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Marriage in seventeenth-century French theater

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MARRIAGE IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH THEATER

A Thesis

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Abstract

In seventeenth-century France, social and political confusion abounded. Absolute monarchy, which was principally created by Richelieu and glorified by Louis XIV, began gradually replacing the medieval feudalism that remained popular among the nobles. Likewise, *préciosité*, a proto-feminist literary and cultural movement that was not in line with official political ideals, emerged in France during this century. The institution of marriage was an important element of the complicated sociopolitical tapestry of seventeenth-century France. Through the depiction of marriage in Pierre Corneille's *Le Cid* (1636), Jean-Baptiste Poquelin de Molière's *L'École des femmes* (1662), and Jean Racine's *Andromaque* (1667), three works of the most prominent form of fiction in seventeenth-century France—theater, one can see how marriage was tightly bound to both politics and society.

Introduction

Seventeenth-century France was racked with social and political turbulence. This century saw a new system of government develop and eventually become firmly established—absolute monarchy. For the most part of the century, it coexisted with feudalism (in mentalities if not in practice), which it sought to replace. Under the reign of Louis XIII (1610-1643), Cardinal Richelieu, the king's powerful adviser, was largely responsible for the creation and rise of absolute monarchy in France, a form of reign in which the king alone is the essence of the representation of political power and of the state. After the deaths of Richelieu and Louis XIII, absolutism was continued during the regency of Anne of Austria (1643-1661), whose influential advisor was the cardinal Mazarin. Absolute monarchy, however, would be most magnificently and gloriously expressed during the personal rule of the Sun King, Louis XIV (1661-1715), a fact that is manifest in the quote often attributed (though most likely falsely) to him: “L'état, c'est moi.”

Absolute monarchy was certainly not without its enemies. The system that absolutism was stamping out was feudalism, whose height was in the Middle Ages. Unlike absolutism, in the feudal system, the king is not all-powerful, government is not centralized, and noblemen hold a great deal of power. In order for absolute monarchy to take hold, the king would have to consolidate power, thus stripping aristocrats of the political control they once enjoyed. Richelieu, although noble himself, believing that absolutism would result in a much more powerful France, saw to it that the nobility's power was severely lessened by passing regulations that effectively curbed the political influence of the aristocracy. When Anne of Austria began her regency, the nobles, no longer under the weighty thumb of absolutist Richelieu, believed that they may once again win back some of their former influence; when the regent appointed Mazarin, another absolutist cardinal, as her advisor, the French nobility was severely disappointed. The repression of the aristocracy at the hands of absolutists ultimately led to the *Fronde*, a series of full-on aristocratic rebellions against the crown, which lasted from 1648 to 1653. “In political terms,” writes Bénichou, “the culmination of aristocratic pride in an age of absolutism is rebellion” (48). Despite their uprisings, the nobles failed to regain their former

glory: because of the pride and the vaingloriousness of the feudal *frondeurs* and their inability to unite and work in cooperation, the *Fronde* made of the French aristocracy an “international laughingstock” and left it “in a state of humiliation and servility from which it would never quite recover” (Cheng 133). By the time of Louis XIV, who regulated the nobles like no one before him—he kept them all near him at his newly built palace in Versailles, for example, ensuring that no other *Fronde* could ever take place—absolute monarchy was a monolith set firmly in place.

Under Richelieu, the state officially moved from feudal brusqueness to absolutist refined order. The royal court of the sixteenth century and the first few decades of the seventeenth century was characterized as being “relatively rude, ignorant, and unrefined, espousing the old warrior values of the feudal tradition” (Cheng 133). Under Richelieu, the court was evolving from a course, rough-around-the-edges warrior’s club into a sort of national standard of good taste, language, wit, sentiment, and even literature based on the stripping away of the “fierce warrior spirit implicit in independent feudal states.” Order was becoming a goal of the state; the increasingly absolutist state sanctioned an aesthetics of order on all aspects of life. On this subject, Cheng quotes Daniel Mornet’s *Histoire de la littérature et de la pensée françaises*: “[t]here was an immense effort to establish everywhere an order which [was] as reasonable as the order of mathematics, to organize a sort of social and aesthetic geometry” (137).

Part of this order that absolutism sought to establish was achieved through marriage, a social institution of great importance in seventeenth-century France. The bond of marriage was the glue that held together the household, which in the seventeenth century served as a microcosm of society and government. In early modern France existed the belief, especially among those who supported the monarchy, that the “body politic” was “the sum of its parts”: “all the states of the world depend upon these little kingdoms which we call families”; “the general disposition of republics is made from the particular disposition of families: and families are like particular states, and miniature kingdoms” (Lougee 90). Each family, therefore, represented the absolutist state, and the order of the state depended on the order of all the family units that the state comprised. Since marriage was the force

that founded the household and held it together, marriage can equally be seen as the force that held society and the state together.

The structure of the family and the state it represented was patriarchy, which comes from the latin word *pater*, meaning “father.” The father ruled the household just as the king ruled the kingdom: “In early modern France, [patriarchy] signified not only one ruler for the realm and one head for the household but a lordly father of the kingdom and a fatherly lord of the household” (Hardwick 134). This view of the king’s position as “father” of his subjects did not exist before the reign of Louis XIII, France’s first absolute monarch, when “the position of the king [was] nothing much more than the highest of the feudal overlords, a first among equals, a description evocative of a privileged eldest brother lording it over his younger siblings rather than of a powerful father figure keeping his children in line” (Goodkin *Birth* 19). Greenberg even insists that absolute monarchy would not be able to exist without the patriarchal construction of the family unit (*Subjectivity* 63).

Because of the belief that the disorder of the household could lead to the disorder of the state, the patriarchal structure of the household had to be maintained, one important element of this structure being gender: “Patriarchy as a principle of social organization in early modern France was a profoundly and consciously gendered concept” (Hardwick 134). It was thus the father’s duty to rule over the household—his wife, his children, and his servants. His wife was afforded very little authority, as this could upset the balance of the household’s and society’s patriarchal configuration. For this reason, widowhood was particularly troublesome. Although in seventeenth-century France “widows did become heads of households and enjoyed the legal rights associated with that position” (Hardwick 133), widows belonged in a plane of uncertainty in France’s patriarchal society where women were to be under the control of either father or husband: since they enjoyed some level of autonomy, widows of a reasonable age who did not remarry after the death of a husband, thereby reentering into the socially stabilizing structure of the patriarchal household, were considered subversive.

Marriage was important to the welfare of the state in another way—through the creation of children. In the seventeenth century, a country's power was seen as being dependent on the amount of inhabitants it possessed, and marriage was the institution through which one produced (legitimate) children. France was considered to be particularly blessed with inhabitants:

Despite their lack of statistics, the writers and statesmen of the mid-seventeenth century were firmly convinced that France was Europe's most populous state. They attributed growing political significance to the factor they called 'peopling' (*peuplement*). Much as the monarch's success in producing heirs signaled divine favor and the promise of a glorious future, they saw France's densely peopled landscape as a demonstration of God's blessing and an implicit legitimization of their monarch and his goals. (Tuttle 26)

For proponents of marriage in seventeenth-century France, having a large family was a mark of patriotism, and "the best way to serve one's prince and one's country [was] without a doubt to give a great number of brave subjects and wise citizens who may be suited to usages advantageous to the public" (Lougee 89).

As marriage was the only socially acceptable vehicle for procreation in the seventeenth-century, some, including the writer Jacques Chaussée, even contended that despite the fact that procreation can occur beyond the bounds of matrimony, it was through marriage that the begetting of children truly flourished. He stated that God grants fertility to parents in marriages and that "marriage proposes only to propagate the human species, while sensual vice proposes only its destruction. Marriage serves to people the earth, and multiply men. Sensual vice serves to diminish them, or at least not augment the number" (Lougee 89).

One threat to marriage and the rigid structure of the household was individualism, which can impede a socially or politically appropriate choice of spouse. Individualism in seventeenth-century France was rife with contradiction because of the coexistence of two forms of politics—the traditional feudalism and the nascent absolutism—which each had their own set of positive and negative values assigned to the notion of the individual. Bénichou states that "noble individualism" was a definitive trait among feudal aristocrats, along with "the spirit of adventure ... [and] the taste for unattainable

extremes and dramatic sublimations” (4). This particular sort of individualism is based upon the acquisition of *gloire*, which is the “haute idée que l’on a de soi-même” (Corneille 175). One obtains *gloire* from honorably following one’s duty and through victories on the battlefield and in duels. The aggrandization of the self that *gloire* accomplishes, however, is not strictly individualistic in nature. By obtaining *gloire*, a nobleman increases not only his own honor, but the honor of his entire family: the true point of reference for *gloire* is not the individual but the lineage he embodies. Identity is based on ancestry, and men are merely representations of their ancestors. Any individualistic desires or actions that defy the honor or interests of one’s family therefore had no place in the noble “individualism” that defined the feudal aristocracy. Moreover, each individual is to act on behalf of his lineage even if it disadvantages the state.

Individualism is even more complicated under absolute monarchy. In the system of feudalism that it gradually replaced, a father passed his money, land, and titles down to his eldest son in a system known as primogeniture. During the reigns of France’s first two absolute monarchs, however, capitalism gradually began to replace the socioeconomic structure of feudalism. Unlike feudalism and the primogeniture that fueled it, capitalism favors those who show talent, not those who happen to have been born first. Louis XIV, partly because he saw the aristocracy as possible enemies, increasingly allied himself with the merchant class, which allowed capitalism to thrive in the seventeenth century. Along with its going against the nobles’ social codes, “One of the most important reasons for the increasing stress on meritocracy and the concomitant deemphasizing of seniority as a necessary and sufficient condition for social prominence is quite simple: the king’s perennial need for money” (Goodkin *Birth* 22). Because of its emphasis on competition, capitalism provided a much better means of revenue for the monarchy than feudalism.

Because of the capitalist mentality of his regime, Louis XIV privileged his subjects based on merit, not inherited social status, thus recognizing and celebrating them as individuals. He frequently ennobled bourgeois, striving to create his own nobility based on talent. He issued pensions to artists and writers, even personally patronizing some: Corneille, Molière, and Racine all enjoyed royal

pensions, and the Sun King favored Molière with his patronage, even making him his official entertainer (Bradby 10). By ennobling and financially supporting members of the bourgeois class, Louis XIV was also ensuring their allegiance to the crown.

Although the regimes of Louis XIII and Louis XIV favored individualism, their support of it only went so far. Despite the new emphasis on personal merit, the feudal Salic law, which named the king's oldest living son the heir to the throne, continued to determine royal succession. Furthermore, absolute monarchy only celebrated individualism within the framework of absolutism: individual desires were not to take precedence over the state. Subjects in an absolute monarchy owe their loyalty exclusively to the king.

In France's "Grand Siècle"—the seventeenth century—theater was the predominant literary form, and during such a time of social and political confusion, "a play in particular, as a spectacle to be mounted as well as a text to be read, can be seen as a means of celebrating and even explaining the contemporary mood and attitudes to life. At times it may go further and become a vehicle for political propaganda. . . . The theatre . . . is an ideal medium through which powerful men can express their influence" (Gossip 8-9). This work will explore the theme of marriage in seventeenth-century France through three dramatic texts: Pierre Corneille's 1636 tragicomedy *Le Cid*, Jean-Baptiste Poquelin de Molière's 1662 comedy *L'École des femmes*, and Jean Racine's 1667 tragedy *Andromaque*. In all of these texts, the author demonstrates the tight chains that bound marriage to society and politics in seventeenth-century France.

Chapter One: *Le Cid*

Le Cid, published in 1636 under the rule of Louis XIII, was the eighth play of the seventeenth-century French dramatist Pierre Corneille. This tragicomedy lifted Corneille from relative obscurity into literary immortality. *Le Cid* was praised for the passions and the beautiful sentiments it presented to the audience. The instant success of the play led to the ennoblement of Corneille's father—and thus of Corneille himself—and even inspired the creation of a proverb: “Cela est beau comme *le Cid*” (Guerdan 46). Though the public adored the play, it had many critics: from them, the *Querelle du Cid*, a fierce war of pamphlets ended by an official statement by the newly-formed Académie Française, was born. This institution's decision would ultimately change the face of French literature. Because of the particular sociopolitical situation that existed when Corneille was writing this play, it should be of no surprise that *Le Cid* was shaped by it: politics not only surrounded the play but determined the action and sentiments found within the very text of the play. The possible marriage of Rodrigue and Chimène, which is the crux of *Le Cid*, is tied up by competing political systems that echo the politics of seventeenth-century France.

As the play opens, Chimène hears from Elvire, her *gouvernante*, that after having considered both of Chimène's suitors—Don Rodrigue and Don Sanche—her father, Don Gomès, Count of Gormas, wishes that his daughter marry Rodrigue. This news elates Chimène because she loves Rodrigue and dislikes Sanche, even though she never made her father aware of which man she preferred because of her great respect for his paternal authority. So, from the very opening of the tragicomedy, Chimène makes evident her adherence to the authority that her father represents (which is opposed to the king's), which will prove crucial as the play progresses.

However, the union that seems very promising to Chimène is complicated in the third scene of the first act. Don Gomès dishonors Don Diègue, and even though her own father authorized the marriage, by disgracing Don Diègue he sets in motion the machine that would prevent Chimène from being able to marry her beloved. Don Diègue, Rodrigue's elderly father and former warrior, has just

received an honor from the king: he is to become the *gouverneur* of the prince of Castile. The count, Chimène's middle-aged father, believes himself more worthy of such an honorable position; his not being appointed to it hurts his personal, aristocratic pride. He lets Diègue know his bitter feelings on the subject: whereas Diègue was once a great warrior but can no longer fight due to his advanced age, the younger Gomès is still essential to the king: "Si vous fûtes vaillant, je le suis aujourd'hui" (I.iii.195). Diègue rejects the count's claims, stating that it is indeed he who deserves to be named *gouverneur* on account of the many glories he achieved throughout his life. Their heated words to each other, becoming briefer and terser, reach a fever pitch that climaxes by Don Gomès's slapping Don Diègue—both verbally (by tutoying him) and physically. After such an affront, they prepare to fight, but a younger and more robust Gomès very easily disarms Diègue. He offers the old man more insults and then departs, leaving Diègue in a state of utter disgrace.

As Diègue is too old and frail for action, he beseeches his young and untested son to come to the aid of his father's honor—and by extension, that of Rodrigue himself and of his entire family—by seeking vengeance on Don Gomès. This puts Rodrigue in an impossible situation because the offender is the father of his fiancée: if he does not go after Gomès to avoid killing Chimène's father, his family's honor would be irrevocably tarnished, but if he sought revenge with Gomès to repair the wrong he did to Don Diègue, Chimène would no longer love him, as he would be her father's killer. Rodrigue, not knowing how to proceed, carefully weighs the situation in what is known as the "*stances*" of Act I's sixth scene. The monumental importance of Rodrigue's personal debate and his ultimate decision is highlighted by the form of the text in this scene. Instead of being in typical alexandrines and having the normal AABBC rhyme scheme like the rest of the play, Rodrigue's decision-making progress is broken into six stanzas of ten non-alexandrine lines of a different rhyme scheme. In these *stances*, Rodrigue vacillates between choosing love—sparing Don Gomès—and honor—fighting him:

Père, maîtresse, honneur, amour,
Noble et dure contrainte, aimable tyrannie,
Tous mes plaisirs sont morts, ou ma gloire ternie.

L'un me rend malheureux, l'autre indigne du jour. (I.vi.311-314)

Rodrigue briefly considers suicide as a means out of his dilemma, but he ultimately decides that he must defend his family's honor: resolute, he seems ashamed to have had doubts on this subject. By choosing honor, he is also in a way choosing love: Rodrigue realizes that by not pursuing vengeance of his father and family, he would not be worthy of Chimène. She deserves a man of honor, and by not facing Gomès, he would be bereft of any honor.

In the second act of *Le Cid*, Don Gomès demonstrates even more clearly his strongly feudal attitude and his disdain for monarchy. This act opens as Don Gomès admits to Don Arias, a *gentilhomme* of the Castilian court, that he let his passions get the better of him. Even though he realizes that he should not have slapped Don Diègue, he knows that now that the deed is done, he would betray his honor not to follow through by sparring with Rodrigue. Arias, however, pleads with Don Gomès to apologize to the man he offended and not to fight Rodrigue because the king forbids it:

Qu'aux volontés du Roi ce grand courage cède :
Il y prend part, et son cœur irrité
Agira contre vous de pleine autorité.
.....
De trop d'emportement votre faute est suivie.
Le Roi vous aime encore ; apaisez son courroux.
Il a dit "je le veux" ; désobéirez-vous ? (II.i.354-356, 362-364)

Faced with this question, Gomès, led by his aristocratic pride, has no intention whatsoever of backing down: he willingly and without question or delay chooses to disobey, believing that the monarch has no reason to interfere with business that concerns only him. By obeying, Don Gomès would be sacrificing his *gloire*, which he simply cannot even consider doing. He justifies his views to Don Arias:

Monsieur, pour conserver tout ce que j'ai d'estime,
Désobéir un peu n'est un si grand crime ;
Et quelque grand qu'il soit, mes services présents
Pour le faire abolir sont plus que suffisants. (II.i.365-368)

Don Gomès defends his disobedience of the absolute monarch by insisting on his numerous services to the king and on his own invaluable and irreplaceable greatness. He does not worry about any retribution on the part of the king for his defiance, stating:

Un jour seul ne perd pas un homme tel que moi.
Que toute sa grandeur s'arme pour mon supplice,
Tout l'État périra, s'il faut que je périsse.
.....
D'un sceptre qui sans moi tomberait de sa main.
Il a trop d'intérêt lui-même en ma personne,
Et ma tête en tombant ferait choir sa couronne. (II.i.376-378, 380-382)

Don Gomès boldly claims that through the many victories he won for his country and his king, he is alone responsible for the security of the state and even for Don Fernand's kingship. Such a claim undermines absolute monarchy, in which the king holds unparalleled significance. By stating that he is of more importance to the state than its very king, Gomès is committing *lèse-majesté*.

Corneille originally wrote four lines in this scene that he had removed in later editions "for reasons of prudence" (Bénichou 48): "Ces satisfactions n'apaisent une âme," says the count to Arias. "Qui les reçoit n'a rien, qui les fait se diffamer. / Et de pareils accords l'effet le plus commun / Est de perdre d'honneur deux hommes au lieu d'un" (Bénichou 48). Corneille had these lines, which represent an apology for dueling, deleted because of their obvious anti-absolutist sentiment. Dueling was an aristocratic means for preserving an individual's honor: it was "a tradition sacred to the nobleman's code of honor and independence, for it was his sole means of redressing or saving his personal honor and glory, which . . . were the defining qualities of a *grande âme*" (Cheng 140). Because of the individualistic nature of this feudal justice, Richelieu officially abolished dueling in France in 1626, limiting one of the last bastions of feudal freedom and privilege. *Le Cid's* Don Fernand shares the seventeenth-century French absolutist views on dueling. He likewise despises duels, as they represent an affront to his omnipotent authority in all sociopolitical matters. The count's ultimate duel with Rodrigue despite the king's wishes both demonstrates Don Gomès's unwavering feudalism and paints Don Fernand as a weak—and therefore hardly absolute—monarch.

When Arias tells Don Fernand that Gomès will duel with Rodrigue despite his orders, the king reacts as expected: he is outraged at Gomès's willful and unpardonable disobedience and his complete lack of respect for his king. He says that despite the fact that Gomès is a celebrated warrior, Fernand would not hesitate to "rabattre une humeur si hautaine" (II.vi.566). He continues by offering a solution that would be impossible to Don Gomès: "Et quoi qu'on veuille dire, et quoi qu'il ose croire, / Le Comte à m'obéir ne peut perdre sa gloire" (II.vi.601-602). Fernand believes that Gomès could have retained his honor by heeding the king's orders and not dueling, but this is an impossibility for the feudal-minded count. Despite what the king may believe, *gloire* is not acquired by obeying one's monarch. Maintaining one's *gloire* is the sole responsibility of the individual, and relying on a monarch to fill this function is an unthinkable option for someone like Gomès.

The lack of respect that Don Gomès and others afford to their king can be explained by the *dramatis personae*, which makes sure to describe him as the *first* king of Castile ("*le premier roi de Castille*" [Corneille 27]). As the first head of state, Fernand is under pressure to establish a monarchy effectively. As Greenberg states: "At the beginning of the play the world the King represents and leads is only just emerging from the cauldron of another order, a dying order which is not completely subdued, which coexists with the new, tainting it and all those in it with its own insecurity. It is this tension between the two orders that threatens the entire social and temporal unity Fernand represents, constantly reminding him (and them) that their world can be cast back into chaos" (Corneille 39). The "two orders" to which Greenberg refers are dying (though certainly not dead) feudalism (represented best by Gomès) and rising absolutism. He suggests that if Fernand were to fail in creating his state and in maintaining order, Castile could return to disorderly feudalism. The action of *Le Cid* is thus situated on the border of order and entropy. Because of the extreme newness of Castile's political situation in *Le Cid*, it should be of no surprise that so much stress exists between the new and old orders that exist simultaneously. Because he represents a threat to absolute rule, Gomès's death ensures Fernand's power, and Rodrigue, even though he chose to partake in a feudal duel, could thus be seen as a safeguard of his absolutism: "It is only in his duel with the count, in his killing of

Chimène's father, that Rodrigue will mark the end of that threat to Fernand's rule and the emergence of the new order of Castilian hegemony" (Greenberg *Subjectivity* 54). This is not completely accurate, however; Fernand will continue to display weakness and insecurity in his role as absolute monarch in the rest of the play, especially because of Chimène.

Chimène, the daughter of *Le Cid*'s emblematic feudalist, proves to be a much more complicated and nuanced figure than her father Don Gomès: Chimène has seemingly both feudal and absolutist tendencies. When Rodrigue slays this disobedient subject of the king, Chimène is put in an awkward position. Rodrigue acts quickly on his own difficult choice, but Chimène's is just beginning and will last for the rest of the play (and beyond). As Greenberg notes, Rodrigue's killing the count is a double-edged sword: "While it frees Rodrigue from the obstacle of his own internal conflict it fixes Chimène in hers" (*Corneille* 55). After the fateful duel, the play seems to center around the character of Chimène, her split psyche, and the impossible choice she will have to make; for this reason, one could say that instead of *Le Cid*, *Chimène* would be a better title for the play.

Chimène follows her lover's noble example: she chooses to pursue her honor when Rodrigue kills her father. However, her means of doing so differ greatly from Rodrigue's. Firstly, whereas Rodrigue must deliberate how to proceed before ultimately deciding to choose honor and engage with Gomès, Chimène's decision is more instinctual, and she does not waver before reaching it. When she hears of her father's slaying, she does not ruminate in *stances* as did Rodrigue: she acts without delay. Furthermore, although Rodrigue resorts to the duel, an institution of feudalism, Chimène instead goes straight to the king when she receives news of her father's slaying:

Sire, Sire, justice ! . . .

.....

Je demande justice. . . .

.....

D'un jeune audacieux punissez l'insolence :

Il a de votre sceptre abattu le soutien,

Il a tué mon père. . . .

Au sang de ses sujets un roi doit la justice. (II.viii.647, 649, 650-652, 653)

Further appealing to the king's absolutist pride, Chimène insists that she evokes his justice more for Fernand's and Castile's sake than for her own:

Enfin mon père est mort, j'en demande vengeance,
Plus pour votre intérêt que pour mon allégeance.
.....
Immolez, non à moi, mais à votre couronne,
Mais à votre grandeur, mais à votre personne ;
Immolez, dis-je, Sire, au bien de tout l'État
Tout ce qu'enorgueillit un si haut attentat. (II.viii.689-690, 693-696)

By claiming that she wishes Rodrigue to be punished for the sake of the state, Chimène is insinuating that Rodrigue's participation in the duel represented a threat against the king's nascent absolutism because of its feudalism. Unlike Rodrigue, to whom beseeching the king's help in a matter of hurt honor was unthinkable, Chimène does not hesitate to seek justice from Don Fernand for her father's death. This quest for justice is therefore a small victory for Castile's new order: by going to Fernand to settle a dispute among his subjects, thereby avoiding more dueling or other means of personal and feudal justice, Chimène is thus submitting herself and her honor to the king's absolutism. Instead of slipping backwards into chaos, Chimène's insistence on royal justice seems to be a step forward for Castile's new reign of order.

Her allegiance to absolutism is not absolute, however. Although she immediately sought the king to exact justice for her father's death and asserted that Rodrigue's feudalism was a menace to the crown, the strong sense of honor that Chimène feels is proof that feudalism is alive in her. Starting at the moment she hears of her father's death, absolutism and feudalism vie for prominence within her heart and mind. Her faith in absolutism is conditional, and it must therefore prove its worth to Chimène for her to accept it over feudalism. Because Fernand, Castile's first king, is trying to make a transition from the old feudal order to his new order, his being able to win over his subjects to the side of absolutism is crucial. Because of Chimène's uncertainty, the ultimate success of Fernand's political system is contingent on proving its value to her; the king is given a chance to demonstrate the

worthiness of his absolute power. For this reason, one can see Chimène as a “stumbling block to the triumph of the newly centralized monarchy” (Greenberg *Subjectivity* 58).

The king of Castile, in what may be an attempt to ensure Chimène’s faith in his regime, makes a significant gesture toward Chimène: hearing her harrowing account of seeing her father’s dead body, Don Fernand tells the troubled, newly orphaned young woman: “Prends courage, ma fille, et sache qu’aujourd’hui / Ton roi te veut servir de père au lieu de lui” (II.viii.671-672). This proposed changing of fathers is representative of the altering of power in Castile from feudalism to absolutism. By shifting her allegiance from the “old father”—Don Gomès—to the “new father”—Don Fernand, the king of Castile—Chimène would be moving from the old feudal order to the newer absolutist order. As Greenberg notes, a king in an absolute monarchy is the ultimate father figure: “Absolute monarchy would be impossible without a metaphoric substructure of patriarchy. . . . [T]he king is...first and foremost ‘le père du peuple’” (*Subjectivity* 63). The only way for the absolute king to consolidate all political power in his person is to make his subjects realize that he is their father; it is to him, and not to their actual biological fathers and forefathers (and thus to their honor), that the citizens of Castile owe their loyalty. By making such a gesture, Don Fernand is trying to strengthen Chimène’s allegiance to his authority.

Although she does exhibit faithfulness to the crown, she still respects feudalism and would seek vengeance according to its values if the king were to prove himself ineffective. It seems that she may be the last of Don Gomès’s lineage, and as he has no sons to defend his honor, Chimène’s duty would be to seek someone (a man) who could avenge the affront to her honor in her stead. Chimène could have easily found this male proxy in Don Sanche, who loves her. Before Don Gomès chose Rodrigue to marry his daughter, Sanche was Rodrigue’s rival for Chimène’s hand. The young man even offers this service to Chimène after her audience with the king:

Employez mon épée à punir le coupable ;
Employez mon amour à venger cette mort ;
Sous vos commandements mon bras sera fort.
. . . De grâce, acceptez mon service. (III.iii.778-780, 781)

Chimène refuses his offer on the grounds that it would undermine the king's power: "J'offenserais le Roi, qui m'a promis justice" (III.iii.782). Later, however, Chimène concedes, accepting his proposition only as a last resort: "C'est le dernier remède ; et s'il y faut venir, / Et que de mes malheurs cette pitié vous dure, / Vous serez libre alors de venger mon injure" (III.iii.788-790). Despite her intentions to have the monarch settle the affair, she would resort to a feudal alternative to her problem if Fernand were to fail her.

Complicating Chimène's situation is her enduring love for Rodrigue, which does not die with Don Gomès. Despite her passionate pleas for his death—"Il est juste, grand Roi, qu'un meurtrier périsse" (II.viii.738)—Chimène never actually stops loving her father's killer: her love and sense of honor will be ever embroiled in warfare. This is made blatantly clear in the fourth scene of the play's third act. Rodrigue, having recently slain Don Gomès, surreptitiously enters Chimène's house, seeking audience with her. His love for Chimène ever burning and his own duty to his family's honor already completed, he offers the girl his sword "du sang de [son] père encor tout trempée" (III.iv.858) so that she may complete her own. He offers no apology for his act:

Car enfin n'attends pas de mon affection
 Un lâche repentir d'une bonne action.

 . . . [J]'ai vengé mon honneur et mon père ;
 Je le ferais encor, si j'avais à le faire. (III.iv.871-872, 877-878)

Demonstrating her respect for feudal order, Chimène admits that she cannot blame him for performing his duty and that she understands why he had to kill her father; she also adds that he set an example that she too must follow. As Rodrigue sought Gomès's death, she too will seek Rodrigue's. "Tu t'es, en m'offensant," she tells Rodrigue, "montré digne de moi, / Je me dois, par ta mort, montrer digne de toi" (III.iv.931-932). The mutual respect they show for each other after such a traumatic experience is an indicator of their love, which still exists. "Va, je ne te hais point," Chimène tells Rodrigue. "Tu le dois," he replies: "Je ne puis," she answers (III.iv.963). Even though he had only a short time before

killed her father, then crept into her home with his sword still dripping with her father's blood, she cannot hate him.

Although she does not blame Rodrigue for desiring to defend his family's honor, even admiring him for it and intending to follow his example, thus proving that her motives are driven by feudalism, she still expects the monarch to settle the matter. At Rodrigue's continued insistence that Chimène take his life, she refuses:

Va, je suis ta partie, et non pas ton bourreau.
Si tu m'offres ta tête, est-ce à moi de la prendre ?
.....
C'est d'un autre que toi qu'il me faut l'obtenir,
Et je dois te poursuivre, et non pas te punir. (III.iv.940-941, 943-944)

She insists that she is merely a plaintiff, suggesting that she can only argue her case to the king, who will ensure justice. By taking the matter into her own hands, she would be disrespecting the king's authority. Chimène is yet again relying on the absolute power of the king to settle her personal affairs.

Despite her love for Rodrigue, however, Chimène remains resolute to defend her family's honor. Just like Rodrigue, Chimène instinctively chooses honor over love. After telling Elvire not long after the duel that she still loves Rodrigue, she states that her love does not blind her to her duty:

Et quoi que mon amour ait sur moi de pouvoir,
Je ne consulte point pour suivre mon devoir :
Je cours sans balancer où mon honneur m'oblige.
Rodrigue m'est bien cher, son intérêt m'afflige ;
Mon cœur prend son parti ; mais malgré son effort,
Je sais ce que je suis, et que mon père est mort. (III.iii.819-826)

Her plan to free herself from her dilemma, she explains to Elvire, is to pursue him (whether by absolutist or feudal means), have him killed as punishment for killing her father, and then to take her own life (III.iii.847-848).

Although Rodrigue and Chimène both opt for honor over love, the nature of their situations differs. By killing Gomès, Rodrigue had "everything to gain" (Cheng 174)—he mended his honor,

yet could still love Chimène freely (though he assumed this love would not be reciprocated)—but Chimène “can only lose: in killing Rodrigue she restores her honor but also extinguishes the possibility of love altogether, ensuring the loss of *both* persons (lover and father) most dear to her” (Cheng 174). Furthermore, by continuing to love the murderer of her father, Chimène goes against her duty. After regaining his family’s honor, Rodrigue increases it even more by defeating the Moors invading Castile. His victory has a two-pronged effect: first, it saves Castile from invasion, and second, it increases his *gloire* to an astronomical level, which is, though still problematic, the only means by which Chimène might be able to consider marrying him despite his previous crime.

His amazing defeat of the Moors is at once anti- and pro-absolutist. The orders he received to go off and fight are not from his “new father” but from his “old father,” Don Diègue. The latter, however, cites his king and country as Rodrigue’s reason for hastening to the battlefield: “Ton prince et ton pays ont besoin de ton bras” (III.vi.1072). His victory is therefore made in the name of Fernand’s authority, and he even apologizes to the king for not waiting for official orders: “Mais, Sire, pardonnez à ma témérité, / Si j’osai l’employer sans votre autorité” (IV.iii.1247-1248). The exceedingly grateful king excuses him and heralds him a hero, rechristening him “the Cid”: the defeated Moors referred to Rodrigue by this title that means “lord.”

The Cid seems to be the absolutist response to Don Gomès and the feudal order he upholds. The count bragged about being essential to the crown, but this time, however, it is Fernand who celebrates Rodrigue’s victory in such terms; Fernand’s claims that Rodrigue is vital to his rule echo Gomès’s similar words about himself:

Pour te récompenser ma force est trop petite ;
Et j’ai moins de pouvoir que tu n’as de mérite.
Le pays délivré d’un si rude ennemi,
Mon sceptre dans ma main par la tienne affermi,
Et les Mores défaits avant qu’en ces alarmes
J’eusse pu donner ordre à repousser leurs armes
Ne sont point des exploits qui laissent à ton roi
Le moyen ni l’espoir de s’acquitter vers toi. (IV.iii.1213-1220)

Strangely, Don Fernand, who is attempting to establish an absolute monarchy in Castile, abases his own political authority and status to praise one of his subjects: “j’ai moins de pouvoir que tu as de mérite” (IV.iii.1214). Furthermore, to the king, Rodrigue’s not waiting for orders—which Fernand should view as an assault against his absolute authority—is welcome and appreciated. Unlike the bragging count, Rodrigue remains humble after his marvelous victory:

Que Votre Majesté, Sire, épargne ma honte,
D’un si faible service elle fait trop de conte,
Et me force à rougir devant un si grand roi
De mériter si peu l’honneur que j’en reçois. (IV.iii.1229-1232)

Although it may seem that Rodrigue, so esteemed by Fernand, is politically in line with the monarch, such an interpretation is faulty: Rodrigue is in fact a political paradox. By engaging in the duel with Chimène’s father, Rodrigue is not acting in the king’s interests but his own: he is acting on behalf of feudalism, the political system opposing Fernand’s. In addition, despite his supposed absolute power, the king recognizes Rodrigue’s essentialness to the crown, which affords some power to the young warrior. Furthermore, even though he acquired victory over the Moors in the name of the king of Castile, his primary reasons for fighting seem to be to follow his father’s demands and, distraught about his situation with Chimène, to seek an honorable death. His father tells him: “Là, si tu veux mourir, trouve une belle mort ; / Prends-en l’occasion, puisqu’elle t’est offerte” (III.vi.1088-1089). His father encourages him, however, to come back victorious, earning even more honor and glory for his family; such a victory, Diègue suggests, would force the king to pardon him and would silence Chimène’s calls for his death. His fighting, therefore, can be seen as a manipulation of the king’s power. However, later in the play, before he is to fight Don Sanche in a duel that would determine whom Chimène marry, Rodrigue tells her that he wishes to die during the duel, stating that he could not meet his end during the battle against the Moors because “. . . défendant mon roi, son peuple et mon pays, / À me défendre mal je les aurais trahis” (V.i.1487-1488).

Moreover, when Rodrigue becomes the Cid, he in many respects becomes more powerful than the king himself. Rodrigue’s ascendancy to the rank of Cid make him worthy of the Infanta (“Il est

digne de moi” [V.ii.1589]), who politically could not love him before because he was not a monarch. Being on the same tier as the king is certainly problematic in an absolutist state, but Rodrigue is on an even higher level: in becoming “*le Cid*,” Rodrigue enters into the world of myth and is transformed into a legendary figure. He rises above the bounds of the law, a place of privilege reserved only for the absolute monarch. While the king is praising Rodrigue on his victory, Chimène’s arrival is announced, much to his chagrin: “La fâcheuse nouvelle, et l’importun devoir !” (IV.iv.1331). It is now clear that the king will not satisfy Chimène’s demands for justice. He even explains this to her:

J’en dispense Rodrigue ; il m’est trop précieux
Pour l’exposer aux coups d’un sort capricieux ;
Et quoi qu’ait pu commettre un cœur si magnanime,
Les Mores en fuyant ont emporté son crime. (IV.v.1411-1414)

Chimène once again appeals to his absolutism:

Quoi ! Sire, pour lui seul vous renversez des lois
Qu’a vu toute la cour observer tant de fois !
Que croira votre peuple et que dira l’envie
Si sous votre défense il ménage sa vie...? (IV.v.1415-1418)

Because Rodrigue’s ascendancy to the position of the Cid makes him indispensable to Don Fernand, he can no longer honor the justice he promised to Chimène. As the king has thus proved his absolutist order to be ineffective, Chimène resorts to that feudal stronghold—the duel—to settle the score. Strangely, Don Fernand allows Chimène’s proposed duel between Don Rodrigue and Don Sanche even though he previously made it clear that as a king who wants complete power over his subject’s lives, dueling would be a crime against his authority. Perhaps he permits it because the seemingly invincible Rodrigue would be pitted against the inexperienced Don Sanche, and the king therefore does not fear losing his precious Cid. He perhaps also believes the duel would at last silence Chimène. If this is the case, by agreeing to this duel, he is contradicting himself and therefore undermining his power. His acceptance of the duel, on the other hand, could actually be a political ploy: knowing that Rodrigue will certainly defeat Sanche, leaving Chimène’s father unavenged, he is using the duel to prove to Chimène feudalism’s inefficacy, which he hopes would lead to a

reaffirmation of her trust in absolutism. The king takes advantage of his authority to add a condition to the contest: whereas Chimène claimed she would marry the man who would defeat Rodrigue for her, the king decrees that Chimène is to marry the duel's victor, whether it be Sanche or Rodrigue. The king thereby rekindles the idea of a marriage between Rodrigue and Chimène that died with Don Gomès: although she still loved Rodrigue, the thought of marrying Rodrigue was utterly thinkable to Chimène after he killed her father.

The Cid ends up disarming Sanche, but he spares his life. Chimène, however, as Sanche arrives at her home after the duel carrying a sword, believes that Rodrigue has died and publicly laments his death, professing her love for Rodrigue in a manner that cannot be taken back. Rodrigue asks what other feats he could perform as the Cid that would allow her to marry him; if he could never win her back in such a way, he beseeches her to kill him, which she cannot do. Since he technically won the duel, the king insists that Chimène marry Rodrigue within a year: “Cet hymen différé ne rompt point une loi / Qui sans marquer de temps lui destine ta foi. / Prends un an, si tu veux, pour essayer tes larmes” (V.vii.1819-1821). Interestingly, the king's demands are softened by the inclusion of a non-absolute “si tu veux” and by the lack of firmness in his command, suggesting yet again that Fernand is a weak monarch. In the meantime, Rodrigue is to go off and fight Castile's enemies in their own lands, thereby performing his duty for his king at the same time as earning Chimène: “Pour posséder Chimène, et pour votre service, / Que peut-on m'ordonner que mon bras n'accomplisse ?” (V.vii.1833-1834).

It may at first seem odd that the king would bother having Rodrigue (whom the king is sure will best Sanche) marry Chimène. Would simply having Chimène's silence after the duel not be enough? There is, however, no reason for him to believe that she will respect such an outcome; she might still try to have Rodrigue killed through other means. One possible reason for Don Fernand's added condition is to offer Chimène, the woman Rodrigue loves but who will not (and cannot) marry him, to Rodrigue as a token of the king's great appreciation for the young man's valiant defense of Castile: she would therefore be reduced to a sexual prize. Chimène herself wonders: “Si Rodrigue à

l'État devient si nécessaire, / De ce qu'il fait pour vous dois-je être le salaire ?" (V.vii.1809-1810).

Also, by marrying Rodrigue, Chimène would be united with the man who replaced and exceeded her warrior father; Chimène would thus be reunited with her father, and order would in a way be restored.

The true reason for Fernand's insistence that they marry, however, seems to be to strengthen and ensure his absolutist rule: in fact, the future of Don Fernand's political power is hinged on the potential marriage. The couple was to marry at the play's beginning; by having them follow through with their plans, he would be encouraging the reinstatement of order by squashing the feudalistic chaos that came between them. Furthermore, if Chimène ends up marrying Rodrigue, forsaking her honor in favor of both her love and her obedience to an absolute king, Fernand will have won a sizeable victory over the feudalism that so threatens his reign. The "stumbling block" to his total power will have been removed. In such a case, Rodrigue would be an even greater champion for absolutism: he already killed one feudal menace to the crown, and by marrying the last threat, he will have ensured Fernand's ultimate political authority.

Corneille left the play open-ended: the reader does not know if the proposed marriage will ever occur. Looking to history, one might surmise that the marriage will take place because the actual Rodrigue was married to Chimène. However, Corneille himself is not too sure that such a marriage will take place; in his *Examen*, he notes that Chimène's silence at the end of the play is a sign of her disapproval: "Je sais bien que le silence passe d'ordinaire pour une marque de consentement ; mais quand les rois parlent, c'en est une de contradiction : on ne manque jamais à leur applaudir quand on entre dans leurs sentiments ; et le seul moyen de leur contredire avec le respect qui leur est dû, c'est de se taire" (Corneille 115). If the wedding never happens, it would be a victory for feudalism and a blow to Fernand's struggling absolutism. Through this ambiguity over the future of the two political systems, Corneille is reflecting the political uncertainty of his own day.

Early seventeenth-century French politics did not just inspire the action of *Le Cid*: the play also had a monumental influence on politics. Speaking of this play, Greenberg states that "[t]he most

significant political event of 1637 was neither military nor diplomatic, it was theatrical” (*Académie* 273). *Le Cid* set off a slew of criticism—referred to as the *Querelle du Cid*—that the Académie Française would eventually silence by an official decision. This literary “quarrel” allowed the Académie, the political determiner of literary taste founded by the absolutist Richelieu, to judge a work of literature for the first time, and its decisions on *Le Cid* would change the course of literature. Firstly, critics rebuked the play for its poor adherence to the three unities of classical theater: it was considered highly improbable, for example, that all the action of *Le Cid* could take place within twenty-four hours. Despite this apparent abuse of the unities, “*Le Cid* was much more regular than most plays of the time” (Cheng 189). The Académie’s rulings on this matter would ensure that Corneille and other playwrights would make certain that they would stay within the bounds of the unities. Furthermore, the action of the Académie in a way reflects the text: the dueling critics (reminiscent of feudalism) were stopped by the absolutist institution of the Académie, something that Don Fernand, being the weak absolutist monarch he was, was never able to accomplish.

What is of more interest are the accusations of a mistreatment of *bienséance*, or decorum, in *Le Cid* leveled by Corneille’s opponents, especially against the character of Chimène. Georges de Scudéry, one of these critics, claiming that plays are meant to be didactic, took issue with Chimène’s continuing to love Rodrigue despite his having killed her father. Such behavior is not “verisimilar and morally proper”; Chimène is thus “shockingly immoral” (Cheng 185). According to Scudéry and other detractors of *Le Cid*, Chimène ought not to have ever approved of Rodrigue’s killing Gomès or told Rodrigue that she wished that he would defeat Don Sanche in their duel, which would have led to her marrying her father’s assassin. Scudéry labeled such behaviors “worthy of a prostitute” (Cheng 185). In a supposedly instructional text, girls would be in danger if they were to imitate the heroine of *Le Cid* by unashamedly forsaking their duty in favor of love.

The critics’ accusations that Chimène was not being true to her honor seem certainly overstated. While she does admit several times in the text that she still loves Rodrigue—from her immediate call for justice after the duel until her disapproving silence at the very end of the play—

Chimène stays ever true to her honor, never wavering as Rodrigue briefly did. Because Corneille called his play a “tragicomedy,” critics assumed that the marriage suggested at the end would occur, which would “[force] Chimène into the moral depravity of renouncing her revenge in order to marry her father's murderer” (Goode 44). In Corneille’s *Examen*, he mentions Chimène’s probable disapproval and highlights her strong sense of honor, making her eventual marriage to Rodrigue ambiguous if not improbable. Strangely, if Chimène were to accept the marriage proposed at the play’s end, as the critics of *Le Cid* unswervingly assumed she will, it would be a victory for absolutism. Thus, oddly, the critics and even the Académie, an institution of absolutism, would rather have the play end in a way that promotes feudalism. It is possible although unlikely, however, that they did not effectively grasp the political significance of the contents of the play.

The critics’ attack on Chimène could be based primarily on gender roles: “The Académie’s opinion reflected a deep-seated sexual bias inherent in the 17th century” (Greenberg *Académie* 274). Whereas Rodrigue resorts to weighing his options of love and honor before at last deciding on his duty, Chimène reacts without delay in her honor’s favor. Rodrigue’s indecisiveness can be viewed as feminine, and Chimène’s firm resoluteness as masculine. Chimène, who in the play is surrounded by men (with the small exception of the Infanta), proves herself to be just as “manly” as they through her pursuit of *gloire*, which, moreover, is undoubtedly a masculine entity (Cheng 179). Her emotional—and therefore feminine—avowals of love to Rodrigue, Cheng argues, only had the opportunity to exist because of the inequity of Rodrigue’s and her own situation: Rodrigue, unlike Chimène, had nothing to lose by continuing to love Chimène (179). She also decries being treated as an object—a sexual prize in the duel between Rodrigue and Sanche. The critics of *Le Cid* may have been knowingly or unknowingly reacting to these transgressions of gender roles when they attacked *Le Cid* and Chimène.

Bénichou suggests that “the seventeenth century [was] the last battlefield between the ethics of feudalism and those of the modern world” (ix). In Corneille’s *Le Cid*, which clearly reflects such a battle, there is no obvious winner of the political showdown. By putting aside her quest for feudal revenge against Rodrigue and marrying him, the future of absolutism is safe; however, by continuing

her pursuit of Rodrigue and therefore disobeying the king's command to marry him, feudalism would win the battle. The year during which Chimène must decide constitutes a period of utter political uncertainty. Perhaps it is this ambiguity that most outraged the tragicomedy's detractors: when Richelieu was gaining power and establishing an absolute monarchy, France was "still reeling from the chaos of civil war, still tottering on the brink of religious, social and political divisions," and "feudality . . . was waning, but far from dead" (Greenberg *Subjectivity* 48). During this politically confused time, perhaps *Le Cid*'s critics were left uneasy by the play's ambiguous political message and the ending's suspense; the disorderly depiction of gender in the play could have also contributed to their disquiet. It is, perhaps, this desire for order and structure that ensured absolutism's eventual political predominance in France.

Chapter Two: *L'École des femmes*

Ancien régime France was a patriarchal society. In such a system, it is men who hold all social and political power, and women are under their authority. The seventeenth century, however, saw the rise of the salon, a feminine space within the male-dominated paternalistic state where women could exercise some form of subjectivity not only over their own lives and their own bodies, but even over literature and society, all of which were subjected to man's domination in a patriarchal system. Salon women, known derogatively as *précieuses*, could escape the restrictive gender roles to which patriarchy confined them or even create new ones by participating in salon activity. This feminine awakening consequently threatened many "antifeminists," those who fervently supported the patriarchal status quo; not even being able to imagine a world in which men and women were equals or at least each held a different amount of power, they feared that through the *préciosité* of the salons, women would take control of society. In his *L'École des femmes*, Molière displays through the character of Arnolphe the anxieties of over-paternalistic antifeminists of seventeenth-century France vis-à-vis the female agency that preciosity proffered. Arnolphe finds himself at odds with both preciosity and "normal" paternalism. In this play, he is the source of tensions between paternalism and preciosity as well as between normative paternalism and a much more ridiculous version of it.

Molière's Arnolphe embodies fanatical paternalism. He fosters a strong mistrust of all women, fearing above all being cuckolded, believing that, if given the opportunity, all wives will be untrue to their husbands, thereby ruining their honor and emasculating them. By engaging in extramarital affairs, women tip the power scales in their favor, which, to a binary-minded paternalist like Arnolphe, is unbearable. However, Arnolphe claims to know women and their dastardly tricks and has therefore devised a novel solution to the problem of the wily wife and of cuckoldry:

Je sais les tours rusés et les subtiles trames
Dont pour nous en planter savent user les femmes,
Et comme on est dupé par leurs dextérités.
Contre cet accident j'ai pris mes sûretés ;
Et celle que j'épouse a toute l'innocence
Qui peut sauver mon front de maligne influence. (Molière I.i.75-80)

Arnolphe took into his care more than a decade before Agnès, a girl only four years old; he sent her away to a convent and ensured that she would be raised in total ignorance: “Je veux,” says Arnolphe,

. . . qu’elle soit d’une ignorance extrême.

.....
Dans un petit couvent, loin de toute pratique,
Je la fis élever selon ma politique ;
C’est-à-dire ordonnant quels soins on emploierait
Pour la rendre idiote autant qu’il se pourrait. (I.i.99-100, 135-138).

This Pygmalion’s intention was eventually to marry the ignorant woman whom he created according to his own specifications. By limiting Agnès’s education to basic domestic skills, religion, and notions of conjugal fidelity and responsibility (“Et c’est assez pour elle, à vous en bien parler, / De savoir prier Dieu, m’aimer, coudre, et filer” [I.i.101-102]), Arnolphe believes he will prevent her from developing any sort of agency that would allow her to cuckold him: he thinks that any kind of subjectivity afforded to women—even through education—will be expressed sexually. Thus, by restricting his young ward’s education, Arnolphe believes that he has created the perfect wife: one that neither would nor could ever render him a cuckold, thus conserving total male dominance.

Arnolphe’s plan was not created on a whim: he spent many years studying cuckolds and women in order to invent it:

En sage philosophe on m’a vu, vingt années,
Contempler des maris les tristes destinées,
Et m’instruire avec soin de tous les accidents
Qui font dans le malheur tomber les plus prudents ;
Des disgrâces d’autrui, profitant dans mon âme,
J’ai cherché les moyens, voulant prendre une femme,
De pouvoir garantir mon front de tous affronts,
Et le tirer de pair d’avec les autres fronts. (IV.vii.1188-1195)

At the play’s beginning, Arnolphe believes that this long-prepared plan is working, much to his pleasure. Having recently taken her out of the convent where he had sent her to become an idiot, he takes delight in witnessing in her the ignorance he so wished: “Et grande, je l’ai vue à tel point innocente, / Que j’ai béni le ciel d’avoir trouvé mon fait, / Pour me faire une femme au gré de mon souhait” (I.i.140-142). He rejoices in her total ignorance of human reproduction:

L'autre jour . . .
Elle était fort en peine, et me vint demander,
Avec une innocence à nulle autre pareille,
Si les enfants qu'on fait se faisaient par l'oreille. (I.i.161-164)

Because Agnès knows nothing of the human body and of sexuality, Arnolphe thinks that she can never engage in adultery. To prevent ruining his carefully crafted project, Arnolphe keeps his ward from coming into contact with society, which has the power of corrupting her: he keeps her “mise à l'écart” (I.i.145) in a smaller house to which he only invites “des gens aussi simples qu'elle” (I.i.148).

Through his depiction of Arnolphe, Molière is satirizing one extreme of paternalism. Even in a patriarchal society like seventeenth-century France, Arnolphe's extremely misogynistic worldview is not considered acceptable. Arnolphe is not admired for staunchly defending totalitarian masculine authority in marriage and society: he is in fact ridiculed for the extraordinariness of his aims. This character's ridiculousness is clearly demonstrated in the play's first scene through his conversation with his friend Chrysalde, who in the play represents the voice of reason. By pairing the extreme Arnolphe and the rational Chrysalde, two characters diametrically opposed in their ideologies, Molière creates a lens through which to view the former's ridiculousness. Chrysalde, who had recently heard of his friend's plans to marry the next day, wishes to make his disapproval of this marriage known to Arnolphe. He defends his intentions to marry his ward by explaining to Chrysalde the plague of cuckoldry running rampant in the city. He ridicules husbands for their “patience” and seems to believe that the husbands who permit cuckoldry are just as worthy of blame as the malign women who commit adultery: “Est-il au monde une autre ville aussi / Où l'on ait des maris si patients qu'ici ?” (I.i.21-22). He gives Chrysalde descriptions of such men and their treacherous wives, whom he refers to as “des sujets de satire” (I.i.43). He mentions the man “qui amasse du bien” (I.i.25) whose wife gives it to her lover, the man who sits idly by as other men present his wife gifts, the man who kindly receives his wife's lover at his home, the wife who “de son galant . . . / Fait fausse confiance à son époux fidèle” (I.i.35-36), and the wife who “pour se purger de sa magnificence” (I.i.39) says that she has won the money by gambling, which was itself in the seventeenth century an occupation in which

women were discouraged from participating. By means of his plans of marrying the girl he himself fashioned in such a way that she never could cheat on him, Arnolphe believes that he has cunningly outmaneuvered the fate of cuckoldry that he sees strike the other men of his city. His efforts would prevent him and his future wife from being among the characters in the absurd spectacle of cuckoldry he sees all around him.

While he concedes that cuckoldry does indeed happen, Chrysalde believes that his friend's fears of being cuckolded are far overblown, reducing the horns of the cuckold, which Arnolphe refers to as an "infaillible apanage" (I.i.12) of marriage, to simple "coups du hasard, dont on n'est point garant" (I.i.13). Chrysalde adds that he believes that it is thus foolish to take too much care to guard oneself against them: "Car enfin vous savez qu'il n'est grands, ni petits, / Que de votre critique on ait vos garantis" (I.i.17-18). Chrysalde also warns Arnolphe about the great and unusual pleasure he takes in ridiculing cuckolds: ". . . vos plus grands plaisirs sont, partout où vous êtes, / De faire cent éclats des intrigues secrètes" (I.i.19-20). By marrying, as he intends to do the next day, Arnolphe, despite what he believes to be a careful and fool-proof scheme, will be putting himself in a position among those whom he constantly ridicules: "Mais quand je crains pour vous, c'est cette raillerie / Dont cent pauvres maris ont souffert la furie" (I.i.15-16). ". . . [Q]ui rit d'autrui," warns Chrysalde, "Doit craindre qu'en revanche on rie aussi de lui. / . . . / Car enfin il faut craindre un revers de satire" (I.i.45-46, 56). Chrysalde claims to have a more reasonable approach to hearing of husbands' misfortunes; instead of mocking and guffawing like Arnolphe, Chrysalde refrains from taking any joy in hearing rumors of cuckoldry. "J'y suis assez modeste" (I.i.51), he claims, although he may indeed find fault with husbands who are too lenient with their cheating wives. By not openly jeering cuckolds, Chrysalde states that if he too were ever to become one himself, he would be spared from ridicule and he may even be pitied:

Après mon procédé, je suis presque certain
Qu'on se contentera de s'en rire sous main :
Et peut-être qu'encor j'aurai cet avantage
Que quelques bonnes gens diront : Que c'est dommage ! (I.i.61-64)

Conversely, Chrysalde shares his concerns that if Arnolphe, despite his intentions against it, were ever to sprout horns from his own forehead, the public would not spare any derision and would mock him because unlike his more reasonable friend, Arnolphe took great pleasure in exposing and making great fun of cuckolds. “Vous risquez diablement” (I.i.66), he warns Arnolphe.

Chrysalde does not only express his concerns over Arnolphe’s attitude toward cuckoldry: he also opposes Arnolphe’s misogynist stratagem that would avoid it. Chrysalde contends that marrying a “sotte” (I.i.81) is a poor solution. Arnolphe believes that a stupid wife—because she is ignorant of both society and sex—can do no evil, but Chrysalde counters this view by stating that an ignorant person could never know when she is doing wrong for the same reasons:

Mais comment voulez-vous, après tout, qu’une bête
Puisse jamais savoir ce que c’est qu’être honnête ?
.....
Une femme d’esprit peut trahir son devoir ;
Mais il faut, pour le moins, qu’elle ose le vouloir :
Et la stupide au sien peut manquer d’ordinaire,
Sans en avoir l’envie et sans penser le faire. (I.i.107-108, 113-116)

Additionally, Chrysalde states that it would be wearisome to have a stupid person always around oneself.

As these men are very different in their views on the subject of marriage, they will never be able to agree with each other. Arnolphe is utterly unmoved by his friend’s entreaty not to marry an idiot and remains unwaveringly unconvinced, letting his friend know that he will never be persuaded to forgo his plans: “À ce bel argument, à ce discours profond,” he tells Chrysalde,

Ce que Pantagruel à Panurge répond :
Pressez-moi de me joindre à femme autre que sotte,
Prêchez, patrocinez jusqu’à la Pentecôte ;
Vous serez ébahi, quand vous serez au bout,
Que vous ne m’aurez rien persuadé du tout. (I.i.117-122)

Arnolphe continues his claims of steadfastness: “Chacun a sa méthode. / En femme, comme en tout, je veux suivre ma mode” (I.i.123-125). Arnolphe then is a man who cannot—and will not—take advice,

even if like Chrysalde's it is perfectly reasonable. His wish to follow his own ambitions, even though they are socially risible and make him a social outlier, takes precedent and subsequently renders him blind to reason. Chrysalde's rational and socially accepted paternalism does not suit Arnolphe; he prefers to operate outside social norms and conventions. Arnolphe's views and intentions go beyond simple paternalism: by wishing to avoid the cuckold's horns, Arnolphe takes paternalism several steps further by severely limiting Agnès's education and by completely removing her from society. By being so engrossed in his ridiculous mindset, Arnolphe is not grounded in reality; he lives in an imaginary dream world of his own making and refuses to function in the terms of the real world. When placed beside the claims of the reasonable Chrysalde, Arnolphe's elaborate and over-paternalistic plan to prevent being assigned the fate of the cuckold can only be seen as asinine: because of the extremeness of his misogynistic views and plans, Arnolphe is without doubt a ridiculous character. Through his advice and warnings, Chrysalde points out the futility of a plan to prevent cuckoldry, and Arnolphe is therefore setting himself up for disaster.

Because of its extremity, Arnolphe's plans based on his hatred for women do indeed backfire. Despite his careful and meticulous intentions, Agnès, the girl in his care, manages to fall in love with Horace, a young man she spies from her balcony. The absurdity of Arnolphe's reasoning and the sagacity of Chrysalde's soon become apparent: because Agnès is completely oblivious to all matters pertaining to courtship and sex, she would never know when a man is taking advantage of her and thus spoiling Arnolphe's carefully crafted virgin bride. After learning of the young man's visit, Arnolphe warns her that she must be married to experience the joys of love:

Oui, c'est un grand plaisir que toutes ces tendresses,
Ces propos si gentils, et ces douces caresses ;
Mais il faut le goûter en toute honnêteté,
Et qu'en se mariant le crime en soit ôté. (II.v.607-610)

He is insinuating that she should marry Arnolphe, but Agnès resolves instead to marry the young Horace so she can love him freely, much to Arnolphe's disappointment. Such snags point out the silliness of Arnolphe's misogynist strategy: although he worked for twenty years to prevent being

made one, he finds himself possibly becoming a cuckold before he is even married to his “perfect” wife.

The force that runs countercurrently to Arnolphe’s overly paternalistic and misogynistic worldview is *préciosité*. This movement, whose apogee is generally placed between 1650 and 1660, was born with the salons—or as they were known in the seventeenth century, *ruelles*—that were run primarily by aristocratic women. The women who frequented these *ruelles* were known pejoratively known as *précieuses*. The movement of the salon and thus of preciosity began when the marquise de Rambouillet left the court of Louis XIII, greatly displeased with its rusticity and rudeness. Other aristocratic women unsatisfied with the court followed her, and her boudoir where they would meet, known as the *chambre bleue*, consequently became a sort of “alternative court” (DeJean 298): the marquise de Sévigné wrote that during a certain time “the Hôtel de Rambouillet was the Louvre” (DeJean 298). Unlike the official court, wit, politeness, and refinement reigned at Rambouillet’s *ruelle*.

The participants of Rambouillet’s salon and of all the other salons that appeared after her example were principally women, and their leaders were always women. The salon was a feminine space, and the proposed values and the activities which took place there were exclusively decided upon by women: “in all these assemblies women set the tone” (Maclean 142). This fact contrasts with the royal court, a center of masculinity and antifeminism (Maclean 142): by creating the *ruelle*, the marquise de Rambouillet created a feminine space analogous to the masculine space of the official power of the state, which was the court.

The salon was also opposed to the state in that it became a place that determined literary, artistic, and social taste, despite the fact the state officially established the Académie Française to accomplish similar goals. The *salonnières* discussed fashions of all domains—e.g., language, clothing, and literature—and “the influence these informal debates had on the literary life of the age was immense” (DeJean 299). Male writers, seeking the approval of the *salonnières*, would go to the

salons to read them their texts, and some authors of the seventeenth century, including La Rochefoucauld, even began their careers in the salons (DeJean 299). According to DeJean, the modern “French style”—both literary and social—is a direct result of the literary conversations held in the *ruelles* of the seventeenth century (298). This salon movement was “the only time in the history of the French literary tradition that a powerful phenomenon, a movement with important literary, social, often even political implications, was initiated by women” (DeJean 299).

The strong feminine presence of the *ruelles* cannot be understated: as DeJean claims, “*préciosité* was much more than a literary movement of minor importance. It began as a feminist movement, inspired by early seventeenth-century projects for women’s education” (302). The *précieuses*, proto-feminists, wished for the right “for women what would today be termed control over their bodies” and “the choice of a marriage partner” (DeJean 302). In seventeenth-century patriarchal France, such matters lay solely in the hands of men—fathers and husbands. Marriages typically arranged by the father were the norm. Although pregnancy often compromised women’s health, and childbirth could very often prove fatal for mothers, husbands were eager for heirs, and women were thus forced to deal with such dangerous possibilities. DeJean notes, however, that despite their intentions, the *précieuses* had no actual enduring victories in “marital or reproductive freedom” (302).

Because of the strong feminine presence of the *ruelles*, seventeenth-century antifeminists naturally decried them; they harbored exaggeratedly negative views of *préciosité*. They accused the female *précieuses* of “idleness, luxury, ambition, illicit love, venality”—all of which “manifestations of human pride” (Lougee 70). The antifeminists believed these feminine traits damaged the social fabric. Salons, as these antifeminists also believed, threatened the well-engrained social class system of the day, as nobles and *bourgeoises* were often considered social equals with the space of the salon. *Précieuses* were accused of foolishly spending money on luxurious items such as lavish clothing and jewelry. Many antifeminists also accused the *salonnières* of prostituting themselves at the salons (Lougee 79). The *précieuses* were nothing more than money-hungry, debauched coquettes and prostitutes who were feeble against the temptations of basic human pride.

Seventeenth-century French antifeminists advocated marriage to remedy what they perceived were the problems that *préciosité* imposed onto society: they called for domesticity. Instead of being engaged in public roles and in salons, they claimed that women should never stray from the home or their duties therein. Women should remain faithful to their roles as wives and as mothers and do everything in their power to please their man and to ensure the smooth operation of the household. If contained firmly within the domestic realm, women could not be corrupted by society (especially through the *ruelles*) and they in turn would not corrupt society and the state by feminizing them, which was another fear of the antifeminists. The honest housewife could, however, help strengthen society and the state by both “[providing] for the spiritual welfare of the family” and promoting “the moral and social regeneration of France” (Lougee 88) by staying true to the traditional gender roles the antifeminists so vehemently defended. Marriage also strengthened the nation through procreation: therefore, rejecting marriage and having children—hallmarks of *préciosité*—were considered treasonous acts (Lougee 90). Dedicated wives and mothers were not obsessed with luxury and laziness like the *précieuses*: they were committed to their various duties in the home. They did not spend lavishly like the *salonnières*: they instead were “good managers” (Lougee 91) of the family’s assets. To the antifeminists, therefore, marriage was the key to restoring the social stability that *préciosité* had weakened.

Because of his views toward preciosity and women in general, Arnolphe can easily be classed among these antifeminists. In accordance with their views on society and marriage, Arnolphe sees the husband as a supreme commander and the wife as a lowly servant. He himself imparts this message to Agnès:

Votre sexe n’est là que pour la dépendance :
 Du côté de la barbe est la toute-puissance.
 Bien qu’on soit deux moitiés de la société,
 Ces deux moitiés pourtant n’ont point d’égalité ;
 L’une est moitié suprême, et l’autre subalterne :
 L’une en tout est soumise à l’autre qui gouverne ;
 Et ce que le soldat, dans son devoir instruit,
 Montre d’obéissance, au chef qui le conduit,

N'approche point encor de la docilité,
Et de l'obéissance, et de l'humilité,
Et du profond respect où la femme doit être
Pour son mari, son chef, son seigneur, et son maître. (III.ii.699-706, 709-712)

He also proves himself to be among the antifeminists through his perceptions of preciosity. *Préciosité* is not as explicitly visible in Molière's *L'École des femmes* as it is in other plays, such as his *Les Précieuses ridicules* and *Les Femmes savantes*, two plays that deal directly with the subject. Whereas paternalism is very conspicuous in *L'École des femmes* and is represented through the character of Arnolphe, Chrysalde, and others, preciosity has no actual voice of its own in the text. The *précieuse* is however present in this play, taking the form of a ghost that haunts and taunts Arnolphe: preciosity thus only exists in the comedy through Arnolphe's phantasmic fears about women, women's sexuality, and even his own sexuality. As Arnolphe harbors many of the same misogynist sentiments of the antifeminists of Molière's day, he devises and attempts to carry out his plan to create the perfect woman, whom he intends to be an "anti-*précieuse*," a woman who is the exact opposite of a *précieuse* through her lack of education and public exposure, her dedication to the roles of spouse and mother, and her total dependence on men. Therefore, unlike a *précieuse* supposedly ruled by baser passions, Agnès could never be untrue to him.

Despite its not being actually present in the play, one can still see in what ways Molière favors and disfavors *préciosité* in *L'École des femmes*. By means of the ridiculous Arnolphe's detractions of *préciosité*, Molière is at once mocking patriarchy and, to a certain extent, defending preciosity. Seeing his wife-to-be sartorially occupied ("La besogne à la main ! c'est un bon témoignage" [I.iii.231]), thus faithfully fulfilling her traditional paternalistic gender role, an overjoyed Arnolphe apostrophizes the *précieuses*, defying them:

Héroïnes du temps, mesdames les savantes,
Pousseuses de tendresse et de beaux sentiments,
Je défie à la fois tous vos vers, vos romans,
Vos lettres, billets doux, toute votre science,
De valoir cette honnête et pudique ignorance. (I.iv.244-248)

Through such a claim, Arnolphe devaluates the *précieuses*' preoccupation with literature and science in favor of the diametrically opposed performance of subservient feminine duties that Arnolphe is elated to behold. Earlier in the play, while defending to Chrysalde his plan to marry the ignorant Agnès, Arnolphe states that a *précieuse* (“une spirituelle” [I.i.87]) spends her time writing and reading literature—which is what he is trying to keep Agnès from by depriving her of education—and frequenting men. Arnolphe thus subscribes to the notion common among the antifeminists of the seventeenth century that the *précieuse* was by nature a sexually promiscuous and perverse creature. By claiming that a wife who received an education extending beyond household chores is naturally licentious and ready to subvert man's traditional dominance over woman, Molière is portraying both Arnolphe and his antifeminist brethren as ludicrous, thus defending *salonnières* from such unwarranted attacks.

Molière's objections to *préciosité* are likewise indirect; he does not attack its excesses as he does with paternalism. However, in his comedy *Les Femmes savantes*, published a decade after *L'École des femmes*, Molière critiques *préciosité* much more explicitly. In this play, Armande, a ridiculous *femme savante* (or *précieuse*), views Henriette's desire to marry as being foolish. The *précieuses* were known for their rejection of marriage, but Armande mostly disapproved of her sister's wedding out of jealousy: Molière is criticizing the *précieuses*' attitude towards marriage as well as their hypocrisy toward their core beliefs. The play ends, however, with the plans of a wedding between Henriette and her lover; in *Les Femmes savantes*, therefore, the paternalistic institution of marriage triumphs and escapes the playwright's criticism whereas the precious refusal of marriage is ridiculous. Although *L'École des femmes* equally ends with a wedding, there is no outright ridicule of a *précieux* rejection of marriage as there is in *Les Femmes savantes*; marriage seems to triumph in the play as Horace and Agnès—a woman—genuinely find happiness in it, suggesting that Molière disagrees with the *précieuses*' rejection of marriage.

Despite preciosity's not being explicit in *L'École des femmes*, Molière does manage to poke fun at it. Arnolphe kept Agnès locked away; her only means of interacting with the outside world was

through her balcony, which, because it exists between her closed-off domestic sphere and the outside world, is a liminal space. It is here that she and Horace first see and fall in love with each other. This space that allowed the intermingling of the sexes is thus analogous to the seventeenth century salon, which the antifeminists were against for this very reason (among many others). The youths then begin an awkward exchange of bows (II.v.488-494). Unlike the art of conversation so prized and esteemed in the salon, the two young lovers' "conversation" of social bodily gestures is clumsy and inelegant: Molière may thus be ridiculing preciosity through this depiction of an asinine "salon" conversation. In the play's last scene, a desperate Arnolphe declares his intentions of carrying off Agnès; the distressed young woman seeks the aid of her lover: "Me laissez-vous, Horace, emmener de la sorte ?" (V.ix.1724). The ineffectual Horace replies: "Je ne sais où j'en suis, tant ma douleur est forte" (V.ix.1725). Through Horace's complete lack of power and of self-confidence, even at the desperate behest of his lover, Molière seems to be mocking the *précieux* ideal of the weak and submissive male lover.

In the play's dénouement, the tensions between these three "systems"—normative paternalism, ridiculous paternalism, and preciosity—are at last resolved. As soon as he finds out about the young man who courted his ward-fiancée, Arnolphe tries to resolve this problem, resorting to overly-paternalistic tactics such as giving her a lecture on gender roles supplemented with an instruction manual on how to behave like a good wife, attempting to harm Horace as he climbed onto Agnès's balcony, and trying to carry Agnès away at the end of the play. His antifeminist pedagogy and masculine violence, however, do not lead him to victory: a strike of luck foils his plans and saves the two young lovers. Arnolphe learns that she is actually the daughter of a friend of his own friend Oronte and that she is engaged to marry Oronte's son—none other than Horace, her lover. The plans he crafted for years now suddenly undone, he emits a defeated "Oh !" (V.ix.1764) and quickly flees. Agnès and Horace are now gleefully able to marry.

As Agnès is ultimately able to marry Horace, this dénouement may lead the reader to question whether or not Molière was a "feminist." According to Johnson, "It can easily be seen that although

Molière in *L'École des femmes* is taking women's side in advocating their right to marry the man of their choice, he is not really suggesting that anything in the social *structure* be changed" (175); the message of the play is "an attempt to change attitudes rather than structures" (176). This is most certainly true: Molière does indeed place Agnès's (and by extension, all women's) victory at the play's end within a paternalistic structure—not the excessive paternalism structure that Arnolphe prescribes, but that of Chrysalde's everyday, rational paternalism.

Even though Agnès can marry the man she wants, both she and Horace choose to base their union on a paternalistic model. Horace mentions early in the play that he wishes to be Agnès's master: "Pour moi, tous mes efforts, tous mes vœux les plus doux / Vont à m'en rendre maître en dépit du jaloux" (I.iv.341-342). Furthermore, in her letter to Horace, Agnès claims that she would very much like to belong to him: ". . . je serais bien aise d'être à vous" (between III.iv.947 and III.iv.948); she accepts and chooses Horace as her master and thus willingly agrees to paternalism—just not Arnolphe's ridiculous brand of it. Horace would not at all be Agnès's "*maître*" in the same way that totalitarian, misogynist, and ridiculous Arnolphe intended to fill this role. According to Johnson, "Agnes will 'belong' to Horace no less surely, although more willingly, than she would have 'belonged' to Arnolphe" (175). Johnson, however, seems not to distinguish the differences between Arnolphe's and Horace's views and understandings of marriage and women. Arnolphe's approach toward Agnès—one of misogyny, oppression, and violence—fails, even though he is at the brink of succeeding when he learns of the arranged betrothal. By contrast, Horace's method of winning Agnès—one of love, respect, and wooing—prevails, even though he is nearly defeated as he impotently gives up when Agnès was to be taken away from him. Arnolphe's failed method is one of excessive—therefore ridiculous—paternalism, and Horace's triumphant method is much more "acceptably" paternalistic, although it also smacks of preciousness: he deplores Agnès's captivity and forced ignorance, and he also seems to have been following *grosso modo* the "Carte de Tendre," a *précieux* roadmap of love and courtship, in winning Agnès's heart. The dénouement thus echoes the sentiment expressed in Marie de Gournay's *Égalité des hommes et des femmes*: "Si l'Écriture a

déclaré le mary, chef de la femme, la plus grande sottise que l'homme peust faire, c'est de prendre cela pour passedroit de dignité" (76). Horace will be Agnès's master, but he will not take this role to its tyrannical extremes, as Arnolphe would do. Molière thus condemns an extreme form of paternalism yet maintains the traditional paternal structures of seventeenth-century France; within this traditional framework he inserts what is almost a form of preciosity: the right for women to be (at least somewhat) educated, to be active in their courtship, and to choose their own husbands—their own “masters”—a respect for women that Arnolphe's excessive paternalism would never allow.

Through the comedy's ending, Molière may be voicing his approval of Louis XIV's absolutist policies. Arnolphe's plan seems to be based on an exaggeration of the absolute monarch's political schema, one of patriarchy: Arnolphe even raised Agnès since she was very young, so Arnolphe can be seen as a sort of father figure to her. At the end of the comedy, however, Agnès is reunited with her real father, Enrique. Her real father—unlike Arnolphe, who grossly inflates the patriarchal structure of the state and the household that mirrors it—represents a more rational form of patriarchy. This actual father—who triumphs over Arnolphe, the quasi-incestuous “father”—represents Louis XIV and his reign. The soundness of the real father trumps the gross exaggeration of Arnolphe's machinations. This presents a positive picture of Louis XIV and his regime: it shows him as a kind—not a barbaric—father, demonstrating “that absolutism need not be synonymous with dictatorship” (Gossip 10).

The dénouement does not, however, solve the problem at the play's core—the objectification of women, especially within marriage. It is pure luck that justifies Agnès's and Horace's union, which ends up being based on the paternalistic system of arranged marriage in which neither spouse—neither wife nor husband—chooses each other. It is thus lucky that Horace and Agnès, who are arranged to be married, actually love each other. When Oronte announced the intended arranged marriage but before it was known that Horace's betrothed was Agnès, Chrysalde, the play's *raisonneur*, was against such a dictatorial marriage, considering it an abuse of paternal authority. Oronte only seems to agree to the marriage after Arnolphe convinces him to assert his authority over

his son and force him to marry his unknown fiancée against his will, which Arnolphe believed would rid him of the threat Horace posed to his marriage. Arnolphe tells the father:

Et moi, le conseil que je vous puis donner,
C'est de ne pas souffrir que ce nœud se diffère,
Et de faire valoir l'autorité de père.
Il faut avec vigueur ranger les jeunes gens,
Et nous faisons contre eux à leur être indulgents. (V.ix.1679-1683)

Chrysalde counters this argument by telling Oronte: “Si son cœur a quelque répugnance, / Je tiens qu'on ne doit pas lui faire violence. / Mon frère [i.e., Enrique, Agnès's father, who knows that Oronte's son is to be married to his daughter but also does not yet know that they are already in love], que je crois, sera de mon avis” (V.ix.1684-1686). Arnolphe continues his strategy: “Quoi ! se laissera-t-il gouverner par son fils ? / Est-ce que vous voulez qu'un père ait la mollesse / De ne savoir pas faire obéir la jeunesse ?” (V.ix.1687-1689).

The fact that Oronte concedes to the advice of Arnolphe, who in the play voices excessive paternalism, and avoids that of Chrysalde, the play's voice of reason; the fact that it is in this spirit of strict paternalism that the play reaches its dénouement; and the fact that it is pure luck that unknots the play make the ending troublesome. Why would Agnès, a woman, be able to marry the man of her choosing at the end of the play if it is only through luck and the approval of Oronte, a paternalistic figure influenced by Arnolphe? How can Agnès's apparent subjectivity be reconciled with the chance and the paternalism that allowed it? One possible explanation that may account for this problem is to look to Molière's use of fate in *L'École des femmes*. According to Hubert: “the idea of Fate, of Destiny, of predestination permeates, under one guise or another, the entire plot of *L'École des femmes* and stands out as the dominant theme of the comedy” (71). To make this point, Hubert uses Arnolphe's and Chrysalde's discussion in the play's first scene of the fate of cuckoldry. He states that Arnolphe's endeavors to avoid such a fate are “his purely human intelligence” pitted against “the persecution of a hostile destiny” (72) and that Arnolphe “becomes increasingly aware of the mysterious forces which insist on persecuting him” (73). Zwillenberg too notices the importance of

fate, stating that “it would seem, both from the denouement and from the exposition, that destiny is a real and serious force in the play” (296). Finally, Beck corroborates: “the victory of the lovers is based . . . on an outside force which has its source less in luck, or a *deus ex machina*, than in destiny, which is the principal lesson of the play. Moliere's comic vision in *L'École des femmes* is consistent, since the simple fact of comedy is that young lovers must ineluctably win out over the machinations of old men” (260).

Therefore, using destiny rather than blind luck as the driving force for the play's dénouement, one could say that this paternally contrived marriage is the form that fate took to allow Agnès to marry her beloved Horace. Whatever misogynistic precaution Arnolphe could have employed to prevent their matrimony—taking her away, for example—would have simply been fruitless: he is vainly and pointlessly fighting a power he cannot defeat—fate. Fate has authorized Agnès, a woman, to marry the man she loves, and Arnolphe's fighting against it with overzealous patriarchy is futile. Even though it was not through her own agency that she is to be married to Horace, it is not really through a man's, either: it is through the strange workings of the higher order of destiny. Molière may thus be showing that in this play a woman's right to choose her mate, which the *précieuses* desired, is written into the unknown workings of the universe, and intentions to subjugate her will thus be unsuccessful. It is also possible that having fate, rather than Agnès herself, realize her wishes provided the author a safe package with which to promote female agency.

This interpretation is perhaps too Jansenist in nature to be used in a work of Molière (as opposed to one of Racine's tragedies). In any case, Arnolphe's domineering paternalism—which is ridiculous throughout the comedy—ultimately fails, and Chrysalde's non-misogynistic paternalism (or as Johnson puts it, “benevolent paternalism” [175]) succeeds. While Arnolphe's preciosity, a specter onto which he projected his deep-seated fears of sexuality, is ridiculed as it is simply an aspect of his staunch misogyny, the play's depictions of “true” preciosity—a wish for women to be educated and to be able to choose their own mates—are triumphant by the end of the comedy, though they work only under a traditional paternalist framework. As a comedian, Molière ridiculed the extremes of society:

extreme paternalism in this text and its polar opposite—extreme *préciosité*—in *Les Précieuses ridicules* and *Les Femmes savantes*. His comedies end, therefore, with the restoration of social equilibrium. Molière was certainly no Marie de Gournay or François de La Barre—two seventeenth-century authors who promoted the equality of the sexes; he was neither socially radical nor revolutionary on his take on gender. Whereas he was certainly not one of the “antifeminists” that he opposed in *L’École des femmes*, Molière was not really a “feminist,” either—he would perhaps better be described as simply a “non-antifeminist.”

Chapter Three: *Andromaque*

By 1660, “absolute monarchy had become accepted as a way of life” (Gossip 10). The highly conservative thematics of Jean Racine’s tragic vision in one of his most well-known plays—the tragedy *Andromaque*, first performed in 1667—demonstrate to what extent Racine functioned as a mouthpiece for Louis XIV’s absolutist policies. Although this monarch prized individualism to a certain extent—in art, literature, and especially economics, for example—the desires of the individual were not to impede those of the state. Racine’s *Andromaque* mirrors the Sun King’s politics: “Racinian society requires the suppression of personal desires for the good of the state. *Andromaque*, Pyrrhus, Oreste and Hermione are unwilling to accept this law” (Cloonan 32). These principal characters of *Andromaque* forgo their political identity despite its gravity, and they thus inevitably encounter tragedy. If they had upheld the interests of their homeland by staying true to the past and resisting the passions of the present, they would have avoided tragedy; in the words of Louis XIV himself: “Quand on a l’état en vue, on travaille pour soi” (Burke 10). Racine demonstrates that only by restraining one’s own desires to ensure political obedience can one successfully avoid tragedy, and in *Andromaque*, marriage is the vehicle whereby Racine delivers his message of political constancy.

In *Andromaque*, the characters’ political identities are highly conspicuous because of the Trojan War, which, though already finished by the time of the action of *Andromaque*, has enormous weight in the play. All the play’s action hinges upon the events and the consequences of this violent war, and the characters’ roles in it are crucial to the workings of the tragedy. It has been stated that the action of *Andromaque* revolves around characters who belong to a “second generation” of heroes of the Trojan War (Tobin 43), with the exception of *Andromaque* herself, who is the widow of the hero Hector. This illustrious ancestry is revealed in the *dramatis personae* before the play even begins:

ANDROMAQUE, veuve d’Hector, captive de Pyrrhus.
PYRRHUS, fils d’Achille, roi d’Épire.
ORESTE, fils d’Agamemnon.
HERMIONE, fille d’Hélène, accordée avec Pyrrhus. (Racine 34)

Here, each major character of the tragedy is identified by his or her relationship to a famous parent or spouse. Racine therefore establishes to his reader before the play the great significance that ancestry—and through it, history and politics—holds in *Andromaque*. The playwright predicates the political identities of the play's principal characters by identifying them with their well-known fathers, mother, and husband. It is thus clear before reading the play where the characters' political allegiances should stand.

Racine underscores the crucial role ancestry plays in *Andromaque* through the use of genealogical periphrasis, a “rhetorical technique . . . that consists in avoiding the direct naming of an individual in favor of stating his or her descendance” (Tobin 44). The use of such periphrasis highlights the importance of being one's descendant or spouse and assigns an identity on the basis of the evoked relative. Upon meeting Pyrrhus at the beginning of the play, Oreste expresses joy at seeing “le fils d'Achille” who, as he states, “a pu remplir sa place” (I.ii.150): rather than addressing Pyrrhus by his name or by his title, he instead identifies him with his father Achilles, stating that Pyrrhus has actually succeeded in becoming his father. Pyrrhus also employs genealogical periphrasis, referring to Oreste as the “fils d'Agamemnon” (I.ii.178). Hermione and Andromaque, too, are objects of genealogical periphrasis in the play. By exchanging a character's name with an appellation referring to a famous ancestor or spouse, the speaker emphasizes that relative, therefore forcing his or her identity upon the character. Similarly, the other play's characters many times refer to Andromaque simply as “la Troyenne,” identifying her solely by her nationality. Through this use of geographical nomenclature and of genealogical periphrasis and the genealogical explanations of the *dramatis personae*, geographical origin and the associations of the characters of *Andromaque* with relatives who actively took part in the Trojan War are constantly at the fore, which effectively demonstrates the low worth afforded to individuality. The prominent role of genealogy in *Andromaque* illustrates the notion that every action one performs has consequences that affect not only himself but his entire family, and by extension, his compatriots and his homeland.

On the surface, because the characters are expected to be true to their parents, it may seem as though feudalism is at play in *Andromaque*, but such is not the case. In Racine's works, one does not owe allegiance to his lineage; rather, he owes it to the state. The relatives mentioned in the dramatis personae do not strictly represent the characters' lineages: they are representatives, principally through their prominent roles in the Trojan War, more of their country than of their lineage. This overlapping of contentious political systems is most likely intentional, as tragedy is an ideal means of presenting propaganda (Gossip 9):

The court at Versailles, which was one of the principal venues for the performance of tragedy, was in fact an integral part of Louis XIV's scheme to undermine the feudal aristocracy by making it fashionable for them to live at court, far away from their fiefdoms, distracted by various *divertissements*, chief among which were the tragedies of Racine. It is a great irony of Classical tragedy that while it is a consummate example of upper-class aesthetics, it can also be seen as contributing to the breakdown of feudal values and the accelerating rise of the bourgeoisie, capitalism, and the centralized state. (Goodkin *Birth* 28)

Considering Versailles as a locus of the conversion of potentially dangerous feudal mentalities to more politically orthodox pro-absolutism mentalities, it is not difficult to see Racine's play as aiding Louis XIV's goal to win the hearts and minds of the nobles. In *Andromaque*, using an aristocratic structure to present an image of absolutist fidelity that is superficially not too different from feudalism, Racine reroutes the veneration of the feudal object—the lineage—to the veneration of the absolutist object—the state.

One character in *Andromaque* who forsakes the state to which they owe their complete allegiance is Oreste. On his arrival in Epirus, Oreste tells his friend Pylade that he has come to seek Hermione's love: "L'amour me fait chercher ici une inhumaine. / . . . / J'aime : je viens chercher Hermione en ces lieux, / La fléchir, l'enlever, ou mourir à ses yeux" (I.i.26, 99-100). However, the reader only later learns that Oreste's venturing to Epirus is in fact of a wholly different nature: he has come on behalf of Greece to have Pyrrhus surrender Astyanax, the son of Andromaque and Hector, whom Pyrrhus holds prisoner: "Je viens voir si l'on peut arracher de ses bras / Cet enfant dont la vie alarme tant d'États" (I.i.91-92).

These two motives for venturing into Epirus—to take back Hermione and to convince Pyrrhus on behalf of the Greeks to surrender his prisoner—are not unrelated: they are carefully woven together by fate. Oreste reminds Pylade of his previous love affair with Hermione. After her father Menelaus gave his daughter to Pyrrhus, the savior of his family during the Trojan War, Oreste, who was in love with Hermione, was greatly saddened. When he began to notice that “Hermione à Pyrrhus prodiguait tous ses charmes” (I.i.50), he was cast into a state of bitter rage. Attempting to free himself from the strong feelings of hatred toward Hermione that were consuming him, Oreste sought to preoccupy himself with war. He inadvertently ended up being sent to Epirus—“au piège que j’évite” (I.i.66)—to demand Astyanax on behalf of all the Greeks. However, he began to realize that his strong feelings of hatred were really just misplaced love, so he decided that he would use his official duty to win back and eventually marry his beloved Hermione. Hearing from Pylade that Pyrrhus is in love with Andromaque, Oreste believes that the king of Epirus would most likely refuse the Greeks’ demand to hand over his captive, and, as Pylade suggests, Pyrrhus’s love for Andromaque would increase (“Plus on les veut brouiller, plus on va les unir” [I.i.139]), and Oreste could thus easily leave Pyrrhus’s kingdom with Hermione. Realizing that the carrying out of his country’s demands would make the execution of his own desires impossible, he even wishes his state-ordered duty to go unfulfilled: he tells Pylade, “Heureux si je pouvais, dans l’ardeur qui me presse, / Au lieu d’Astyanax, lui ravir ma princesse !” (I.i.94-95). Oreste would rather leave Epirus with Hermione than with Astyanax: he prefers that Greece’s concerns go unmet so that he may instead achieve his own amorous ambitions. Therefore, the official context of Oreste’s going to Epirus merely acts as a pretext to his own personal objective of trying to sway Hermione to love him. For Oreste, having officially been sent to Epirus was simply fortuitous: it gave him an opportunity to accomplish an undertaking of a more personal nature.

Since Oreste is using his official duty as a vehicle for his own aims, he puts aside Greece’s cares in favor of his own: the manner in which he does this, however, is outwardly non-subversive. Hampton, quoting Bourdieu, states that ““The delegate is in a kind of relationship of metonymy with

the group.’ . . . [T]he spokesperson constitutes, by his very function, the group for which he speaks—and whose voice he becomes” (167). Oreste does in fact speak for the Greeks he represents: he conveys the Greeks’ message to Pyrrhus, and he even references the Trojan War and the horrors that Astyanax’s father Hector brought upon the Greeks in order to “persuade” Pyrrhus to give up the boy. Oreste’s words and aims, however, do not align: he betrays in his heart the intentions of the Greeks whom he is supposed to be representing. Oreste thus manipulates his official duty: he performs it because he knows it will have the opposite effect—an effect that will outrage the Greeks yet delight him. He is therefore not functioning metonymically with—and is therefore not really an ambassador of—the Greeks.

Oreste’s separation from the Greeks who sent him (and of which he himself is one) is made manifest by his joy at Pyrrhus’s rejecting their demands. Oreste, despite Pyrrhus’s outright treasonous refusal, which should upset him as a Greek, is elated that he now has the opportunity to have Hermione:

Sauve tout ce qui reste, et de Troie, et d’Hector,
Garde son fils, sa veuve, et mille autres encore,
Épire, c’est assez qu’Hermione rendue
Perde à jamais tes bords et ton prince de vue. (II.iv.599-602)

Later, after Pyrrhus changes his mind and submits to Greece’s command, Oreste is distraught because this compliance prevents him from accomplishing his own individualistic aims. Furthermore, Hermione’s hand was given by her father to Pyrrhus; pining over and planning to take away Hermione either willingly or by force, thereby ruining the alliance formed by two Greek kings and grounded in the weight of past deeds, would be a scandalous and even a traitorous act against Greece.

Pyrrhus refuses to comply with Greece’s command because he plans to marry Andromaque, a political prisoner, thereby renouncing his own political allegiances, which also determine his very identity. As the son of Achilles and a Greek, Pyrrhus should not hesitate to hand over Hector’s son, but just as love for Hermione blinds Oreste, Pyrrhus’s love for Andromaque blinds him to his political

situation and to the past to which he owes allegiance. Loving and planning to marry Hector's widow and keeping Hector's son alive are serious affronts against Greece. Moreover, Pyrrhus is ignoring his promise to marry Hermione, given to him by Menelaus as a token of gratitude for his exploits in the Trojan War. To postpone marrying her is to insult Menelaus and by extension Greece and his part in the war. Pyrrhus even wishes for Oreste to take Hermione away from his kingdom:

Ah ! qu'ils s'aiment, Phœnix ! J'y consens. Qu'elle parte.
Que charmés l'un de l'autre ils retournent à Sparte !
Tous nos ports sont ouverts pour elle et pour lui.
Qu'elle m'épargnerait de contrainte et d'ennui ! (I.iv.253-256)

He views marrying Hermione more as an impediment to his own desire than as a political duty that he must fulfill without any qualms. When Pyrrhus announces to Hermione in Act IV that he will marry Andromaque, he shows that he is blind to Hermione's love for him, believing that they both were only following their duty:

Je crains de vous trahir, peut-être je vous sers.
Nos cœurs n'étaient point faits dépendants l'un de l'autre ;
Je suivais mon devoir, et vous cédiez au vôtre ;
Rien ne vous engageait à m'aimer en effet. (IV.v.1351-55)

By breaking his engagement with Hermione, he believes that he may be doing her a favor by not making her marry someone she does not love.

Although he explains to Oreste that he will not relinquish Hector's son because he is merely a helpless young child, Pyrrhus is actually unwilling to do so because he is desperate to win Andromaque's love, and he believes that by defending her son from death he may gain her affection. Despite his gesture, Andromaque remains faithful to her deceased husband and continues to refuse Pyrrhus's advances. Frantic to win Andromaque, Pyrrhus commits a serious political transgression:

Madame, dites-moi seulement que j'espère,
Je vous rends votre fils, et je lui sers de père ;
Je l'instruirai moi-même à venger les Troyens ;
J'irai punir les Grecs de vos maux et des miens.
Animé d'un regard, je puis tout entreprendre :
Votre Ilion encor peut sortir de sa cendre ;

Je puis en moins de temps que les Grecs ne l'ont pris,
Dans ses murs relevés couronner votre fils. (I.iv.326-332)

Pyrrhus has completely forgone his identity as a Greek; he reinvents himself instead not only as a Trojan but as Hector himself. Pyrrhus plans a future that would be a sort of skewed rewriting of history: instead of Pyrrhus's being Achilles reborn, as Oreste had suggested earlier, Pyrrhus here casts himself as Hector reincarnate, stating that he would rebuild in Epirus the city that he himself had a hand in destroying.

Pyrrhus realizes this wish in the last act of the play. Rather than performing his political duty by marrying Hermione, creating a union of the offspring of great Greek heroes and thereby strengthening the glory of Greece, he marries the enemy—Andromaque “la Troyenne.” Pyrrhus announces that upon marrying her that Epirus has become the new Troy, that he is now the new Hector, and that Astyanax is the king of Troy:

Enfin, avec transport prenant son diadème,
Sur le front d'Andromaque il l'a posé lui-même :
Je vous donne, a-t-il dit, ma couronne et ma foi,
Andromaque, réglez sur l'Épire et sur moi.
Je voue à votre fils une amitié de père,
J'en atteste les dieux, je le jure à sa mère :
Pour tous mes ennemis je déclare les siens,
Et je le reconnais pour le roi des Troyens. (V.iii.1505-1512)

By marrying the Trojan widow of Hector and pronouncing these words that constitute a complete reversal in geopolitical allegiance, Pyrrhus privileges his individualistic desires. Overwhelmed by his passion for Andromaque, Pyrrhus is unable or unwilling to take into consideration the monumental importance of the past, his own geopolitical identity and that of others; Pyrrhus's act is thus shameful and is certainly not fitting of the son of Achilles, of whom he is supposed to be a replica.

Oreste makes the claim in the first scene of the play that he would rather take Hermione instead of Astyanax away from Epirus, selfishly executing his own interests rather than those of the state, and it is likewise known to the entire kingdom before the play takes place that Pyrrhus is romantically preoccupied with his Trojan captive and is thus disregarding his legitimate fiancée.

Whereas these two characters forsake the affairs of their homeland before the text even commences, Hermione in contrast seems to uphold her duty as a Greek and as the daughter of Helen and Menelaus. She is angered that the son of Achilles is wooing a Trojan woman, thereby ignoring his duty to marry her. She seems to be genuinely concerned about Pyrrhus's possible disgrace should he marry Andromaque; Hermione expresses that shame would befall all of Greece if this were to occur (II.ii.571-572). When Oreste tries to convince her to leave Epirus with him, she recalls to him her duty: "Vous savez qu'en ces lieux mon devoir m'a conduite ; / Mon devoir m'y retient ; et je n'en puis partir / Que mon père ou Pyrrhus ne m'en fasse sortir" (II.iv.582-584). It seems that she respects and is obedient to the authority of her duty and that she is only willing to break it if it becomes her duty to do so.

Hermione's strict adherence to her and Pyrrhus's political obligations may not be as innocent and righteous as it seems, however, as she uses her political and filial duties to her advantage many times throughout the play. Hermione loves Pyrrhus, and it is only coincidental that it is their duty to be married; just as Oreste's being sent to Epirus functions as a serendipitously legitimate pretext for him to see Hermione, Pyrrhus and Hermione's political duty to marry is simply convenient for the daughter of Helen: it allows her to pursue him under the pretext of allegiance to Greece. In this case, her demands for political obedience serve as an instrument with which to accomplish her own ends. She is less concerned with marrying Pyrrhus to uphold the honor of Greece than she is with doing so to carry out her own individual desires. Angry and humiliated because Pyrrhus ignores her and dotes on Andromaque, Hermione refuses to flee and wishes instead to use Pyrrhus's neglect for his duty to embarrass the man she both loves and hates:

Mais l'ingrat ne veut que m'outrager.
Demeurons toutefois pour troubler leur fortune,
Prenons quelque plaisir à leur être importune ;
Ou, le forçant de rompre un nœud si solennel,
Aux yeux de tous les Grecs rendons-le criminel. (II.i.440-44)

Hermione does not wish to expose Pyrrhus as a criminal to the Greeks simply because he is disobeying orders and not acting in the best interest of the state: she wants to punish the lover who has jilted her. Later, when Oreste comes to see her, Hermione instructs him not to waste time wooing her but instead to go and perform his duty as ambassador of the Greeks:

À des soins plus pressants la Grèce vous engage.
.....
Songez à tous ces rois que vous représentez.
Faut-il que d'un transport leur vengeance dépende ?
Est-ce le sang d'Oreste enfin qu'on vous demande ?
Dégagez-vous des soins dont vous êtes chargé. (II.ii.506, 508-11)

As Pyrrhus's heeding the commands of Greece would result in what she desires most of all—marrying him—she pushes her tool Oreste toward his function.

Hermione's mask of fidelity can most clearly be seen when, embittered by Pyrrhus's constant refusal and his upcoming marriage to Andromaque, she demands that Oreste kill the king of Epirus to avenge her. Hermione indicates that the true reason for her wish for Pyrrhus to die is much more personal than it is political: "Ne vous suffit-il pas que je l'ai condamné ? / Ne vous suffit-il pas que ma gloire offensé / Demande une victime à moi seule adressée ?" (IV.iii.1188). She later sends her servant Cléone to give Oreste a message:

Va le trouver : dis-lui qu'il apprenne à l'ingrat
Qu'on l'immole à ma haine, et non pas à l'État.
Chère Cléone, cours : ma vengeance est perdue
S'il ignore en mourant que c'est moi qui le tue. (IV.iv.1267-1270)

Pyrrhus's death at Oreste's hand would therefore take the form of a personal vengeance and not a political assassination. In the play's final act, the Spartan Hermione, enraged that Oreste killed the man she loved without letting him know that Oreste was avenging her and not Greece, goes as far as renouncing her geopolitical identity:

Adieu. Tu peux partir. Je demeure en Épire:
Je renonce à la Grèce, à Sparte, à son empire,
À toute ma famille ; et c'est assez pour moi,
Traître, qu'elle ait produit un monstre comme toi. (V.iii.1561-1564)

Therefore, although Hermione initially appears to be concerned about upholding Greece's interests, it becomes clear that she has merely been exploiting political duties as a pretext to have Pyrrhus love and marry her, just like Oreste's own manipulations in his interest of marrying Hermione.

Hermione manipulates not only politics but filial duties to obtain what she wants. "To [Hermione]," writes Racevskis, "duty toward her father means nothing in itself; it simply provides the possibility of gaining more leverage in her struggle to win over Pyrrhus" (83). When speaking to Oreste, she hints at her possible lingering attachments to him: "J'ai passé dans l'Épire où j'étais reléguée : / Mon père l'ordonnait ; mais qui sait si depuis / Je n'ai point en secret partagé vos ennuis ?" (II.ii.522-524). She makes sure to place the responsibility of leaving Sparta to go to Pyrrhus's Epirus on Menelaus, her father: "She keeps Oreste's hopes alive . . . by the reference point of Menelaus's wishes" (Racevskis 82). Later, when Andromaque comes to Hermione in Act III to beseech the woman she believes will be Epirus's future queen to persuade Pyrrhus to save her son's life, Hermione employs "her own filial obligations as a part of a strategic kind of rhetoric" (Racevskis 83). In order to avoid this very uncomfortable situation, the cold Hermione tells the troubled mother: "Je conçois vos douleurs. Mais un devoir austère, / Quand mon père a parlé, m'ordonne de me taire" (III.iv.881-882).

Of all the play's four main characters, it is Andromaque who is the most complex. Like the three other main characters of the tragedy, Andromaque allows her individual concerns to take precedence over the state, but whereas Pyrrhus, Oreste, and Hermione are only preoccupied by selfish cares of the present, Andromaque never ceases to keep her glance fixed firmly and faithfully toward the past. While Oreste and Pyrrhus easily forget or dismiss their fathers' roles in the long and bloody Trojan War and the peril and danger it caused their Greek countrymen, Andromaque cannot separate her behavior and her desires from her vivid memories of the past. "In fact," writes Goodkin, "what Andromaque wishes to be is a leftover, a 'reste,' someone whose existence in the present is a pure reference to the past. Most would-be Racinian heroes—like Oreste . . . —struggle against the heritage of past determinations; Andromaque asks for nothing more than to be a pure vestige" (*Tragic* 107).

This obsession with history, which contrasts to the others' blindness of it, should be advantageous to Andromaque, giving her the impetus to perform a grand political duty—restoring Troy—but it instead actually prevents her from doing so.

Andromaque remains faithful to the memory of her deceased spouse, and despite Pyrrhus's many advances toward her, her love and devotion for Hector prevent her from even considering remarriage: “Ma flamme par Hector fut jadis allumé ; / Avec lui dans la tombe elle s'est enfermée” (III.iv.865-66). Pyrrhus, who slew many of her fellow Trojans and whose father killed her husband, would be her last choice if she were even able to think about marrying again: such a union would be a grave act of infidelity toward Hector and a disrespectful and treasonous affront to his memory and that of Troy. Desperate to convince her to marry him, Pyrrhus makes an offer that should please her politically: he offers to fight the Greeks and to rebuild Troy in Epirus if she would be his wife (I.iv.326-332). Andromaque swiftly refuses; speaking of herself and her son, the last vestiges of the once great Troy, she tells the king of Epirus:

Seigneur, tant de grandeurs ne nous touchent plus guère.
Je les lui promettais tant qu'a vécu son père.
Non, vous n'espérez plus de nous revoir encor,
Sacrés murs que n'a pu conserver mon Hector ! (I.iv.333-336)

Even though she very much loves her husband and Troy, they are no more, and Andromaque has accepted her fate and does not wish to see her city restored. Faced with this rebuff, Pyrrhus warns Andromaque that he will hand Astyanax over to the Greeks unless she agrees to marry him, but once again, Andromaque refuses.

What Andromaque wants is an asylum for her and Astyanax and not to have to marry Pyrrhus. She tells him that honoring her request would be the noble thing for him to do:

Non, non ; d'un ennemi respecter la misère,
Sauver des malheureux, rendre un fils à sa mère,
De cent peuples pour lui combattre la rigueur,
Sans me faire payer son salut de mon cœur,
Malgré moi, s'il le faut, lui donner un asile :
Seigneur, voilà des soins dignes du fils d'Achille. (I.iv.309)

Similarly, during her meeting with Hermione later in the play, Andromaque begs for clemency, urgently imploring the woman whom she believes will soon be queen to allow her and her son a private sanctuary, taking her ideal “asile” from within Epirus to elsewhere: “Laissez-moi le cacher en quelque île déserte ; / Sur les soins de sa mère on peut s’en assurer, / Et mon fils avec moi n’apprendra qu’à pleurer” (III.iv.878-880). Andromaque is refusing political involvement: being alone on this desert island with her son, they would be on neutral ground, away from the politically charged soil of Epirus, and she would spare Astyanax from lessons of political fidelity. Andromaque simply wants to be free from political conflict, and even though she has an opportunity to do so, she has no desire to take vengeance on Greece and Pyrrhus: she simply wants peace.

Céphise, Andromaque’s confidant who acts as a “voice of reason,” disagrees with the Trojan widow and strongly suggests that she accept Pyrrhus’s proposition. She recognizes Andromaque’s chance to avenge the fallen city of Troy and exhorts her to take it. Andromaque, unable to dishonor her marriage to Hector, is shocked at such encouragement: “Quoi, je lui [Hector] donnerais Pyrrhus pour successeur ?” (III.viii.984). “Ainsi le veut son fils que les Grecs vous ravissent,” Céphise replies.

Pensez-vous qu’après tout ses mânes en rougissent ?
Qu’il méprisât, Madame, un roi victorieux,
Qui vous fait remonter au rang de vos aïeux ;
Qui foule aux pieds pour vous vos vainqueurs en colère,
Qui ne souvient plus qu’Achille était son père,
Qui dément ses exploits et les rend superflus ? (III.viii.985-91)

Céphise sees a golden opportunity for Andromaque, and she even speaks for Hector, claiming that his ghost would not be offended by a marriage that could actually allow her—by means of Pyrrhus’s willingness to subvert his own political identity—to avenge him and Troy, and that it would save her son’s life. “Madame, à votre époux c’est être assez fidèle : / Trop de vertu pourrait vous rendre criminelle” (III.viii.981-982): Céphise warns Andromaque that by being excessively virtuous, Andromaque is condemning her son to death. “However,” as Mould states, “it is not a lack of concern for Astyanax which characterizes Andromaque so much as a refinement of ethical principle” (561),

which is to say that she believes that marrying Pyrrhus, even if it is the only way she can save the life of her and Hector's son, would betray everything she represents and upholds.

Faced with Céphise's reasoning, Andromaque remains resolutely against such an insufferable union. Her choice is fueled by her vivid, painful memories of the Trojan War:

Dois-je oublier Hector privé de funérailles,
Et traîné sans honneur autour de nos murailles ?
Dois-je oublier son père à mes pieds renversé,
Ensanglantant l'autel qu'il tenait embrassé ?
Songe, songe, Céphise, à cette nuit cruelle
Qui fut pour tout un peuple une nuit éternelle ;
.....
Songe aux cris des vainqueurs, songe aux cris des mourants . . . (III.viii.993-998, 1003)

Pyrrhus, on the other hand, took no heed when Oreste, with "tous les Grecs [parlant] par [sa] voix" (I.ii.144), reminded him of the havoc that Hector wreaked on the Greeks, his own people, as the messenger ironically advocated the surrender of his captive Astyanax:

Ne vous souvient-il plus, Seigneur, quel fut Hector ?
Nos peuples affaiblis s'en souviennent encor.
Son nom seul fait frémir nos veuves et nos filles,
Et dans toute la Grèce il n'est point de familles
Qui ne demandent compte à ce malheureux fils
D'un père ou d'un époux qu'Hector leur a ravis. (I.ii.155-160)

Whereas Andromaque relies on the past to make important and difficult decisions, Pyrrhus, who must be prompted to consider past events, is not at all moved considering them. Andromaque remains so faithful to her political identity that when Pyrrhus forsakes his in order to win her, she suggests that he behave more like a Greek and the son of Achilles, that he stay true to his identity rather than vileyly serving hers:

Seigneur, que faites-vous, et que dira la Grèce ?
Faut-il qu'un si grand cœur montre tant de faiblesse ?
Voulez-vous qu'un dessein si beau, si généreux,
Passe pour le transport d'un esprit amoureux ? (I.iv.297-300)

Her firmness in avoiding a damning marriage with Pyrrhus is troubled, however, when yet another memory of the past suddenly comes to her mind. During the Trojan War, before Hector went off to face Achilles, he told his wife to take care of Astyanax if he should die in battle:

“Chère épouse,” dit-il en essuyant mes larmes,
“J’ignore quel succès le sort garde à mes armes ;
Je te laisse mon fils pour gage de ma foi :
S’il me perd, je prétends qu’il me retrouve en toi.
Si d’un hymen la mémoire t’est chère,
Montre au fils à quel point tu chérissais le père.”
Et je puis voir répandre un sang si précieux ? (III.viii.1020-27)

Thinking back to this final moment with her beloved husband, Andromaque realizes its significance. Through his speech, Hector transformed their son into a sort of living gauge of their conjugal love. Allowing this invaluable token to perish by not marrying Pyrrhus would therefore be insufferable to Andromaque. Now, armed with this memory, Andromaque is for the first time in the tragedy truly conflicted; there is for her no dilemma until this point.

Her dilemma does not last long, however: it is resolved offstage between the play’s third and fourth acts. Andromaque, a woman who lives in the past, finds the solution to her present problem in a way that brings the past to the present: she consults Hector at a shrine that she built for him. After Andromaque’s pious pilgrimage to her husband’s tomb, Céphise, noticing a change in Andromaque’s demeanor, believes that she, motivated by Hector, has finally come to her senses and has at last decided to avenge her homeland:

Ah ! je n’en doute point : c’est votre époux, Madame,
C’est Hector qui produit ce miracle en votre âme.
Il veut que Troie encor se puisse relever,
Avec cet heureux fils, qu’il vous fait conserver.
Pyrrhus vous l’a promis. . . .
.....
Croyez-en ses transports : père, sceptre, alliés,
Content de votre cœur, il met tout à vos pieds.
Sur lui, sur tout son peuple il vous rend souveraine.
.....
Déjà contre les Grecs plein d’un noble courroux,
Le soin de votre fils le touche autant que vous. (IV.i.1049-1053, 1055-1057, 1059-1060)

Andromaque does not meet Céphise's hopes, however. She explains to Céphise the compromise she reached that would allow her both to remain true to Hector and to assure the life of Astyanax. Because her son embodies their marriage, Andromaque realizes that the only way that she can honor her marriage to Hector is to marry Pyrrhus. She thus decides to marry "le vainqueur de Troie" (I.ii.145) in order to save the life of her son, "Le seul bien qui me reste et d'Hector et de Troie" (I.iv.262). Soon after the ceremony, however, she will take her own life. The marriage, then, would exist in a sort of limbo: even though it would take place, it would never be consummated, thus preserving her fidelity to Hector and satisfying Pyrrhus's condition that she marry him to save Astyanax's life. Andromaque entrusts her young son's education of his father, his ancestors, and Troy to her servant Céphise:

Fais connaître à mon fils les héros de sa race ;
Autant que tu pourras, conduis-le sur leur trace:
Dis-lui par quels exploits leurs noms ont éclaté,
Plutôt ce qu'ils ont fait que ce qu'ils ont été,
Parle-lui tous les jours des vertus de son père. (IV.i.1113-1117)

By instructing Céphise to tell Astyanax of his ancestor's glorious deeds but not to tell them who they were, Andromaque is depoliticizing history. Céphise is not to tell him that his ancestors were Trojans because it might make Astyanax wish to avenge them, which Andromaque prohibits: "Mais qu'il ne songe plus, Céphise, à nous venger : / Nous lui laissons un maître, il le doit ménager. / Qu'il ait de ses aïeux un souvenir modeste" (IV.i.1119-1121). Andromaque hopes that having accepted Astyanax as his son after the wedding, Pyrrhus will not have him killed, and, wishing for the cycle of war to be finally broken, she does not want Astyanax to fight for Troy as his father did. She does not want the violence of the past to be reborn.

Pyrrhus weds Andromaque, but because Oreste has the king killed just after the ceremony, she is not able to commit suicide, thereby absolving herself of her dishonorable marriage and leaving her son a sworn protector. Just before his death, Pyrrhus crowned Astyanax king of the Trojans and

declared that all enemies of Troy were now Pyrrhus's enemies. Hearing this treasonous proclamation, Oreste's retinue slays Pyrrhus, and Andromaque's wish of avoiding past violence dies with the king of Epirus. With Pyrrhus dead, Andromaque finds herself in a place she dreads, far from the "île déserte" that she craves: she is now at the helm of a new Trojan War. Pylade, trying to persuade Oreste, driven mad by Hermione's death, warns him:

Aux ordres d'Andromaque ici tout est soumis,
Ils la traitent en reine, et nous comme ennemis.
Andromaque elle-même, à Pyrrhus si rebelle,
Lui rend tous les devoirs d'une veuve fidèle,
Commande qu'on le venge, et peut-être sur nous
Veut venger Troie encore et son premier époux. (V.v.1587-1592)

However, as Cloonan explains: ". . . Pylade's assessment of the situation is much too simplistic. . . . Pylade's explanation is superficial. He is a secondary character in the play, and along with the other confidants, he represents the viewpoint of the general citizenry" (40). Andromaque certainly finds herself in a perfect position to avenge Hector and Troy by attacking Greece after Pyrrhus's slaying, but she has proven since Act I that she has absolutely no desire to restore Troy. Despite her wishes, she has no choice but to attack Greece: according to Cloonan, she must declare war on Greece because with her son's protector dead, she has no other way to preserve Astyanax's life, which she promised Hector she would do (41). Pylade and the Greeks misinterpret her motives, though, believing her "to be pursuing the traditional goals of vengeance and the acquisition of power" (Cloonan 41).

Because of how they handle marriage, all four major characters have reached a tragic end by the end of the play. Pyrrhus dies for marrying a political prisoner, Hermione commits suicide after renouncing her homeland and ordering the death of a Greek king because he would not marry her, and Oreste's futile murder of Pyrrhus and Hermione's refusal to marry him despite his deed drive Oreste to madness. Andromaque, who rejects her chance for avenging her husband's death, also suffers, receiving a fate worse than death—life: "At the end of the play Andromaque remains alive, but only to act in ostensible agreement with values she detests. Events have forced her to participate in a new war, where the possibility of victory is slight, and which is little more than a repetition of the sort of

conflict which initially destroyed her happiness” (Cloonan 42). According to Gossip, many tragedians of seventeenth-century France “had, almost as their motto, the dual aim to please and instruct, *plaire et instruire*” (13). Racine may very well have wished his *Andromaque* to be a didactic text, demonstrating to the spectator and the reader the political dangers of love. Marriage should reinforce one’s political and social duties, not impede them. Marriage, therefore, as is clear in *Andromaque*, must be politically harmonious and not subversive, for disorder or instability at the level of marriage could prove disastrous for society and the state. As the fates of Pyrrhus, Oreste, Hermione, and *Andromaque* prove, marriage should not be pursued or maintained with purely individualistic desires in mind: one should instead be concerned with its political ramifications, as marriage has the purpose of solidifying the state.

Conclusion

In these three texts, it is individualism that makes marriages troublesome. In *Le Cid*, if Chimène will choose to disobey the king's orders to marry Rodrigue, thus individualizing herself by not conforming to his new absolute authority, Castile could be thrown back into feudal chaos. Many of Molière's fools, such as Arnolphe in *L'École des femmes*, are ridiculous because of their individuality: Arnolphe's asinine plan to create the perfect wife places him on the margins of society. In *Andromaque*, the marriages that Pyrrhus, Hermione, and Oreste crave never occur because they place their own concerns over the interests of the state. Furthermore, fate forces *Andromaque* to live in her nightmare because she rejected the opportunity to avenge her husband (who represents her homeland) by raising Troy from the ashes: she therefore chooses the peace she desired instead of political redemption. One can link these negative portrayals of individuality directly to the policies of the absolutist monarchs of seventeenth-century France.

However, despite the heavy atmosphere of absolutism, not every writer in seventeenth-century France held and promoted this state-sanctioned view of marriage and of individualism. Although the theater, which often served as a mouthpiece for the government (Gossip 9), was the prominent form of literature of the day, another—the novel—was coming into its own in the seventeenth century. The novel was common in the salons, which were exclusively led by women and existed outside the influence of the male-centered royal court. Despite their obvious differences, the absolute monarchy and the salons shared some views on social individuality: much to the nobles' chagrin, Louis XIV socially promoted bourgeois men whom he felt deserved distinction, and in the salons, those with the greatest wit were most admired, be they bourgeois(es) or aristocrats.

The political ideas of individuality that the monarchy and the salons held, however, differed greatly. Marie-Madeleine de Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves*, "the inaugural text of the French psychological novel" (Schor 116), which she had anonymously published in 1678, stands in contrast to *Le Cid*, *L'École des femmes*, and *Andromaque*. In this novel, the heroine's individuality prevails.

Although *La Princesse de Clèves* takes place during the reign of Henri II, the court that Lafayette depicts is actually that of Louis XIV. In the novel, the court is a place of rampant marital infidelity—even the king and queen partake in it—where everyone is constantly trying to keep up appearances. Madame de Chartres, the eponymous character’s mother, wishes for her daughter to be different from the other women of the court, and unlike “la plupart des mères” (Lafayette 76), she teaches her daughter about the dangers that men pose to married women, insisting that only an honorable woman—one who avoids extra-marital affairs—can find happiness. Madame de Chartres’s greatest fear is to see her daughter “tomber comme les autres femmes” (Lafayette 108).

Mademoiselle de Chartres marries Monsieur de Clèves, a man for whom she has fondness but not love. She falls in love with another man, Monsieur de Nemours, and, staying true to her individualistic education, she consciously avoids adulterous activity with him. In order to avoid “falling like other women,” Madame de Clèves goes as far as confessing her love of Nemours to her husband: “je vais vous faire un aveu que l’on n’a jamais fait à son mari” (Lafayette 171). The story of this strange avowal ends up being spread among the courtiers (not knowing that it is about Madame de Clèves), who note the exceptionality of such a confession. Monsieur de Clèves soon dies (of a broken heart), leaving his widow free to marry Nemours, the man she truly loves and who also loves her. However, Nemours has a reputation for womanizing, and Madame de Clèves knows that if she were to marry him, he would not be faithful to her. Discussing her feelings with Nemours near the end of the novel, she tells him:

“Je sais que vous êtes libre, que je le suis, et que les choses sont d’une sorte que le public n’aurait peut-être pas sujet de vous blâmer, ni moi non plus, quand nous nous engagerions ensemble pour jamais. Mais les hommes conservent-ils de la passion dans ces engagements éternels ? Dois-je espérer un miracle en ma faveur ; et puis-je me mettre en état de voir certainement finir cette passion dont je ferais toute ma félicité ? Monsieur de Clèves était peut-être l’unique homme du monde capable de conserver de l’amour dans le mariage.” (Lafayette 230-231)

Madame de Clèves understands that by marrying Monsieur de Nemours she would not have the chance to be happy. Her happiness would depend on her marrying a man who, like her, is an individual:

The only man worthy of the love of a princess deeply marked by a maternal discourse that enjoins her to be different from other women is a man who would be similarly distinct from the other members of his sex. There is, however, a notable difference between male and female difference: to be unique among her sex a woman must practice an exemplary virtue and thus avoid, in Mme de Chartres's dying words, 'descending to the level of other women' . . . , whereas to rise above his peers a man must refrain from advertising his conquests. (Schor 120)

In the last paragraph of the novel, the narrator describes Nemours's considerable grief after Madame de Clèves rejects him; after several years pass, however, he forgets her. Madame de Clèves retires from the court, spending "une partie de l'année dans [une] maison religieuse et l'autre chez elle" (Lafayette 239). Instead of remarrying, which in the seventeenth century was expected of widows, she opts to live alone. At the novel's end, Madame de Clèves triumphs: she alone determines her destiny and controls her own life.

Through the characters of Madame de Clèves, Madame de Chartres, and even Monsieur de Clèves, Lafayette presents a positive image of individualism vis-à-vis marriage. She even exposes the hypocrisy of those who claimed the imperative of marriage and the household structure through her depiction of the ubiquitous extra-marital affairs of the court and the king and through Madame de Clèves's success at choosing a life alone far removed from the male dominance of the court and society. If Madame de Clèves were a character in a seventeenth-century play instead of a *salonnière's* novel, however, she would be a tragic character warning spectators and readers of the perils of individualism within marriage, or she would be a ridiculous character worthy of derision.

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