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The Evolution of Dramatic Procedure in Cornelian Tragedy With Emphasis On the Period From 1643 to 1674.

Larry Robert Derouen
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THE EVOLUTION

OF DRAMATIC PROCEDURE IN CORNELIAN TRAGEDY

WITH EMPHASIS ON THE PERIOD FROM 1643 TO 1674

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Foreign Languages

by

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B.A., McNeese State College, 1958
M.A., Louisiana State University, 1964
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TITLE PAGE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FROM LE CID TO POLYEUCTE: 1636-1643</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FROM POMPÉE TO PERTHARITE: 1643-1651</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FROM OEDIPHE TO ATTILA: 1659-1667</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER IV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TITE ET BÉRÉNICE, PULCHÉRIE, SURENA: 1670-1674</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

Pierre Corneille, after having written four masterpieces of French classical tragedy within a seven year period, was unable in thirty additional years of writing even to approach the standard which he himself had set, in spite of the fact that there occurred at no time any significant deterioration in his poetic ability.

An explanation of this phenomenon can be found in an examination of the evolution of dramatic procedure in the Cornelian masterpieces and in those tragedies which followed them. In the four masterpieces, Le Cid, Horace, Cinna, and Polyeucte, Corneille's successful dramatic formula consists of a relatively simple plot constructed around two central themes: a political question to be solved, which leads to a physical conflict between opposing forces; and a moral issue which results from the political problem and engenders a mental conflict. While the political issue is frequently dated in interest and no longer of importance, the inner struggle is a human characteristic which gives universal appeal to the plays and to the characters.

During the second stage in the evolution of Cornelian tragedy, beginning with Pompee (1643) and ending with Per-tharite (1651), several major changes in dramatic procedure are noted: the moral issue is almost nonexistent, having been replaced by political concerns and ideals, and with
its disappearance comes the elimination of the element of inner conflict, resulting in subjects which are wholly political and plays consisting of physical conflicts between opposing forces of different political beliefs. Certain romanesque and melodramatic elements are introduced which prove detrimental to the creation of the highly restrictive classical tragedy; extremely complex and complicated plots replace the relatively simple ones of the masterpieces and result in poor or incomplete development of the principal characters and loss of spectator interest. Likewise the will of the Cornelian hero, which in the past was in some cases almost superhuman but which always inspired its possessor actively to seek his goal, becomes so rigid and inflexible that it inspires not activity but passiveness in the protagonist and results in insensitive, immobile characters solving cold, uninspiring political problems.

In the third period, which dates from 1659 (Œdipe) to 1667 (Attila), we note only one major change from the tragedies of the previous period. The one essential difference is that Corneille depicts a new kind of love, based on political expediency and couched in gallant vocabulary, with its sole object a marriage leading to political advancement. It is clearly a love designed to suit the vogue for préciosité and gallantry prominent at the time, and while most of the tragedies produced during this period enjoyed a measure of success, their popularity
ended with the death of préciosité.

During the final stage, which includes *Tite et Bérénice* (1670), *Pulchérie* (1672), and *Suréna* (1674), we note several major changes within the framework of Cornelian drama. These plays, like the earlier masterpieces, are psychological in nature and relatively simple in plot, with a minimum of emphasis on political ideas and maximum focus on character reaction. The Cornelian heroic, gallant, and political loves of the past are replaced by strong emotional love; and the element of inner conflict once again assumes a vital role. However, in this case it results solely from the passions of love, anger, and jealousy. These changes, made after the presentation of Racine's *Andromaque*, are considered too drastic and too similar to be coincidental and have caused Corneille's last three plays, although very excellent Cornelian tragedies, to be classified by most critics as imitations of Racinean tragedy.
INTRODUCTION

In the autumn of 1676, upon learning that six of his tragedies had been presented at Versailles, Pierre Corneille wrote to Louis XIV an expression of gratitude which terminated with the following supplication in favor of his later plays:¹

Achève: les derniers n'ont rien qui dégénère, Rien qui les fasse croire enfants d'un autre père; Ce sont des malheureux étouffés au berceau Qu'un seul de tes regards tirerait du tombeau... Et ce choix montrerait qu'Othon ni Suréna Ne sont pas des cadets indigne de Cinna. Sophonisbe à son tour, Attila, Pulcherie Reprendrait pour te plaire une seconde vie; Agésilas en foule aurait des spectateurs, Et Bérénice enfin trouverait des acteurs.²

Time has since revealed that Corneille was alone in this belief, for none of these later plays has been granted "une seconde vie" or received "des spectateurs en foule."

One cannot help but wonder why such a phenomenon exists; why Corneille could dazzle France with a masterpiece of tragic drama at the age of thirty, write three more very famous plays within the next half-decade, and then, in thirty years more of writing, could not even approach the standard which he himself had set, in spite


of the fact that there occurred at no time any marked diminution in his poetic powers.

Throughout the course of the last two and one-half centuries, numerous studies have been written in an attempt to answer this question. Critics generally have blamed Corneille's decline upon the success of Racine, saying that the former introduced French Classical tragedy as we know it today with *Le Cid*, refined it to a certain degree with *Horace*, *Cinna*, and *Polyeucte*, and then, unable to work within the increasing limitations placed upon the tragedy by the theorists of the time, yielded, although unwillingly, to the younger and more talented Racine. While both the success of Racine and the narrow boundaries of the tragedy are valid influences in Corneille's decline, they alone, in the opinion of this writer, cannot account entirely for the change. They could suffice as an explanation if they had succeeded in reducing all of Corneille's tragedies to the obscure position occupied by those written after *Polyeucte*, but the fact remains that at least four, *Le Cid*, *Horace*, *Cinna* and *Polyeucte*, have withstood the test of time and remain so popular that their titles have become synonymous with the name of their author.

As a result, it is felt that other reasons can be

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found which, when combined with the previously mentioned ones, will account for the decline to be seen in those tragedies written by Corneille after *Polyeucte*. It also appears that such a cause must of necessity be due to some variations or changes within the very framework of the Cornelian tragedy, for if there were no variations, then it follows that one could easily point to any of Corneille's tragedies, be it *Horace* or *Pertharite*, as a perfect example of the dramatic poet's ability. Such, of course, is not the case.

What this study proposes to do, then, is to present a brief analysis of the four masterpieces of Corneille, and then to examine the later tragedies, from *Pompée* to *Suréna*, in the light of this analysis, in an effort to determine what changes take place and their possible influence on the decline of these tragedies. Since only the serious dramas beginning with *Le Cid* are of real significance in this study, those plays written before *Le Cid* as well as the comedies and productions for music (*Psyché*) and spectacle (*Andromède. La Toison d'Or*), will not be considered.

It should be pointed out here that a portion of this study, that concerned with the evolution of the element of conflict in the tragedies of Pierre Corneille, was
made earlier by this writer. For the purpose of presenting a complete analysis of the tragedies of Corneille, and in an attempt to draw valid conclusions from the analysis, that material has been revised and fully integrated into this study.

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In said portion, entitled A Study of the Element of Conflict in the Tragedies of Pierre Corneille from 1636-1674, (M.A. Thesis, Louisiana State University, 1964), six serious dramas, Don Sanche d’Aragon (1649), Sertorius (1662), Sophonisbe (1663), Otho (1664), Agesilas (1666), and Attila (1667), were not discussed because this writer found no significant contribution to the evolution of the element of conflict in any of these plays. Such is not the case in this more general analysis, however, and therefore every serious Cornelian drama written between 1636 and 1674 will be examined.
CHAPTER I

From Le Cid to Polyeucte: 1636-1643

By the time he had reached his thirtieth year, Pierre Corneille was ranked among the leading dramatists of his time, and had to his credit six comedies, one tragi-comedy, and one tragedy. Yet in all this work there was nothing to suggest the real genius which was "on the point of bursting into full flower,"\(^1\) and which did so in December, 1636 or early in January, 1637,\(^2\) with the introduction of Le Cid.

However important his plays which preceded Le Cid may have appeared to Corneille and to his contemporaries, they have since fallen into the category of his inferior works. But Le Cid opened a new epoch in the history of French drama, for with the innovation of the emphasis on mental conflict, "it pioneered the tragedy of inner conflict and sealed the fate of the tragedy of mere misfortune."\(^3\) It is essentially the dramatization of dual

\(^1\)Lockert, op. cit., p. 29.

\(^2\)H.C. Lancaster, A History of French Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century, Part V, Recapitulation (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1942), p. 39. Critics prior to Lancaster generally accept December, 1636 as the correct date of Le Cid. The latter, however, after extensive research, concludes that January, 1637 is the probable date of its first presentation.

conflicts: one a physical conflict between two forces, the other a mental conflict engendered solely as a result of the first. It is then, a conflict between Rodrigue and Chimène, and within Rodrigue and Chimène.4

The opposing forces which characterize the physical conflict may be said to be the families of Don Diègue and Don Gomès. On one side are Don Diègue, the proud old nobleman who has been highly insulted, and his son, Rodrigue, who must defend his father's honor or lose his own; and on the other side stand Don Gomès, so embittered by the choice of Don Diègue instead of himself as the tutor of the young prince of Castille that he chose to insult Don Diègue rather than accept the wishes of his king, and his daughter, Chimène, who likewise must avenge any action taken against her father, even at the risk of losing her loved one.

The irony of this situation is that Rodrigue and Chimène love each other, and this mutual love brings about the second and most important conflict in the play - the mental conflict experienced by both. Here the conflict is characterized on one side by love, with the desire for possession; and in opposition is "a code that demands not only the sacrifice of one's desires to family honor, but conduct of a kind that will fulfill the beloved's ideal."5

4Lancaster, op. cit., II, I, 123.
5Ibid., p. 123.
Corneille's handling of the dual conflict, in view of the fact that he had no precedent to follow, was excellent. While it is probably true that had he written this play a few years later he probably would have opened it after the killing of Don Gomès, and have concentrated upon clearing up the situation created thereby, nevertheless his choice should not be regretted. By constructing the play as he did, he was not only able to portray adequately the mental and physical conflicts of his two main characters but he also portrayed, in the first two acts, his three leading male characters as well as Chimène's love for Rodrigue and her uneasiness over such complete happiness. When she says:

Il semble toutefois que mon âme troublée
Refuse cette joie et s'en trouve accablée.
Un moment donne au sort des visages divers,
et dans ce grand bonheur je crains un grand revers... 7

Chimène forewarns us of the obstacle she and Rodrigue will face, as well as the tremendous mental suffering they will undergo as a result of it. Thus the first two acts, as irrelevant as they appear to be from the point of view of concentration, are important in that they emphasize the love and the danger faced by the young couple, and they

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6Corneille accomplished this in Cinna.
enlist our sympathies, through the character portrayals, on the side of Rodrigue. This makes it possible for us to accept, at the end of the play, Chimène's presumed agreement to marry Rodrigue, even though he has killed her father.

The physical conflict begins early in the play when Don Gomès slaps Don Diègue, and it is sustained throughout, first by Don Diègue and Don Gomès, then by Don Gomès and Rodrigue, and finally by Rodrigue and Chimène. It reaches its highest peak during the duel between Don Gomès and Rodrigue, but it continues on an important plane throughout the remainder of the play and is resolved only at the very end, when Chimène ostensibly concedes to the wishes of her king.

Dependent upon, and skillfully woven into this physical conflict, is the all important mental conflict. It begins immediately after the incident between Don Gomès and Don Diègue, and is likewise sustained, first by Rodrigue, then by Chimène, throughout the play. Rodrigue is the first to experience it. After his father explains the insult he has suffered and says "Va, Cours, Vole, et nous venge," Rodrigue realizes his predicament:

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8Ibid., p. 715.
9Ibid., p. 715.
10Ibid., p. 717.
Que je sens de rudes combats!
Contre mon propre honneur mon amour s'intéresse:
Il faut venger un père et perdre une maîtresse.
L'un m'anime le coeur, l'autre retient mon bras.
Réduit au triste choix ou de trahir ma flamme,
Ou de vivre en infâme,
Des deux côtés mon mal est infini.
O Dieu! l'étrange peine!
Faut-il laisser un affront impuni?
Faut-il punir le père de Chimène? 11

He sees that he must choose between family honor and love for Chimène; between betraying his love or living en infâme, and that, in either case, he will lose Chimène because "l'un me rend infidèle, et l'autre indigne d'elle." 12 His initial solution, then, is:

Allons, mon âme; et puisqu'il faut mourir, 13
Mourons, du moins, sans offenser Chimène.

Immediately after this decision is reached, however, Rodrigue realizes that he cannot die and leave his name as well as that of his father in disgrace. And so, by calling upon all his powers of reason, he reaches a decision in favor of his honor and duty:

Allons, mon bras, sauvons du moins l'honneur,
Puisque après tout il faut perdre Chimène. 14

This victory of the will over the emotions is not an easy one for Rodrigue, and it is attained only by a careful analysis of right and wrong. Once he realizes, however,

11Ibid., p. 718.
12Ibid., p. 718.
13Ibid., p. 718.
14Ibid., p. 718.
that duty must come before inclination, he does not waver. True, he does express sorrow and regret after the duel with Don Gomès, but this sorrow is only for what he has done to Chimène, and not for what he has done to Don Gomès. It is only natural and human that he should regret hurting his loved one.

Chimène's plight is basically the same as that of Rodrigue, with the exception, of course, that with her it is love that triumphs. As has been previously pointed out, she feels, at the beginning of the play, that her happiness is too complete to run smoothly, and only too soon her feelings are justified. Her initial conflict, when she learns of her father's actions and their effect on Rodrigue, is simply an amplification of that of Rodrigue, for she too realizes that she is unable to prevent the duel. She knows that her intervention could probably prevent the clash, just as Rodrigue could have avoided it by taking his own life or by fleeing, but she also realizes that should she stop Rodrigue, she would cause him to lose his honor and thus she would lose him. And so her sense of honor prevents her intervention. She does, however, indicate the strength of her love for Rodrigue, for when the Infante proposes:

\[ \text{Mais si jusques au jour de l'accommodement} \\
\text{Je fais mon prisonnier de ce parfait amant,} \\
\text{Et que j'empêche ainsi l'effet de son courage,} \quad 15 \\
\text{Ton esprit amoureux n'aura-t-il point d'ombrage?} \]

\[ \text{Ibid., p. 727.} \]
Chimène is quick to accept the proposal, for it appears to her to be the ideal way to preserve her lover and his honor. Unfortunately, this decision comes too late, for Rodrigue and Don Gomès have already departed for their duel.

After the death of her father, Chimène dominates the action of the play, and her portrayal by Corneille is magnificent. She sees immediately the obligation put upon her by the accepted code of honor and she persists in demanding her lover's death, all the while painfully regretting every action she feels honor-bound to take. Her portrayal is one of love versus her sense of honor, with her convictions toward the latter manifesting themselves in her outward, open insistence upon Rodrigue's death, and her feelings for Rodrigue gnawing unceasingly within her upon the very roots of these convictions. She fights with all her strength to procure Rodrigue's death, even to the point of accepting a champion to fight against him after he has conquered the Moors and been pardoned by the king. Finally, however, she can resist no longer, and when offered an opportunity to have Rodrigue put to death,¹⁶ she yields to her love as she tells him:

Si jamais je t'aimai, cher Rodrigue, en revanche,
Defends-toi maintenant pour m'ôter à don Sanche,
Combats pour m'affranchir d'une condition
Qui me donne à l'objet de mon aversion.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 766.
Te dirai-je encore plus? va, songe à ta défense,
Pour forcer mon devoir, pour m'imposer silence,
Et si tu sens pour moi ton cœur encore épris,
Sors vainqueur d'un combat dont Chimène est le prix. 17

The chief defect in Le Cid is obviously the role of Dona Urраque, l'Infante de Castille. 18 It is "the one role in the play which critics almost without exception have condemned as useless . . . " 19 The struggle between her love for Rodrigue and her pride which forbids her to marry a man not of royal blood, coupled with the fact that she is never in contention insofar as Rodrigue is concerned, however, do not vitally affect the action of the play, although "the disingenuousness of her advice to Chimène at times and the uncertainty of how she may intervene in the course of events do increase in some small degree the tension of the tragic predicament." It is not, however, a major defect, and its significance insofar as this study is concerned lies not so much in its possible violation of the unity of action as in the fact that it marks the beginning of a trend toward plot complexity and intrigue and is indicative of Corneille's apparent "pervasive

17Ibid., p. 766.
18Lockert, op. cit., p. 30.
20Lockert, op. cit., p. 30.
fondness . . . for complication . . .," a characteristic which is also observed in *Horace* and which, in the opinion of this writer, contributes significantly to the failure of the later tragedies. However, it is in *Le Cid* and *Horace* a minor defect, and it does not become of prime importance until the creation of *Pompeé*.

While *Le Cid* has many other excellent qualities its long lasting success is without any doubt due to Corneille's innovation of emphasis on inner conflict. The mental anguish suffered by Rodrigue and Chimène in choosing between what they wanted to do and what they felt honor-bound to do is the element which takes them and the play out of the Middle Ages, and, for that matter out of its own time. Their dilemma is probably more universal and irresistible in its appeal than any other in the dramatic literature of mankind. So well did Corneille present it that he was never quite able to capture again the verve, passion, and warmth of human sympathies which characterized *Le Cid*.  

*Horace*, first played between February 19 and March 9, 1640 is ample proof of the preceding statement. Corneille's

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23 *Lancaster, op. cit.*, II, I, 303. For purposes of simplification, the dates of Corneille's tragedies presented in this study will be those selected by Lancaster.
technique in *Horace* was basically the same as that in *Le Cid*. He placed his characters in a certain milieu of family harmony, presented to them a problem which forced them to choose between family ties and some aspect of honor or duty; and then portrayed their reactions as they attempted to reach a solution.

The dual conflict found in *Le Cid* is also present in *Horace*. The physical one is between Rome, as represented by Horace and his brothers, and Alba, defended by Curiace and his two brothers. Caught in the middle are Sabine, the wife of Horace and sister of Curiace, and Camille, the sister of Horace and fiancée of Curiace.

The mental conflict which stems from the physical one is between love in its various phases on the one hand and patriotism on the other, and no two characters react in the same manner. There are at least five carefully differentiated men and women. In the heart of each is a struggle, and all their conflicting emotions react upon the emotions of the others. The elder Horace is a patriot in whom devotion to the cause of Rome is a noble and dignified enthusiasm. Camille, although a Roman, daughter and sister of fanatical patriots, is an emotional pacifist who puts her love for Curiace before her duty or his. She is happy when she thinks Curiace has left the Alban army out of love for her, and she bitterly curses Rome when she learns
that he has been killed. Sabine, on the other hand, has no less feeling and no less vision than Camille, but she is more resigned, more submissive.

Curiace is probably the finest of the five characters, for he is a man with the imagination to see the horror of his position as Alban champion, to be afraid and yet not to shrink. His analysis is similar to that of Rodrigue, who, when forced to decide between his love for Chimène and his duty to his father, entered into a state of emotional torment. True, he decided in favor of his duty, which was by no means invraisemblable during that epoch, and having once reached the decision, he did not waver; but at least he showed signs of being human, in that he had difficulty in making the decision. Curiace experiences this same anguish. When he learns that he has been given the honor of defending Alba against his brother-in-law, the Roman Horace, he says of this honor:

Et puisque par ce choix Albe montre en effet
Qu'elle m'estime autant que Rome vous a fait,
Je crois faire pour elle autant que vous pour Rome;
J'ai le coeur aussi bon, mais enfin je suis homme:
Je vois que votre honneur demande tout mon sang,
Que tout le mien consiste à vous percer le flanc,
Près d'épouser la soeur, qu'il faut tuer le frère,
Et que pour mon pays j'ai le sort si contraire.
Encor qu'à mon devoir je coure sans terreur,
Mon coeur, s'en effarouche, et j'en frémis d'horreur;
J'ai pitié de moi-même, et jette un oeil d'envie
Sur ceux dont notre guerre a consumé la vie,
Sans souhait toutefois de pouvoir reculer.
Ce triste et fier honneur m'emeut sans m'ebranler:

\[^{24}\text{Ibid., p. 307.}\]
J'aime ce qu'il me donne, et je plains ce qu'il m'ôte; 
Et si Rome demande une vertu plus haute,
Je rends grâces aux dieux de n'être pas Romain,
Pour conserver encor quelque chose d'humain. 25

Later he tells Camille, his intended wife and the sister of Horace:

Hélas! je vois trop bien qu'il faut, quoi que je fasse,
Mourir, ou de douleur, ou de la main d'Horace.
Je vais comme au supplice à cet illustre emploi;
Je maudis mille fois l'état qu'on fait de moi:
Je hais cette valeur qui fait qu'Albe m'estime;
Ma flamme au désespoir passe jusques au crime,
Elle se prend au ciel, et l'ose quereller.
Je vous plains, je me plains; Mais il y faut aller. 26

Thus, in his reaction Curiace is, like Rodrigue, an exemplification of normal humanity. He feels the full force of both sides; he does his duty to his country unhesitatingly, but he regrets bitterly the necessity of fighting against his sister's husband and the brothers of the woman he loves.

However, Curiace is not the principal character. Horace, who is, presents a completely different picture. When he is first informed of his selection as defender of Rome, he is somewhat overwhelmed and proud, and rightly so, for it is a great honor. When he later learns that he must fight against his sister's loved one and the brothers of his wife, one would expect him to be troubled at the thought of this, as was Curiace. But he is not! Instead he informs Curiace:

25 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., I, 800.
26 Ibid., p. 802.
Contre qui que ce soit que mon pays m'emploie,
J'accepte aveuglément cette gloire avec joie;
Celle de recevoir de tels commandements
Doit étouffer en nous tous autres sentiments.
Qui, près de le servir, considère autre chose,
A faire ce qu'il doit âchement se dispose;
Ce droit saint et sacré rompt tout autre lien.
Rome a choisi mon bras, je n'examine rien.
Avec une allégresse aussi pleine et sincère
Que j'épousai le soeur, je combattrai le frère;
Et, pour trancher, enfin un discours superflus,
Albe vous a nommé, je ne vous connais plus. 27

Later, when he returns victorious from battle, he
doesn't express regret over having killed Curiaice or con­
cern over having hurt his sister so deeply. Instead, he
is so obsessed with his own glory that he cruelly brags
of his feat as he informs Camille of the death of Curiaice:

Ma soeur, voici le bras qui venge nos deux frères,
Le bras qui rompt le cours de nos destins contraires,
Qui nous rend maîtres d'Albe; enfin voici le bras
Qui seul fait aujourd'hui le sort de deux États;
Vois ces marques d'honneur, ces témoins de ma gloire
Et rends ce que tu dois à l'heure de ma victoire. 28

These words from Horace combined with such actions
as his remorseless slaying of Curiaice and Camille have
created a belief among many critics that Horace is a kind
of superman, almost devoid of humanity. 29 Regardless of
what Horace represents, the important observation here is
that he experiences no inner conflict; he wins no victory
over his more gentle feelings, for he doesn't even con­
sider them. This marks the beginning of a trend which is

27 Ibid., p. 800.
28 Ibid., p. 827.
29 Caudwell, op. cit., p. 62.
once more portrayed in Polyeucte and which develops completely in the later tragedies: a trend which either eliminates completely the inner conflict or relegates it to a role of relative unimportance, and focuses on an open, physical conflict between opposing forces. Already, in Horace, Corneille relegates the inner conflict to characters other than his primary one, although it is portrayed frequently enough to be of capital importance.

However, this removal of the conflict within Horace, is, as has just been pointed out, the beginning of a trend, and nothing more. It is not a major characteristic of the tragedies of this period and it does not become one until the period beginning with Pompée.

Critics have generally found two weak points in Horace: an obvious violation of the unity of action when in Act V Horace falls into a second peril after having murdered his sister; and the questionable importance of Sabine to the action of the play. Of the former, criticism ranges from Lancaster's belief that it is the legal atmosphere of the last act, rather than the so-called second peril, which is the principal defect, to Lockert's suggestion that the last act be re-written; while, concerning Sabine, critics generally agree that her "useless and some-

\[30\]

\[31\]
what ridiculous role, with her "often reiterated eagerness to die" is "monotonous and ineffectual".

It seems more than ironic that Corneille, after having been violently criticized for crowding too much action and creating the useless role of the Infante in Le Cid, would deliberately commit the same sins in Horace. And yet, when, at the first reading of the play in 1639, he was asked by several of his contemporaries, among them Chapelain, d'Aubignac, and Boisrobert, to make the necessary changes, he refused to do so.

Twenty years after the play was published, however, Corneille softened and admitted that (Sabine "ne sert pas davantage à l'action" and that) Horatius had "no need to kill his sister", that this led to "a double plot", in which the hero fell into a "second peril" (the trial) after coming out of the first one (the battle). The author now found the fifth act was "all forensic speeches . . . harangues and long discourses; these can be borne near the beginning of the play, but the fifth act must be more than talk". But the strictures of Corneille at 54 on the work of Corneille at 34 strike a modern observer as academic. They read like the words of a writer who knows he is now acknowledged to be great and can afford to admit some of his earlier faults without jeopardizing his reputation. The

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32 Lancaster, op. cit., II, I, 310.
33 Lockert, op. cit., p. 42.
34 Ibid., p. 42.
35 Lancaster, op. cit., II, I, 304.
37 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., I, 782.
young Corneille knew very well what he was doing...

What seems obvious is a certain fondness on the part of Corneille for "l'histoire à deux fils," and

... un certain goût du "beau sujet", c'est-à-dire du sujet où l'ingéniosité du poète pourra acquérir du lustre, du sujet aux péripéties surprenantes et émouvantes, du sujet aux situations inouïes. Ce goût, Corneille le possède dès Le Cid et ne le perd jamais... Ce goût du "beau sujet", dangereux en lui-même, puisqu'il conduit Corneille à préférer Rodogune à Polyeucte et peut-être à estimer ses tragédies en raison directe de la peine qu'il a eue à les construire, ce goût est encore plus dangereux du point de vue classique en ce qu'il rend presque impossible la stricte application des règles qui régissent la disposition du drame, et en particulier de la règle des trois unités. L'unité d'action est gênée par la fécondité de l'intrigue et la multiplicité des épisodes. Cette même fécondité ne permet pas la réduction de l'action à l'unité de temps et à l'unité de lieu. Trop d'événements s'y passent pour ne pas sortir du jour unique et du lieu restreint où ils doivent se dérouler. S'ils y sont contenus, c'est aux dépens de la vraisemblance. Ainsi la tragédie garde une extension contraire à l'esprit classique, qui voudrait la concentrer autour d'une simple crise psychologique, disons mieux, d'un bref conflit de sentiments.

It is not intended to imply that Corneille has overly complicated Le Cid or Horace, or that either of the two

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38 Bermel, op. cit., p. xi.

39 Lanson, op. cit., pp. 133-134. Lanson defines "l'histoire à deux fils" as "la pièce composée où... il faut deux réglements distincts pour deux intérêts qui, tout en se liant, demeurent indépendants. Par exemple, si l'amour... fournit l'intrigue... dans la tragédie composée, il y aura deux mariages à décider ou empêcher."

masterpieces is "une histoire à deux fils." There is no doubt that these two tragedies, as well as Cinna and Polyeucte "sont précisément des tragédies simples." What is important is that Corneille, because of his repeated use of elements for which he was criticized in Le Cid, indicates an intentional preference for plot complexity, and as such forewarns his readers of what is to follow in his later tragedies, beginning with Pompée.

That these weaknesses are not to be considered major characteristics of this period is best illustrated by Corneille's next play, Cinna ou La Clemence d'Auguste (1640), for it represents the best example of simplicity and emotional conflict in the entire Cornelian repertory of tragedy. With Cinna Corneille demonstrates that he has:

at last learned the secret of dramatizing a small subject in a harmonious five-act tragedy without the help of physical action either before or behind the scenes. In the Cid there had been a battle and two duels, in Horace a judicial combat and a murder, but in Cinna there is no deed of violence, only a series of plans, moral struggles, and decisions. 42

The dual conflict found in Le Cid and Horace is still present in Cinna, but the physical aspect of it never leaves the planning stage, and Corneille focuses on it only when necessary to strengthen the mental conflict in one of his

41 Lanson, op. cit., p. 135.
42 Lancaster, op. cit., II, I, 319.
characters. Emilie, in her very first words:

Impatients désirs d'une illustre vengeance
Dont la mort de mon père a formé la naissance,
Je m'abandonne toute à vos ardents transports,
Et crois, pour une mort, lui (Auguste) devoir mille morts. . .

informs us of the physical conflict which exists between her and Auguste. Throughout the first act, she presents her side of the struggle, and Cinna, completely under the influence of his love for Emilie, reveals to us that he is in total agreement with her.

In the second act, Auguste presents his position in the conflict, but in a way which is much more dramatically effective than the procedure used in either of the two previously discussed plays. In Le Cid and Horace, the physical conflict was presented openly and all concerned were forced to choose sides. In Cinna, however, Emilie's desire for vengeance is kept secret from everyone but herself and Cinna, and the success or failure of the conspiracy depends entirely upon the latter. Thus, when Auguste, unaware of the plot against his life, reveals his sincere desire to accept the advice of Cinna and then does accept it, he also unknowingly reveals his side of the conflict to Cinna. From this point on, the physical conflict is suspended as it awaits Cinna's decision. By the time Cinna does reach a decision, Auguste has learned of the conspiracy. He summons Cinna, who is followed by Emilie,

43Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit, I, 850.
and solves the entire problem by forgiving the would-be assassins and thus meriting their admiration.

While the physical conflict, in essence, ends with the completion of the second act, the mental one is sustained from the beginning of the play until the very end. Emilie, who is the first to reveal the physical confrontation, is likewise the first to show signs of an inner struggle. In the very speech in which she expresses her duty to avenge her father's death, she also shows a desire to be free of this obligation because of the danger it imposes upon Cinna. She quickly overcomes this desire, as she pleads with herself:

Cessez, vaines frayeurs, cessez, lâches tendresses,
De jeter dans mon coeur vos indignes faiblesses;
Et toi qui les produis par tes soins superflus,
Amour, sers mon devoir, et ne le combats plus:
Lui céder, c'est ta gloire, et le vaincre, ta honte. 45

She remains strong until the very end of the first act, when once more, upon hearing that Auguste has summoned Cinna and Maxime, her fear for Cinna's life causes her to yield to her love, and she tells Cinna:

Fuis d'Auguste irrité l'implacable colère.
Je verse assez de pleurs pour la mort de mon père:
N'aigris point ma douleur par un nouveau tourment,
Et ne me réduis point à pleurer mon amant. 46

This time Cinna's reasoning persuades her to be strong, and

44 Ibid., p. 850.
46 Ibid., p. 858.
again she dominates her fear for him.

The end of Act I marks the end of the inner conflict in Emilie. From the beginning of the second act until the very end of the play, she exhibits no sign of giving in to her love. As a matter of fact, her will becomes so determined that she is able to strengthen Cinna when he attempts to change his mind. However, Corneille does not allow the element of inner conflict to disappear, for at the very moment when Emilie's struggle is resolved, that of Auguste begins.

His conflict differs from those of all Cornelian characters prior to Cinna in that their mental conflicts always resulted from physical ones which forced them to choose between certain aspects of love or duty or love and honor, while Auguste's is a self-imposed conflict which has little to do with love or duty. It is brought on by his failure to find happiness and repos in spite of his having attained the absolutism that had been his goal. His conflict is, then, a mental debate over the proper course to pursue - attainment of greater heights, or abdication - in order to achieve his desire of happiness and tranquillity. Upon the advice of Cinna, he abandons the idea of abdication, and in the final analysis he realizes

47 Ibid, Cinna, Act III, Scene IV.
48 Lancaster, op. cit., II, I, 315.
49 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., I, 868
that through his forgiveness of the conspirators he has attained greater heights:

Je suis maître de moi comme de l’univers;
Je le suis, je veux l’être. O siècles, ô mémoire,
Conservez à jamais ma dernière victoire!
Je triomphe aujourd’hui du plus juste courroux
De qui le souvenir puisse aller jusqu’à vous... 50

At the same time he realizes that in triumphing over himself he has achieved greater happiness in his reconciliation with Cinna:

Soyons amis, Cinna, c’est moi qui t’en convie. 51

Cinna’s role in this play has a certain similarity to those of Rodrigue, Curiaice and Horace in that Cinna, like the others is forced to choose between love and duty, but two basic factors exist which make his position unique. In the first place, Rodrigue, Curiaice, and Horace were faced with death in order to fulfill their duty and preserve their honor. The task cost Curiaice his life. Cinna, however, must risk death and the loss of his honor, in order to win Emilie’s love.

The second major difference is seen in Cinna’s reaction to his choice. It has been previously pointed out that, when forced to make a choice, the Cornelian heroes of Le Cid and Horace made their decisions courageously, although with some difficulty in the case of Rodrigue, and once the decisions were made, they did not waver. Cinna does not follow

50 Ibid., p. 905.
51 Ibid., p. 905.
this pattern. In the initial act of the play he is so firm in his support of Emilie that even the fear of having been discovered does not affect him. Then, in Act II, he appears to be just as strong in his support for Auguste. True, he tells Maxime that he could not avenge Emilie on Auguste if the Emperor were to abdicate and for this reason he had to insist upon Auguste's retention of the throne. While this argument, reinforced by his desire to win Emilie, could conceivably be true, Cinna's reaction in the very next scene in which he is present seems to indicate that he was also greatly influenced by Auguste's humility and generosity and advised him to retain the throne because he (Cinna) actually felt that Auguste was a good emperor. If this were not the case, there would hardly be reason for Cinna to experience any emotional conflict after his meeting with Auguste, and yet, by the time Act III begins, he is completely torn between Emilie and Auguste:

Emilie et César, l'un et l'autre me gêne:
L'un me semble trop bon, l'autre trop inhumaine.

His mental conflict really begins at this point, as he reveals to Maxime that he is not so blinded by love as to fail to see Emilie's faults and Auguste's qualities, but his love is so strong that he feels helpless to correct the situation.

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52 Ibid., p. 905.
53 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., I, 875.
Little more need be said of Cinna except that, unlike the previously discussed Cornelian heroes, he is unable to make the decision alone. His vacillation continues throughout the third act, and it is only after being highly insulted and provoked by Emilie that he does reach a decision:

Eh bien! vous le voulez, il faut vous satisfaire,
Il faut affranchir Rome, il faut venger un père,
Il faut sur un tyran porter de justes coups;
Mais apprenez qu' Auguste est moins tyran que vous.  

Even then he leaves one wondering, considering his previous change, if he will be able to accomplish his task, a fact which is certainly not typical of other Cornelian heroes.

One must keep in mind, however, the nature of the task which Cinna has vowed to accomplish. Rodrigue and Horace would have been guilty of cowardice had they reacted in such a manner, for they were honor-bound to accomplish their tasks. But Cinna is not so bound, and in his case his hesitancy and vacillation make him all the more worthy of the high position he occupies.

Cinna's conflict, then, is one between love and duty, where love represents Cinna's tragic flaw, his weakness, and actually triumphs over duty. This marks another first in the characteristics of Cornelian heroes, for prior to Cinna, Corneille's protagonists had been able to exercise strong will power in following the dictates of their reasons rather than those of their passions. Cinna, after the

54Ibid., p. 883.
typical Cornelian analysis of his situation, knows very well what he should do, and he tries to do it, but in spite of his efforts, he is unable to overcome his love for Emilie, and he yields to her demands. Fortunately for him, Auguste is informed of the conspiracy and, through his clemency, brings about complete reconciliation without the loss of honor or self respect to anyone.

Cinna must be classified as Corneille's best étude psychologique, for neither Le Cid nor Horace can compare with it as a penetrating psychological study of man. In Le Cid and Horace, Corneille concentrates upon the strength of man's will over his emotions. In each case, the principal characters were able to overcome their emotional desires, sometimes with ease, more often with great difficulty, and allow their wills, their reasons, to dominate. While the superiority of the will over the emotions can be and often is a human quality, it also belongs to the superhuman and can carry that implication. It is for this reason that Horace has at times been accused of being more than human. Certainly this could never happen to Cinna, for what is more human, more normal, than man's emotions overpowering his will?

From human weakness in Cinna, Corneille turns once more to superhuman strength in Polyeucte, (1643). This play, like Cinna, is a model of classical structure. The

55 Ibid., Cinna, Act III, Scene IV.
events of the day are reduced to the arrival of Sévère, the profaned sacrifice, the execution of Néarque, a minor character, and the death of Polyeucte. These events develop logically from the characters of the persons, and the action takes place in a few hours and in a single room.

Like Le Cid, Horace, and Cinna, Polyeucte is characterized by a dual conflict. The physical conflict, which is predicted in Pauline's dream and begun by Polyeucte's interruption of the pagan religious ceremony, is one between Christianity, as represented by Polyeucte and Néarque, and paganism, whose advocates are Pauline, Sévère, and Félix. It is an evenly matched conflict of opposites throughout. The greatest physical effort on the part of the Christians—the destruction of the pagan idols by Polyeucte and Néarque—is counterbalanced by the death of Néarque and the arrest of Polyeucte. Even the final triumph of Christianity in winning over Pauline and Félix is no overpowering victory, for in so doing it lost, by death, Néarque and Polyeucte. (The victory, however, is symbolic and not to be viewed as a matter of statistics).

While Polyeucte's destruction of the pagan idols signals the beginning of the physical conflict, his mental struggle begins, and ends, before this episode takes place. As the play begins, Polyeucte reveals that he loves Pauline...

Lancaster, op. cit., II, I. 327-328.
and believes that he can hold her equal to his newly-found God. He feels that he can refuse a little to God in order to give it to Pauline, and because of this he wishes to delay his departure with Néarque in order to calm the fears of Pauline. At this point he has a very sincere desire to please and to love both his God and Pauline, and while he wants to leave with Néarque, he finds it very difficult to do so against the wishes of Pauline:

Je sens déjà mon cœur prêt à se révolter,  
Et ce n'est qu'en fuyant que j'y puis résister.

Encouraged by Néarque, he flees from Pauline, and the next time he appears, he is a changed man, for, enlightened by his baptism, he knows his God better, he knows what it is to love God, and he realizes that in order to love Him properly, he cannot make exceptions. Thus, the struggle within Polyeucte ceases. "Il ne reste plus suspendu entre sa femme et Dieu. Il vole au martyre; il envisage la mort sans effroi, avec enthousiasme." He renounces all terrestrial happiness:

Monde, pour moi tu n'as plus rien;  
Je porte en un coeur tout chrétien 
Une flamme toute divine.

He goes even further by renouncing "la douceur d'être pleuré par la femme qu'il quitte, et il se purifie si bien de

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57 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., I, 923.
58 Lanson, op. cit., p. 110.
59 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., I, 964.
l'amour - propre, qu'il la donne à un rival, pour être heureuse sans lui, et par un autre." 60 From this point on, his heart is filled with nothing but "saintes douceurs du ciel, adorables idées." 61

Polyeucte resembles Horace in many ways: both experience little or no struggle in surmounting the obstacles thrown into their paths, and neither expresses regret over his choice; both use the same "Je ne vous connais plus" 62 in renouncing the persons they consider to be their enemies; both seek death as a means for the preservation of their glory; and finally, both bear the traits of fanatics. Certainly Horace, through his slaying without remorse of Curiace and the cold-blooded murder of Camille in the name of Rome, brands himself as a fanatical patriot. By the same token, Polyeucte, through his willful destruction of the pagan idols in the name of Christianity, has all the characteristics of a religious fanatic.

One great difference does exist between the two, however, and it is this difference that accounts for the fact that critics and audiences throughout the centuries have been able to feel a certain admiration for Polyeucte which is often impossible to feel for Horace. The difference lies in the respective goals of the two heroes. Horace

60 Lanson, op. cit., p. 110.
61 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., I, 964.
62 Ibid., pp. 801 and 981.
did everything for his own glory, and the effect of his actions was not altogether praise-worthy, for while he did save Rome, he also brought about the death of his sister and earned scorn from his father. Polyeucte's goal, on the other hand, was the glorification of his God and the elevation of his fellow man.

An examination of the actions of Pauline reveals that Polyeucte was successful in his goal, for her inner conflict and eventual solution of it are a direct result of the actions of Polyeucte and do represent an elevation in her character. In the very beginning of the play she reveals to Stratonice that she had loved Sèvere very much, but that, believing him dead and bound by duty to her father, she gave to Polyeucte "Tout ce que l'autre avait par inclination." 63 Shortly after this, Sévere appears, and Pauline is at once thrown into a state of emotional stress as she feels the flames of her former love rekindled. She expresses great fear of seeing Sévere again. When she does see him, she immediately confesses her love for him, but feels bound to follow her duty rather than her inclination. She struggles strongly within herself, and she finds her only hope in obtaining from Sévere a promise not to see her again.

As the play develops, however, a remarkable change

63 Ibid., p. 926.
takes place within Pauline. In this purely human and very
dramatic evolution within her soul, which transforms her
feelings for Polyeucte and leads to her conversion, lies
the basic interest of the play. 64 It is in Pauline's trans-
formation that Polyeucte's ideals manifest themselves, for
as the play progresses, the greatness of his soul causes
the human virtues of Sévère to grow pale in the eyes of
Pauline. 65 Initially, when both Sévère and Polyeucte stood
as equals, Pauline desired Sévère. Little by little, how­
ever, after Polyeucte's conversion and dedication to his
religious ideals, Pauline begins to see that her husband,
who after loving and possessing her, renounced her and
sacrificed all his earthly goods in favor of an abstract
idea, is much greater than Sévère, who finds in her all
his material possessions, all his reason for existing.
This evolution continues until finally she is not only
able to reject completely her love for Sévère, but is
also able to accept the death of Polyeucte and to find
happiness in his God.

Further proof of the success of Polyeucte's goal may
be found in Félix, who in the beginning is a weak, self-

64 Valdemar Vedel, Deux Classiques Francais (Paris:
Librairie Ancienne Honore Champion, 1935),
65 Lanson, op. cit., p. 111.
66 Ibid., p. 111.
67 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., I, 987.
seeking politician who is unable to see farther than the immediate future or to comprehend motives that are finer than his own, and who, because of the actions of Polyeucte, is converted to Christianity. For Félix, the change and degree of elevation border on the miraculous.

In spite of the nobility and greatness of soul of Polyeucte, it must be emphasized that he experiences little or no mental conflict. Because of this lack of human emotion on his part, the main interest in the play is devoted to Sévère, the worthy young man who is denied the hand of his sweetheart by an act of fate, and to Pauline and her position between lost lover and husband. Fortunately for Corneille, there is, as was the case with Horace, enough of the human element to give the play lasting appeal.

One may conclude from this analysis that the Cornelian masterpieces contain two central themes: a political question to be solved, which results in a physical conflict between two forces (families or groups of individuals), and a moral issue which results from the political problem and engenders the all-important mental conflict.

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68 Lancaster, op. cit., II, I, 325-327.
69 Lockert, op. cit., pp. 50-55.
71 Vedel, op. cit., p. 122.
The political theme of Le Cid is "a central problem of Corneille's own age - the problem of order and disorder, of the conflict between the authority of the monarch and the independence and lawlessness of a feudal aristocracy"; Horace is a study of the various aspects of and reactions to patriotism; Cinna, with its discussion of whether a republic or a monarchy is the best form of government, whether justice or mercy is more to be commended in a ruler, and whether tyrannicide is justifiable", is the most political of the masterpieces; and finally, Polyeucte is concerned with the conflict of Christianity versus the Roman state.

The resulting moral issues include: the code of family honor (Le Cid), which causes the mental conflict over the emotions of the individual and family loyalties; the duty of the family to the state (Horace), which precipitates the conflict between love or family ties and patriotism; the duty and responsibility of subjects and monarchs to the state (Cinna), which causes Cinna to struggle over his love versus his duty and Auguste over humanity versus the raison d'état; and one's duty to God (Polyeucte), with its ensuing mental conflict between human love and love of God.  

\[72\] Yarrow, op. cit., p. 108.  
\[73\] Lockert, op. cit., pp. 44-45.  
\[74\] Lancaster, op. cit., II, I, 322.
Of the two themes, political and moral, the former is obviously the weaker one, for it accounts for two of the three weaknesses noted in the masterpieces, i.e., the increasing plot complexity through use of extraneous characters and the violation of the unity of action. Lanson perhaps better than any other critic explains why this is the case:

Corneille extrait presque toutjours sa tragédie des historiens, dont il fait une étude minutieuse; il tire de chacune d'elles ce qu'elle peut fournir d'explication ou de préparation. Comme il prend dans la politique et non dans l'amour la matière principale de l'intrigue, les personnages du second plan s'imposent en plus grand nobre. Dans l'amour, on peut montrer deux rivaux, trois aux plus: mais dans la politique, le nobre est illimité de ceux qui peuvent tracasser autour de la même affaire et tâcher de tirer leur profit du même événement. Toute pièce historique et politique tend à se peupler de personnages plus nombreux, et par conséquent d'une intrigue plus accidentée.

However, this should not be construed as implying that any of these plays is not a masterpiece, because the main interest in each lies not in the political themes but in "the realistically portrayed conflict in the minds of the characters," which in every case consists of the painting by Corneille of the human emotions and mental anguish experienced by these characters as they attempt to reach a solution to the moral issue in question. In

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76 Yarrow, op. cit., p. 108.
two instances little or no mental conflict is experienced, but in general, the characters do experience considerable emotional torment. Thus, while the physical conflict and the historical or political question which causes it are frequently dated in interest and no longer of importance, the inner conflict experienced as a result of certain moral issues is a never ending human characteristic which gives the characters, as well as the plays, universal appeal.
CHAPTER II

From Pompée to Perharite: 1643-1651

In 1666 Corneille wrote, in his preface to Agésilas:
"On court, à la vérité, quelque risque de s'égarder, et même on s'égare assez souvent, quand on s'écarte du chemin battu. . . " ¹ He might well have written this statement in his preface to Pompée, and called it his epitaph, for with this tragedy he strayed from the chemin battu and although he perhaps came close at times, he was never quite able to find it again.

Ironically, Pompée (1642-43) was not a deliberate attempt by Corneille to deviate from his established pattern. He himself had said in the preface to Le Menteur that Pompée was written "pour satisfaire à ceux qui ne trouvaient pas les vers de Polyeucte si puissants que ceux de Cinna, et leur montrer que j'en saurais bien retrouver la pompe quand le sujet le pourrait souffrir." ² Nevertheless, it was a deviation, and such a great one that it is considered the least successful of the tragedies Corneille wrote before Perharite, with the possible excep-

¹ Corneille, Théâtre., op. cit., II, 907.
² Ibid., I, 1057.

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Pompee contains no plot, but rather "a mere sequence of events logically connected" which begins when the news is received that César has defeated Pompee and that the latter is on his way to Egypt to seek refuge. The play opens with a formal discussion by Ptolomée, the king of Egypt, and Photin, Achillas, and Septime, his counselors, as to whether to welcome the vanquished Pompee, refuse asylum to him, or kill him. Ptolomée quickly accepts the advice of Photin and decides to have Pompee killed. Cléopâtre then intervenes in favor of Pompee and threatens to have César take the throne away from her brother, but her threats are in vain, for Ptolomée proceeds with his plan to kill Pompee. In the meantime, Cléopâtre reveals to one of her servants her love for César and his love for her. She relates the entire history of the development of this love, and accounts for everything that has happened since her first meeting with César in Rome, including all the battles he has won for her and the daily love letters he has sent her by messenger. Her exposition is interrupted when Achorée, a servant, enters to inform Cléopâtre, in great detail, of the death of Pompee, the flight of his wife, Cornélie, and the coming of César.

Shortly after this, César arrives and immediately

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3 Lancaster, op. cit., II, II, 505.
4 Ibid., p. 500.
condemns Ptolomée's actions. Then Cornélie, who has been captured and brought to the palace, informs César that she will seek his death in order to avenge the death of Pompée. When César offers her clemency, she refuses it. A few scenes later, she returns to warn César that a conspiracy against him exists, and in the same breath she informs him that she still plans to seek his death when she is freed. César then leaves, and shortly after it is learned that he has had Photin, Achillas and Septime killed. It is also learned that he had tried to save Ptolomée because Cléopâtre had pleaded for his life, but that Ptolomée, refusing to be saved, had fought against César's men and had then drowned trying to flee. The play ends with César giving the throne of Egypt to Cléopâtre, and Cornélie again swearing to seek vengeance against César.

There is no definite event at the end to which the different actions of the tragedy inevitably lead. Furthermore, the play provides no solution to the action, and it is only through a knowledge of history that one learns of the result of César's love for Cléopâtre and Cornélie's plans to avenge Pompée's death.

Pompée, like Cinna which it sought to rival, is a political play in which the theme "is that of the maxims of conduct which government should adopt, whether it

5 Ibid., p. 500.
6 See footnote 2 above.
should follow a realistic policy of self-interest at the expense of gratitude and loyalty, or whether its guiding principles should be the same as those of the individual - honour, generosity, and uprightness." Not only is the play like Cinna in being political, but it resembles the latter also in dealing, as most of Corneille's plays do henceforth, with Roman royalty and the struggle for power. Here all similarity to Cinna ends however, for Pompée, in imitation Cinna:

has the characteristic faults of imitation; it exaggerates the defects of the earlier play. Its verse is the most grandiose that Corneille ever wrote. Attempting to rival the debate between Cinna and Maximus over the proposed abdication of Augustus, it opens with a formal discussion by the young king Ptolemy and his counselors as to whether to welcome the vanquished Pompey, refuse asylum to him, or kill him.  

Corneille devotes two-thirds of Act I (212 of 358 lines) to this all but useless deliberation and discussion of a political subject which, however important it might be in the study of la politique, serves no real purpose in this play. While it is true that Ptolomée's decision is important, the deliberation is not, and, although the reasoning in it is good, the discussion takes place too early in the play, before sufficient interest in the pro-

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7 Yarrow, op. cit., p. 112.
8 Ibid., p. 112.
9 Lockert, op. cit., p. 59.
blem is aroused. The result is that the play begins on a very boring, tiresome note and is never quite able to overcome this fault.

Pompée is a very strange play indeed, for it is an historical one employing "la mauvaise politique de la cour d'Égypte"\textsuperscript{11} as a subject, and is built solely upon physical conflicts between opposing forces. Yet rarely are the forces matched evenly enough to create suspense. Ptolomée and Cléopâtre are in opposition during the first two acts over what to do about Pompée, and yet they confront each other in only two short scenes (I, 3 and II, 3). The remaining scenes of Acts I and II are used to discuss Pompée's fate and to describe his death, the reaction of Cornélie, the arrival of César, and the romanesque, précieuse type of love\textsuperscript{12} between César and Cléopâtre.

After the death of Pompée, the conflict shifts to one between Ptolomée and César, but they meet each other only once (III, 2). Their opposition is further weakened by the fact that Cléopâtre does an about face and pleads with César to spare Ptolomée, who willingly hides behind his sister in order to save himself.

The only other clash of any importance - that between

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{10}Lancaster, \textit{op. cit.}, II, II, 503-504.
\item \textsuperscript{11}Corneille, \textit{Théâtre, op. cit.}, I, 991.
\item \textsuperscript{12}Lockert, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 62. See below for additional discussion on this matter.
\end{itemize}
Cornélie and César - is not a logical one, for Cornélie has no reason to demand César's death in retaliation for the assassination of Pompée. The quarrel of these two men had been a political, not a personal one, and César in victory was very eager to treat his conquered opponent with kindness and honor. He was horrified by the murder of Pompée and pledged himself to avenge it. When examined from this point of view, Cornélie's hatred of César takes on the "blind and senseless spirit of a vendetta". Her error lies not in her desire to avenge her husband's death, but rather in the object of her vengeance. Ptolomée is the guilty party, yet only twice does Cornélie even mention his name and never does she face him. Thus, in spite of the pity one feels for her position and the admiration for her dedication, all is, in reality, misguided and in vain.

If Pompée bears a similarity to the Cornelian masterpieces through choice of subject it resembles nothing ever written before by Corneille in its portrayal of love. Of all the faults found in this play, the chief one is the depiction of the love of César for Cléopâtre. At the very outset of Act II, Cléopâtre describes César's love for her and its history to Charmion, her dame d'honneur:

Notre séjour à Rome enflamma son courage:

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13 Ibid., p. 60.
14 Ibid., p. 60.
 Là j'eus de son amour le premier témoignage,  
Et depuis jusqu'ici chaque jour ses courriers  
M'apportent en tribut ses voeux et ses lauriers.  
Partout, en Italie, aux Gaules, en Espagne,  
La fortune le suit, et l'amour l'accompagne.  
Son bras ne dompte point de peuples ni de lieux  
Dont il ne rende hommage au pouvoir de mes yeux;  
Et de la même main dont il quitte l'épée,  
Fumante encor du sang des amis de Pompée,  
Il trace des soupirs, et d'un style plaintif  
Dans son champ de victoire il se dit mon captif.  
Oui, tout victorieux il m'écris de Pharsale;  
Et si sa diligence à ses feux est égale,  
Ou plutôt si la mer ne s'oppose à ses feux,  
L'Égypt le va voir me présenter ses voeux.  

Later, César not only proposes to divorce Calphurnie and  
conquer Roman opposition to his marriage with a foreign  
queen, but he assures Cléopâtre of his love in such verses  
as:

Mais, O Dieux! ce moment que je vous ai quittée  
D'un trouble bien plus grand a mon âme agitée!  
Et ces soins importuns, qui m'arrachaient de vous,  
Contre ma grandeur même allumaient mon courroux:  
Je lui voulais du mal de m'être si contraire,  
De rendre ma présence ailleurs si nécessaire;  
Mais je lui pardonnais, au simple souvenir  
Du bonheur qu'à ma flamme elle fait obtenir.  
C'est elle dont je tiens cette haute espérance  
Qui flatte mes désirs d'une illustre apparence,  
Et fait croire à César qu'il peut former des voeux,  
Qu'il n'est pas tout à fait indigne de vos feux,  
Et qu'il peut en prétendre une juste conquête,  
N'ayant plus que les Dieux au-dessus de sa tête.  
Qui, Reine, si quelqu'un dans ce vaste univers  
Pouvait porter plus haut la gloire de vos fers;  
S'il était quelque trône où vous puissiez paraître  
Plus dignement assise en captivant son maître,  
J'irais, j'irais à lui, moins pour le lui ravir,  
Que pour lui disputner le droit de vous servir;  
Et je n'aspirezais au bonheur de vous plaire  
Qu'après avoir mis bas un si grand adversaire.  
C'était pour acquérir un droit si précieux  
Que combattait partout mon bras ambitieux;  
Et dans Pharsale même il a tiré l'épée

15Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., I, 1009.
Plus pour le conserver que pour vaincre Pompée.
Je l'ai vaincu, Princesse; et le Dieu des combats
M'y favorisait moins que vos divins appas:
Ils conduisaient ma main, ils enflaient mon courage;
Cette pleine victoire est leur dernier ouvrage:
C'est l'effet des ardeurs qu'ils daignaient m'inspirer;
Et vos beaux yeux enfin m'ayant fait soupirer,
Pour faire que votre âme avec gloire y réponde,
M'ont rendu le premier et de Rome et du monde.
C'est ce glorieux titre, à présent effectif,
Que je viens ennoblir par celui de captif:
Heureux, si mon esprit gagne tant sur le vôtre,
Qu'il en estime l'un et me permette l'autre! 16

With these lines it is obvious that a new influence has
now become of major importance in the work of Corneille.
No longer do his hero and heroine speak of love based on
glory, honor, and admiration, but their talk of sighs,
"flames", and "conquests" make them worthy of characters
from the Astrée 17 with its "strained conventions of gallantry and decorum, its preoccupation with love, and its
stereotyped love-jargon." 18 Even Auguste Dorchain, who is
most generous in calling Pompée "le plus magnifique
tableau de politique et d'histoire qui soit sorti de la
main de Corneille", 19 finds this romanesque influence
too difficult to endure:

Les "soupirs et le "style plaintif " de César!
Ces choses-la nous remplissent de stupéfaction,
tandis qu'elles ravissaient ... les contemporains de Corneille, qui retombera souvent en

16 Ibid., pp. 1036-1037.
18 Lockert, op. cit., p. 60-62.
de pareilles fautes, à présent que dans ses tragédies l'amour ne sera plus, ainsi qu'il l'était au temps du Cid et de Polyéucte, au coeur de l'action, mais en marge, comme un simple ornement, ou comme une cause seconde des péripéties et de la catastrophe.

Corneille himself made no secret of the fact that he preferred themes other than l'amour as subjects of his tragedies;

La dignité (de la tragédie) demande quelque grand intérêt d'Etat, ou quelque passion plus mâle que l'amour, telles que sont l'ambition ou la vengeance, et veut donner à craindre des malheurs plus grands que la perte d'une maîtresse.

Nonetheless he recognized the value of its use in the tragedy:

Il est à propos d'y mêler l'amour, parce qu'il a toujours beaucoup d'agrément, et peut servir de fondement à ces intérêts, et à ces autres passions dont je parle; mais il faut qu'il se contente du second rang dans le poème, et leur laisse le premier.

Few critics would deny that love plays an important role in the masterpieces. However, all agree that the romanesque love of Pompée, which depicts César as a wonderfully valiant and absurdly gallant hero, is not quite "a propos" in the tragedy. "Et par suite de cette erreur, la tragédie cornélienne traîne toujours avec elle l'ornement glacé d'une intrigue d'amour, qui, traitée comme ornement, en a

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20 Ibid., p. 244-245.
22 Ibid., p. 13.
tout l'artifice et manque essentiellement d'intérêt."²³

There are many other weaknesses in Pompée which, in the opinion of this writer, violate the seriousness, if nothing else, of the tragedy. ²⁴ However, most of these are faults inherent in this play only, and, as such offer no valuable contribution toward any basic changes in the structure of Cornelian drama. Thus they need not be discussed here. One more item is of considerable importance, however, and that is the element of inner conflict, which is essentially nonexistent in Pompée. In the first place, the moral issue which caused the crise de conscience in Corneille's previously discussed plays is not present in this one. Such an issue could perhaps have been built around what to do with Pompée, but his death so early in the play rules out that possibility. Secondly, even if such an issue had existed, where could Corneille have possibly found space within five acts to present any emotional conflict along with his description of five deaths and a love affair, and the presentation of seven main historical figures? ²⁵

The major faults of the play can be found in the

²³ Bray, op. cit., p. 34.

²⁴ For example, the morbid description of Pompée's death, Cornélie's adoration of Pompée's ashes; and her subsequent request that César render to her Pompée's head.

²⁵ Pompée, César, Cléopâtre, Ptolomée, Cornélie, Marc-Antoine, and Lépide are all portrayed in this play.
preceding statement. Because he chose to present so many well-known historical characters, Corneille was unable to develop any one of them to any extent. This, combined with the fact that there are so many, tends to diminish or divide the interest of the spectator. Then too, the necessity of relating to the audience the historical background, the history of the development of the love between Cléopâtre and César, and the deaths of five characters, greatly hinders the dramatic action of the play. As a matter of fact, so many lines are given (over 340) to the description of these events and episodes, that the play is very nearly a narrative one. As a result, the characters, although historically famous, are relatively undeveloped, the long recits are tiring, and the play, lacking the humanity and simplicity of its immediate predecessors, is largely rhetorical. Perhaps the words of Robert Brasillach illustrate best the effect of so many grave errors upon the play:

Le théâtre a disparu, il ne reste qu'une tapisserie riche et solide, ou plutôt une fresque égyptienne, où les visages se tiennent de profil, et les torses de face, et où quelques hiéroglyphes luxueux chantent la mort et la bataille. Rarement Pierre Corneille a mis moins de coeur et plus d'habileté à composer une tragédie: et ce n'est plus une tragédie d'ailleurs, mais un chant éloquent et vide, qui nous propose quelques étourdissantes images de la trahison, des bûchers funèbres, de la mer, de la défaite, de la révolte, de la lâcheté, en longues tirades écrasantes et immobiles.  

Rodogune (1644-45), which marks Corneille's return to tragedy after two comedies, Le Menteur and La Suite du Menteur, represents a considerable change from Pompée. From political spectacle and romanesque love in Pompée Corneille turns to high suspense and melodrama in Rodogune. The contrast between the two plays is so remarkable that they hardly appear to be creations of the same artist. Pompée, as observed, has little or no plot, while Rodogune possesses, excluding the exposition, a very simple one; the former is sadly lacking in dramatic structure, while the latter, from this standpoint, is one of Corneille's best efforts; and finally, Pompée is without any doubt one of the dullest, slowest moving examples of classical tragedy created by Corneille, while Rodogune, certainly one of his masterpieces of suspense, retains spectator interest from beginning to end.

27 Act I is consecrated to the exposition, which as Corneille admitted in his Examen, is somewhat inartistic but nonetheless necessary. Act II is constructed around Scene 3, in which Cléopâtre declares to her sons that she will crown the one who will kill Rodogune. Scenes I and 2 prepare this scene, and scene 4 shows the reactions of the two princes to their mother's proposition. Act III is exactly symmetrical with Act II. The central scene is the fourth one, where Rodogune counter-attacks Cléopâtre by offering to marry the son who will kill his mother. Scenes 2 and 3 lead to the adoption of this attitude by Rodogune, and Scenes 5 and 6 expose the reactions of the two brothers. Act IV portrays the effect on Antiochus, who tries to mend matters; upon Séleucus, who renounces both women; and upon Cléopâtre, who concludes that both of her sons must die. Dramatic tension builds from one act to the next and culminates in Act V, considered one of the most dramatic in Corneille's theater.
In the latter play, the exposition of what has previously taken place provides the spectator with the knowledge that Demetrius Nicanor, king of Syria, had been taken prisoner by the Parthians and reported dead. His wife, Cléopâtre (not to be confused with the famous Cleopatra of Egypt) then married his brother, Antiochus, who, after several years of reigning, died in battle. Later she learned that Nicanor was still alive, an honored captive in the hands of his adversaries. He refused to accept excuses for her second marriage and planned, in retaliation, to wed Rodogune, the young sister of the Parthian king; but when he brought this princess home to marry her, the outraged Cléopâtre killed him and subjected Rodogune to cruel imprisonment until her brother came with an avenging Parthian army. To save herself, the queen pretended to agree to a treaty arranging for Rodogune to wed the elder of Cléopâtre's twin sons, who would then mount the throne of Syria. At the opening of the play, these two young men, Antiochus and Séleucus, have recently arrived from Egypt, where they were sent when infants for protection from the political turmoil through which their country was passing. Only Cléopâtre knows which of them was born first.

Corneille selects as the moment for his tragedy the day when the queen proposes to reveal the name of her elder son and award him the throne and Rodogune. In the meantime, the two young men, who are strongly attached to each other, discover that each loves Rodogune, but never-
theless swear to abide by the decision of their mother.

Cléopâtre, unwilling to relinquish the throne, has no intention of keeping her bargain. She sends for her two sons and reveals her intention to name as king the one who will kill Rodogune. Both are shocked by her proposition, and in an attempt to solve the matter without bloodshed, they call on Rodogune to ask her to choose one of them. Rodogune, informed by Laonice of Cléopâtre's intention, retaliates by offering to marry the one who will kill his mother. Séleucus, stunned by this unexpected reaction, decides to renounce both women and the throne. Antiochus, however, determined to bring about a reconciliation, returns to Cléopâtre and reveals the sentiments of himself and his brother for Rodogune. Cléopâtre then pretends to award the throne and Rodogune to Antiochus and tells him to prepare for the ceremony, but immediately tries to excite the jealousy of Séleucus. Unable to accomplish this, she decides to kill both her sons and Rodogune in order to preserve her right to rule.

The final act finds Antiochus and Rodogune ready to drink "la coupe nuptiale," when Timagène enters to announce that Séleuces has been stabbed to death and that his dying words were for Antiochus to beware of someone very dear to him. Immediately accusations begin to fly between Cléopâtre and Rodogune. Antiochus, refusing to choose between the two women, insists that the ceremony continue. However, Rodogune accuses Cléopâtre of poisoning the drink. Cléo-
pâtre, unable to defend her position any longer, decides to die rather than yield the throne. She drinks, then hands the cup to Antiochus in an effort to take his life as well. However, the poison reacts so rapidly that she is frustrated in her purpose, and she leaves the stage dying, all the while reviling Antiochus and Rodogune.

The violent physical conflict in this play needs little elaboration. It begins as soon as the exposition is completed, and ends only in the very last scene of the play. It is a struggle between Cléopâtre, determined to reign at all costs, and Rodogune, dedicated to preserving her own life and avenging the death of Nicanor.

Cléopâtre begins her side of the struggle when she declares to Antiochus and Séleucus:

Le sort de votre père enfin est éclairci:
Il était innocent, et je puis l'être aussi. . .
Rodogune, mes fils, le tua par ma main.
Ainsi de cet amour la fatale puissance
Vous coûte votre père, à moi, mon innocence;
Ainsi vous me rendez l'innocence et l'estime,
Lorsque vous punirez la cause de mon crime. 28

Rodogune quickly creates the opposition when she tells the twins:

Tremblez, princes, tremblez au nom de votre père:
Il est mort, et pour moi, par les mains d'une mère.
Je l'avais oublié, sujette à d'autres lois;
Mais libre, je lui rends enfin ce que je dois.
C'est à vous de choisir mon amour ou ma haine.
J'aime les fils du roi, je hais ceux de la reine:
Reglez-vous là-dessus; et, sans plus me presser,

28 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., II, 113-114.
Voyez auquel des deux vous voulez renoncer.

From this point on, the conflict intensifies and suspense mounts steadily because of it. The clash between the two women is such that it is the primary element in the play, which has caused at least one critic to remark that "dans Rodogune, c'est la loi de la jungle qui domine. Le plus fort, ou le plus adroit, triomphe du plus faible".

Antiochus and Séleucus are caught between the two women. They are asked not only to choose between their mother and the woman they love, but to show their choice by eliminating the opposition. When Cléopâtre informs them of her hatred for Rodogune, she tells them:

Si vous voulez régner, le trône est à ce prix.
Entre deux fils que j'aime avec même tendresse
Embrasser ma querelle est le seul droit d'aînesse:
La mort de Rodogune en nommera l'aîné.

Shortly after, Rodogune counters with:

Pour gagner Rodogune il faut venger un père;
Je me donne à ce prix: osez me mériter;
Et voyez qui de vous daignera m'accepter.

Their choice then, lies between mother and loved one, the throne and happiness, and is further compounded by the fact that they are, in reality, rivals for Rodogune and the crown. This choice alone is more than ample material to produce a

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29 Ibid., p. 125.
31 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., II, 114.
32 Ibid., p. 126.
major crise de conscience in each of the twins. However, in spite of a situation so conducive to a tremendous inner crisis, this element is weak.

In the first place, Séleucus, in whom it is best portrayed, renounces the throne and both women too soon to occupy a significant role. In the initial act, in the only scene in which he appears, he is torn between his love for Rodogune and his affection for his brother. In Act II, once again in only one scene, he appears quite troubled over the choice given him by Cléopâtre. But all conflict ends for him in the first scene of Act III when, outraged by Rodogune's equally atrocious proposal, he decides to renounce everything:

Dans mon ambition, dans l'ardeur de ma flamme,
Je vois ce qu'est un trône et ce qu'est une femme,
Et jugeant par leur prix de leur possession,
J'éteins enfin ma flamme, et mon ambition.

On the other hand, the inner conflict in Antiochus, who does occupy an important position in the play, is weakened by his blind love for both his mother and Rodogune and his equally blind optimism, because both contribute to his failure to comprehend the true situation. In the initial act, he too, like Séleucus, is tormented by his feelings for Rodogune and his brother. After the interview with his mother however, his conflict is lessened by the fact that his optimism prevents him from recognizing his

33Ibid., p. 128.
true situation:

Je conserve pourtant encor un peu d'espoir,
Elle est mère et le sang a beaucoup de pouvoir,
Et le sort l'ëust-il faite encor plus inhumaine,
Une larme d'un fils peut amollir sa haine. 34

Later, after Rodogune's proposal, he tells Séleucus:

Cependant allons voir si nous vaincrons l'orage,
Et si contre l'effort d'un si puissant courroux
La Nature et l'amour voudront parler pour nous. 35

He persists in his blindness to the very end, for when he learns that his mother wished to poison him and is herself dying from the poison, he pleads:

Ah! vivez pour changer cette haine en amour.

Thus, because of his love for both women and his optimism about finding a solution, Antiochus does not see himself as having to choose between Cléopâtre and Rodogune. He does not feel that he will have to lose one or the other and, as a result, he does not experience the profound conflict required by one who must make such a choice.

Cléopâtre, in contrast to her sons, experiences no inner conflict whatsoever. An attempt on her part to decide between her ambition and her love for her sons could have produced one, but she is so possessed by the desire to reign that she reveals from the very outset of the play her lack of sentiment for everyone and her in-

34 Ibid., p. 116.
35 Ibid., p. 129.
36 Ibid., p. 154.
tention to let nothing stand in her way:

Ne saurais - tu juger que si je nomme un roi,
C'est pour le commander, et combattre pour moi?
J'en ai le choix en main avec le droit d'âinesse.
Et puisqu'il en faut faire une aide à ma faiblesse,
Que la guerre sans lui ne peut se rallumer,
J'userai bien du droit que j'ai de le nommer.
On ne montera point au rang dont je dévale,
Qu'en épousant ma haine au lieu de ma rivale:
Ce n'est qu'en me vengeant qu'on me le peut ravir;
Et je ferai régner qui me voudra servir. 37

Throughout the play her actions reveal that she is,
without any doubt, "la reine barbare. . . Elle est de ces
ambitieuses . . . de ses démons femelles consumés par le
désir de dominer, prêts à tout ruiner pour se satisfaire
et à périr même plutôt que d'accepter la défaite." 38

And die she does, rather than yield and live as a subject:

Trône, à t'abandonner je ne puis consentir:
Par un coup de tonnerre il vaut mieux en sortir;
Et de quelque rigueur que le destin me traite,
Je perds moins à mourir qu'à vivre leur sujette. 39

From all appearances, Rodogune seems to be created
from the same mold as Cléopâtre, with one exception: at the
beginning she is presented as a victim who was affianced
by her brother to Nicanor, deprived of the latter's hand,
and imprisoned by her enemy. She is willing to accept the
husband designated by reasons of state, although she loves
one brother and is indifferent to the other. 40

37 Ibid., p. 110.
39 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., II, 144.
40 Lancaster, op. cit., II, II, 519.
the time that she first demands Cléopâtre's death, she is no less savage, vicious, and dangerous than her enemy, for she too is willing to forsake her own feelings as well as those of the man she loves, in order to achieve her goal. 41

While Rodogune, due to certain inconsistencies within her character, 42 is not the overwhelming figure that Cléopâtre is, both belong to the same category of Cornelian personnages in which we earlier placed Horace and Polyeucete. In the previous chapter, careful notation was made of the fact that the Roman patriot and the Christian martyr experienced no inner conflict whatsoever, that they possessed volontés so strong there could be no room in their minds for gentler human emotions. The same can certainly be said of Cléopâtre and Rodogune.

It has already been pointed out in this study that Corneille began, in Horace, through the creation of such iron-willed characters, a trend which either eliminated or reduced to unimportance the element of inner conflict, and focused instead on the physical conflict. What was prior

41Lockert, op. cit., p. 65.

42Rodogune's initial role as a victim is at variance with the position she occupies when she demands Cléopâtre's death. Then too, she demands the death of Cléopâtre in order to avenge her late betrothed. From her speech, one might well think that she loves Nicanor, who cannot have been dead very long, and yet she also declares her love for one of his sons. Finally, she dedicates herself to what she calls her duty to seek vengeance for Nicanor, but when Cléopâtre pretends a reconciliation, Rodogune, in accepting it, reacts as though nothing but friendship had existed between her and the queen.
to Rodogune an important but minor tendency now becomes a highly developed major characteristic of Cornelian tragedy. The inner conflict has been eliminated completely in the two principal characters, and the primary action of the play consists almost entirely of a suspense-filled fight to the finish between two opposing forces. In addition, as in Pompee, the moral issue, which created the mental conflict in the masterpieces, is of no real significance in Rodogune. Unlike the former, however, Rodogune is not a failure, and its success is without doubt due to the fact that it appeals highly to those audiences interested either in spectacle, in suspense, or in a clash of characters.

If the element of suspense is the saving grace of Rodogune, it is likewise responsible for what critics consider to be the major weakness in the play, i.e., its dependency upon melodramatic techniques to sustain the suspense.

. . . On prétend que Corneille aime l'action, l'action pour elle-même, abstraction faite des caractères qui s'y expliquent. On dit qu'il tend au mélodrame, qu'il a créé le mélodrame. . .

Dans Rodogune, les quatres premiers actes ne sont que des préparations pour arriver au

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43 Actually, Pompee is the first play to make use of the physical conflict only, but the opposing forces are so unmatched and the characters so poorly developed that the technique can hardly be called fully developed.

44 Lancaster, op. cit., II, II, 512., Lancaster, along with many other critics, ranks Rodogune next to the masterpieces.
terrible cinquième: une coupe de poison est là, préparée pour le héro. Mais qui l'a préparée? Sa mère ou sa femme. Il faut que ce soit l'une des deux, et il a autant de raison de soupçonner l'une que l'autre.

De telles situations sont tout à fait en dehors du caractère de la tragédie classique; elles ne fournissent de matière à aucune analyse psychologique. Elles sont purement pathétiques, faites pour serrer le cœur et donner de l'angoisse, dans l'attente fiévreuse de l'incident qui dérèglera tout. Corneille donc devance ici le mélodrame du XIXe siècle.

In addition to what Lanson feels is the overall melodramatic structure of the play, there are other individual incidents which further support this observation. In the first place, at the very outset of the play Corneille presents one of the improbabilities frequent in melodrama the question of which twin is the elder and thus will inherit the throne, a question to which only the mother knows the answer! And of course the circumstances of the death of Séleucucus which places doubt on both Cléopâtre and Rodogune are highly melodramatic. Discovered dying, he gasps:

Une main qui nous fut bien chère  
Venge ainsi le refus d'un coup trop inhumain.  
Régniez: et surtout, mon cher frère,  
Gardez-vous de la même main.  
C'est...

and then dies. What could be more melodramatic than a

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45 Lanson, op. cit., pp. 129-130.  
46 Lockert, op. cit., p. 64.  
47 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., II, 149.
dying man, with such information to impart, withholding the most important fact of all, his murderer's name, until he dies before uttering it?

Corneille's use of melodrama might also account for the previously-cited weaknesses in this play, i.e., the lack of emotional conflict and the inconsistency of Rodogune, since in melodrama the interest excited is found in the plot rather than in the characters. As a result, the characters are likely to be simplified as altogether good (Antiochus and Séleucus) or altogether bad (Cléopâtre); the consistency of a character is violated for the sake of the plot (Rodogune); and the plot itself is "likely to be devised to secure the maximum possible tension and shock." 48

Whatever its weaknesses may be, Rodogune, still an exceptional drama if not an excellent tragedy, is highly significant in this period of Cornelian tragedy, for it presents for the first time a tragedy built solely and completely upon a physical conflict, and it is indicative of the author's increasing love of suspense, spectacle and intrigue. 49

48 Lockert, op. cit., p. 63.
49 Corneille himself said later, in his Examen of Rodogune, (Théâtre, op. cit., II, 89-90): "On m'a souvent fait question à la cour: quel était celui de mes poèmes que j'estimais le plus; et j'ai trouvé tous ceux qui me l'ont fait si prévenus en faveur de Cinna ou du Cid, que je n'ai jamais osé déclarer toute la tendresse que j'ai toujours eue pour celui-ci (Rodogune), à qui j'aurais donné..."
From high suspense and melodrama in *Rodogune*, Corneille passes to coldness in *Théodore* (1645), a tragedy about an early Christian martyr. He obviously was attracted to this theme, despite the criticisms which *Polyeucte* had incurred, because it embodied more than any other his favorite topics of inexorable duty and unflagging will. Duty to one's God, he had said in *Polyeucte*, is the highest of all duties, and, as everything else must be renounced, if necessary, in the performance of this duty, it can furnish the most extreme test of one's constancy.

Polyeucte renounced his love and his life for his God. Théodore is faced with the choice of renouncing Christianity or being thrown into a house of ill repute.

Corneille selected characters and circumstances well calculated to produce a tragic result. Valens, the Roman governor of Antioche, is a puppet in the hands of his wife, Marcelle, who had saved him when the emperor had condemned him to death. Placide, his son by a former wife, was betrothed in childhood to Flavie, Marcelle's daughter by a former husband. Placide cannot endure Flavie, who is dying for love of him. Instead he loves Théodore, mon suffrage, si je n'avais craint de manquer. . . au respect que je devais à ceux que je voyais pencher d'un autre côté. Cette préférence est peut-être en moi. . . un peu d'amour-propre, en ce que cette tragédie me semble être un peu plus à moi que celles qui l'ont précédée, à cause des incidents surprenants qui sont purement de mon invention, et n'avait jamais été vus au théâtre."

50 Lockert, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
which causes Marcelle to look upon Théodore as a rival to her own daughter and to seek the former's death in order to eliminate this opposition. When Marcelle learns that Théodore is a Christian who does not love and will not marry Placide, she allows Valens to convince her that the best way to cure Placide of his love for Théodore is to defile her in his eyes. As a result, Théodore is told to renounce Christianity as well as her vow of perpetual virginity and to marry someone other than Placide. Obviously she cannot do this and when she refuses she is placed in a house of ill fame. Just as Théodore is on the verge of being ravished, Didyme, a young Christian who loves her, enters and, giving her some of his garments to disguise her, makes possible her escape. Because of his actions, Didyme is held prisoner in place of Théodore. Shortly after this, however, Théodore returns and surrenders herself to the jailors. She does this, she says, because she could allow Didyme to die to save her from shame, but not to save her from death, and God has revealed to her that Marcelle, due to the death of Flavie, now seeks her death instead of her dishonor. Unfortunately for Théodore, God did not reveal to her that since Didyme is a Christian she cannot save his life by returning, but will only lose hers as well, which indeed does happen. Marcelle kills both Théodore and Didyme and then commits suicide. The play ends with Placide stabbing himself, cursing his cowardly father, and fainting from loss of blood.
However well constructed Théodore may be from the point of view of classical theory, its theme is shocking to say the least, for a tragedy is hardly the place for a brothel and a discussion of prostitution. Furthermore, Corneille's handling of the Scene 3 in Act IV where Théodore is erroneously believed to have been violated, is in even poorer taste. Since this type of episode must of necessity take place off stage, the action is related to Placide by Paulin, one of the confidents. His description

Dans ces lieux à peine on l'a trainée,
Qu'on a vu des soldats la troupe mutinée:
Tous courent à la proie avec avidité,
Tous montrent à l'envi même brutalité.
Je croyais déjà voir de cette ardeur égale
Naître quelque discorde à ces tigres fatale...

is one which belongs in a comedy of low life, but hardly in the elevated genre of classical tragedy. In addition, the entire scene and Placide as well are rendered almost comical when Pauline erroneously relates how Didyme first entered to violate Théodore, and upon his exit was followed by Cléobule, Placide's friend, to which Placide's reaction is:

Le traître! Mais dis-moi, l'en as-tu vu sortir?
Montrait-il de l'audace ou quelque repentir?

Théodore, as a religious tragedy, is a far cry from Polyeucte!

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51 Lancaster, op. cit., II, 519.
52 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., II, 60.
53 Ibid., II, 62.
Many critics have found the cleverness with which the characters are pitted against one another to be the one remarkable characteristic of Théodore, for in essence the action is built upon a physical conflict between Placide and Marcelle, with Théodore as the chief stake in the game. Marcelle desires Théodore's death or defilment in order to protect the interests of her daughter. Placide, on the other hand, hates the daughter, loves Théodore, and desires to protect both her life and her honor in order to marry her. However, this conflict, as violent as it is, is gravely weakened by the lack of sincere, realistic motivation on the part of Marcelle and Placide.

In the first place, Marcelle's sole motivation is to protect the interests of her daughter, who never appears on stage and who is depicted as a frail young maiden dying from an excessive amount of unfulfilled love. While Marcelle's actions may be valid, the audience can hardly be expected to identify with or feel any compassion for her invisible daughter. Consequently, Marcelle's motivation becomes suspect.

On the other hand, Placide bitterly opposes his stepmother because of his love for Théodore and his desire to marry her. While his actions are admirable, their importance is questionable, since Théodore makes no secret of the fact that she loves only her God, and she certainly has

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54 Lancaster, *op. cit.*, II, II, 517.
no intention of marrying him, because she has taken a vow of perpetual virginity. As a matter of fact, when told by Cléobule that she should marry Placide, Théodore replies:

Si cette fermeté dont elle (son âme) est ennoblie
Par quelques traits d'amour pouvait être affaiblie,
Mon coeur, plus incapable encor de vanité,
Ne ferait point de choix que dans l'égalité;
Et rendant aux grandeurs un respect légitime
J'honorerais Placide, et j'aimerais Didyme. 55

Thus the physical conflict upon which Théodore is constructed, which exists from beginning to end of the play, which reaches great intensity at various stages, and which terminates in the death of four of the principal characters, is based upon weak if not questionable motivation.

There is practically no struggle in the hearts of any of the characters. Marcelle somewhat resembles Cléopâtre (Rodogune) in that she too will allow nothing to stand in the way of her desire; Placide is equally as determined to accomplish his goal; and Théodore surpasses all others with her superhuman strength which allows her to experience neither inner conflict, fear, nor horror, even when faced with the loss of her honor.

The lack of inner conflict is not the element which makes Théodore the complete failure that it is, however, for if it were, Rodogune would likewise be classified as one. The primary fault of the play is its coldness, which

55 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., II, 29.
derives directly from Théodore herself. The chief source of potential effectiveness in this tragedy lay in Corneille's initial conception: the monstrousness of the sacrifice demanded of the heroine, who is aware that she is a victim of circumstances and not at all responsible for her predicament:

*Si je suis en péril, Placide en est l'auteur; L'amour qu'il a pour moi lui seul m'y précipite; C'est par là qu'on me hait, c'est par là qu'on s'irrite. On n'en veut qu'à sa flamme, on n'en veut qu'à son choix: C'est contre lui qu'on arme ou la force ou les lois. Tous les voeux qu'il m'adresse avancent ma ruine, Et par une autre main c'est lui qui m'assassine.*

However, her sacrifice cannot seem great when she exhibits little distress at the prospect of it. Even this is not enough to account for the lack of interest inherent in Théodore, however, for Polyeucte, in a somewhat similar situation, experiences no more mental conflict than does Théodore, and yet the earlier Christian tragedy is a very successful one.

The coldness in both the heroine and the play can be found, it would seem, in the passive attitude of Théodore. It will be recalled that while Horace, Polyeucte, Cléopâtre, and Rodogune possessed superhuman wills which allowed no inner debate, no mental struggle, they nevertheless remained outwardly active; that is, each sought vigorously to accomplish his objective, and as a result, created the action

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56 Lockert, op. cit., p. 71.

57 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., II, 30.
of the play. Such is not the case with Théodore, and the 
Cornelian volonté appears to undergo its final and most 
harmful refinement in this play. In Le Cid and Cinna it 
had been one which struggled against the emotions and 
eventually triumphed. In Horace, Polyèucte, and Rodogune, 
it was changed to one which was so strong that it virtually 
eliminated all inner conflict but which still guided its 
possessor actively to seek his goal. Now, in Théodore, it 
reaches such perfection that it places its possessor above 
all conflict, be it mental or physical:

Maîtresse de soi, elle (la volonté) a tout ce qu'on 
pent souhaiter. Elle renonce donc sans peine à 
s'exercer. Elle est trop au-dessus des intérêts 
du monde, trop au-dessus des compétitions et des 
compétiteurs, pour se mêler activement dans les 
combats de la politique. Rien ne l'ébranle plus: 
elle ne trouve plus d'obstacle au-dedans, elle ne 
s'abaisse plus vers l'obstacle du dehors. Et 
ainsi elle se repose en elle-même: les impeccables, 
qui sont des impassibles, deviennent enfin des 
immobiles. Leur activité est une activité négative, 
de renoncement ou de résistance. Ils méprisent 
le succès qu'ils ne veulent pas préparer, ils 
acceptent le malheur auquel ils ne daignent pas se 
dérober. Ils disent "non" aux tentations comme 
aux menaces. Tout consiste dans ce "non" bien 
ferme qu'ils réitèrent à toute sommation. . . La 
perfection de la volonté active se réalise dans 
une superbe "non-agir"; quelle action, en effet, 
précise et déterminée, serait l'expression 
adéquate de ce vouloir infini? Ainsi toutes les 
impulsions supprimées, consciente et contente de 
soi, sans désir ni regret, l'âme attend le destin, 
elle veut l'inévitable. 58

Because of this passive attitude, this desire to wait 
for "le destin" to kill her or deliver her, Théodore does 

58 Lanson, op. cit., pp. 138-139.
nothing but "jaillir son grandeur d'ame en discours exaltes."

As a result, the action of the play depends on characters other than the principle one and Théodore is nothing more, as Corneille himself points out in his *Examen*, than a cold, self-possessed "Terme qui n'a ni jambes ni bras, et par conséquent point d'action."  

Therein lies the reason for the froideur which, beginning with Théodore, chills many Cornelain tragedies, rendering them almost unplayable, in spite of the beauties of character and the delicate nuances of psychology, in spite of the originality of the portraits of political life and the excellent dramatic poetry. "Les héros sont des termes imposants, mais des termes: l'action vient des comparses." Consequently, what interest there is in any of these plays lies in characters other than the main one, for whatever happens to the latter is a result of the actions of those surrounding him. Because of his refusal to take an active part in the action, this type of Cornelain hero fails to excite the emotions of his audience. He remains calm and the audience participates in his calmness. "On s'étonne, quelquefois on admire: on n'est ni effrayé, ni attendri. On sait que cela ne finit jamais mal pour le héros, même

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59 Ibid., p. 140.

60 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., II, 13. The word "Terme" refers to le Dieu Terme and therefore is indicative of a person who lacks freedom of action and is thus immobile.

61 Lanson, op. cit., p. 140.
Confronted with his first failure since his rise to fame with Le Cid, Corneille returned to his successful formula of high suspense and melodrama employed in Rodogune: to melodrama so highly involved that "c'est la pièce la plus compliquée, la plus implesxe qui existe au théâtre; à coté de cette complication... celle de Rodogune était presque élémentaire." 64

For extreme complication, Corneille's Héraclius (1646-47) has become a legend. Corneille himself had said, in his examen of the play:

Le poème est si embarrassé qu'il demande une merveilleuse attention. J'ai vu de forts bons esprits et des personnes des plus qualifiées de la cour, se plaignre de ce que sa représentation fatiguait autant l'esprit qu'une étude sérieuse. Elle n'a pas laissé de plaire; mais je crois qu'il l'a fallu plus d'une fois pour en emporter une entière intelligence. 65

The recounting of the plot indicates the direction Cornelian dramaturgy takes at this time, for Corneille has in Héraclius merely taken some names from the history of the Byzantine Empire and put them into a story that is entirely of his own devising. During the course of the first two acts, in what must be considered one of Corneille's

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62 Ibid., p. 44.
63 Pompée was not an immediate failure.
64 Dorchain, op. cit., p. 295.
65 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., II, 165.
most dramatically effective expositions, we learn that the Syrian Phocas had usurped the throne of the emperor Maurice, murdered him, and had attempted to kill all of Maurice's children except a daughter, Pulchérie, whom he chose to rear. However, Léontine, a gouvernante, devoted to Maurice and his children, had saved Maurice's infant son, Héraclius, by sacrificing in his place her own son, Léonce.

Later Phocas, upon departing for battle, had entrusted Léontine with his infant son Martian, whereby she effected another substitution and gave to Phocas, when he returned some three years later, not Martian but Héraclius!

Several years later, as the play opens, the rumor spreads that Héraclius, the true heir to the throne, is not dead, but is present in Constantinople, and is believed to be the young man reared by Léontine. This young man, the real Martian, has never doubted that he is Léonce until the play begins, but then is led to believe that he is Héraclius: The real Héraclius, supposed to be Martian, knows that he is Héraclius. Consequently both of them hate Phocas and desire his death.

In an attempt to insure his rule, Phocas tries to compel a marriage between Pulchérie, Maurice's daughter, and his own supposed son, who knows himself to be really her brother; she and the real Martian are in love and of course, Martian, upon coming to believe himself Héraclius, believes himself her brother! All these complications lead to a stirring climax when Phocas learns that whereas
one youth is certainly his son, the other is no less certainly his mortal enemy; and he does not know which is which; and Léontine, the woman who originally was responsible for the confusion and who knows the truth, will not reveal it to him but challenges him to guess it if he can and choose between them if he dares;

Le secret n'en est su ni de lui, ni de lui;
Tu n'en sauras non plus les véritables causes:
Devine, si tu peux, et choisis, si tu l'oses.
L'un des deux est ton fils, l'autre est ton empereur.
Tremble dans ton amour, tremble dans ta fureur.
Je te veux toujours voir, quoique ta rage fasse,
Craindre ton ennemi dedans ta propre race,
Toujours aimer ton fils dedans ton ennemi,
Sans être ni tyran, ni père qu'à demi.

In the end, Phocas is killed by neither of them, but by a band of conspirators led by Exupère, who had previously been suspected of being a traitor to the two young men. The confusion over identities is then cleared up by a letter produced by Léontine and written by Constantine, the mother of Héraclius:

Parmi tant de malheurs mon bonheur est étrange;
Après avoir donné son fils au lieu du mien,
Léontine à mes yeux, par un second échange,
Donne encor à Phocas mon fils au lieu du sien.
Vous qui pourrez douter d'un si rare service,
Sachez qu'elle a deux fois trompé notre tyran:
Celui qu'on croit Léonce est le vrai Martian,
Et le faux Martian est vrai fils de Maurice.

The identity problem thus solved, Héraclius is free to marry Eudoxe, Léontine's daughter, and Martian can wed

\[ \text{Ibid., p. 213.} \]

\[ \text{Ibid., p. 232.} \]
Pulchérie, Héraclius's sister.

That Héraclius is extremely complicated is obvious. That it is melodrama can best be observed by considering the number of melodramatic devices used in it: at the very outset Corneille introduces "une situation de mélodrame et même l'une des situations types du mélodrame, la substitution d'enfant," which in turn precipitates another common device, the identity problem; in addition, in an attempt either to discover or prevent discovery of true identities, various characters in the play are guilty of using such melodramatic devices as incomplete documents, feigning of thoughts, and outright deception to accomplish their respective objectives; the interest in the play is found in the plot, rather than in the characters, who are highly simplified as representing either good or evil—Phocas represents the typical villain, whose position, as he himself points out, was attained and is sustained only through a series of atrocities, murders, and crimes, and who, when his position becomes doubtful through the refusal of the heiress apparent to marry his son would force her "à m'épouser moi-même"; and finally, Corneille introduces here for the first time in French classical

69 Corneille, op. cit., II, 166.
70 Ibid., p. 226.
drama an old and wide-spread superstition which appears
again in his next play, *Don Sanche d'Aragon*, and which
becomes of prime importance in the melodrama and the roman-
tic drama of the nineteenth century: "la voix du sang" -
the idea that one instinctively feels an impulse of affec-
tion for one's unrecognized relatives when one encounters
them. Léontine is the first to express a belief in it when,
after she has convinced Martian that he is really Héraclius
and sends him on his way to slay Phocas, she says:

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

Martian and Pulchérie quickly affirm their beliefs in the
"blood will tell" theory when they attempt to explain away
their love for each other now that they believe themselves
to be brother and sister. First Martian explains:

> Je veux bien l'avouer, Madame, car mon coeur
> A de la peine encore à vous nommer ma soeur,
> Quand malgré ma fortune à vos pieds abaissée
> J'osai jusques à vous élever ma pensée
> Plus plein d'étonnement que de timidité,
> J'interrogeais ce coeur sur sa témérité;
> Et dans ses mouvements, pour secrète réponse,
> Je sentais quelque chose au-dessus de Léonce,
> Dont, malgré ma raison, l'impérieux effort
> Emportait mes désirs au delà de mon sort.

Then Pulchérie relates that while she sometimes felt that
Martian (as Léonce) was beneath her, she allowed love to
triumph. Now however, she concludes:

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L'amour pensait le dire, et le sang le disait;  
Et de ma passion la flatteuse imposture  
S'emparait dans mon coeur des droits de la nature.73

Later, when Martian tries to convince Phocas that he is really Héraclius, he explains that were he Martian instead, he would never have been able to turn against his own father:

Si je l'avais été (Martian),  
Seigneur, ce traître (Héraclius) en vain m'aurait sollicité;  
Et lorsque contre vous il m'a fait entreprendre,74  
La nature en secret aurait su m'en défendre.

Even Héraclius professes credence in the superstition when eventually he doubts his own identity because Phocas shows a love for him which he thinks may be possible only in one's real father.75 Every principal character, including Phocas, expresses some belief in "la voix du sang," and it is sustained as an important element throughout the play, for even in the final scene, upon learning of the death of Phocas, Martian, who still thinks himself to be Héraclius, exclaims:

Je ne sais quoi pourtant dans mon coeur en murmure.76

In spite of the fact that Héraclius is melodrama, and melodrama so original that it has caused at least one critic

73 Ibid., p. 192.
74 Ibid., p. 211.
75 Ibid., p. 219.
76 Ibid., p. 231.
to state, "cette pièce est à côté de la tradition classique et il se pourrait bien que Corneille fut l'inventeur du "mélodrame et de la pièce policière," it is not without value as a Cornelian tragedy, since, for the first time since Polyeucte, the dual conflict found in the earlier chefs d'oeuvres reappears, however briefly, in it.

The physical struggle is one between Phocas and the surviving members of the Emperor Maurice's family: Héraclius, Martian (who believes himself to be Héraclius) and Pulchérie, Maurice's daughter. The latter three seek the death of Phocas in order to avenge the death of Maurice. Phocas, in turn, seeks the elimination of the heirs to the throne he has unsurped. A new twist has been added by Corneille, however, which results in one of the few scenes of emotional conflict in the play: Phocas, who loves his son and hates his enemy, cannot distinguish one from the other. Bound by necessity to kill the rightful heir in order to protect his position, he is restrained from taking action by the knowledge that in so doing he might kill his own son instead. In what this writer considers one of the most dramatic scenes of the play, Phocas succeeds in arousing the sympathy of the audience, in spite of his villainous nature, as he laments over his sad fate:

Hélas! je ne puis voir qui des deux est mon fils; Et je vois que tous deux ils sont mes ennemis. En ce piteux état quel conseil dois-je suivre?

Lemonnier, op. cit., p. 173.
J'ai craint un ennemi, mon bonheur me le livre;
Je sais que de mes mains il ne peut se sauver,
Je sais que je le vois et ne puis le trouver.
La nature tremblante, incertaine, étonnée,
D'un nuage confus couvre sa destinée:
L'assassin sous cette ombre échappe à ma rigueur,
Et, présent à mes yeux, il se cache en mon coeur . . .
Trop d'un Héraclius en mes mains est remis;
Je tiens mon ennemi, mais je n'ai plus de fils.
Que veux-tu donc, nature, et que prétends-tu faire?
Si je n'ai plus de fils, puis-je encore être père? . . .
O toi, qui que tu sois, enfant dénaturé.
Et trop digne du sort que tu t'es procuré,
Mon trône est-il pour toi plus honteux qu'un supplice?
O malheureux Phocas! ô trop heureux Maurice!
Tu recoupres deux fils pour mourir après toi,
Et je n'en puis trouver pour régner après moi!
Qu'aux honneurs de ta mort je dois porter envie,
Puisque mon propre fils les préfère à sa vie!

It is easy to imagine the anguish Phocas feels, and to pity him, in spite of the apparent blackness of his soul, for "c'est la pire misère d'un esprit plein de ténèbres avec une volonté sans défaillance: avoir l'arme en main et ne pas voir où est l'ennemi," 79

The only other scene of emotional conflict - that between Martian and Pulchérie after the former comes to the erroneous conclusion that he is Héraclius and that Pulchérie, whom he loves, is his sister - is rendered almost ineffective by the fact that the audience at this point knows that Martian has erred and is not in the tragic situation in which he believes himself to be.

In spite of the complications which exist the action throughout this drama is full of excitement, suspense,

78 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., II, 211-212.
79 Lanson, op. cit., p. 95.
sharp turns, and striking situations. Héraclius could, were it not for one element, be considered from this point of view as equal to Rodogune. This one element, which runs rampant throughout the play, and which at times borders on the comical is, of course, the identity problem. Those concerned with discovering the real Héraclius, as we have previously observed, rely on everything from unqualified guesses to "la voix du sang" in an effort to decide, and those who desire to keep the identity of Héraclius hidden use, as stated earlier, all available devices, including incomplete documents, feigning of thoughts, and outright deception to accomplish their objective. In Rodogune, the identity problem was used by Cléopâtre simply as a device to further her own ambition, but in Héraclius, it it given so much attention that it appears to be the subject of the play. As such it is weak, for it apparently is not enough to motivate any action on the part of the two characters primarily involved with it. Martian, after being informed that he is really Héraclius, speaks momentarily of avenging the death of Maurice, but in his very first encounter with Phocas, he quickly resigns himself, quite calmly, to the fact that, as the son of Maurice, he will die:

Phocas: Nous verrons la vertu de cette âme hautaine. Faites-le retirer en la chambre prochaine, Crispe, et qu'on me l'y garde, attendant que mon choix
Pour punir son forfait vous donne d'autres lois.
Martian: Adieu, Madame, adieu, je n'ai pu davantage,
(a Pulchérie) Ma mort vous va laisser encor dans l'esclavage:
Le ciel par d'autres mains vous en daigne affranchir.

Héraclius, on the other hand, knows his true identity, and
speaks of vengeance, but he does nothing. At one point he
explains his attitude by saying,

J'ai voulu conspirer, mais on m'a retenu,

but his explanation is not logical since, had he actively
sought the death of Phocas and succeeded, Léontine could
easily have proven his legal right to the throne with the
documents she possessed, and, as a result, exonerated him
in the eyes of the people.

What seems more likely is that both men, judging
from their actions, belong to that category of Cornelian
heroes in which we have previously placed Théodore. Both
have rather passive attitudes, seemingly content to await
their destiny and to accept calmly whatever happens in
the meantime. Thus, the events which do take place - the
death of Phocas, the "discovery" of the true Héraclius and
his subsequent crowning as Emperor - result directly from
the actions of Exupère and Léontine, two much less im-
portant characters, while Martian and Héraclius, and
especially the latter, remain, as Lanson points out, im-
peccable, impassible, immobile, and cold.

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80 Cornelle, Théâtre, op. cit., II, 197.
81 Ibid., p. 211.
Corneille was obviously pleased with the success of 
Héraclius, for in his next play (not counting Andromède), 
he turned again to melodrama, this time Spanish melodrama, 
with Don Sanche d'Aragon (1649). Because this play is 
almost completely of his own invention, Corneille deemed 
it necessary to present the historical background to his 
audience. In the Argument preceding the play, he informs 
us that Don Fernand, king of Aragon, after having been de­
teated by rebels, entrusted his son, Don Sanche, together 
with a casket containing a statement of his identity and 
other documents of identification, to Don Raymond. The 
latter in turn placed the boy in the family of a fisherman 
who was away from home and whose wife had recently lost an 
infant. At the age of sixteen the young man entered the 
army of Castile and distinguished himself by saving the 
king's life and capturing Seville. Known only as Carlos, 
he believed that he was the fisherman's son and had decided 
to keep this knowledge to himself. Meanwhile his father 
(Don Fernand) had died and his mother, Léonor, had taken 
refuge at the court of Castile, where her daughter Elvire 
had been born.

As the play opens, we learn that Elvire, now grown, 
is very interested both in Carlos and in Alvar de Lune. 
Isabelle, sister of the recently deceased King of Castile, 
has to select a husband. She loves Carlos, but cannot 
consider marrying a man of unknown birth. At her request 
her états have selected three great nobles, Lope de Gusman,
Manrique de Lare, and Alvar de Lune, from among whom she is to select their king. Carlos, who is present at her interview with the nobles, is insulted by Lope and Manrique when he, in spite of the obscurity of his birth, attempts to seat himself with them. In reply to this insult, the queen makes Carlos a marquis and gives to him her ring, which he is to give to the noble he considers worthy to be her husband. He then asks the three to fight with him in order to determine which is worthiest of the queen, but Lope and Manrique refuse and Alvar, who consents, is prevented from dueling by the queen. Elvire then reminds Carlos that, since the rebels have been defeated in Aragon and she and her mother called back, he is to escort them. He assures her that he is devoted to both her and Isabelle and that he will honor his obligation to both. Meanwhile, Isabelle learns that Alvar loves Elvire and she releases him from his obligation to her and proposes to marry whichever of the other two will allow Carlos to marry his sister. Both at first refuse, but finally agree provided Carlos considers himself worthy. Isabelle is determined, however, to marry neither. At this moment, the rumor arises that Don Sanche, the lost Aragonese prince, has been found and is present in Isabelle's court. All believe it is Carlos, but the latter denies that he has such illustrious parentage and soon supports his statement by recognizing as his father an old fisherman, who claims him as his son. Believing this to be some sort of trick, Lope and Manrique have the
fisherman arrested. Carlos demands that Isabelle free the man he believes to be his father, while Alvar brings in the casket confided to him by the fisherman. Leonor, before opening it, tells what is in it if it be the casket her husband sent away with their son. Just at this moment Raymond, who has just been freed after six years imprisonment, arrives and recognizes Carlos as Don Sanche. The casket is then opened and Carlos' true identity confirmed. He is then free to marry Isabelle and to give his sister Elvire to Alvar.

Obviously, the theme of this play is a romantic and melodramatic one which involves a king's hiding his infant son in a fisherman's family in order to save his life, the inexplicable mouvement felt by the boy's mother when she sees him as a distinguished warrior whom she does not know, the triumph of heredity over environment, and the recognition of him as a prince by means of a casket left in the fisherman's possession. That this play should be discussed in a study of Cornelian tragedy is a matter of choice only, for Don Sanche d'Aragon is not a tragedy. Corneille himself recognized this, when, in the dedication he referred to the play as belonging to a new genre which he created and which he called "comédie héroïque: comédie (parce que) on ne voit naître aucun péril par qui nous puissions être portés à la pitié ou à la crainte; héroïque

83 Lancaster, op. cit., II, II, 683.
(parce que) tous les acteurs y sont ou rois ou grands d'Espagne."

However, Corneille's choice of genre alone is not a valid reason for excluding the play from this study, since he also placed, several years later, Tite et Bérénice and Pulchérie in this same category when both are most certainly Cornelian tragedies. What takes Don Sanche d'Aragon out of the realm of tragedy is the manner and style in which Corneille presents his story. As Lanson puts it:

Ces combats de la naissance et du mérite... qui ne sont pas mis en discours, mais en action, plus qu'en action, en spectacle, ces disputes de seigneurs pour un siège, ces titres entassés en noms sonores sur la tête du soldat de fortune par une reine amoureuse, tout cela saisit l'imagination comme des scènes de Ruy Blas ou d'Hernani; et ce don Sanche, qui fait sonner si fièrement sa roture, qui brave les grands et a l'amour de deux reines, ce beau cavalier campé en posture d'aventurier héroïque, la main sur la garde de l'épée, il semble bien que sa vraie patrie soit le "boulevard"... et son vrai nom Mélingue... Don Sanche est le premier de ces drames où, aux environs de 1830, avec une couleur et des noms plus ou moins exactement empruntés à l'histoire, se dérouleront des aventures purement romanesques.

Ironically, these elements which make Don Sanche d'Aragon a romantic drama or a melodrama rather than a classical tragedy are the very reasons for the presentation of the play in this study, for Don Sanche d'Aragon, with

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84 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., II, 318.
all its melodramatic tendencies and romantic qualities, represents the apogee of a trend toward a new type of Cornelian drama: a type which begins with the presentation of romanesque love in *Pompée*; which is embellished by the addition of melodrama and suspense in *Rodogune*: which is expanded through the use of greater plot complexity, intrigue, high suspense and melodrama in *Héraclius*; and one which, when given the additional romantic characteristics set forth above in *Don Sanche d'Aragon*, firmly establishes the fact that Corneille, in his constant search for *la nouveauté* and *le beau sujet*, had created a new type of drama which placed him in the role of precursor, at the very least, of the nineteenth century romantic drama.

*Don Sanche d'Aragon* was written in the seventeenth century, however, and Corneille's experiment was not a success. He was obviously upset over its failure, which he blamed on lack of praise from a certain distinguished person, for he returned to tragedy with his next play, *Nicomède* (1650-51), where, he points out in his *Au Lecteur*, one will not find these same characteristics:

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86 It would be superfluous to illustrate with quotations these tendencies and qualities when the recounting of the plot makes them obvious.

87 Even the romanticists were apparently aware of a certain debt to this play, for its only period of popularity was from 1830-1848, when it was played at the Comédie Française twenty-seven times, more than any other Cornelian tragedy except *Le Cid* (Lancaster, op. cit., II, II, 686).

88 Théâtre, op. cit., II, 322.
La tendresse et les passions, qui doivent être l'âme des tragédies, n'ont aucune part en celle-ci; la grandeur du courage y règne seul, et regarde son malheur d'un œil si dédaigneux qu'il n'en saurait arracher une plainte. Elle y est combattue par la politique, et n'oppose à ses artifices qu'une prudence généreuse, qui marche à visage découvert, qui prévoit le péril sans s'émovoir, et ne veut point d'autre appui que celui de sa vertu, et de l'amour qu'elle imprime dans les coeurs de tous les peuples.

It should be interesting to observe the effects of this "prudence généreuse, qui prévoit le péril sans s'émovoir" upon Nicomède, one of the most successful of Corneille's plays that followed Rodogune. 90

As he had done in Horace, Cinna, and Pompée, Corneille again turned to Rome for his subject. This time, however, the Rome that he depicts is not the glorious Rome of kings, but republican Rome in her dealings with the petty kings of Asia Minor; and he treats his subject from the viewpoint of those unfortunate monarchs. 91

Corneille chose for his hero, whose name the play bears, Nicomède, the son of King Prusias of Bithynie, and made the historically undistinguished prince an impressive figure by representing him as having learned the art of war from Hannibal, as having already caused Rome anxiety by his conquests, and as "embodying Asiatic nationalist resistance to Roman aggression, before which the cowardly

89 Ibid., p. 389.
90 Lancaster, op. cit., II, II, 694.
91 Lockert, op. cit., p. 77.
Prusias cringes".\textsuperscript{92}

In this play, Nicomède is the son of Prusias' first marriage; and the king's second wife, Arsinoé, hates her step-son and wants her own son, Attale, to succeed to the throne and to marry Laodice, queen of Arménie, who loves and is loved by Nicomède. As the play begins, Nicomède has just returned from battle after having discovered a conspiracy, instigated by Arsinoé, against his life, and his step-brother, Attale, has just arrived from Rome where he had been educated to rule according to Roman doctrine. Arsinoé, motivated solely by ambition, plots, schemes, and lies in an effort to have the throne and Laodice taken away from Nicomède and given to Attale. Naturally she has the support of Flamininus, the Roman ambassador, for Rome likewise desires to see Attale crowned. She also succeeds in turning Prusias against his son. Insensible to the calumnies of Arsinoé, the threats of Flamininus and Rome, and the anger of Prusias, Nicomède refuses to give up the throne or Laodice. Finally, he succeeds in arousing great anger in his father, and the latter awards the throne to Attale and makes plans to deliver Nicomède to the Romans. The populace, upon hearing the news, rises in revolt, causing Arsinoé to plan to have Nicomède secretly escorted out of the city and to Rome. Attale, who by this time has turned against his mother and Rome, hears her plan, goes

\textsuperscript{92}Ibid., p. 78.
out under a pretext, stabs his brother's guard, and frees him. Once released, Nicomède returns triumphant to the palace and, upon learning that Attale is responsible for his freedom, commends his brother and pardons everyone.

Nicomède is a political play — perhaps the most political of all Corneille's tragedies — and not at all by accident, for in the preface to the play Corneille indicated his desire to create the play in this manner:

Mon principal but a été de peindre la politique des Romains au dehors, et comme ils agissaient impérieusement avec les rois leurs alliés; leurs maxims pour les empêcher de s'accroître, et les soins qu'ils prenaient de traverser leur grandeur, quand elle commençait à leur devenir suspecte à force de s'augmenter et de se rendre considérable par de nouvelles conquêtes. 93

In his "principal but" Corneille did not fail, for Nicomède consists almost entirely of a series of political discussions and diplomatic maneuvers which present a very realistic and highly detailed picture of republican Rome's attempt to manipulate the governments of her subordinates. As a matter of fact, the first four acts contain hardly anything but a description of "la politique des Romains": Act I is devoted to explaining why Rome fears Nicomède and wishes Attale to rule; Act II centers around the attempt by Flaminius to convince all concerned of the invincibility of Rome: Act III sees Flaminius direct his diplomacy toward Laodice, the Armenian queen, in an

attempt to persuade her to submit to Roman policy; and Act IV consists of repeated encounters between Nicomède and his adversaries which are "purely thrust and parry and counter thrust". 94

We do not mean to imply, however, that the entire play is a boring political monologue. Quite the contrary, for Corneille, with no little dramatic skill, intersperses between these scenes the reactions of each principal character to Roman policy. As a result, each individual is fully developed and the reader is keenly aware of the virtues and vices of each.

Aside from the political discussions, Nicomède is a conflict between, on one side, Rome, represented by Flaminius, and pro-Roman Asiatic rulers, represented by Prusias and Arsinoé; on the other, liberty loving Asiatics, represented by Nicomède with his reputation as a disciple of Hannibal and with so strong a hold upon the people that they rise in his defense, also by Laodice, whose followers help the Bithynians in their effort to rescue Nicomède. Because of the passive attitudes of Nicomède and Laodice, the conflict is a weak one. Had it not been for Attale, there would have been no real physical conflict to speak of, for both Nicomède and Laodice are so unmoved by their situation and so sure of their own rights, that they offer no resistance whatsoever to the pro-Roman forces.

94 Lockert, op. cit., p. 78.
Attale is the most dramatic figure in the play, for the transformation of this youth from the complacent pro-
tégé of Rome and spoiled son of Arsinoé to the noble lad who comes to his elder brother's rescue is perhaps the finest single thing in *Nicomède*. On his return to Bithynie he had at first blindly followed the directives of Rome and his mother in all their plans for him and as such had drawn biting, sarcastic remarks from his half-
brother:

Seigneur, je crains pour vous qu'un Romain vous écoute; Et si Rome savait de quels feux vous brûlez, Bien loin de vous prêter l'appui dont vous parlez, Elle s'indignerait de voir sa créature A l'éclat de son nom faire une telle injure, Et vous dégraderait peut-être dès demain Du titre glorieux de citoyen romain.

*Nicomède*'s sarcasm and Laodice's preference for the latter apparently awake in Attale the ambition to be more than a slave to Rome, for he is able by the middle of the third act to answer his brother so cleverly and with such independence that he wins the latter's admiration:

C'est n'avoir pas perdu tout votre temps à Rome, Que vous savoir ainsi défendre en galant homme: Vous avez de l'esprit, si vous n'avez du coeur. 97

Soon after this he even dares defend *Nicomède* to his mother.

His transformation is a gradual one, with every one of his encounters with *Nicomède* and *Arsinoé* influencing

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him. Finally his eyes are fully opened when, after he has been declared his father's successor, Flaminius indicates to him that Rome will oppose his marriage to Laodice.

Left alone, he decides to throw off the chains of Rome:

Attale, était-ce ainsi que régnaien tes ancêtres?
Veux-tu le nom de roi pour avoir tant de maîtres?
Ah! ce titre à ce prix déjà m'est importun:
S'il nous en faut avoir, du moins n'en ayons qu'un.
Le ciel nous l'a donné trop grand, trop magnanime,
Pour souffrir qu'aux Romains il serve de victime.
Montrons-leur hautement que nous avons des yeux,
Et d'un si rude joug affranchissons ces lieux.
Puisque à leurs intérêts tout ce qu'ils font s'applique,
Que leur vaine amitié cède à leur politique,
Soyons à notre tour de leur grandeur jaloux,
Et comme ils font pour eux faisons aussi pour nous.

While there are no scenes depicting Attale undergoing any emotional conflict, there is every reason to believe that he does experience one in transferring his devotion from his mother to his brother, for his change is too gradual for him not to have been at one point or another equally torn between the two. The same cannot be said of the other characters in the play. Prusias, like his predecessors, Félix, Ptolomée, and Valens, is a politician who is afraid to offend the Roman government and will do nothing to oppose it. His wife, Arsinoé, is a clever and hypocritical woman, who is guided by ambition and who will allow nothing to prevent her from fulfilling her desire of seeing her own son on the throne.

One of the major weaknesses in the play is found in

98 Ibid., pp. 445-446.
the portrayal of Nicomède. Although he is, perhaps, the strongest-willed character that Corneille has depicted up to this time, in the sense that he is the one most absolutely sure of himself, there is an unfortunate rigidity about his character that gives it some resemblance to that of Théodore.

The resemblance can be found in Nicomède's volonté parfaite, for he too, like Théodore, is so completely certain of his destiny that he refuses to be moved by any situation, however perilous it might appear to those around him. Consequently, he refuses to take any action whatsoever in an attempt to improve his situation or to seek his goal. When forced by his father to choose between the throne and Laodice, he chooses the girl, but only because he is certain that he will have both.

Mais un monarque enfin comme un autre homme expire; Et vos peuples alors, ayant besoin d'un roi, Voudront choisir peut-être entre ce prince et moi. Seigneur, nous n'avons pas si grande ressemblance, Qu'il faille de bons yeux pour y voir différence; Et ce vieux droit d'aînesse est souvent si puissant Que pour remplir un trône il rappelle un absent. 100

Later, when informed by Prusius that he is being sent away to Rome, instead of fighting to retain what is rightfully his, he willingly yields:

J'irai, j'irai, seigneur, vous le voulez ainsi;

99 Lancaster, op. cit., II, II, 691.
100 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., II, 441.
Et j'y serai plus roi que vous n'êtes ici.  

Nothing which is done for or against him can move him in any manner. "Arrête, il ne frémit pas; délivré, il n'exulte pas."  

Since he remains passive throughout the play, everyone else has to create the action and he, in spite of his "cool bravery, bitter irony, and ready wit," is just another cold Cornelian termé. In this case, the effect is most harmful, for without this weakness, Nicomède, in the opinion of the writer, could easily have been an indication that the prolific dramatic poet had rediscovered the "chemin battu" of his earlier masterpieces.

While there is some disagreement among critics as to the relative position of Nicomède among the tragedies of Corneille, many would rank it next in merit to the four masterpieces. There is no such disagreement, however, over Corneille's next tragedy, Perharite (1651). It was from its inception, and still is, classified as one of the worst Cornelian tragedies.

The plot of this play falls into two parts, one preceding, the other following Perharite's unexpected

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101 Ibid., p. 442.
102 Lanson, op. cit., p. 141.
103 Lancaster, op. cit., II, II, 689.
104 Ibid, p. 694.
105 Lockert, op. cit., p. 83.
appearance. As the play begins, we learn that Grimoald has usurped the throne of Lombardie from Pertharite, who has since been assumed dead. Garibalde, wishing to become king by marrying Eduige, Pertharite's sister who is engaged to Grimoald, has attracted the latter's attention to Rodelinde, the presumed widow of the deposed king. She, however, refuses to marry the usurper of her husband's throne. Eduige, rejected by Grimoald, whom she loves, offers to marry Garibalde if he will kill Grimoald, but Garibalde sees no profit in such an undertaking. Instead he urges Grimoald to threaten to put Rodelinde's son to death if she refuses to marry him. When confronted with this proposition Rodelinde agrees to marry Grimoald on condition that he put her son to death because she believes that he will be unable to attain a happy life under Grimoald. However, before the agreement is concluded, Pertharite returns. Grimoald at first believes he is an imposter, and, even after he has become convinced that he is not, pretends to do so in order to deceive the people. Garibalde urges him to put Pertharite to death and, when the latter escapes, pursues him, but is killed by him. Brought before Grimoald, Pertharite refuses to accept freedom in return for pretending to be an imposter, so that Grimoald, convinced of Pertharite's bravery as well as of his identity, restores him to his wife and his throne and agrees to marry Eduige, while permanent friendship is promised between the two men and their wives.
How needlessly Corneille has botched his subject by having Pertharite return! That the situation as it existed before the return of Pertharite is a most dramatically effective one is best illustrated, in Lancaster's view, by Racine's Andromaque:

In both cases (Pertharite and Andromaque) a princess is waiting at a foreign court to be married to a man she loves, who has promised to marry her, and who prefers a captive, the real or supposed widow of his enemy. In both plays the ruler threatens to put to death this woman's child if she refuses to marry him, and thus wins her consent, though the marriage does not take place. In both the flouted fiancee asks a man who wishes to marry her to kill the man she loves. . . . So great is the general similarity in situation that it seems safe to conclude that Racine, writing his first great play, sought to make better use than his most prominent predecessor had done of similar material. 106

Time has revealed that Racine did make better use of the material and succeeded, while Corneille failed miserably. However, it is not in these items of similarity that Corneille failed. Quite the contrary, for until the arrival of Pertharite, there are several beautiful and moving scenes depicting such things as the wrath of the scorned Eduige and the effects of her demands upon Gari-balde, the tragic situation of Rodelinde, caught between her son and Grimoald, as well as that of Grimoald, loved by and engaged to one woman, but desiring another who will have nothing to do with him.

In spite of the beauty of these scenes, most of the first three acts is rendered useless by the return of

Pertharite. Furthermore, whatever interest is stimulated in Rodelinde and Eduige in the beginning, is lost completely in the last two acts when these two fall into minor positions in order to focus attention on Pertharite. Then too, the position of Grimoald is weakened, for until the return of Pertharite, he is portrayed in his attempts to reject Eduige and win Rodelinde, but upon the surprising return of the king, he immediately transfers his love back to Eduige, thus rendering him inconsistent.

Pertharite can only be of importance because of Racine's alleged indebtedness to it and because it is a landmark in Corneille's career, for in his discouragement over its reception he felt he had lost touch with his public and resolved to write no more for the stage:

La mauvaise réception que le public a faite à cet ouvrage, m'avertit qu'il est temps que je sonne la retraite... Il vaut mieux que je prenne congé de moi-même que d'attendre qu'on me le donne tout à fait; et il est juste qu'après vingt années de travail, je commence à m'apercevoir que je deviens trop vieux pour être encore à la mode. 107

In this resolve he persisted for seven years.

During this second stage in the evolution and development of Cornellian drama, several major changes within the framework of the tragedies themselves are seen. The first is in the general area of subject matter. We noted earlier, concerning the masterpieces: that the subject of each contained two themes, a political problem to be analyzed and

a moral issue to be resolved; that the political question precipitated a physical conflict, while the attempt to resolve the moral issue resulted in a mental conflict within the heart of the character involved; and that in each case it was the moral issue and the ensuing mental conflict which gave the characters, as well as the plays, universal appeal. In this second period of Cornelian drama we observe that in almost all cases, the moral issue is non-existent, having been replaced by political issues and/or ideals; and with the elimination of the moral issue comes the elimination of the heretofore vitally important element of inner conflict. Thus we find the subject wholly political and the play consisting of a physical conflict between opposing forces of different political, ideals, with the characters no longer forced to choose between love and duty or love and honor, but between opposing political philosophies.

Secondly, we see introduced into Cornelian tragedy for the first time certain fully developed romanesque and melodramatic elements. These elements, beginning with the portrayal of the romanesque love of César and Cléopâtre in Pompeé, and culminating in the totally melodramatic and highly romantic Don Sanche d'Ararcon, while apparently establishing Corneille as at least a precursor of French Romantic drama, prove themselves to be, as we have noted, detrimental to his attempts to continue to create masterpieces of classical tragedy.
Additionally, we find in this period, in contrast to the relative simplicity of plot in the masterpieces, highly complex and complicated plots which become increasingly difficult to follow and which frequently cause the dramatic poet to devote too much attention to the intricacies of the plot and to require a multiplicity of characters to satisfy plot needs, resulting in poor or incomplete development of the principal characters.

Finally, we observe a major change in the portrayal of the will of the Cornelian hero, which in the past in some cases was almost superhuman but always inspired its possessor actively to seek his goal. Now we note that the Cornelian volonté has become so rigid and inflexible that it inspires not activity, but passiveness, in the protagonist. The Cornelian hero now not only refuses to be moved emotionally by his dilemma, but he is so certain of accomplishing his goal that he sees little or no need to take part in any action which seeks to oppose him or support him. As a result, the action which does take place is created by characters other than the principal one; the latter remains impeccable, impassible, immobile, and cold; and the play resembles more a political tableau - more often than not, an uninteresting one - than a tragedy.

There can be little doubt then, that up to this point, Corneille himself, through changes made within the framework of his plays in his constant search for "la nouveauté" and "le beau sujet", is primarily responsible for their failure.
CHAPTER III

From Oedipe to Attila: 1659-1667

When at length Corneille returned to the theater in 1659, he dedicated his play to Monseigneur le Procureur Général Fouquet, to whom he owed "quelque sentiment de reconnaissance pour une faveur signalée",¹ and who had requested that Corneille recommence his dramatic endeavors. In the vers dedicating the play to Fouquet, Corneille makes one feel that he has truly rediscovered his former secret of success and is on the verge of presenting another masterpiece:

Laisse aller ton essor jusqu'à ce grand génie
Qui te rappelle au jour dont les ans t'ont bannie,
Muse, et n'oppose plus un silence obstiné
A l'ordre suprenant que sa main t'a donné. . .
Qui, généreux appui de tout notre Parnasse,
Tu me rends ma vigueur lorsque tu me fais grâce;
Et je veux bien apprendre à tout notre avenir
Que tes regards bénins ont su me rajeunir.
Je m'élève sans crainte avec de si bons guides:
Depuis que je t'ai vu, je ne vois plus mes rides:
Et plein d'une plus claire et noble vision,
Je prends mes cheveux gris pour cette illusion.
Je sens le même feu, je sens la même audace,
Qui fit plaire le Cid, qui fit combattre Horace;
Et je me trouve encor la main qui crayonna
L'âme du grand Pompée et l'esprit de Cinna.²

It is ironic then that Corneille, after remaining in

¹Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., II, 537.
²Ibid., p. 535.
retirement for seven years because he felt he had lost touch with his audience, and after vowing that he had re-
discovered his successful formula, would, upon returning to the theater, continue to create the same type of tragedy that had originally caused his discouragement. Nevertheless, he did just that, and *Oedipe* (1659), the play which marked his return to the stage, fully illustrates this fact. While this play appears, on the surface, to be different in that its subject is taken from Greek mythology and its theme is not so much a political but a moral one, it is not so in fact. In the first place, as in *Pertharite*, the plot is divided into two parts. The first is a conflict between, on the one hand, *Dircé*, Jocaste's daughter, and Thésée, prince of Athens, who love each other and wish to marry, and, on the other, Oedipe, King of Thebes, who will not allow the two to marry because he fears that Dircé's ambition to reign combined with Thésée's power will eventually take the throne away from him. The second part concerns Oedipe's seeking to discover his own identity and his subsequent predicament as he learns that he has killed his father and married his own mother.

Corneille did not create his *Oedipe* in an attempt to rival the immortal masterpiece of Sophocles, for he well knew that his audience would not tolerate any such play. Instead, he took the subject given to him by Fouquet and fabricated his own plot by fitting together both legendary and invented details. As the play begins we learn that the
plague has broken out at Thebes. Dirce, the daughter of Laius and Jocaste and a Cornelian creation, urges Thésée, prince of Athens whom she loves, to leave, since all of his men have died except one, but he refuses unless she accompanies him as his wife. But Oedipe, the present king, afraid of the political implications of such an alliance, refuses, claiming that Dirce is promised to his cousin and offering one of his daughters to Thésée. Both Dirce and Thésée maintain, however, that Oedipe has no right to marry her without her consent. At this time a messenger reports that the oracle, consulted about the plague, refuses to answer, and Oedipe proposes to have Tirésie summon the ghost of Laius. This done, the ghost declares that the blood of his race must be shed and Dirce offers to die, but her offer is refused since it has been learned that Laius's son is alive and may be found before the day ends. Now Thésée offers himself as the missing son and thus the demanded victim, for his own origin is obscure. Jocaste reminds him, however, that to establish his claim he must show that he killed Laius. She reports that Phorbas had given the child to a stranger and that he remembers the face of the king's murderer. Brought in, he is recognized by Oedipe as one of the supposed "brigands" which the latter had fought and later suspected of killing Laius. However, Phorbas and Jocaste make it clear that Phorbas was with Laius, and Oedipe realizes that he had killed Laius by mistake, but he is not yet aware that Laius
was his father. This final identification occurs when Oedipe learns from Iphicrates, his supposed father's messenger, that the latter, Polybe, has died after declaring that Oedipe was not his son but that he had received him through Iphicrates from a Theban. Iphicrates recognizes Phorbas as the Theban in question and Oedipe as Laïus' son and murderer. Oedipés identity thus established, Phorbas and Jocaste stab themselves, Oedipe tears out his eyes, the pestilence ceases, and Dircé and Thésée will be married.

In addition to the violation of the unity of action, as noted above, many other similarities to previous plays can be found in Oedipe. One of the most obvious is the almost complete absence of mental suffering in spite of not one, but two dramatic situations highly conducive to inner conflict. The first, the situation in which Dircé and Thésée find themselves as young lovers forbidden to marry, is almost completely ineffective because these two, like Théodore, Nicomède, and a host of other Cornelian characters, do absolutely nothing to remedy their situation. Each refuses to marry anyone else, but neither tries to remove the obstacles to their own marriage. Furthermore, when a sacrifice is demanded, Dircé becomes convinced that she must die, and throughout the remainder of the play she insists upon being sacrificed, although she does nothing actively to seek her goal. During this time Thésée likewise remains inactive, saying only that he too will die should Dircé be sacrificed. When he comes to believe
himself to be Laïus's son, he then takes over the chant from Dirce and maintains that he should be sacrificed, all the while doing nothing to see that his death is accomplished. Ultimately it is left to other characters to achieve a solution.

The impact of the problem in which Oedipe finds himself as murderer of his father and husband of his mother is also greatly weakened by the fact that Corneille devotes too little time and attention to the tragic situation, since almost all of the first four acts are given to Dirce and Thésée. Thus, in spite of the potential dramatic effectiveness which could result from such issues, Corneille, by combining both in one play and having at least two of those concerned refuse to be affected by their predicament, failed to make proper use of either and once again eliminated the element of inner conflict.

Another theme found in many Cornelian dramas which followed Polyeucte and which was ultimately responsible for their classification as melodramas, recurs in Oedipe: the problem of identity, i.e., one's obscure or unknown origin, and the use of the "voix du sang" as a method of discovering the truth. Naturally, where Oedipe is concerned, the ignorance of his true identity is of paramount importance, and Corneille cannot take credit or be condemned for the use of it in this context. His error instead was in creating an additional principal character with obscure origins, Thésée, and allowing him to believe
that he occupies the role ultimately reserved for Oedipe. As such, he appears ridiculous, and his role, due to the universal knowledge of the original legend, borders on the comical. His first intimation that he is the son of Laïus comes immediately after Tiresie informs Oedipe that Jocaste's son, who has murdered his father and is guilty of incest, is still alive and present in the court and is the one to be sacrificed. At the same time, Thésée learns from one of his attendants dying of the plague that his parents are unknown and that he was brought to his present home as an infant. Immediately Thésée assumes that he is the son of Laïus and that, because he loves Dirce, he is guilty of incest. He seems almost too anxious to die as he informs Jocaste of his discovery:

THÉSÉE
Dircé n'est plus, Madame, en état de périr:
Le ciel vous rend un fils, et ce n'est qu'à ce prince
Qu'est dû le triste honneur de sauver sa province.

JOCASTE:
C'est trop vous assurer sur l'éclat d'un faux bruit.

THÉSÉE:
C'est une vérité dont je suis mieux instruit.

JOCASTE:
Vous le connaissez donc?

THÉSÉE
A l'égal de moi-même.

JOCASTE:
De quand?

THÉSÉE:
De ce moment.
JOCASTE:
Et vous l'aimez?

THÉSÉE:
Je l'aime
Jusqu'à mourir du coup dont il sera percé.

JOCASTE:
Mais cette amitié cède à l'amour de Dircé?

THÉSÉE:
Hélas! cette princesse à mes désirs si chère
En un fidèle amant trouve un malheureux frère,
Qui mourrait de douleur d'avoir changé de sort,
N'était le prompt secours d'une plus digne mort,
Et qu'assez tôt connu pour mourir au lieu d'elle
Ce frère malheureux meurt en amant fidèle.

JOCASTE:
Quoi? vous seriez mon fils?

THÉSÉE:
Et celui de Laïus.

Immediately Jocaste rejects Thésée's idea, using
the "voix du sang", or lack of it, as the basis of her
reasoning:

Je ne sens point pour vous l'émotion du sang,
Je vous trouve en mon cœur toujours en même rang;
J'ai peine à voir un fils où j'ai cru voir un gendre;
La nature avec vous refuse de s'entendre,
Et me dit en secret, sur votre emportement,
Qu'il a bien peu d'un frère, et beaucoup d'un amant. 4

Thésée persists however, and it is in his counter-argument,
where he attempts to explain his now fraternal love for
Dircé, that he appears comical:

Que vous connaissez mal ce que peut la nature!
Quand d'un parfait amour elle a pris la teinture.
Et que le désespoir d'un illustre projet
Se joint aux déplaisirs d'en voir périr l'objet,

3Ibid., p. 578.
4Ibid., p. 580.
Il est doux de mourir pour une soeur si chère.
Je l'aimais en amant, je l'aime encore en frère;
C'est sous un autre nom le même empressement:
Je ne l'aime pas moins, mais je l'aime autrement.
L'ardeur sur la vertu fortement établie
Par ces retours du sang ne peut être affaiblie;
Et ce sang qui prêtait sa tendresse à l'amour 5
A droit d'en emprunter les forces à son tour.

After he is informed by Jocaste that he must show proof of having killed Laïus if he is to be accepted as his son, Thésée vehemently denies that he could have committed such a crime, and yet he continues to insist that he is the lost son. His insistence that his newly discovered identity be accepted leads to a stirring interview with Dircé where they, very much in love, are forced to look upon their relationship as that of brother and sister. The entire scene (Act IV, 1) is completely ineffective however, because the audience is well aware of the Oedipus legend, and the situation is reminiscent of an identical one between Martian and Pulchérie in Héraclius.6

Lancaster observes7 that in spite of these very obvious weaknesses, Oedipe was apparently popular from its inception until 1729, for during this time it was acted more frequently than any other play Corneille composed after 1650. Its popularity has been at least partially attributed to Corneille's introduction of a new type of

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5Ibid., p. 580.
6See discussion of Héraclius above.
love episode into his tragedy. "A ces démêlés politiques, Corneille joint l'intrigue galante de Dirce-Thésée. Cet épisode fait de la pièce une tragédie du Tendre."  

During the time of the writing of Oedipe, preciosity and gallantry reigned supreme. Madeleine de Scudery's Cyrus had been followed by her more extravagant Clélie, with its "Carte du Tendre"; and, beginning with the Timocrate (1656) of Thomas Corneille, romanesque plays dominated the stage. Amid such a world, and in view of his previously noted tendencies toward the romanesque, it is no wonder that Corneille fell victim to his environment and began to portray some of these elements in his plays. In Oedipe, "c'est le héros Thésée qui pousse le mieux les soupirs et s'empresse d'obéir aux lois du pays de Tendre" and who acts as though he "might have stepped from the pages of Clélie itself." He represents the very opposite of the typical Cornelian hero who places duty above all else. If Dircé dies, he will also die, regardless of his obligations to others:

**DIRCÉ**

Mais que vois-je? Ah, Seigneur, quels que soient vos ennuis,
Que venez-vous me dire en l'état où je suis?

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9 Lockert, op. cit., p. 83.

10 Nadal, op. cit., p. 237.

11 Lockert, op. cit., p. 84.
THÉSÉE:
Je viens prendre de vous l'ordre qu'il me faut suivre; 
Mourir, s'il faut mourir, et vivre, s'il faut vivre.

DIRCÉ:
Ne perdez point d'efforts à m'arrêter au jour: 
Laissez faire l'honneur.

THÉSÉE:
Laissez agir l'amour.

DIRCÉ:
Vivez, Prince; vivez.

THÉSÉE
Vivez donc, ma princesse.

DIRCÉ:
Ne me ravalez point jusqu'à cette bassesse. 
Retarder mon trépas, c'est faire tout périr: 
Tout meurt, si je ne meurs.

THÉSÉE
Laissez-moi donc mourir.

DIRCÉ:
Hélas! qu'osez-vous dire?

THÉSÉE:
Hélas! qu'allez-vous faire?

DIRCÉ:
Finir les maux publics, obéir à mon père, 
Sauver tous mes sujets.

THÉSÉE
Par quelle injuste loi 
Faut-il les sauver tous pour ne perdre que moi? . . . 
J'en ai fait (des combats) et beaucoup, et d'assez 
généreux; 
Mais celui-ci, Madame, est le plus dangereux. 
J'ai fait trembler partout, et devant vous je tremble. 
L'amant et le héros s'accordent mal ensemble; 
Mais enfin après vous tous deux veulent courir: 
Le héros ne peut vivre où l'amant doit mourir; 
La fermeté de l'un par l'autre est épuisée; 
Et si Dircé n'est plus, il n'est plus de Thésée.

Dircé vainly wishes to teach him some of the lessons

of heroism in bringing to mind the intimate relationship between love and valor:

Il faut qu'en vos pareils les belles passions
Ne soient que l'ornement des grandes actions.
Ces hauts emportements qu'un beau jeu leur inspire
Doivent les éléver, et non pas les détruire. 13

But Thésée would renounce in favor of Dircé the throne, the love of his subjects, and the good of the general public:

Hélas! à votre aspect je ne sais plus qu'aimer....
Périsse l'univers, pourvu que Dircé vive!
Périsse le jour même avant qu'elle s'en prive!
Que m'importe la perte ou le salut de tous?
Ai-je rien à sauver, rien à perdre que vous? 14

He places la tendresse above all other sentiments and as such depreciates the value of the Cornelian idea of la gloire. Honor, he says, should yield to love. Dircé then orders him to go on living, to which he replies:

Le véritable amour ne prend loi de personne;
Et si ce fier honneur s'obstine à nous trahir,
Je renonce, Madame, à vous plus obéir. 15

Unfortunately for Corneille the depiction of this gallant love, however much it might have been in vogue at the time, represents another change in direction which succeeds only in worsening his tragedies. Ironically, Corneille had no intention of creating such a situation, for he pointed out in the preface to Oedipe that "l'amour

13 Ibid., p. 543.
14 Ibid., p. 565.
15 Ibid., p. 567.
n'a point de part dans ce sujet," and in his *Discours du Poème dramatique*, published shortly after *Oedipe* in 1660, he stated that the dignity of the tragedy "demande... quelque passion plus noble et plus mâle que l'amour," that while it was à propos to use love," il faut qu'il se contente du second rang dans le poème." The problem with this play, however, and with those which follow it during this period, is not that love is relegated to a secondary part, but that it is an exaggerated form of love which is stressed too much. Nearly every character is represented as in love with someone, and in almost every decision on matters of historical significance, some love, generally invented outright by Corneille, is involved.

*Sertorius* (1662), Corneille's next play, provides an excellent example of this major characteristic of Cornelian drama of this period. Its scene is laid at "Nertobrige, ville d'Aragon," in the palace of Viriate, queen of Lusitania. The play is concerned with whether Sertorius, the aging Roman general representing Marius in Spain, will marry Viriate, whom he loves and who desires to marry him in order to strengthen her own kingdom, or Aristie, the divorced wife of Pompée, who still loves her husband but who sees in Sertorius a chance to avenge the divorce

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17 *Théâtre*, op. cit., I, 13.
18 *Lockert*, op. cit., p. 86.
and strengthen both the position of Sertorius and herself in Rome. The situation is further compounded by the fact that Perpenna, a lieutenant under Sertorius, also loves Viriate. When Sertorius learns of Perpenna's love, he decides, in order to prevent Perpenna from revolting, to allow him to marry Viriate, but the latter is unwilling. Sertorius then seeks a delay and Perpenna, in jealousy, decides to kill him. Meanwhile, Pompéé arrives with an army and, during a truce, tries to persuade Sertorius to discontinue the enmity with Rome, while the latter beseeches Pompéé to join forces with him and to fight for Roman liberty against the dictator Sylla. Pompéé then begs Aristie not to wed Sertorius but instead to await their reunion after Sylla's death. He assures her that his forced marriage to Emilie, Sylla's daughter and the pregnant wife of another man, has not been consummated. Aristie, still in love with Pompéé, feels he is insincere, rejects his plea, and Pompéé angrily departs.

Soon a letter brings news of Emilie's death in childbirth and Sylla's resignation as dictator, and at the same time Perpenna and his followers murder Sertorius. In the confusion which ensues, Pompéé returns and is reunited with Aristie. In order to win Pompéé's favor, Perpenna shows him unfavorable letters from Rome written to Sertorius, but Pompéé refuses to read them, has them burned, turns Perpenna over to the townspeople to be put to death, and enters into a political alliance with Viriate.
The plot of Sertorius contains a great deal of similarity to those plays written after Polyeucte in that its theme is political and it is extremely complex. Its distinguishing factor, however, is not in its similarity to its immediate predecessors but in its presentation of a new kind of love, based on political expediency, which occupies the center of attention in the play, and which

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19 Bray, op. cit., pp. 17-18, notes five different subjects in Sertorius, each of which has the essentials for a separate play:

"Le premier sujet met en présence Sertorius, général du parti de Marius en Espagne, Aristie, femme repudiée de Pompée, Viriate, reine de Lusitanie, alliée de Sertorius. Sertorius est amoureux de Viriate; elle accepte de l'épouser par estime pour son talent et pour consolider son trône. D'autre part Sertorius est ambitieux: il ne peut écraser Sylla qu'en se servant d'Aristie qui lui apporte le concours de l'aristocratie romaine. Mais Aristie, pour se venger de Pompée qui l'a repudiée, n'aide Sertorius que s'il l'épouse. Le sujet, c'est le conflit de l'ambition et de l'amour dans le coeur de Sertorius..."

"Le deuxièm sujet écarte Aristie et Pompée et fait intervenir Perpenna, lieutenant de Sertorius. Tous les deux aiment Viriate. Ils se l'avouent. Sertorius, par générosité et nécessité - il a besoin de Perpenna - se sacrifie et s'entremet pour son rival auprès de la reine. Mais Perpenna ne peut croire à cette générosité. Il se méfie, un malentendu l'irrite, il fomente un complot et fait périr son général.

Le troisième sujet a pour centre Aristie. Repudiée par Pompée, elle choisit Sertorius pour la venger. Il aime Viriate. Elle travaille à faire céder l'amour devant l'ambition. En vain; Sertorius épouse la reine. Il promet à Aristie de la réconcilier avec Pompée...


will be observed, in increasing proportion, in Sophonisbe, Othon, Agésilas, and Attila. It is not a true passion — Corneille himself points this out in his Au Lecteur to Sertorius: "vous n'y trouverez ni tendresses d'amour, ni emportements de passions..." — but an "amour politique et galant," the sole object of which is a marriage leading to political advancement. Thus it may often be insincere and subject to change as political fortunes change. The characters involved often:

profess intense love; even when great things are at stake they frequently listen to love's promptings to an extent that would have horrified Chimène; but in the end they do not obey its promptings. Moreover, they talk about their love frigidly, and often in conventional phrases of gallantry, so that though it intrudes into all their affairs, it seems almost an impersonal consideration. 22

Sertorius is the first character to make us aware that we are observing a new Cornelian approach to love. At the very beginning of the play, when asked by Perpenna if he will marry Aristie, he replies:

Il faut donc, Perpenna, vous faire confidence
Et de ce que je crains, et de ce que je pense.
J'aime ailleurs. A mon âge il sied si mal d'aimer,
Que je le cache même à qui m'a su charmer;
Mais tel que je puis être, on m'aime, ou pour mieux dire,
La reine Viriate à mon hymen aspire. 23

21 Nadal, op. cit., p. 248.
22 Lockert, op. cit., p. 86.
23 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., II, 709.
Several important bits of information are presented in this passage. We learn that this aging soldier is in love with Viriate, but because of his age, he doesn't dare tell her so. We also see that Viriate wishes to marry him because, he goes on to explain, "elle veut... de son peuple avec nous commence l'union." The situation, however, becomes almost comical when Sertorius explains, concerning Viriate's alleged desire to marry him:

Non qu'elle me l'ait dit, ou quelque autre pour elle; Mais j'en vois chaque jour quelque marque fidèle; and he goes on to say that he cannot marry Aristie because:

Je crains donc de l'aigrir si j'épouse Aristie, Et que de ses sujets la meilleure partie, Pour venger ce mépris et servir son courroux, Ne tourne obstinément ses armes contre nous.

How could anyone believe in the seriousness of Sertorius after this beginning? An aging Roman general, sought after by two illustrious women, is in love with one of them, although he is apparently too bashful to let her know of his feelings; he knows she wants to marry him for reasons of political unity, although she has never uttered a word of this to him, and he doesn't dare marry the other for fear of political repercussions from the first! Given this information, one immediately senses a lack of sincerity in the play. Corneille does not stop

24 Ibid., p. 709.
25 Ibid., p. 709.
26 Ibid., p. 709.
here, however, for, in the same scene, as soon as Sertorius becomes aware that Perpenna loves Viriate, he does an immediate about-face:

Dites que vous l'aimez, et je ne l'aime plus.

Tous mes voeux sont déjà du côté d'Aristie;
Et je l'épouserai, pourvu qu'en même jour
La Reine se résolve à payer votre amour;
Car quoi que vous disiez, je dois craindre sa haine,
Et fuirais à ce prix cette illustre Romaine.

And yet, before the play ends, he tells Viriate:

Souffrez, après ce mot, que je meure à vos pieds.
J'y veux bien immoler tout mon bonheur au vôtre;
Mais je ne vous puis voir entre les bras d'un autre.

In all of his irresolution, one moment unable to control himself and wanting to die, the very next thinking of political expediency again, Sertorius is completely unable to evoke any sympathy from his audience, and one feels no real loss whatsoever when his death is announced.

The two women involved also forfeit all sympathy as a result of their respective actions. Aristie's plight as the rejected wife of Pompée is a very sad one, and one cannot help but feel sympathy for her as she learns of Pompée's coming:

J'apprends qu'un infidèle, autrefois mon époux,
Vient jusque dans ces murs conférer avec vous.
L'ordre de son tyran et sa flamme inquiète
Me pourront envier l'honneur de ma retraite:
L'un en prévoit la suite, et l'autre en craint l'éclat; 27
Et tous les deux contre elle ont leur raison d'État.

27 Ibid., p. 711.
28 Ibid., p. 744.
29 Ibid., p. 711.
She gains even more sympathy shortly after as she reveals her anger and jealousy and, at the same time, her willingness to return to Pompeé:

L'ingrat, par son divorce en faveur d'Emilie, M'a livrée aux mépris de toute l'Italie.
Vous savez à quel point mon courage est blessé;
M'aurais peine, Seigneur, à lui refuser grâce. 30

From this point until Aristie's interview with Pompeé, it is possible for us to pity her, and even to accept her desire to marry Sertorius as nothing more than jealous rage. But she forfeits all right to sympathy during the interview with Pompeé when, after being assured that he still loves her and has never consummated his marriage to Emilie, and after hearing him plead with her to wait for him for the brief interval until the end of Sylla's regime, she refuses to do so. Instead she tells him to break immediately with Sylla or she will marry Sertorius, and when he explains that he cannot do this for very sound political reasons, she tells him:

Adieu pour tout jamais. 32

Viriate, on the other hand, never really has our

30 Ibid., p. 712.

31 Pompeé felt that the only way Roman liberty could be restored was for him to remain at Sylla's side until the latter abdicated in his favor, whereby he (Pompeé) would restore freedom; and he knew at this time that Sylla was on the verge of abdicating.

32 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., II, 740.
sympathies, for she reveals from her very first appearance that she desires a husband for political reasons and that she wants nothing to do with love:

Ce ne sont pas les sens que mon amour consulte;  
Il hait des passions l'impétueux tumulte;  
Et son feu, que j'attache aux soins de ma grandeur  
Dédaigne tout mélange avec leur folle ardeur.  33

Later she reinforces her philosophy when she tells Sertorius:

Je ne veux point d'amant, mais je veux un époux;  
Mais je veux un héros, qui par son hymène  
Sache élever si haut le trône ou je suis née,  
Qu'il puisse de l'Espagne être l'heureux soutien  
Et laisser de vrais rois de mon sang et du sien.  34

It is with Viriate, in this writer's opinion, that Corneille made his most serious mistake in Sertorius. There is no reason why Viriate could not have been in love with Sertorius, and the play would have thus taken on a more serious appearance. Sertorius' plight, torn between the woman he loved and the one he should marry for political reasons, would have been greater; whereas, as the play stands now, he must choose between two insensitive, ambitious women, and one cannot help but conclude that his ultimate fate was preferable to marriage with either woman.

Consider also the tragic situation of Viriate, in love with Sertorius but facing the possibility of losing him to a political rival who does not love him, or still worse,

33Ibid., p. 716.  
34Ibid., p. 745.
of being forced to marry Perpenna in order to protect the life and the political future of the man she loves. Under these circumstances, the death of Sertorius would have held some meaning for her and for the audience.

The only possible explanation for the lack of emotion in Sertorius is that Corneille was attempting to prove, as he had so often and so recently stated, that love as a passion was not an essential requirement for successful tragedy. If this be the case, it is unfortunate that Corneille felt obliged to do so. In presenting the subject as he did, he seems only to have proven the opposite, for Sertorius, in spite of its excellent poetry and at least one superior scene, gives no real indication that Corneille has rediscovered the road to fine tragedy. As a matter of fact, his very next play, Sophonisbe (1663), appears to indicate that he has completely lost his way, for this tragedy, the aging dramatic poet's third major failure in his own time, is ranked by most critics as his very worst.

In this play, which like its predecessors has a similar background of Roman expansion, we learn that Sophonisbe has loved Massinisse, a prince of Numidie, and had been engaged to him, but while he was in Spain with her father, Asdrubal, she had married Syphax, king of

35 Act III, Scene I, consists of a highly esteemed, very long political discussion between Pompeé and Sertorius.
Numidie, a much older man, in order to make him an ally of Carthage. Syphax had defeated Massinisse and taken as a prisoner Éryxe, queen of Gétulie, who had aided Massinisse and fallen in love with him. Massinisse and his Roman allies are now trying to take Cyrthe, capital city of Numidie, which is defended by Syphax. A truce, common in Cornelian battles, allows Syphax to return to the city to seek Sophonisbe's permission to accept a favorable armistice, but the latter refuses and insists on his fighting. In the ensuing battle, Syphax is defeated, captured, and chained. Éryxe now hopes to win Massinisse, but the latter offers marriage to Sophonisbe as a means of saving her from captivity. She accepts, marries him, and reproaches Syphax for his inability to protect her. Then Massinisse, in an off-stage interview with Scipion, the Roman consul, learns that Rome will not allow the marriage and sends poison to Sophonisbe. She refuses his poison, however, and takes her own. As the play ends, Éryxe and Massinisse are urged to marry, and it is suggested that in time they may do so.

With the possible exception of Corneille's treatment of love, the play contributes little or nothing to the study of Cornelian tragedy, for it contains "nearly all the characteristic questionable features of its author's work... and exhibits them in their worst form." 36

36 Lockert, op. cit., p. 90.
Its chief contributions to literature are that it served as a vehicle for comparison with Jean Mairet's *Sophonisbe*, which preceded it by some thirty years, and that it provoked a long and bitter quarrel between the Abbé d'Aubignac and Corneille. Its chief weakness is that of omission, for, in treating the same theme as Mairet, and in attempting to avoid imitation, Corneille was forced to omit many of the best scenes afforded by the theme, such as Sophonisbe's first meeting with the victorious Massinisse, her suicide, and Massinisse's grief at her death.38

*Sophonisbe* is important in this study, however, for it illustrates better than any other play the extent to which Corneille believed in his recently created "amour politique et galant."

Massinisse presents an excellent portraiture of the "héros politique et galant" of which we spoke earlier. In his first appearance in the play he gives credit to Éryx for his victories, and he does it in a manner reminiscent of Cesar's victories for Cléopâtre in *Pompée*:

Enfin, maître absolu des murs et de la ville,
Je puis vous apporter un esprit plus tranquille,
Madame, et voir céder en ce reste du jour
Les soins de la victoire aux douceurs de l'amour.

37 For a brief but thorough analysis of the quarrel and its results, see Bray, *op. cit.*

Ma première victoire a fait votre esclavage:
Celle-ci, qui le brise, est encor votre ouvrage;
Mes bons destins par vous ont eu tout leur effet,
Et je suis seulement ce que vous m'avez fait.

Éryxe is not quite convinced of his love, however, for it was she who shortly before had observed that when Massinisse first saw Sophonisbe, "ses (his) troubles ont cessé, sa joie est revenue;" and rightly so, for in his first on-stage encounter with Sophonisbe, Massinisse proposes to her in identical "mots galants!"

N'attendez point, Madame, ici que je vous die
Que mon peu de mérite et mon trop de malheur
Ont seuls forcé Carthage à forcer votre coeur;
Que votre changement n'éteignit point ma flamme,
Qu'il ne vous ôta point l'empire de mon âme;
Et que si j'ai porté la guerre en vos Etats,
Vous étiez la conquête où pretendait mon bras.
Quand le temps est trop cher pour le perdre en paroles,
Toutes ces vérités sont des discours frivoles.

Shortly after Sophonisbe accepts his proposal, Massinisse reveals the shallowness of his love when, upon being informed by Éryxe that she (Éryxe) really did not love him, his reaction indicates a wounded pride:

Vous avez feint d'aimer, et permis l'espérance;
Mais cet amour traînant n'avait que l'apparence;
Et quand par votre hymen vous pouviez m'acquérir,
Vous m'avez renvoyé pour vaincre ou pour périr.
J'ai vaincu par votre ordre, et voilà avec surprise
Que je n'en ai pour fruit qu'une froide remise.

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39 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., II, 791-792.
40 Ibid., p. 789.
41 Ibid., p. 797.
42 Ibid., p. 801.
It is really toward the end of the play, however, that Massinisse comes to light as "un heros galant," as he pleads with Lélius, Scipion's representative, for Roman acceptance of his marriage to Sophonisbe:

Chargez, chargez-moi donc de vos fers en sa place:  
Au lieu d'un conquérant par vos mains couronné,  
Traînez à votre Rome un vainqueur enchaîné.  
Je suis à Sophonisbe, et mon amour fidèle  
Dédaigne et diadème et liberté sans elle;  
Je ne veux ni régner, ni vivre qu'en ses bras:  
Non, je ne veux... 43

Like Thésée in _Oedipe_, Massinisse would give up everything, including his life, in order to have his Sophonisbe. Unlike Thésée however, Massinisse is not a naive, inexperienced individual, and thus his gallantry makes him appear all the more ridiculous to us. Moreover, he does not stop at this point, for realizing that his plea thus far has been unsuccessful, he becomes more emotional:

Résolus à ma perte, hélas! que vous importe  
Si ma juste douleur se retient ou s'emporte?  
Mes pleurs et mes soupirs vous fléchiront-ils mieux?  
Et faut-il à genoux vous parler comme aux Dieux? 44

Later, in asking Sophonisbe to help him, he says:

Il (Scipion) vient d'entrer au camp; venez-y par vos charmes  
Appuyer mes soupirs et secourir mes larmes. 45

And finally, unsuccessful in his attempt to convince Scipion to let his marriage with Sophonisbe stand, he

43 _Ibid._, p. 817.  
44 _Ibid._, p. 817.  
45 _Ibid._, p. 820.
writes to her a final letter "qu'ont arrosé ses pleurs, qu'ont suivi ses sanglots." Thus, for the first time in Corneille's drama, the hero resorts to tears over his plight. Massinisse is a far cry from Rodrigue! Furthermore, once he realizes that even tears will not work, Massinisse apparently decides to direct his love back to Éryxe. By this time he has changed so often that even Sophonisbe is aware "qu'il est Numide et sujet (donc) à un amour qui s'allume et s'éteint en un jour." 

Ironically, Sophonisbe should be the very last person in the play to criticize the amorous actions of Massinisse, for she, in an attempt to secure her political position, is guilty of far worse in that she shifted not only her attention but her marriage vows from one man to another. Initially she had loved Massinisse, but during his absence and for political reasons, she married Syphax and stopped loving Massinisse:

Je brûlais d'un beau feu, je promis de l'éteindre; J'ai tenu ma parole. . . .

Then, when Massinisse returns and proposes marriage, she quickly recognizes the possibilities for her future and indicates that she perhaps still loves him:

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46 Ibid., p. 826.
48 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., II, 826.
49 Ibid., p. 785.
L'hymen que vous m'offrez peut rallumer mes feux.

She thus accepts the proposal, and enters into a bigamous marriage, for which, incidentally, Corneille was highly criticized in spite of his attempts to show that captivity meant automatic divorce under ancient Roman rule. If her sin be great in marrying Massinisse while Syphax still lives, it becomes even more so somewhat later when she fears that Massinisse will not succeed with the Romans and offers to return to Syphax:

Cependant, bien qu'un autre ait le titre d'époux, Sauvez-moi des Romains, je suis encore à vous.

It is unfortunate that Sophonisbe elected to take poison and terminate her life, for had she decided to go on living with Massinisse, one could at least conclude that the two deserved each other.

Syphax, in his actions, is an aging imitation of the Cornelian hero portrayed by Massinisse. His entire world appears to depend upon Sophonisbe, for regardless of his situation, he concerns himself more with her reaction than with the problem at hand. "Roi en danger, il pense à sa femme et non à son trône; roi détrôné, mari abandonné, il pense encore à sa femme."

The exaggerated "amours galants" and "marriages politiques" were too excessive however, for even at a time

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50 Ibid., p. 796.
51 Ibid., p. 809.
52 Couton, op. cit., p. 88.
when such themes were popular, *Sophonisbe* was a failure and Corneille was accused, as he himself admitted, "d'avoir efféminé mes héros par une docte et sublime complaisance au goût de nos délicats." 53

In spite of the failure of *Sophonisbe*, Corneille did not change the central theme of his drama, for the three plays which followed—*Othon* (1664), *Agésilas* (1666), and *Attila* (1667)—while representing a definite improvement and serving to prove that *Sophonisbe* was more a mistake than a representative play, 54 offer little variety by way of format or structure from those already examined. Each is a political intrigue where love and marriage of the type previously discussed is the central theme.

While the stories vary according to their respective sources, the situations are similar in that the theme of each play is concerned with the choice of the proper spouse for insuring the strongest political alliance. The opening lines of each play indicate well this similarity:

> On s'étonne de voir qu'un homme tel qu'Othon, Othon, dont les hauts faits soutiennent le grand nom, Daigne d'un Vinius se réduire à la fille. *(Othon)* 55

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Ma soeur, depuis un mois nous voilà dans Ephèse
Prêtes à recevoir ces illustres époux
Que Lysander, mon père, a su choisir pour nous.

(Agésilas) 56

Mais, Seigneur, quel besoin de les en consulter?
Pourquoi de votre hymen les prendre pour arbitres?

(Attila) 57

Moreover, the similarities do not end with the situations. Most of the male protagonists in each play display such identical feelings of "amour galant" that there exists between them, and their immediate predecessors as well, no significant difference, so that almost any one could change roles with any other, and there would be no noticeable distinction.

Othon, as an example, in the very beginning of the play which bears his name, points out that he had chosen

56 Ibid., p. 908.
57 Ibid., p. 988.
58 This play is another Roman political intrigue story. Galba is emperor of Rome during this time, and Othon, a Roman senator, although he had been one of the first to support the former, soon found that he was in danger of being put to death, along with others who had been favorites of Neron, unless he procured for himself powerful protection at the court. Consequently he sought to wed Plautine, daughter of Vinius, the Roman consul. He succeeded in winning her affections, the approval of her father, and even fell in love with her. Then he was advised that he should seek the hand of Camille, Galba's niece, in order to succeed Galba and prevent someone else from becoming emperor. He finally agrees and then succeeds in winning the affections of Camille, only to learn that Galba has promised the throne to Piso. The remainder of the plot consists of political schemes by those surrounding Othon directed at procuring the throne for the latter. He finally wins the throne and Plautine, not through his own endeavor, but due to the fact that the army rejects Piso as emperor, and Galba falls into a trap set by one.
to marry Plautine for political reasons, but that he had later fallen in love with her:

Il (mon coeur) ne le sentit pas, Albin, du premier jour;
Mais cette politique est devenue amour;
Tout m'en plaît, tout m'en charme, et mes premiers scrupules
Près du si cher objet passent pour ridicules. 59

Albin, Othon's friend, then informs him that he should direct his attention to Camille, but the latter says that such action is impossible:

Mon coeur, tout à Plautine, est fermé pour Camille.
La beauté de l'objet, la honte de changer,
Le succès incertain, l'infaillible danger,
Tout fait à tes projets d'invincibles obstacles. 60

Shortly after, when Vinius tells him it is not politically sound for him to marry Plautine, Othon's "galant" protestations of his love for Plautine and his inability to do without her become more intense:

Je ne prends plus de lois que de ma passion:
Plautine est l'objet seul de mon ambition;
... 
Que m'importe après tout, si tel est mon malheur
De mourir par son ordre, ou mourir de douleur
... 
Mais j'adore Plautine, et je règne en son âme:
Nous ordonner d'éteindre une si belle flamme,
C'est ... je ne l'ose dire... 
... 
Je n'en veux rien jugez, Seigneur, et sans Plautine
L'amour m'est un poison, le bonheur m'assassine;

of Othon's friends and is killed, along with Vinius, by Lacus, one of his own friends, who then takes his own life.

59  Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., II, 841.
60  Ibid., p. 842.
Et toutes les douceurs du pouvoir souverain
Me sont d'affreux tourments, s'il m'en coûte sa main.

Et l'amour est la seule où tout mon cœur s'applique.
Rien ne vous a servi, Seigneur, de me nommer:
Vous voulez que je règne, et je ne sais qu'aimer.
Je pourrais savoir plus, si l'astre qui domine
Me voulait faire un jour régner avec Plautine;
Mais dérober son âme à de si doux appas,
Pour attacher sa vie à ce qu'on n'aime pas! 61

In spite of his "profound" love and his desire to die if
he cannot marry Plautine, Othon's very next step, in the
form of political expediency, is to propose to Camille.
One cannot help but wonder about the sincerity of such
love, and of such an individual, for that matter.

The three gentlemen lovers of Corneille's next play,
Agésilas,62 are no different from Othon. Each loves

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61 Ibid., pp. 844-846.

62 Except for Corneille's mislabeling of this play
as a tragedy, it would not be discussed here, for it is
much more comedy than tragedy. Lockert (op. cit., p. 92)
says Agésilas is "only an inept experiment in a new kind
of light comedy, with a nominally classical setting and
colorless characters who in all but their classical
names are French gallants." In any case, the play is a
story of misguided betrothals. As it begins, we learn
that Lysander, Agésilas' minister, has engaged his two
daughters, Elpinice and Aglatide, to Cotys, king of
Paphlagonia, and Spitridate, a Persian nobleman, while
Agésilas, king of Sparta, plans to marry Mandane,
Spitridate's sister. However, as the play progresses,
we see that Spitridate and Elpinice love each other,
Cotys and Mandane love each other, and Aglatide is her-
self eager to wed Agésilas, chiefly because he is a
king, although he had, in fact, once encouraged her to
believe he might be interested in marrying her. All of
this information is made available in Act I, and the
remainder of the play consists mostly of discussions of
the political implications of the marriages and/or changes
desired. The confusion is finally cleared up when
Agésilas decides to marry Aglatide, after seeing that he
is beginning to love her, thus paving the way for the
other necessary switches to be made.
deeply and speaks of his love in gallant terms; when faced with the possibility of losing his loved one, each bemoans his sad plight and speaks of dying; but in the final analysis none is willing to do anything to protect his love interest.

Spitridate quite eloquently tells Elpinice of his love for her:

A ce moment fatal qui nous permit la vue
   Et de vous et de cette soeur,
   Mon âme devint toute émue,
   Et le trouble aussitôt s'empara de mon coeur;
   Je le sentis pour elle tout de glace,
   Je le sentis tout de flamme pour vous.63

Like Othon, he too laments when he learns that he may be forced to marry Aglatide instead of Elpinice:

Voyez s'il fut jamais un amant plus à plaindre,
   Un cœur plus accablé de mortelles douleurs.
   C'est un malheur sans doute égal au trépas même
   Que d'attacher sa vie à ce qu'on n'aime pas.
   Et voir en d'autre mains passer tout ce qu'on aime.
   C'est un malheur encore plus grand que le trépas. 64

Yet when he has the opportunity to explain the situation to Lysander, he is too cowardly to do so, and as he flees, his parting words are:

. . . Seigneur, je tremble à vous le dire:
   Ma soeur vous l'expliquera mieux. 65

Cotys is a carbon copy of Spitridate, except that his words of love for Mandane are even more précieux:

63 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., II, 916.
64 Ibid., p. 916.
65 Ibid., p. 927.
Ce n'est point qu'Elpinice aux miens n'ait paru belle;
Mais enfin (le dirai-je?), c.i, Seigneur, on m'a pris,
On m'a volé ce coeur que j'apportais pour elle:
D'autres yeux, malgré moi, s'en sont fait les tyrans,
Et ma foi s'est armée en vain pour ma défense;
Ce lâche, qui s'est mis de leur intelligence,
Les a soudain reçus en justes conquérants.

He finds the loss of Mandane and marriage to Elpinice
just as difficult to anticipate, but he can do nothing
about it, in spite of whatever ill effect it might have
on him, because:

Ma parole est donnée, et dussé-je en mourir,
Je la tiendrai, Seigneur, jusqu'au dernier soupir.  

Agésilas is of such slight significance in the play —
until Act V he appears in only three short scenes of
political discussions (III, 1, 2, and 3) — that he merits
little attention, and he is mentioned here only because
of the ridiculous facility with which he transfers his
love from Mandane to Aglatide. At the beginning of Act V,
when he is told by his ministers that he should not marry
the foreigner Mandane and that he should give some thought
to Aglatide, who is interested in him, he professes his
love for the former, but reluctantly agrees to give her
up. Shortly after, however, when she sees him for the
first time in the play, he suffers to an almost unbel-
lievable extent:

O vue! Ô sur mon coeur regards trop absolus!

66 Ibid., p. 929.
67 Ibid., p. 930.
Que vous allez troubler mes voeux irrésolus!
Ne partez pas, Mandane. O ciel! j'en vais trop dire.
Qui, partez, encore que j'en soupire.

J'aime trop à vous voir et je vous ai trop vue:
   C'est, Madame, ce qui me tue.
Partez, partez, de grace. 68

Just a few short moments after this, with great ease and as though nothing had ever happened, he tells Aglatide, in front of the entire cast:

Mais pour le rendre encor plus doux et plus charmant
Sachez que Sparte voit sa reine en Aglatide,
A qui le ciel en moi rend son premier amant... Rendons nos coeurs, Madame, à des flammes si belles:
Et tous ensemble allons préparer ce beau jour Qui, par un triple hymen, couronnera l'amour! 69

Thus, with little or no vraisemblance, another Cornelian hero, following a trend initiated by Sertorius and supported by Massinisitse, makes full use of his "amour politique et galant" by shifting it from one woman to another in accordance with the requirements of his country's political policy. While there is no real counterpart to Agésilas in Attila, the last of the plays to be discussed in this chapter, Attila's "amour galant" for Ildione, due to the nature of the protagonist, 70 is

68 Ibid., pp. 972-973.
69 Ibid., p. 983.
70 This play resembles Rodogune in that Attila, the king of the Huns, like Cléopâtre, is a vicious, hard-hearted person bent upon satisfying his ambition at all costs. The scene of the action is in Attila's camp in Norique, where he has with him his two fiancées, Honorie, sister of the Emperor Valentinian, and Ildione, sister of Merouée, king of the Franks. Present also are Ardaric, king of the Gepides, and Valamir, king of the Ostrogoths.
almost as inappropriate and invraisemblable as Agésilas' love, and is generally considered, in addition to the dénouement, as the chief defect in the play. It is almost impossible for us to visualize this "savage Mongolian conqueror, who would be ignorant of any love but sheer animalism," as capable of the same refined ideas of love and the same gallant language as the Cornelian heros who precede him. However, Corneille, in spite of a change in locale, persisted in creating the same type of marriage play with its now common "heros galant."

In the first scene of Act III, Attila reveals his

Ardaric and Ildione love each other, Valamir and Honorie also. However, Attila's plans are to make allies of the Franks and Romans by marrying one of the two princesses and keeping the other as hostage, and, in order to avoid being blamed for rejecting one of the princesses, he asks Ardaric and Valamir to decide for him which he shall marry. When they delay a decision, he suspects them of trying to aid the women and has them imprisoned. Still unable to marry one and reject the other, for he despises Honorie's arrogance and fears that Ildione, whom he loves, will control him. Attila then offers each king the woman he loves on condition that he kill the other king. They again hesitate, and learn that his plan is to have the murderer killed by the victim's subjects. Fearing Ardaric's death Ildione pretends to love Attila and, although he doubts her, he decides to marry her and informs Honorie that if she wishes to save Valamir, she must marry Octar, one of Attila's soldiers. The dénouement is brought about by the death of Attila which results not from the actions of the characters, but from excessive nose bleeding brought on by his extreme anger. Thus the couples, Ardaric and Ildione, Valamir and Honorie, are free to marry.

71 Lockert, op. cit., p. 95.
love for Ildione, and he immediately proves that he is no less eloquent than his predecessors:

O beauté, qui te fais adorer en tous lieux, 
Cruel poison de l'âme, et doux charme des yeux, 
Ah! vous me charmez trop, moi de qui l'âme altière, 
Cherche à voir sous mes pas trembler la terre entière:
Moi qui veux pouvoir tout, sitôt que je vous vois, 
Malgré tout cet orgueil, je ne puis rien sur moi. 
Je veux, je tâche en vain d'éviter par la fuite 
Ce charme dominant qui marche à votre suite:
Mes plus heureux succès ne font qu'enfonder mieux 
L'inévitable trait dont me percent vos yeux. 
Un regard imprévu leur fait une victoire; 
Leur moindre souvenir l'emporte sur ma gloire: 
Il s'empare et du coeur et des soins les plus doux; 
Et j'oublie Attila dès que je pense à vous. 72

It is indeed unfortunate that Corneille chose as his protagonist a man whose historical reputation prohibits our visualizing him as anything but a savage, cruel, and cunning warrior, for, in spite of his gallant language, Attila seems to feel the sincere, profound, passionate kind of love long absent in Cornelian drama.

It was pointed out previously that the final three plays in this period, Othon, Agésilas, and Attila, contain many similarities, among which are the nearly identical situations, or themes, of each, and the type of love of the male protagonists. Another great similarity may be found in the roles played by women in these plays, for they, in all Cornelian tragedies in this period, fall into one of two equally stereotyped categories: the haughty, ambitious crown seeker, to whom love and marriage

72 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., II, 1017.
are requirements for advancement only and thus subject to change as political fortunes change; and the sincere but submissive lover who is willing to sacrifice everything, including her love, in order to aid her loved one or to avoid defiance of royal authority.

In the first category we have already placed Viriate and Aristie (Sertorius), and Sophonisbe. In addition, we may add Eryxe (Sophonisbe), Camille (Othon), Aglatide and Mandane (Agésilas), and Honorie (Attila). The identical personality of each of these illustrious women is well illustrated by the following excerpts from the plays concerned:

**ERYXE (Sophonisbe):**

L'hymen des rois doit être au-dessus de l'amour;
Et je sais qu'en un prince heureux et magnanime
Mille infidélités ne sauraient faire un crime;
Mais si tout inconstant il est digne de moi,
Il a cessé de l'être en cessant d'être roi. 73

**CAMILLE (Othon):**

Et j'avouerai, Seigneur, que pour mon hymeneé
Je crois tenir un peu de Rome où je suis née. . .
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
J'aime mieux un mari qui sache être empereur,
Qu'un mari qui le soit et souffre un gouverneur. 74

**AGLATIDE (Agésilas) to Elpinice:**

Il n'est pas roi, . . . et c'est un grand défaut. . .
J'ai peut-être le coeur trop haut,
Mais aussi bien que vous je sors du sang d'Hercule;
Et lorsqu'on vous destine un roi pour votre époux,
J'en veux un aussi bien que vous.
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
. . . pourvu qu'un amant soit roi,

73 Ibid., p. 831.
74 Ibid., p. 870, 873.
Il est trop aimable pour moi.
Mais sans trône on perd temps: C'est la première idée
Qu'à l'amour en mon coeur il ait plu de tracer. 75

MANDANE (Agésilas):
Je ne sais si le ciel pour régner m'a fait naître,
Et quoi qu'en ma faveur j'aye encore vu paraître,
Je doute si l'on aime ou non;
Mais je pourrais être assez vaine
Pour dédaigner le nom de reine
Que m'offrirait un roi qui n'en eût que le nom. 76

HONORIE (Attila):
Que j'estime assez peu le sang de Théodore
Pour souffrir qu'en moi-même un tyran en dispose,
Qu'une main qu'il me doit me choisisse un mari,
Et me présente un roi comme son favori!
Pour peu que vous m'aimiez, Seigneur, vous devez croire
Que rien ne m'est sensible à l'égal de ma gloire.
Règnez comme Attila, je vous préfère à lui;
Mais point d'époux qui m'abaisse au rang de ses sujets.
Enfin, je veux un roi: regardez si vous l'êtes. 77

In the second category we have already discovered
Dircé (Oedipe), and we can also place here the three
remaining important female characters not yet discussed:
Plautine (Othon); Elpinice (Agésilas); and Ildione (Attila).

Plautine first reveals her role when she learns
that it is necessary for Othon to marry someone else in
order that he and her father might survive. At this
point she tells Othon:

A votre sûreté, puisque le peril presse,
J'immolerai ma flamme et toute ma tendresse, 78

She goes on to say that Othon must marry Camille for his

75 Ibid., p. 909, 912.
76 Ibid., p. 924.
77 Ibid., p. 1004.
78 Ibid., p. 847.
good as well as that of their country, and that while it hurts her deeply to give him to another, she will be consoled by the fact that "le choix de (mon) coeur fut digne de l'empire." And finally, when Othon's plan to marry Camille fails, it is Plautine who is once more willing to sacrifice herself, this time by marrying Martian, whom she despises, in order to gain the needed vote on Galba's council.

Elpinice (Agésilas), indicates her submissiveness when she reveals to her sister that while she doesn't love Cotys, her father has affianced her to him and:

Des qu'un père parle, il porte en mon courage Toute l'impression qu'il faut pour obéir.

Later, when asked by Spitridate to confirm her love for him, she replies:

Que voulez-vous que je vous die? Je suis sujette et fille, et j'ai promis ma foi; Je depends d'un amant, et d'un père, et d'un roi.

Finally, Ildione (Attila) is one who loves sincerely but will not, under any circumstances, defy lawful authority:

Mais ce n'est point à moi de rompre une alliance Dont il vient d'attacher vos Huns avec sa France.

However, she is willing to sacrifice everything in order

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79 Ibid., p. 849.
80 Ibid., p. 917.
81 Ibid., p. 953.
82 Ibid., p. 1009.
to help her loved one, for it is she who, in an attempt to prevent Ardaric's death, persuades Attila to marry her. Fortunately for her, Attila's inglorious death saves her from having to go through with the marriage, but her unselfish act is nonetheless commendable.

Thus we see that the final three plays of this period add nothing new to what has been observed in the first three. Like their predecessors, these plays all contain gallant love and political marriage as a theme, and the reactions of the characters become so identical that it is often difficult to distinguish one from another.

During this third stage of the evolution of Corneillian drama, we note only one major difference from the tragedies of the previous period. There continues to exist no real emotional conflict, in spite of situations which could easily produce such a conflict; the physical conflict is still based on political issues; the romanesque and melodramatic elements are ever present; plot complexity is still of prime importance; and the will of the Cornelian hero is still generally passive. It seems strange that Corneille, after retiring from the theater because he had lost touch with his audience, and after having written, during the interim, his three important discours on the dramatic art, would return to the theater with the same type of tragedy. Yet this is, from all outward appearances, exactly what happened, for
the plays of both periods are essentially identical, with
the exception of an emphasis on a new kind of love in the
tragedies of this third period.

It is the portrayal of this new type of love, how­
ever, which indicates that Corneille, aware of his past
failures, was attempting to regain his lost art and
recapture his lost audiences, for, in portraying love
as he did, he dramatized in the genre of serious tragedy:

les mouvements et le langage de la tendresse à
la mode: romanques amoureux, sentimentalité
précieuse, symboles et métaphysique du coeur
et de l'esprit, issus de la pastorale et de la
tragi-comédie, de l'Astrée et des romans contem­
porains. Il suit la mode, l'esprit de son
temps et son propre goût. Il n'omettra aucun
des thèmes habituels: démission de l'héroïsme
devant l'amour, longues et prudentes démarches
de l'amé à travers les périls de la "Carte du
Tendre;" mystique et politique amoureuses;
amour gynécocentré; complexes états d'âme où
se heurtent la gloire, l'amour, l'amitié,
ambition; confusion troublante de sentiments,
en particulier de la tendresse fraternelle et
d'amour.83

Time has since proven that Corneille's choice was
an unfortunate one, for while most of these tragedies
were popular during the time when préciosité and gallan­
try reigned supreme, their popularity ended with the
death of the movement.

83
Nadal, op. cit., p. 277.
Eight months after the first representation of Attila, Racine, on November 17, 1667, presented Andromaque to the French theater-going public, and in so doing he showed that a tragedy could be produced, and very successfully, with love alone as its theme and with little or no political, patriotic, religious, or any other such motivation. The success of Andromaque obviously had some effect on Corneille, for it must be considered more than mere coincidence that this aging and declining dramatic poet returned, in 1670, after a lapse of twenty-seven years, to the tragedy of inner conflict and, more significantly, to an inner conflict produced solely by the passions, with little or no outside motivation. Tite et Bérénice, in spite of its classification by Corneille as a comédie héroïque, is just such a tragedy.

The plot of this play is relatively simple, at least in comparison to those Cornelian tragedies discussed in the two preceding chapters. Tite had loved Berenice when his father, Vespasian, was Emperor of Rome,

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1 Lancaster, op. cit., IV, I, 61.
but their marriage had been prohibited because Bérénice was a Jewish queen, and Tite was betrothed to Domitie, the daughter of Corbulon and a member of the Roman nobility. The latter loves Domitian, Tite's brother, but desires to be empress. As the play opens, Tite and Domitie are to be married in four days. Domitian, in the meantime, seeking to recapture Domitie's love, has arranged for his confident to return Bérénice to Rome in the hope that she may cause Tite to change his mind. The plan is successful and Tite renews his interest in Bérénice, while Domitie seeks revenge. Bérénice, however, refuses Tite's offer to give up the empire and marry her, for she fears that such a move would cost him his life. Yet she is unwilling to allow the Senate to force her to leave Rome, or to see Tite marry her rival. Domitian proposes that Tite give him Domitie, and when his request is refused, he asks that he be given Bérénice in order to avenge his loss of Domitie to Tite. This request is also refused. In order to prevent the banishment of Bérénice from Rome, Tite is about to dismiss the Senate, when word arrives that Domitian has persuaded it to adopt Berenice as a Roman and to leave to Tite the question of whom he shall marry. Tite is at first elated by the news, for he can see no other obstacle to the marriage. Bérénice, however, her pride satisfied in knowing that she will not be banished, reveals that because she loves Tite,
she cannot expose him to the danger of being killed by some irate Roman citizen who refuses to accept the Senate's decision. Convinced that Tite will never love anyone but her, she consents to his marriage to Domitie. Tite, however, affected by Bérénice's example, renounces matrimony for himself and promises that his brother shall marry Domitie and that they, upon Tite's death, shall succeed to the throne.

*Tite et Bérénice* represents a considerable change from its immediate predecessors. While it is still a "histoire à deux fils," it contains by no means the complexity of plot characteristic of every Cornelian tragedy written after *Polyeucte*; the melodramatic and the romanesque have disappeared; the "amour politique et galant" has been replaced by a more realistic form of that passion, although some few traces of gallantry remain in Domitian; there are no political discussions, and while the theme is in a sense political in that it is concerned with the prohibition of a royal marriage, attention is devoted to the reactions of the individuals concerned rather than to political discussion for or against the marriage; the emphasis on the element of inner conflict returns, after a lengthy absence, to Cornelian tragedy; and finally, there is no physical conflict in this play which can be said to be similar to that found in any of the earlier plays. Instead, the knowledge on the part of Tite and Bérénice that the
Senate and Roman customs prohibit the marriage of a Roman emperor with a Jewish queen is all that is necessary to produce the emotional torment engendered in this tragedy.

In the opinion of this writer, Corneille handled the element of physical conflict better in *Tite et Bérénice* than in most of his previous works. In the first place, there are no fights, no deaths, no physical clashes, in the play. What takes place is solely a result of the fact that such a marriage will or will not be prohibited. In the beginning stages it is the knowledge that the marriage between Tite and Bérénice will not be allowed which produces a struggle within the hearts of Tite, Berenice, and Domitian, while the possibility of the marriage gives rise to torment within Domitie and emotional anxiety in Tite and Domitian. Furthermore, the manner in which Corneille presents the idea, through infrequent mention of the news of the Senate meeting, allows full attention to be devoted to the reactions of those affected by the action of the Senate. From this point of view, the play is very well constructed.

Unlike any Cornelian tragedy since *Polyeucte*, *Tite et Bérénice* is filled with emotional torment from beginning to end. Domitie is the first to experience it, and throughout the play, as her position is altered, her conflict undergoes changes which reflect her reactions to her varying positions. At the beginning of the play she is to be married in four days to Tite, and thus is about
to succeed in her ambition to reign, and yet she is unhappy:

"Mon coeur dans tout l'empire est le seul mécontent."\(^2\)

She feels this way, she tells her confident, because although Tite will marry her, he does not love her and, as a result:

J'ambitionne et crains l'hymen d'un empereur
Dont j'ai lieu de douter si j'aurai tout le coeur.\(^3\)

Later, in her first interview with Domitian, she tells him that she loves him, but that her desire to rule is the strongest emotion:

Je ne veux point, seigneur, vous le dissimuler,
Mon coeur va tout à vous quand je le laisse aller:
Mais sans dissimuler j'ose aussi vous le dire,
Ce n'est pas mon dessein qu'il m'en coûte l'empire.\(^4\)

She proposes that, in order for both of them to be happy, Domitian provide her with the opportunity to become empress as well as his wife:

Tout mon coeur vous préfère à cet heureux rival;
Pour m'avoir toute à vous, devenez son égal.\(^5\)

Up to this point, Domitie's conflict is one between her ambition and her love, with her ambition the stronger emotion. Once Bérénice returns and Domitie is faced with the possibility of losing the throne to her, all

\(^{2}\)Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., II, 1054.
\(^{3}\)Ibid., p. 1054.
\(^{4}\)Ibid., p. 1060.
\(^{5}\)Ibid., p. 1060.
semblance of love disappears, she becomes obsessed with jealousy and anger, and she demonstrates throughout the remainder of the play the "wrath of a woman scorned":

Contre un tel empereur nous n'en manquerons pas. S'il épouse sa reine, il est l'horreur de Rome. Trouvons alors, trouvons un grand coeur, un grand homme, Un Romain qui réponde au sang de mes aieux; Et pour le révolter, laisse faire à mes yeux. Juge par le pouvoir de ceux de Bérénice, Si les miens auront peine à s'en faire justice. Si ceux-là forcent Tite à me manquer de foi, Ceux-ci feront briser le joug d'un nouveau roi; Et, si de l'univers les siens charment le maître, Les miens charmeront ceux qui méritent de l'être.

Domitie is, beyond any doubt, a woman dominated by ambition, but she is not, as has been the case with many women in Corneille's previous plays, a woman without feeling. Quite the contrary, for she demonstrates all the hurt, anger, and jealousy characteristic of a woman who has been rejected by the man, or in this case the two men, with whom she was involved.

Domitian is the complete opposite in character of the woman he loves, for he is a man for whom love is everything and life without love is not worth living. In his first appearance in the play, he reveals his unwillingness to live without Domitie:

Faut-il mourir, madame? et, si proche du terme, Votre illustre inconstance est-elle encor si ferme, Que les restes d'un feu que j'avais cru si fort Puissent dans quatres jours se promettre ma mort?

6 Ibid., p. 1076.
7 Ibid., p. 1058.
Later, when his confident, Albin, suggests that Bérénice br brought back in an attempt to renew Tite's interest in her, Domitian finds new hope, but even then he loves Domitie so much that he hesitates to do anything which might displease her:

Mais j'aime Domitie; et lui parler contre elle
C'est me mettre au hasard d'irriter l'infidèle.
Ne me condamne point, Albin, à la trahir.
A joindre à ses mépris le droit de me haïr;
En vain je veux contre elle écouter ma colère;
Toute ingrate qu'elle est, je tremble à lui déplaire.

While Domitian appears at first glance to be but another "héros galant" in that he speaks of dying if he cannot marry Domitie, in reality he is far from being one, for he, unlike any of his immediate predecessors, is not content with lamenting his sad plight. He is instead a man of action – of intelligent psychological action. He realizes that he cannot defy his brother, for to do so would be to betray his country, and he can accomplish nothing as a traitor. Instead, he agrees to have Bérénice returned to Rome, and he proceeds to cause Tite to renew his interest in her. Then he informs Tite of his love for Domitie and asks the Emperor to give her to him. When his proposal proves unacceptable due to Domitie's desire to reign, Domitian then asks Tite that he be allowed to marry Bérénice, which results in arousing jealousy in both Tite and Domitie.

Ibid., p. 1064.
While he does appear somewhat inconsistent in that, after vowing that he would prefer death to life without Domitie's love, he proposes marriage to Bérénice, his explanation to Domitie is a logical one:

**DOMITIAN:**
Son nom seul prononcé vous a mise en alarme:
Me puis-je mieux venger, si vous me trahissez,
Que d'aimer à vos yeux ce que vous haïssiez?

**DOMITIE:**
Parlons à coeur ouvert. Aimez-vous Bérénice?

**DOMITIAN:**
Autant qu'il faut l'aimer pour vous faire un supplice...
J'épouserai, madame, ou Bérénice, ou vous.\(^9\)

Furthermore, his tactics work, for he succeeds in making Domitie jealous:

Ou Bérénice ou moi! La chose est donc égale,
Et vous ne m'aimez plus qu'autant que ma rivale?\(^10\)

Domitian's predicament throughout the play is a sad one, and his actions succeed in acquiring for him both pity and admiration, for no matter what he tries in an effort to regain Domitie, he is never quite able to accomplish it, and yet he never ceases to try, nor does he allow himself to be lowered in stature by hating either Domitie or his brother.

The inner conflict in Tite is noted upon his first appearance in the play, and it ends only in the very last scene when, following the example set by Bérénice, he is

\(^9\)Ibid., p. 1096.

\(^10\)Ibid., p. 1096.
able to elevate himself above his personal desire.

Upon learning that Bérénice's ambassadors have come for his wedding, Tite reveals the effect that Bérénice's return could have upon him:

Jusqu' après mon hymen remettons leur venue;  
J'aurais trop à rougir si j'y souffrais leur vue,  
Et recevais les yeux de ses propres sujets  
Pour envieux témoins du vol que je lui fais.  
Car mon coeur fut son bien à cette belle reine,  
Et pourrait l'être encor, malgré Rome et sa haine,  
Si ce divin objet, qui fut tout mon désir,  
Par quelque doux regard s'en venait ressaisir.  

He points out how much he had loved Bérénice and what wonderful memories he has of their love. But he tells his confident that when his father died and he became emperor:

J'ai pris ses sentiments lorsque j'ai pris sa place;  
Je m'impose à mon tour les lois qu'il m'imposait,  
Et me dis après lui tout ce qu'il me disait.  
J'ai des yeux d'empereur, et n'ai plus ceux de Tite;  
Je vois en Domitie un tout autre mérite,  
J'écoute la raison, j'en goûte les conseils,  
Et j'aime comme il faut qu'aient tous mes pareils.  

Now, however, just four days before his marriage, he finds himself torn between his love for Bérénice and his duty as emperor. He reveals that his only hope is that Bérénice, in spite of the everlasting love she had promised him, has now found someone else:

N'aurais-tu point appris qu'elle fût infidèle,  
Qu'elle écoutât les rois qui soupirent pour elle?  
Dis-moi que Polémon règne dans son esprit,  
J'en aurai du chagrin, j'en aurai du dépit,

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11 Ibid., p. 1065.  
12 Ibid., p. 1069.
D'une vive douleur j'en aurai l'âme atteinte:
Mais j'épouserai l'autre avec moins de contrainte.  

This expressed desire gives rise to what may be considered one of the most dramatic scenes, however short, in the play (II, 4):

**FLAVIAN:**

Vous en serez surpris,
Seigneur, je vous apporte une grande nouvelle:
La reine Bérénice.

**TITE:**

Eh bien! est infidèle?
Et son esprit, charmé par un plus doux souci.

**FLAVIAN:**

Elle est dans ce palais, seigneur; et la voici.

From this point on, Tite's struggle becomes more and more intense. He at first resolves to abdicate and flee with Bérénice, but the latter refuses to allow him to do so, for she knows he would be sought out and put to death by his successor. Then, when it is suggested that, as emperor, Tite can marry Bérénice if he so desires, he quickly realizes that Domitie, obsessed with the idea of becoming empress, has a legitimate claim and, once rejected, will seek his death. Faced with the realization that he will lose Bérénice in either case, he once more decides to abdicate and live with Bérénice in her country. Once more she refuses, and before a decision can be made, the news from the Senate is announced. At

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13Ibid., p. 1066.
14Ibid., p. 1073.
last a solution is in sight. But Bérénice, for reasons which will be explained momentarily, still cannot accept the marriage. Tite is at first troubled, but, uplifted by Bérénice's example, he is able to accept his fate and to resolve his conflict:

TITE:
Madame en ce refus un tel amour éclate,
Que j'aurais pour vous l'âme au dernier point ingrate,
Et mériterais mal ce qu'on a fait pour moi,
Si je portais ailleurs la main que je vous dois,
Tout est à vous: l'amour, l'honneur, Rome l'ordonne.
Un si noble refus n'enrichera personne.
J'en jure par l'espoir qui nous fut le plus doux:
Tout est à vous, madame, et ne sera qu'à vous;
Et ce que mon amour doit à l'excès du vôtre
Ne deviendra jamais le partage d'une autre.

BERENICE:
Le mien vous aurait fait déjà ces beaux serments,
S'il n'eût craint d'inspirer de pareils sentiments:
Vous vous devez des fils, et des Césars à Rome,
Qui fassent à jamais revivre un si grand homme.

TITE:
Pour revivre en des fils nous n'en mourons pas moins,
Et vous mettez ma gloire au-dessus de ces soins.
Du levant au couchant, du More jusqu'au Scythe,
Les peuples vanteront et Bérénice et Tite;
Et l'histoire à l'envi forcera l'avenir
D'en garder à jamais l'illustre souvenir. 15

Bérénice, the most appealing figure in the play, is also the most complex. "Amante et reine, elle est tour à tour capable de soumission et d'orgueil, d'infinie douceur et de hauteur dédaigneuse. Esclave pour Titus, souveraine pour les autres."16 When confronted by Domitie, she exhibits the orgueil of a queen as she points out that

15 Ibid., p. 1113-1114.
Tite owes his position to her efforts:

Il peut se souvenir, dans ce grade sublime,
Qu'il soumit votre Rome en détruisant Solyme,
Qu'en ce siège pour lui je hasardai mon rang,
Prodiguai mes trésors, et mes peuples leur sang,
Et que, s'il me fait part de sa toute-puissance,
Ce sera moins un don qu'une reconnaissance. 17

Later, when told that the Senate, if informed of her presence in Rome, might banish her once more, she replies with all the pride, conviction, and hauteur dédaigneuse characteristic of one who occupies a position of sovereignty:

Philon, laissons-les faire; ils n'ont qu'à me bannir
Pour trouver hautement l'art de me retenir.
Contre toutes leurs voix je ne veux qu'un suffrage,
Et l'ardeur de me nuire achèvera l'ouvrage. 18

However, when she encounters Tite, all pride and determination cease, and she suffers greatly, as would any woman, at the prospect of seeing the man she loves marry another:

Pourrez-vous l'épouser dans quatre jours? O cieux!
Dans quatre jours! seigneur, y voudrez-vous mes yeux?
Vous plairez-vous à voir qu'en triomphe menée
Je serve de victime à ce grand hymène?
Que, traînée avec pompe aux marches de l'autel,
J'aille de votre main attendre un coup mortel?
M'y verrez-vous mourir sans verser une larme?
Vous y préparez-vous sans trouble et sans alarme?
Et si vous concevez l'excès de ma douleur,
N'en rejaillit-il rien jusque dans votre coeur? 19

As a woman, she experiences all the hurt, anger, and

17 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., p. 1082.
18 Ibid., p. 1091.
19 Ibid., p. 1084.
jealousy of any woman who has been rejected for another, and yet she loves Tite so deeply that, when offered a chance to marry him, she refuses to accept it because, as pointed out above, she fears that his abdication will mean his death. She becomes resigned and submissive where Tite is concerned:

S'il faut partir demain, je ne veux qu'une grâce;  
Que ce soit vous, seigneur, qui le veuilliez pour moi. 20

As a queen, she is outraged over the treatment accorded her, proud, disdainful, and sovereign. She demands that Rome remember that she is "son amie, et non pas sa sujette." 21

Her conflict is brought on, then, by Rome's banishment of her as a queen and by Tite's rejection of her as a woman. She seeks recognition of her rights as the solution of the former, and the restoration of Tite's love in the latter case.

Oddly enough, once she is recognized by Rome and certain that she, and she alone, possesses Tite's love, her reaction is contrary to what might be expected of one so honored.

N'étant pas aveuglée par l'honneur qu'elle reçoit, elle juge clairement la situation: la complaisance des sénateurs est bien prompte, et le grand corps s'est montré, pour d'autres empereurs, aussi inconstant que flatteur empressé. Même s'il n'y a rien à craindre du Sénat, il faut compter avec

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20 Ibid., p. 1110.
21 Ibid., p. 1110.
d'autres. Beaucoup n'approuveraient pas le mariage de César avec une reine, et il suffit d'un fanatique pour un assassinat.\textsuperscript{22}

And so, in her final and most admirable act Bérénice refuses to marry Tite, for his own protection, and finds consolation in knowing that she is loved by him:

Votre coeur est à moi, j'y règne, c'est assez.\textsuperscript{23}

It would appear that \textit{Tite et Bérénice} is a very good Cornelian tragedy, and one which deserves more consideration than it has received. When examined in the light of his previous works it surpasses anything written since \textit{Polyeucte} insofar as interest, warmth, pity, and admiration are concerned, and it is only slightly below, if not equal to, the earlier masterpieces in its portrayal of the passions of love and jealousy.

This play almost certainly suffers more from Racine's \textit{Bérénice} than from its own shortcomings. While there can be no doubt that Racine's tragedy is superior to Corneille's, this in itself is certainly not ample reason for the claim that \textit{Tite et Bérénice} is inferior to \textit{Cinna} or \textit{Polyeucte}, much less for saying that is inferior to \textit{Rodogune} or \textit{Nicomède}. And yet critics, throughout the years, have persisted in criticizing the play and calling it a weak and inferior tragedy simply because \textit{Bérénice} is "far from being the appealing figure that Racine portrayed," and

\textsuperscript{22} Tastevin, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 212.

\textsuperscript{23}Corneille, \textit{Théâtre}, \textit{op. cit.}, II, 1112.
Tite, due to his inability to reach a decision, is "less forceful than Racine's hero."24

This conviction may be further substantiated by the fact that Corneille's next and final tragedies, Pulchérie and Surena, are very similar to Tite et Bérénice in that all are concerned with royal marriages in which considerations of state oppose the dictates of the heart, and yet the final two, while certainly considered inferior to Racine's tragedies of love and jealousy, are rated by most critics as the very best of the later tragedies,25 in spite of the fact that Pulchérie, for reasons which will be explained later, lacks the excitement and tension of Tite et Bérénice. It is

24 Lancaster, op. cit., III, II, 576; and Lockert, op. cit., p. 98. While both of these statements are certainly true, they should not be considered as valid reasons for calling Tite et Bérénice a weak Cornelian tragedy, for an examination of the two principal characters reveals that Tite, in his vacillation, shows a significant resemblance to Cinna, and Bérénice, in a comparative study of Cornelian heroines (Tastevin, op. cit., p. 180.) has been found to be "une soeur aînée des Chimène et des Pauline, plus altière parce qu'elle est reine, plus résignée parce qu'elle a plus vécu, mais aussi tendre, aussi généreusement dévouée que la fiancée de Rodrigue ou l'épouse de Polyeucte."

25 Both Lancaster (Op. cit., Part III, II, 582) and Lockert (Op. cit., p. 100) rate Pulchérie as one of the best of the later tragedies of Corneille, while concerning Surena, Lockert points out that "Lemaître has words of commendation for it, Faguet pronounces it, if not one of the author's plays of the first rank, at least very near them in merit; Brasillach declares that it is surpassed only by the Cid and Polyeucte; and Schlumberger thinks the role of its heroine comparable to none but that of Racine's Phaedra."
unfortunate, indeed, that the latter play is not given the same consideration as Pulchérie and Suréna simply because a better play on the same subject was written by someone else.

Pulchérie (1672), Corneille's third comédie héroïque, closely resembles Tite et Bérénice in its subject and in the actions of the Empress whose name the play bears. Pulchérie, who has for fifteen years ruled the Byzantine empire in the name of her weak brother, must, now that he is dead, marry whatever man the Senate may elect as his successor. She hopes that it will be Léon, a young soldier whom she loves and in whom she sees the growing seeds of greatness, but Aspar, a powerful general, hopes either to win the throne by marrying Pulchérie, or to support Léon and thus divide the power with him. Léon, however, refuses to take part in this conspiracy and, aware of Pulchérie's love for him, proposes that the Senate elect her empress and leave to her the choice of a husband. When the Senate accepts this suggestion and designates Pulchérie as empress, she realizes that if she were to choose Léon, other aspirants for her hand and crown — older, more famous men, like Aspar, for example — might cause a rebellion and the downfall of the man she loves. Consequently, for the good of both Léon and the kingdom, she chooses to wed in a nominal, celibate marriage Martian, an elderly general and statesman revered by all, who has long cherished a love for
her which he has considered hopeless because of the difference in their ages. She then arranges that Léon shall marry Justine, Martian's daughter who secretly loves him, and be heir to the throne, and she appeases Aspar by giving to him Irène, Léon's sister.

Pulchérie's actions are very similar to those of Bérénice, especially after the latter received Roman recognition. Both loved deeply and yet felt that their contemplated marriages would involve great dangers to their loved ones. Consequently, both consoled themselves with the knowledge that they alone were loved and would continue to be loved by their respective young men. Both vowed to love no one else. In order to assure their promises, Bérénice chose never to marry, while Pulchérie, forced to marry in order to retain the throne, chose to unite herself in name only to an elderly statesman. And finally, both proposed that their amants marry someone else. Tite of course refused, while Léon reluctantly accepted the wishes of his empress.

As in Tite et Bérénice, there exists in Pulchérie also a conflict within the individual soul, a split that cannot be resolved. "Love and duty, the private self and the public self, are in dire conflict and sacrifice is unavoidable." However, the play suffers from the fact that while the conflict is present, it consists mostly of

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26 Nelson, op. cit., p. 244.
a series of conversations lacking excitement and tension, for, while one senses the presence of true emotion in its characters, strong feeling is restrained. For example, Léon knows that Pulchérie loves him, and his predicament should produce extreme anger and jealousy in him when Pulchérie hesitates to name him as her husband and emperor, but he fails to manifest any outburst of either passion. Instead he limits himself to a rather calm discussion of the situation:

Elle ne me veut pas encor désespérer,
Mais elle prend du temps pour en délibérer.
Son choix n'est plus pour moi, puisqu'elle le diffère:
L'amour n'est point le maître alors qu'on délibère;
Et je ne saurais plus me promettre sa foi,
Moi qui n'ai que l'amour qui lui parle pour moi.

Pulchérie, on the other hand, devotes far too much time to arranging the marriages of Léon and Aspar and far too little to an analysis of her own unavoidable plight. Because of this, her role is not as sympathetic as it might be, nor do we feel for her the admiration we have for Bérénice, although the former's sacrifice is just as great.

Thus, it can be seen that Pulchérie, while not a bad play and certainly better than any written by Corneille between Polyeucte and Tite et Bérénice, lacks the interest found in the latter play; and consequently our hypothesis

27 Lockert, op. cit., p. 100.
28 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., II, 1140.
that *Tite et Bérénice* suffers more from comparison to *Racine's Bérénice* than from its own intrinsic demerits seems more creditable.

Such is not the case with *Surena* (1674) however, for this play, Corneille's final contribution to the French classical theater, in spite of its employment of a *Racinean subject*, is rated by most critics as one of his finest tragedies.\(^{29}\)

Like the two plays which precede it, *Surena* is a tragedy of royal marriage, love, and jealousy. Unlike them however, interests of state count for little with the four principal characters, Surena, Eurydice, Pacorus, and Palmis, for all are motivated and actuated solely by the passions of love and jealousy.\(^ {30}\)

The play develops the fact that Surena, the Parthian general who annihilated the Roman army of Crassus, and the Armenian princess Eurydice had secretly fallen in love when he was an envoy at her father's court; after the war, a treaty stipulates that she wed the son and heir of King Orode of Parthia, Pacorus, who has loved Surena's sister, Palmis, but is now captivated by the beauty of Eurydice. As the play opens, preparations are being made for the wedding of Pacorus and Eurydice, but the latter, because of her love for Surena, seeks to delay the marriage.

\(^{29}\) See Chapter IV, Footnote 25.

\(^{30}\) Lockert, op. cit., p. 103.
Pacorus learns from his fiancée that she loves another man, but he is unable to discover, from her, from Palmis, or from Surena, who he is. King Orode, whose obligations to Surena weigh heavily upon him, and who fears the latter's powers, seeks to bind him by marriage and offers him his daughter, Mandane. Surena, unwilling to marry anyone but Eurydice, replies that he is not of high enough birth and proposes that his own sister, Palmis, wed Pacorus instead. The king refuses, seeks to discover whom Surena loves, becomes more and more suspicious of him, and has the palace guarded. Palmis begs Eurydice to marry Pacorus and Surena to accept the king's offer, but Eurydice declines to marry as long as she loves Surena, while the latter resists both his sister's plea and the threats of Pacorus. Finally, Eurydice yields in order to save Surena, but it is too late, for moments after she has agreed to marry Pacorus, she learns that Surena, upon leaving the palace, was assassinated. She is helped off the stage, dying of grief, while Palmis vows to gain revenge.

This play resembles, more than any other written by Corneille, a Racinean tragedy in that its action is almost completely inward, psychological. It depicts the stages by which the hero and the heroine, both of whom are required to marry someone else, gradually betray to others the secret of their love, despite their efforts to conceal it. It further portrays the suffering these two endure
at the prospect of losing each other, as well as the jealousy they experience when confronted with the idea that each will marry someone else.

Corneille shows no little mastery of dramatic technique in portraying the lovers' betrayal of their secret, for in order to reveal the truth, he has the search begun simultaneously by Pacorus and Orode from both ends, so to speak, and immediately the ultimate meeting of the two truth seekers becomes inevitable. Pacorus, who represents a spoiled, selfish, royal "brat," commences his side of the quest through Eurydice. When she does not return his love, he becomes infuriated and demands the reason for her coldness, ultimately forcing her to reveal that she loves another. From this point on, motivated solely by jealousy, he actively seeks to discover the identity of her secret lover.

The search is begun in a completely different manner, and for different reasons where Surena is concerned. King Orode, whose throne had been restored to him through the military might of Surena, becomes quite disturbed over the latter's apparently indifferent attitude to the court festivities. For fear of what might happen to him should Surena become discontented, Orode decides to reward him for his loyalty and at the same time bind him to Parthia by giving to him in marriage his daughter, Mandane. When Surena refuses because of his low birth, Orode immediately suspects him of loving someone else, and,
motivated by fear and jealousy of Surena's ability, he seeks to discover her identity. At this point it becomes inevitable that father and son will eventually discuss the matter and reach but one conclusion.

The unintentional revelation by Surena and Eurydice of their secret love shows no less ability on the part of Corneille, for its handling illustrates a keen perception by the poet of the inability of people in love to hide their love in times of great emotional stress.

Eurydice is the first to succumb when Pacorus, upset over her lack of feeling toward him, begins to question her:

PACORUS:
Je vous aime, et demain l'hymen doit nous unir:
M'aimez - vous?

EURYDICE:
Oui, Seigneur, et ma main vous est sûre.

PACORUS:
C'est peu que de la main, si le coeur en murmure.

EURYDICE:
Quel mal pourrait causer le murmure du mien,
S'il murmurait si bas qu'aucun n'en apprit rien?

PACORUS:
Ah! Madame, il me faut un avec plus sincère.

EURYDICE:
Épousez-moi, Seigneur, et laissez-moi me taire.

PACORUS:
Dans ces tristes froideurs dont vous payez ma flamme,
Quelque autre amour plus fort . . .

EURYDICE:
Qu'osez-vous demander, Prince?
PACORUS:  
De mon bonheur ce qui doit décider.

EURYDICE:  
Est-ce un aveu qui puisse échapper à ma bouche?

PACORUS:  
El est tout échappé, puisque ce mot vous touche.  
Si vous n'aviez du cœur fait ailleurs l'heureux don,  
Vous auriez moins de gêne à me dire que non;  
Et pour me garantir de ce que j'apprêhende,  
La réponse avec joie eût suivi la demande.  
Madame, ce qu'on fait sans honte et sans remords  
Ne coûte rien à dire, il n'y faut point d'efforts;  
Et sans que la rougeur au visage nous monte.

... Mais il est fait, ce choix qu'on s'obstine à me taire,  
Et qu'on cherche à me dire avec tant de mystère?

EURYDICE:  
Je ne vous le dis point; mais si vous m'y forcez,  
Il vous en coûtera plus que vous ne pensez.

PACORUS:  
... Dites, est-ce un héros? est-ce un prince?  
est-ce un roi?

EURYDICE:  
C'est ce que j'ai connu de plus digne de moi.  
Ne me pressez point tant, Seigneur, de vous l'apprendre.  
Si je vous l'avais dit...

PACORUS:  
Achevons.

EURYDICE:  
Dès demain  
Rien ne m'empêcherait de lui donner la main.

PACORUS:  
Il est donc en ces lieux, Madame?

Thus, with a few well chosen questions at the right moment, Pacorus obtains enough information from Eurydice to make his search relatively easy, and it is only a matter of time until Pacorus concludes that she loves Sûrèna.

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31 Corneille, Théâtre, op. cit., II, 1198-1203.
The latter's betrayal of his love is accomplished almost as easily but in an entirely different manner, for his is a matter of protesting too well and too much his proposed marriage to Mandane. That his reaction is an obvious indication of his feelings is best illustrated by the words of Pacorus:

Vous refusez Mandane avec tant de respect,
Qu'il est trop raisonnable pour n'être point suspect.
Avant qu'on vous l'offrit vos raisons étaient prétextes,
Et jamais on n'a vu de refus plus honnêtes;
Mais ces honnêtetés ne font pas moins rougir:
Il fallait tout promettre, et la laisser agir;
Il fallait espérer de son orgueil sévère
Un juste désaveu des volontés d'un père,
Et l'aigrir par des voeux si froids, si mal conçus,
Qu'elle usurpât sur vous la gloire du refus.
Vous avez mieux aimé tenter un artifice
Qui pût mettre Palmis où doit être Eurydice,
En me donnant le change attirer mon courroux,
Et montrer quel objet vous réservez pour vous.
Mais vous auriez mieux fait d'appliquer tant
d'adresse
A remettre au devoir l'esprit de la princesse:
Vous en avez eu l'ordre, et j'en suis plus hâlé.
C'est pour un bon sujet avoir bien obéi. 32

Thus, they are discovered. Immediately Surena's sister, Palmis, "qui a pour lui cette admirable amitié fraternelle dont jamais Corneille n'a fait un plus touchant tableau," 33 tries to persuade both Eurydice and Surena to accept the marriages offered them in order to save their lives, but:

ils hochent la tête, écoutent à peine,
se regardent, immobilisés, comme aimantes par la passion, fermés au monde, à la sécurité,
As was previously pointed out, the actions of each of the principal characters are motivated solely by the passions of love or jealousy, clearly a Racinean influence. Because Eurydice loves Surena, she refuses to marry Pacorus. At the same time, her jealousy, which results from her love, causes her to insist that Surena refuse to marry Mandane. Surena, who prior to this time had been completely loyal to Orode, in spite of his own superior ability, now refuses to sacrifice his love in order to save his life. Instead he proposes that Pacorus marry Palmis, certainly an idea engendered by his love, or perhaps his jealousy, for such a marriage would at least leave Eurydice free. And finally, Pacorus, upon learning from Eurydice that she loves someone else, flies into a rage of jealousy, and stimulated by this passion, begins the fatal search for the unknown lover.

Surena is, in the opinion of this writer, a masterpiece of Cornelian tragedy. In no other play by this

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34 Ibid., p. 349-350.
35 Many critics share this feeling, among them Brasillach, op. cit., p. 350, who concludes: "Le sacrifice de Surena, dans cette incomparable lumière du soir qui tombe à la fin de tout tragédie classique, c'est le sacrifice de tout un monde, c'est l'adieu de Pierre Corneille à sa jeunesse et à son passé. Surena, qui ne surpassent peut-être en beauté que le Cid et Polyeucte, est le chef-d'oeuvre du reniement."
dramatist, except perhaps *Le Cid*, can one find such warm, passionate, sincere, human love, such fiery jealousy, and such keen psychological insight and action; and in no other Cornelian drama can one sense, from the outset, the fatality of the tragic situation:

Dès que le drame commence, il se place sous le signe des planètes maudites, et ces amants si parfaits et si beaux, ce Surena, cette Eurydice, ils vont à la catastrophe, au plutôt ils se laissent glisser vers elle, presque sans lutter, et nous sommes sûrs qu'on tuera Surena dans la rue dès qu'il aura passé la porte, et qu'Eurydice mourra. Nous en sommes sûrs, et pourtant ils pourraient se sauver, mais ils n'en feront rien, ils ne résisteront pas, car plus fortes encore que toutes les contraintes, l'amertume de vivre, la lassitude de combattre dès les premières scènes les ont possédés tout entier. 36

Unfortunately, however, *Surena* is once more, like its immediate predecessors, a Cornelian tragedy with a Racinean treatment of the subject and, however excellent it may be as a Cornelian tragedy, it does not equal Racine's accomplishments in his own special field.

During this final period of Cornelian drama we note several important changes in dramatic technique. The three plays in this period, unlike those of the previous two, are relatively simple in plot; they are psychological in nature, with a minimum of emphasis on political ideas and maximum focus on the reactions of the characters; the Cornelian heroic, gallant and political loves of the past are replaced by an obviously Racinean-influenced

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emotional love; and the element of inner conflict once again, as in the earlier masterpieces, assumes a vital role. However, and once again almost certainly influenced by Racinean tragedies, it replaces the physical conflict completely and results not from the moral issues found in the earlier masterpieces, or from the political issues found in those plays between 1643-1667, but is one which arises solely from the passions of love, anger, and jealousy. It is, then, a Racinean kind of conflict, and the tragedies in which it is portrayed, Tite et Bérénice, Pulchérie, and Suréna, while very excellent Cornelian tragedies, must be classified as imitations of a Racinean formula.
CONCLUSION

In this study of the evolution of Cornelian tragedy, four sharply differentiated periods or stages have been observed. During the first period, from Le Cid to Polyeucte, Corneille's successful dramatic formula consists of a relatively simple plot constructed around two central themes: a political question to be solved, which leads to a physical conflict between two forces (families or groups of individuals); and a moral issue which results from the political problem and engenders a vitally important inner or mental conflict. The political themes present such varied issues as the conflict between the authority of the monarch and the independence and lawlessness of a feudal aristocracy, the various aspects of patriotism, the best forms of government, and Christianity versus the Roman state. The resulting moral issues include the code of family honor, the duty of the family to the state, the duty of subjects and monarchs to the state, and duty to God. Of the two themes, the latter is by far the most important, for, while the former produces only a physical conflict over political issues which are often dated in interest and no longer of importance, the moral issue results in the portrayal of a conflict in the
minds of the characters - the painting by Corneille of the human emotions and mental anguish experienced by these characters as they attempt to find a solution to the moral issue in question - and this mental conflict is a never ending human characteristic which gives the characters, as well as the plays, universal appeal. Four tragedies, Le Cid, Horace, Cinna, and Polyeucte, were produced during this period; each contains, in varying degrees, the above-mentioned characteristics, and each is still recognized today as a masterpiece of French classical tragedy.

During the second stage in the evolution of Cornelian tragedy, beginning with Pompée (1643) and ending with Pertharite (1651), several major changes within the framework of the tragedies themselves are seen. In the first place, in almost all cases, the moral issue is nonexistent, having been replaced by political concerns and ideals; and, with the elimination of the moral issue comes the elimination of the vitally important element of inner conflict. Thus we find the subject wholly political and the play consisting of a physical conflict between opposing forces of different political beliefs, with the characters no longer forced to choose between love and duty or love and honor, but between opposing political philosophies.

Secondly, we see introduced into Cornelian tragedy certain romanesque and melodramatic elements which, while
perhaps establishing Corneille as a precursor of French romantic drama, prove detrimental to the creation of the highly restrictive, narrowly confined classical tragedy.

Additionally we find, in contrast to the relative simplicity of plot in the masterpieces, highly complex and complicated plots requiring too much attention to plot intricacies and too many characters in order to satisfy plot needs, all of which results in poor or incomplete development of the principal characters and loss of spectator interest.

Finally, we observe a major change in the portrayal of the will of the Cornelian hero, which in the past in some cases was almost superhuman but always inspired its possessor actively to seek his goal. Now we note that the Cornelian volonté has become so rigid and inflexible that it inspires not activity, but passiveness in the protagonist. The Cornelian hero now not only refuses to be moved emotionally by his dilemma, but he is so certain of accomplishing his goal that he sees no need to take part in any action which either supports or opposes him. As a result, the action which does take place is created by characters other than the principal one; the latter remains impeccable, impassible, immobile, and cold; and the play resembles more a political tableau - more often than not an uninteresting one - than a tragedy. Six tragedies, Pompée, Rodogune, Théodore, Héraclius, Nicomède,
and Pertharite, as well as one comédie héroïque, Don Sanche d'Aragon, were produced during this period. Of them, three were immediate failures, and only two, Rodrigo and Nicomède, are presently given any favorable consideration.

During the third stage, which dates from 1659 to 1667, we note only one major difference from the tragedies of the previous period. There continues to be no real emotional struggle; the physical conflict is still based on political issues; the romanesque and melodramatic elements are ever present; plot complexity is of prime importance; and the will of the Cornelian hero is still generally passive. The one essential difference is that Corneille depicts a new kind of love. No longer does the protagonist feel in his heart a love based on worthiness and glory. His love is one based on political expediency and couched in gallant vocabulary with its sole object a marriage leading to political advancement. Thus while the hero sighs, laments, and even weeps over his plight, his "amour politique et galant" is most frequently insincere and subject to change as his political fortunes change. It is clearly a love designed to suit the vogue for préciosité and gallantry prominent at the time. Six tragedies, Oedipe, Sertorius, Sophonisbe, Othon, Agésilas, and Attila, were produced during this period, and all but Sophonisbe enjoyed a measure of success. Their popularity, however, ended with the death
of préciosité.

During the fourth, and final, stage, which includes two comédies héroïques, Tite et Bérénice and Pulchérie, and one tragedy, Suréna, and which dates from 1670 to 1674, we note several major changes within the framework of Cornelian drama. The three plays in this period, unlike those of the preceding two stages, are psychological in nature and relatively simple in plot, with a minimum of emphasis on political ideas and maximum focus on character reaction; the Cornelian heroic, gallant, and political loves of the past are replaced by strong emotional love too similar to that depicted by Racine to be mere coincidence; and the element of inner conflict once again assumes a vital role. However, in this case it replaces the physical conflict completely and results not from the moral issues found in the earlier masterpieces, or from the political issues found in those plays between 1643 - 1667, but solely from the passions of love, anger, and jealousy. This change, like the previous one, made after Racine's Andromaque was presented, is also considered too drastic to be coincidental and has caused these last three plays, although very excellent Cornelian tragedies, to be classified by most critics as imitations of Racinean tragedy.

In the beginning of this study we pointed out that its purpose was to present an analysis of the four masterpieces of Corneille, and then to examine the later tragedies
in light of this analysis in an effort to determine the changes which take place and their possible influence on the decline of these tragedies.

Based on the facts presented in this study, it is reasonable to conclude that the tragedies of Pierre Corneille declined primarily because of changes within their framework made by Corneille, either through personal choice (plot complexity, melodrama, political love, physical conflict based on political philosophies, removal of inner conflict, and the passive will of the hero), or under environmental influences (romanesque and gal­lant loves, and imitation of Racine), for in every case except the Racinean influence, the variations from the successful standard of the masterpieces have been shown to be major weaknesses exerting a considerable amount of harmful influence upon the tragedies involved. It is further concluded that when Corneille did at last return to the successful formula employed in his earlier masterpieces, the fact that he apparently modified it because of his rivalry with Racine places his last three tragedies, in spite of the fact that they are better than anything written by him since Polyeucte, in the unfortunate position of being imitations of Racine's tragedies and of seeming to be of value primarily because they serve to emphasize Racine's superiority in a field which clearly belongs to him.
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VITA

Larry Robert Derouen was born in Bell City, Louisiana, on October 16, 1935. Later he moved to Lake Charles, Louisiana, where in May, 1954, he graduated as Salutatorian of his class at Landry Memorial High School.

Mr. Derouen attended McNeese State College, Lake Charles, Louisiana, from which he graduated in June, 1958, a Distinguished Military Graduate and was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the United States Army. He received the degree of Bachelor of Arts with a major in French.

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