alidor, who unconsciously wishes to unite with Angélique on a basis of equality, cannot do so because he cannot envision a relationship in which neither of the partners will be master or slave. His false solution is to drive her into a convent.

Jason in Médée does not advance beyond Alidor, but this play is significant developmentally because it points to a way out of the hero's quandary. Like Alidor, Jason unconsciously wishes to possess the beloved as idyllic equal but is doomed to pursue the unattainable image of the lion-woman. When he is successful in capturing one of those real women in whom her shadowy form appears, it vanishes, and so does his desire. Possession leads to dégoût ("le dégoût qu'apporte l'hyménée"¹), and dégoût leads to infidelity. If Jason were as intelligent as Alidor, perhaps he too would realize that he is (1) an ignoble slave and (2) the slave of a mirage. He never does understand this, however, and it is not through him, but through Médée, that Corneille rebels against the myth that holds him captive.

Médée defeats leonine Créuse in what is essentially a beauty contest. She proves herself more clever, more eloquent, more mysterious, more deadly, more éblouissante than her rival,

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Corneille, Théâtre complet, II, 57 (Polyeucte, IV, iii).

and then retires, leaving Jason and the audience to decide, rationally, which of the two is more worthy of his passion. Because he is blinded by pain and hatred, Jason fails to understand how fully she has annihilated Créuse; and similarly, because the demigoddess breaks the most fundamental laws of human morality, we are likely not to realize that she opens the way to redemption for his successors.

After her defense of the Female's inviolate otherness, it becomes possible for Corneille to replace leonine enthrallment with amour-estime, that is, to install a purified Médée on the throne abandoned by the discredited lion-woman, Créuse. In order to do this he must invent a heroine who will awaken in the hero a love based on both physical attraction and the realization that her mysterious goodness (as opposed to Médée's mysterious evil) makes her his superior--and therefore his equal.

Corneille accomplishes this in L'Illusion comique, which, of all the plays studied here, describes most perfectly a coming together of the hero and heroine as idyllic partners --for, though considerable, the charm of the subdued lion-woman in Le Cid, Cinna, and Polyeucte does not match the hero's glory, nor is Curiace the peer of Camille.

L'Illusion comique also differs from those works in that it preserves the mystical quality of the heroine's love: Clindor-Théagène does not deserve to be loved by Isabelle-Hippolyte, yet, mysteriously, she loves him. The three other

plays are in this respect less effective, for, in order to overcome the heroine's leonine disapproval, Rodrigue, Auguste-Cinna, and Polyeucte must clearly demonstrate their objective superiority. This done, the heroine has to love them, and everyone can see why. There is nothing mysterious about her love, therefore the hero cannot admire her for experiencing it. Moreover, since his love for her depends on something other than his appreciation of her love for him, it is, from the idyllic, narcissistic point of view, imperfect.

Of course Chimène, Émilie, and Pauline appeal to us, in part, because they remain faithful to lovers who have wronged them. But they evoke our admiration and sympathy only to the extent that we consider them mysterious and innocent, and all of them are more or less understandable and guilty--their offense being the attempted subjugation of the hero.

Hippolyte, unlike these lion-women, is both blameless and admirable. She alone fully stimulates the hero's self-love, deserting her father to follow him into exile, whereas Chimène, Émilie, and Pauline hesitate to renounce their alliance with the Evil Parent until the very end. No doubt Corneille finds them as desirable as Hippolyte, but they are less likeable.

Now, idyllic love takes place between two people who like as well as desire each other. The relationship is perfectly balanced; neither partner overshadows the other as the

one who wins out at his expense. The need of each is equally satisfied, and that need is to possess the other. Each not only possesses but is possessed, to an equal degree. Here is where Corneille departs from the archetype. What matters most to him at the end of Polyeucte, for example, is not the spiritual union of the hero with his lovely wife, but her subordination and his glory. This I consider a flaw because the real subject of the play is Polyeucte's relationship with Pauline, and because if that relationship is not perfect, his heavenly beatitude cannot be perfect either.

Corneille does not seem fully to understand the discovery which he himself has made in L'Illusion comique. He knows that happiness has to do with the union of the two lovers, but not, apparently, that this union can be accomplished in the most beautiful way by not subordinating one to the other. Polyeucte has learned neither to live nor to die in tandem with the beloved. He sadistically attacks her otherness, rather than cherishing it, for he associates it with his own inability to cope with the evil of this world.

In the heaven to which he flees he will find a happiness similar to that which he sought in vain on earth. The condition of the archetypal lovers, Pyramus and Thisbe, eternally united and eternally separated, is like that of the blessed, whose spiritual yearnings are satisfied "Sans que la plénitude émousse le désir." But Corneille sees the union of the soul with God as closer than that of Yin and Yang. It is a melting

together, an infusion of one into the other:

L'esprit, de lumière en lumière,
Montant dans ton infinité,
S'y transforme en ta déité,
Qu'il embrasse et voit tout entière.²

His heroes seem to be seeking just such a union,³ whereby the weaker is absorbed into the stronger, in their relations with the opposite sex. Obviously, then, he must prefer that process to union-in-otherness, and therefore we may assume that, even if he recognized his achievement of the latter in L'Illusion comique, he was not interested in repeating the experiment.

Thus in Polyeucte he fails to establish a true heroic-idyllic relationship, even though this play reproduces the idyllic archetype formally:

Idyllic love: Union in childhood...plus...separation through
Domination of both physical death.
lovers by Great
Mother.

Polyeucte: Union in heaven.....plus...separation through
Domination of one physical death.
lover by the other.

Although Polyeucte is a faultless hero, the play depicts the victory of a denatured kind of archetypal-idyllic love over true heroic-idyllic love. It neither follows the optimistic

2

Corneille, Oeuvres, VIII, 646-647 (Imitation, IV, xi).

3

The desire for which can perhaps degenerate--as it almost does in Théodore--to vampirism and necrophilia. See Doubrovsky, Dialectique, p. 286.

tradition, according to which earthly union is possible, nor does it unite the lovers in a relationship of idyllic parity. In the environment where they will finally be brought together, the principles of social-idyllic love which we saw formulated in L'Astrée are reversed: male reigns over universe and absorbs female.

Apparently the lion-woman has not yet been fully overcome, for Corneille continues to fuire en Parthe. He remains drawn to archetypal-idyllic love but repelled by the thought of "dying" (remaining a child) in order to experience it; drawn to heroic-idyllic love (union in life) but unable to accept the beloved as an equal. And so in Polyeucte he fashions a destiny for the lover which enables him to die without really dying and to dominate completely his partner. Polyeucte is both an idyllic lover and a heroic lover, the demands of the Good Parent being in him superficially reconciled with the regressive tendencies of the child, while at the same time he is neither heroic (since he is an escapist) nor idyllic (since he rejects parity).

We see, in other words, an attraction in Corneille to an archetypal myth which seems to find its most perfect literary expression in the story of Pyramus and Thisbe, and of which all other forms of romantic love are imitations, conventional stylizations, or personal and sometimes pathological improvisations. The myth is attractive to Corneille because it unites the lovers passionately and eternally; but it also repels him,

because it symbolizes arrested development. He finds the popular social variant, amour-service, likewise repugnant, for, in requiring that the male assume an attitude of inferiority, it arouses his fear of the lion-woman. Therefore he pieces together a kind of heroic-idyllic love which will allow his protagonist to assert his freedom and maturity at the same time that it will bring him together with the female in an eternally passionate relationship. But such is Corneille's urge to conform (or submit to the secret alliance of the Good and the Evil Parents), and such is his fascination with the lion-woman, that he is unable to take possession of the beloved even after he has fairly won her. Despite his mastery over her, himself, society, the parents, the Rival, and Fate itself, he remains, at heart, a child. And since he feels like a child he remains attracted to a childish form of love--the archetype.

Neither his idyllic nor his heroic impulses are in the end satisfied. Le Cid finishes on a note of expectation rather than fulfillment. In Horace the pair of lovers which is united dies, while the pair which survives is not united. Auguste is the real hero of the next play, but it is Cinna who wins Émilie. In Polyeucte the hero seeks union in death under the pretext that this is a heroic and saintly, rather than childish, solution. Like a painted curtain, the image of his luminous ascent hides a plunge downward and away from mature Pauline, into the past.

Considering *Polyeucte* from another point of view, I have noted that Corneille's tendency to assume the role of God in relation to the beloved--to become, so to speak, her very soul--is reflected in his attitude toward his art. In the eyes of this unhappy lover, clumsy and inarticulate in society, the audience replaces the beloved and the theater that paradise where he once charmed her with the "music" of his presence. There--supreme Magus, problem-solver, hurler of thunderbolts, spinner of fantasies--he vindicates his proud boast: "Mihi res, non me rebus submittere conor."⁴

The idyllic love archetype inspires in various ways the works he composes after *Polyeucte*. *Andromède* and *Psyché* end with marriages in heaven. *Théodore* unites the lovers in death:

Ayant fait avancer l'une et l'autre victime,
D'un côté Théodore, et de l'autre Didyme,
Elle lève le bras, et de la même main,
Leur enfonce à tous deux un poignard dans le sein,⁵

⁴
"De ce vers, déjà traduit dans la préface de *Clitandre*, Corneille avait-il fait, comme on l'a dit, la devise de son blason? Nous n'avons pu le vérifier." (Herland, *Corneille*, p. 129, n. 1.)

For the theory of an Orphic Corneille I am indebted to François Carlo ("*Illusion et mensonge*," *Esprit créateur*, IV (1964), 169-175.), and, indirectly, to Herbert Marcuse (*Eros and Civilization, a Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), esp. pp. 144-156.), but more particularly to a dream in which I saw Corneille as a dancer with hypnotic powers.

⁵
Corneille, *Théâtre complet*, II, 451 (V, viii).

and in Suréna Eurydice expires with the prayer: "Généreux Suréna, reçois toute mon âme."⁶ Ovid's theme of voluntary death becomes self-imposed exile in Tite et Bérénice, where the lovers are spiritually united but physically separated. In Héraclius two pairs of perfect lovers come together after the elimination of an Evil Parent, Phocas, and in Agésilas three pairs are joined when the hero renounces his idyllic dream of union with Mandane, while in Pulchérie it is not idyllic love that the heroine rejects, but growth.⁷

In sum, a dissertation on the ways in which Corneille responds in his later works to the challenges implicit in the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe would be of great interest. With regard to the broader applications of the findings made here, I am now working on a study of the idyllic mistress in Western literature, my tentative plan being to discuss her appearances across the centuries as innocent child, perverse child, lion-woman, and savior.

6

Ibid., III, 758 (V, v).

7

See Doubrovsky, Dialectique, pp. 420-421: "Platonicienne résolue, un peu à la façon d'Edgar Poe, sachant que les 'belles hyménées' se font au 'ciel', Pulchérie, elle, verrait plutôt rôder l'amour parmi les ombres du tombeau que de la rêverie."

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