ALIENATION IN THE TRAGEDIES OF CORNEILLE

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PREFACE

The type of alienation discussed in this thesis is not related to the famous Verfremdungseffekt attempted by Brecht, where the audiences are prevented from identifying with the characters of the drama in the hope that the public will reflect on the ideas presented more rationally and objectively. "Alienation" in this thesis is a psychological force which acts divisively between the characters in the drama and thus contributes to the development of a tragic situation. This alienation might be outright enmity, or a lack of common interests and ambitions, or merely a conflict in high ideals. Wherever alienation appears, though, some kind of conflict develops.

Traditional interpretation of Cornelian tragic drama has emphasized heroes and heroines. This preoccupation of the critics with Corneille's characters is a reflection of a general admiration French audiences have had for the heroic rôles he created. Most modern criticism has followed to varying extents the pioneering scholarship of Gustave Lanson. Lanson pointed out the special power that Corneille's heroes have in affecting their destiny as opposed to the pre-Cornelian concept of the rule of cruel fate. Although Lanson pointed out the dynamic quality of Corneille's heroes and later writers have elaborated on their individual characteristics, little has been said concerning the different motifs of alienation

in the plays.

A notable exception to the traditional approach is Serge Doubrovsky's Corneille et la dialectique du héros (Paris, 1963), which discusses the Cornelian hero from the point of view of Marxist existentialism. In direct contrast to Doubrovsky's work a search for divisive psychological forces in Corneille's tragedies will not attempt to explain the drama according to a certain philosophy but will attempt to discover some of the elements in the plays that produced dramatic tension. The search for the existence and effects of alienation will help to minimize expressing the criticism in a limited intellectual frame of reference such as Doubrovsky's.

A "psychology of alienation" approach will reveal the psychological factors that are important, whether Corneille intended for them to be so or not, in developing an heroic role. The "psychology of alienation" approach will thus point out the nature of the conflicts through which Corneille's heroes struggle and probe the depths of emotional turmoil that would accompany such conflicts.

This approach does not reject the mass of traditional critical scholarship which has pointed out so much pertinent information on the Cornelian hero, but builds upon past criticism selectively in order to gain a wider perspective. Alienation in the tragedies of Corneille involves not only the heroes but the plot, the historical sources, contemporary audience psychology, dramatic technique, and poetic ability.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE THEATER OF CORNEILLE

Corneille's Place in the History of French Drama

Conditions Leading to a Revival of Classic Drama

Pierre Corneille was born in Rouen, Normandy, on the 6th of June, 1606. It is an interesting coincidence that he was born just when the spring of the year had brought forth its completely created array of nature's beauty, shortly before the brilliant apex of summer. His entrance into the world of French drama and literature came just at the beginning of cultural and poetic creations unequaled since the high summer of ancient classicism. The art of tragic drama had lain buried and dormant during the long winter of the decline of the Roman Empire and the Middle Ages.

When Constantinople fell in 1453, monks and scholars transferred their libraries to western Europe. An undreamed of treasure of ancient artistic literature, which included tragic drama of the Golden Age of Greece, became, then, available to those willing to learn Greek.

By the 1500's humanism had spread all over Europe, and Francis I had established a college in Paris especially for the purpose of teaching the new knowledge of ancient classical

languages and literature.[1] He was counselled by the humanist, Guillaume Budé, to patronize men who constructed grammar texts and lexicons to be used in the new studies, and who established printshops to disseminate the results of their labor.

The young boys who went into the college were subjected to a rigorous program of memorization, recitation, reading, and writing of the ancient languages, especially Greek, and emerged as young men with erudition and inspiration equal to any in history. Their resulting literary work helped to make the sixteenth century France's first century of modern literature.

The best of these scholars formed a group called La Pléiade. They set an audacious goal of re-working French vernacular into a literary medium for artistic creation that could rival or surpass the best of the ancients. This group was the most influential force in focusing literary attention on the ancient Greek achievements in tragic drama. La Pléiade outlined its purpose and method in the Illustration et défense de la langue française, in 1549. From that time until the success of le Cid, by Pierre Corneille, in 1636, French language and literature were in a stage of rapid development in accordance with the program of La Pléiade.[2] It was Corneille, coming at the

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[1] "Collège des lecteurs royaux", 1530, later to become the Collège de France.

[2] La Pléiade was influential in expanding the French language to new capabilities. Malherbe's influence, shortly before Corneille, checked this expansion by setting a limit on vocabulary and establishing strict literary rules.

peak of this literary impetus, who gave the French theater its final preparation for the genius of Molière and Racine. Corneille, followed by Molière and Racine produced the Age d'or of French drama.

Corneille as the First Great French Tragedian

Corneille went through a period of apprenticeship from the time of his first tragedy, Mélite, in 1629, until the brilliant success of le Cid seven years later. During this time his renown was steadily growing, both as a writer of comedy and of tragedy. He produced a tragedy, Médée, in 1635, which was similar to that of Seneca. Then, in 1636, his experimenting culminated in le Cid. It raised tragic drama to a new level of recognition, and it established Corneille as France's leading tragedian.[3]

After le Cid, the tragedies, Horace (1640), Cinna (1640), Polyeucte (1641), Rodogune (1644), Nicomède (1650), and the comedy, le Menteur (1642) represented Corneille's domination of the French theater, and were recognized as the greatest dramas France had produced. After 1650 Corneille began a decline, at least in popularity, if not ability, that ended in

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[3]Maurice Rat, editor, Théâtre choisi de Corneille, Introduction to le Cid (Paris, 1961), p. v, as quoted from Histoire de l'Académie, t. I, p. 110, éd. de 1730, "Il est malaisé de s'imaginer, écrit Pellisson, avec quelle approbation cette pièce fut reçue de la cour et du public. On ne se pouvait lasser de la voir, on n'entendait autre chose dans les compagnies, chacun en savait quelque partie par coeur, on la faisait apprendre aux enfants et, en quelques endroits de la France, il était passé en proverbe de dire: Cela est beau comme le Cid."

his complete eclipse by Racine's Andromaque in 1667. By then Corneille had lost touch with his audience, and his days of personal glory were gone forever. He continued valiantly to try to find the key to gripping his audiences as of old, but with a last effort in December, 1674, he produced the failure, Suréna, and was silent.[4]

Corneille's proud heroism had appealed to audiences before the wars of the Fronde, but after the humiliating defeats of 1650, most people were satisfied to leave matters of state and glory to Louis XIV, and confine their intrigues to the domain of the heart. A chastened aristocracy made few major efforts to regain its former glory, even after "le grand Prince de Condé" and other prisoners were released in 1651.[5]

The General Significance of Corneille Today

Corneille's Obscurity in the English Speaking World versus His Stature in France

Corneille's lack of renown in the English speaking world has been due, in part, to a scarcity of good textual translations. In 1969, the Britisher, Samuel Solomon, published

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[4]Rat, op. cit., p. 486. The only record of the public reception of this play is a letter from Bayle to a friend, dated the 15th of December: "On joue à l'Hôtel de Bourgogne une nouvelle pièce de M. Corneille l'aîné, dont j'ai oublié le nom, qui fait, à la vérité, du bruit, mais pas eu égard au renom de l'auteur."

[5]H.C. Lancaster, French Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century, Part II, Vol. II, 5 parts with 2 vols. in Part II (Baltimore, 1932), p. 687.

his rendition of seven of Corneille's plays. This, with his translation of Racine's Théâtre Complet, is one of the very few attempts to put the greatest French classicists into English.[6] English speaking critics, then, have not often had opportunities to examine Corneille in live productions; therefore, criticism of Corneille has been principally in French and from a French point of view.[7]

However, Corneille's greatest plays are still presented regularly by the leading theaters in France, and are held by some critics to be in some ways the equal of, or superior to the plays of Racine:

> Corneille indeed had more fire, more imaginative inventions, a more triumphant mastery of comedy as well as tragedy; his range was wider than Racine's, and he is, with Balzac, the closest approach that French literature had to Shakespeare.[8]

A growing appreciation of the timeless beauty of Corneille's poetry is of definite significance to today's art. Better translations will aid in this delayed appreciativeness.

A realistic evaluation of Corneille's significance today will take into account the kind of classicism which was Corneille's. T. S. Eliot, in What Is a Classic, very revealingly

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[6] Seven Plays of Corneille, translated by Samuel Solomon (New York, 1959). Solomon was invited to a lecturing tour of the United States in response to his work.

[7] Because of Corneille's renown in France he is regularly studied outside of France in classes on western and French literature but not often by drama critics of other nations.

[8] Henri Peyre, "The Tragedy of Passion. Racine's Phèdre", Tragic Themes in Western Literature, edited by Cleanth Brooks (New Haven, 1955), p. 79.

divides classicism into two categories: "I am now approaching the distinction between the relative and the absolute classic, the distinction between the literature which can be called classic in relation to its own language, and that which is classic in relation to a number of other languages."[9] Up until the present, Corneille has often been regarded primarily as a classic writer of French literature, rather than of literature in general.

The Significance of Corneille's Audience to Today's Criticism

It is not surprising that English critics should overlook Corneille, not only because of the lack of his works on their stages, but also because he is a foreigner, and has considerably receded into history's obscurity.

Corneille can only be meaningful to an audience or to a reader of today in proportion to the extent to which the ideas and emotions of Corneille's time can be understood. For example, he stated that in addition to arousing fear and pity (as Aristotle had suggested) his tragedies were designed to arouse "admiration".[10] This word is very significant to the student of seventeenth century French psychology. The desire to excite admiration and wonder was evidenced in this period's architecture, literature, dress, and public entertainment. This mentality produced the Versailles, innumerable lesser

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[9]T.S. Eliot, What Is a Classic (London, 1944), p. 26.

[10]Rat, op. cit., "Examen de Nicomède," p. 420.

extravaganzas, the fabulous comédie-ballets by Molière and Lulli, modes of speech, writing, dress, and general bearing that appear to later generations as pompous and grandiose. It is an understanding of this mentality that is part of understanding the theater of Corneille.

Admiration and wonder were so deeply meaningful to his early audiences as to be a type of passion. This passion will be seen to play a part in Corneille's method of alienation. Understanding the reasons for his successful use of certain alienation themes should be of value today, even though the passions are of yesterday.

It has often been the custom to consider Racine as the poet of passion, and Corneille as the poet of duty and honor. However, if one considers that to Corneille's audience duty, glory, and honor involved passions at least as strong as the sexual themes of Racine, this categorization does not hold true: "Le théâtre de Corneille est plein de héros appliqués à servir leurs passions de toute leur volonté, comme leur raison est appliquée à la légitimer."[11]

The French society of Corneille's time had a different outlook from that of Racine. Corneille's plays were presented at a time when the nobility still felt more of a sense of its former grandeur as well as the new refinement.[12]

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[11]Gustave Lanson, Corneille (Paris, no date), p. 96.

[12]The French invasions of Italy made the Frenchmen aware, especially Francis I, that the Italian nobility had become educated and refined. As the Renaissance spread to France, literary salons grew popular, as one manifestation of a wide interest in education, literature, and refined culture in general.

The noblemen were not so far removed from the days when the great dukes were powerful in their own rights, and the king of France had owed his security to their support. During the time of Louis XIII, when Corneille began his career, though centralization of power was well on its way under Richelieu, the nobles were still highly conscious of tradition-honored devoir, and gloire, which had been some of the cohesive forces of chivalrous society. These two ideas of "devoir" and "gloire" are found again and again in Corneille. They were closely related to his concept of "admiration", and reflected the remnants of customs carrying the sacredness of traditions evolved during the centuries of the struggle away from barbarism.

It can be seen, then, that Corneille's themes of statesmanship, of patriotism, of duty to family, of an heroic code of honor played before an audience of men and women who were not so far removed from real power, by time or by station, could arouse as intense a passion as Racine's later Ovidian themes. By Racine's time Louis XIV had completely centralized political power, and had debased the nobility to such offices as attending his bedroom, his eating, his promenades, his entertainment, his social events, and had placed administrative power in the hands of such ministers as Fouquet and Colbert. Passions would no longer be so closely connected to the earlier heroism, but would be more limited to the dimensions of life available under the authoritarianism of Louis XIV. It becomes apparent why Corneille's heroic tragedies declined in popularity as the wars of La Fronde receded into the forgotten distance,

and why Racine's Ovidian passion would appeal to the new "clipped-wing" generation.[13]

Understanding that Corneille's drama involved passion, simply a different type of passion from Racine's, will contribute to a comprehension of the depth and poignancy of the alienation portrayed by Cornelian tragedy.

At the same time as the audiences with which Corneille reckoned had different passions from later periods, they had also developed a set of "proprieties" that limited classical French dramatists in a way that few nations or times have ever limited their writers. The French had very elegantly refined manners. These bienséances were so delicate as to not even allow a scream of pain on the stage, much less violent action.[14]

These are two important characteristics of Corneille's audiences, then, that must be understood if a critic is to be fair: the passions that could be aroused, peculiar to that period, and the tyranny of the "proprieties".

The Significance of Tragic Drama Today

Modern critics have begun to realize that tragic drama is more than an art form, even more than a literary expression of man's basic creativity. It goes deeper than mere creativity, and is considered by some as evolving from primordial impulses

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[13]Georges Couton, Corneille et la Fronde (Paris, 1951), gives a study of the changing political scene and its effect on drama, and cites Corneille's plays up to 1650 that reflected an independent Norman spirit.

[14]Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Laokoon, Gesammelte Werke, Zweiter Band (Gütersloh, 1966), p. 15, "Dank sei unsern artigen Nachbarn, diesen Meistern des Anständigen, dass nunmehr ein winselnder Philoktet, ein schreiender [illegible]

involving the deepest needs and instincts of man, and as being as timeless as religion. O'Connor says that the inception of tragedy was bound up in the idea of meaningful existence; that in tragic drama "There was a morality to be observed--there was an enigma to be wondered at. At the core of tragedy there was an unanswered question, and only, the man of judgment and experience could dare ask it."[15] Another student of tragedy, following Jung's theory of "archetypes" says:

> In plays like Hamlet or the Agamemnon or the Electra we have certainly fine and flexible character-study, a varied and well-wrought story, a full command of the dramatist; but we have also, I suspect, a strange unanalyzed vibration below the surface, an undercurrent of desires and fears and passions, long slumbering, yet eternally familiar, which for thousands of years have lain near the root of our most intimate emotions and been wrought into the fabric of our most magical dreams. How far into past ages this stream may reach back, I dare not even surmise; but it seems as if the power of stirring it, or moving with it were one of the last secrets of genius.16

An analysis that reveals, at least in part, some of the application to today's world of this undercurrent of the deep meaning of tragedy could be of inestimable value, especially to the extent that this meaning is connected with alienation. Today, alienation is a major problem. It not only threatens the family, religion, the government, but even the continued existence of conscious life. Alienation is a force which could destroy the world. A study of the themes of alienation

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[15]William Van O'Connor, Climates of Tragedy (New York, 1965), pp. 61,62.

[16]Maud Bodkin, "Archetypal Patterns in Tragic Poetry", Modern Criticism, Theory and Practice, edited by Walter Sutton and Richard Foster (New York, 1963), p. 209.

in Corneille may, in some way, prove to be of value to the twentieth century.

The Criticism of Cornelian Tragedy

An Analysis of Common Methods of Criticism

The most basic criticism is by definition. The examiner formulates, or accepts a definition, and then measures the drama to see if it fits the standard. This would appear to be an authoritarian approach that could be repressive to the spirit of innovation. Such an approach brought an angry flock of critics down on Corneille at the very time le Cid was receiving accolades all over France.[17] In the next century Voltaire was to conclude a critical comment on tragedy with the words, "These are the conditions now imposed on tragedy."[18] The idea of imposing a set of rules without an expedient degree of flexibility has come to be offensive to many artists and critics. It would certainly seem more appropriate to arrive at a general definition that conveys, in a complete sense, the dimensions of the art, but which sets absolutely no arbitrary

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[17] La Querelle du Cid was a bitter attack on Corneille by purists, accusing him of violating French civilized proprieties, and Aristotelian "unities". Part of the bitterness was over the fact that he did not use Alexandrine verse throughout, with his detractors ignoring the lyric beauty of the "stances" which were actually a welcome change in pace. L'Académie Française published its Sentiments on the quarrel in 1637, forbad any further bickering, and laid down such stringent rules on tragedy writing that it was four years before Corneille trusted himself and his critics with another attempt at tragedy. He made no efforts to challenge openly the dictates of the Académie.

[18] As quoted by Branden Matthews, The Principles of Play-Making (New York, 1919), pp. 52-53.

boundaries or requirements. A concensus may set a temporary standard, and will most certainly determine the popularity of the piece, but this should not be confused with rules.

An open-minded approach to Corneille will undoubtedly raise his status as one of history's great writers of drama in view of the popularity of some of his pieces for which the critics assailed him mercilessly.[19]

There has been a recent rebellion in France against traditional interpretation of tragedy demanding a better grasp of the total situation. One of the best known leaders in this new approach to criticism is Roland Barthes. "University criticism suffers, according to Barthes, from a usually unavowed positivism or concern with little facts, to the neglect of the spirit and symbolism of literature."[20] Another expression of this revolt against traditional criticism is that criticism should always be made within a specific framework, an "intellectual language", such as existentialism, phenomenology, Marxism, psychoanalysis, or structuralism.[21] Whatever the implications and value of this new approach, it would seem preferable to build a criticism of Corneille on a foundation of commonly understood and accepted psychological principles,

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[19]In the well-received Polyeucte Corneille observed "classical rules"; yet some purists maintained that Christianity was not tragic, and no real tragedy could have a Christian hero, and thus Polyeucte was not a real tragedy.

[20]Hugh M. Davidson, "The Critical Position of Roland Barthes", Criticism, edited by L.S. Dembo (Madison, 1968), p. 94.

[21]Ibid., p. 95.

illuminated by historically established information. Any probing of symbolism thought to have been overlooked by previous critics should rather be expressed in a language as universal as possible than in one intelligible to a select group only. It would then be amenable to later re-examination and re-evaluation by students not acquainted with a certain philosophical jargon.

The criticism of Cornelian tragedy in this thesis will be based upon a general definition of tragedy and a correlated method of analysis. The definition, as follows, is as simple and as inclusive as possible, and it does not presume to separate "real tragedy" from "melodrama" (as some have done with Corneille).

> A "tragedy" is the dramatic presentation of an episode in which deepening alienation leads to a decisive and fateful climax.

Alienation is obviously a basic ingredient of tragedy. It is the different types of alienation that form the basic themes, and it is discussion of the significance of these themes and analysis of the skill in portraying them that would appear to be the essence of criticizing tragic drama. There is a contrast in the fact that the tragedian's success would depend upon his understanding of the audience, while the critic's will depend upon his understanding of the author and the audience.

The purpose of this thesis is to make a critical analysis of the themes of alienation used by Corneille in his tragedies. This analysis will be based as much as possible on commonly accepted principles of psychology and historically documented information.

CHAPTER II

LE CID: ALIENATION BY A CODE OF HONOR

Progressive Alienation: A New Tool for Tragic Drama

The Difference between Progressive and Static Alienation

Corneille's introduction of a hero, the Cid, who is dynamic in action, who forcefully takes a hand in his own destiny, raised drama to a new fascination in France. Previous tension had been achieved by passionate and eloquent declamation. Beginning with Jodelle, the French tragedians had, in accordance with their aim of imitating the greatness of the Greeks, portrayed characters who were quite helpless against destiny. The drama consisted principally of their laments as the victims of fate. Regarding Corneille's innovation of the active tragic hero, Lanson says, "Il faudra qu'il soit actif, qu'il marche à un but, consulte, resolve, achève. C'est une révolution dans l'art, et toute la structure, tout le mécanisme de la tragédie en sont modifiés."[1]

Too often, twentieth century readers of le Cid have been mystified by its astounding success. Critics, without probing the real significance of Corneille's techniques, often relegate him to the lesser tragedians. For example the theorist, Raphael,

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[1]Lanson, op. cit., pp. 119,120.

in The Paradox of Tragedy, does not find him dramatic or appealing. He quotes F.L. Lucas, in regard to Corneille's heroes, "The objection to perfect characters is not that their misfortunes are, as Aristotle says, unbearable, but that they are apt themselves to be so."[2] Mandel is a little kinder, but still unappreciative, "Chimène is in the category of acceptable heroines, even if she leaves us, actually, rather indifferent."[3] Mandel makes it obvious that he is considering Chimène from a very narrow, "provincial" point of view by his statement, "French classical dramatists are notoriously flat, not to say shallow."[4] Campbell, who is recognized as an authority on tragedy, puts the matter in its true perspective when he says that the appeal of le Cid was only to a certain society, who had common conventional points of honor.[5]

Once this is understood, and the significance of a new type of alienation that made use of this code of honor to progress to an ever higher and more finely tuned conflict is seen, the success of le Cid is no mystery. Understanding the deep emotional basis for this code of honor, and analyzing Corneille's technique of playing on this emotion is criticizing the tragedy

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[2]Raphael, The Paradox of Tragedy (Bloomington, 1960), p. 60. Note: This is an example of a "dated" criticism. The statement is made within a context of limited empathy that may render it less durable than Corneille's tragedies.

[3]Oscar Mandel, A Definition of Tragedy (New York, 1961), p.89.

[4]Ibid., p. 58.

[5]Lewis Campbell, Tragic Drama (London, 1904), p. 35.

according to the stated "psychology of alienation" approach.

Conditions that Favored Progressive Alienation

Bodkin makes the statement that the most enduring tragic dramas are those which portray the most enduring conflicts.[6] In other words, the tragedy is successful to the extent to which it "grips" the audience, or causes them to feel as if they are a part of the conflict. The first audiences of le Cid had this experience.

In 1636, a new spirit had taken hold of the educated world. Men were beginning to look on themselves, not as the helpless pawns of the gods (as the Greeks had done), but as heroic strugglers who could, with the proper amounts of courage, intelligence, and resourcefulness, have a definite hand in their destiny. Descartes was a leader in this idea, with his precept of accepting nothing that could not be proved, and raising men to a noble level by imposing "will" over "passion".[7] It is to be noted that Corneille's characters balance, ponder, make decisions. It will be seen later in the chapter that Rodrigue's monologue, as he debates whether to avenge his father or not, is one of the tragic highlights of the play. His conclusion is a deliberate decision. Although the pressure of a code of honor is the deciding force in his decision, he does not lament his helplessness as much as he resolves to follow the course of action most acceptable to him.

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[6] Bodkin, op. cit., p. 215.

[7] G. Lanson, and P. Tuffrau, Manuel illustré d'histoire de la littérature française (Paris, 1919), pp. 177-180.

The greatest revolt against static alienation is made by Corneille with Rodrigue's redemptive act. The idea of a tragic hero redeeming himself was not limited to Corneille and seventeenth century France, although many critics have rejected its value.[8] However, for an audience who felt that new lights were dawning that would lead man to unprecedented achievement, a redemptive act was almost required. This was the era of optimistic expansion in many fields of endeavour. Astronomy, medicine, physics, chemistry, mathematics were all reaching for the unknown, under the impetus and discipline of men like Galileo, Descartes, and Gassendi. H. C. Lancaster describes the attitude of audiences of tragedy of this time, saying tragedy did not reach its triumph in France until "authors had modified it so that it might have a happy ending and stress admiration rather than awe. . . . Efforts to substitute a type of tragedy that would emphasize horror, spectacle, or music met with little success."[9]

Some conflicts in society are extremely enduring, such as that between sexes, between generations, and between builders and destroyers. It will be seen that Corneille played upon each of these enduring struggles to enhance and magnify his principal alienation by honor. Thus, there is a degree of conflict between Rodrigue and Chimène, between them and their parents, and between destructive and creative forces in le Cid. This craftsmanship on the part of Corneille undergirded a contempory

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[8]For example, Oedipus at Colonnus, as cited by Ralph J. Hallman, The Psychology of Literature (New York, 1961), p. 7.

[9]Lancaster, op. cit., p. 762.

appeal in a play that could have lost the French interest long ago, a fate which most playwrights of that time have suffered. Le Cid, however, still appeals to many Frenchmen.[10]

Thus it can be seen that Corneille made an advance in dramatic effectiveness with a new progressive alienation, rather than static, in le Cid, and that his "happy ending", so unfavorably criticized by purists, was necessary for the audience of his time.

Personal Honor: A Good Choice of Subject

It will be seen that a violated code of honor produced the alienation, and that this code of honor was of deep significance to the audience. While this enhanced the appeal of le Cid for a time, the passing of the code of honor necessarily produced a decline in appreciation of le Cid. While the basis of alienation, the code of honor, was temporary, it is by no means an indication that Corneille's treatment of the theme was shallow or transitory in value.

The subject of personal honor and challenges to duels was fort à la mode at this time. The aristocracy resented the new law against duelling as stripping them of nobility and personal honor.[11] Administrative officials all over France were having problems putting the law into effect. They were

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[10]Solomon, op. cit., p. xxxiii. Between 1680 and 1966 le Cid played 1,480 times at the Comédie-Française. The credit for the enduring appeal of le Cid must be shared with Guillen de Castro, and his Las Mocedadas de Cid (1618), which Corneille used as a source.

[11]Bénichou, Morales du grand siècle (Paris, 1948), p. 85.

liable to be called at any minute to prevent an impending duel. As an example of their conscienticus efforts, it was for this reason that the Pascals were running to stop a duel in Rouen when Blaise fell on the ice and broke his leg. The noblemen were very touchy about the subject of unavenged honor. When the elderly Don Diègue is slapped the audience is living the experience with him even more than today's would. When Rodrigue kills the offender in a duel the men in the audiences had a ready place for him in their admiration. They were duellers themselves. The choice of subject was excellent for the purpose of arousing sympathetic passion and admiration.

Alienation through Different Offenses of Honor

In accordance with the stated method and purpose of this thesis le Cid will now be analyzed according to the varying psychologies of alienation employed. It has already been seen that the basic conflict was a result of offended honor. The alienation will be seen to progress from the basis of one type of offense to another.

Alienation by Honor Wounded

In Act 1, scene 3, Don Gomès and Don Diègue have just received the king's decision that the older man is to be the prince's mentor instead of the younger war-like Don Gomès. It is natural that the rejected nobleman will feel some hot resentment. The audience expects scorn of the older man's ability to train a future leader of armies and government,

but when the scorn mounts to insult, and then to the climax of a slap, seventeenth century Frenchmen are caught up violently in the drama. They are on the edge of their seats, their hands have clamped on their own swords, each of them would kill a man for such an insult. They are ready to leap to the defense of the aged Don Diègue. One can imagine them weeping for him when his sword is knocked so easily from his hand, and the worn-out warrior stands with pathetic dignity and asks for death to come upon him and end his humiliation.[12]

Here is tension portrayed with passion and communicated to the audience of that time. Today, a similar slap might mean a scuffle, or a black eye, or with a man in public position, stifled anger. But it would not mean an inevitable duel to the death, with the self-respect and reputation of the insulted man depending on his deadly intent. The drama is increased considerably because the audience remembers that le Cid is the warrior whom no one can defeat.[13] They know that Don Diègue will tell his son of the insult, and they know that the enemy is the father of Rodrigue's sweetheart. There were two things that these French noblemen would rather die than suffer: a

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[12]Rat, op. cit., p. 147. It was not unknown for noblemen to weep at a tragic presentation. Voltaire tells us that at the first presentation of Cinna le duc d'Enghien could not restrain himself from tears.

[13]At the time of the presentation of this play, the legend of El Cid was almost as widely known in France as in Spain. Spectators, therefore, came knowing that Corneille's "Cid" would be victorious in any battle into which the story might lead him.

public insult to one's dignity, such as a slap, and causing anguish to the queen of one's heart. Here is conflict in such magnitude for the audiences of that time as to rouse their keenest interest and their deepest passions. Here is Aristotle's fear and pity, without gruesomeness, but also, most important for the audience, an opportunity for Rodrigue to arouse their admiration. The conflict that began with a slap and wounded honor is certain to take on new dimensions as le Cid begins to take an active part in the story.

For those who say that Racine is the poet of passion, and Corneille of duty and reason, one may say that le Cid must be an exception to this. Passions are often something other than affairs of the heart, and who is to say which emotion is deeper or more violent? A thusly offended code of honor at this time and place aroused emotions that arbitrated life and death. When Don Diègue with his sword hanging heavily in his hand says, "Achève, et prends ma vie après un tel affront,/Le premier dont ma race ait vu rougir son front,"[14] could it not be maintained that he is as tragic, as passionate, as pathetic as Racine's Phèdre? He is not, to the audience of that time, merely an old man ridiculously trying to wield a sword he can no longer handle, futilely facing a scornful bully. He is a symbol of generations of grandeur, the hoary reminder of the pride and indomitable courage that turned back the Moslem hoard under Charles Martel, that carved kingdoms out of the

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[14]Act 1, sc. 3.

haunts of by-gone Roman legions, that held the castles against centuries of Moorish attacks--and now he has received an affront that none of his ancestors had ever allowed! The alienation by honor wounded was complete, deep, and passionate; but a nuance will be sketched in by Corneille, as the theme turns to alienation by honor avenged.

Alienation by Honor Avenged

In Act 1, scene 5, Don Diègue says to his son, "Rodrigue, as-tu du coeur?" Rodrigue answers according to the emotions of the time, "Tout autre que mon père l'éprouverait sur l'heure." Such a fiery response is meaningless to today's American, but entirely the opposite was true with Corneille's audience.[15] It identifies with Rodrigue.

When Rodrigue learns that he must kill the father of his Chimène, the drama goes deeper than the passions of honor offended. The tragic struggle is about to begin between Rodrigue and Chimène who are alienated, but because they love each other, will also be in conflict with themselves. In a lyric monologue renowned for its poetic and tragic beauty Rodrigue says,

> Percé jusqu'au fond du coeur
> D'une atteinte imprévue aussi bien que mortelle,
> Misérable vengeur d'une juste querelle,
> Et malheureux objet d'une injuste rigueur,
> Je demeure immobile, et mon âme abattue
> Cède au coup qui me tue.
> Si près de voir mon feu récompensé,
> O Dieu, l'étrange peine![16]

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[15]In Rostand's Cyrano de Bergerac an authentic portrayal is given of the psychology of the audiences of this time. Cyrano is just as touchy and deadly as Rodrigue.

[16]Act 1, sc. 4.

Rodrigue is attempting to probe the boundaries of the meaning of his existence. What had seemed to be an ordered world of beauty and reward has now become meaningless. The passage is not beautiful to the modern reader unless he realizes the dire necessity that has been laid upon Rodrigue. Later in the monologue it will be seen that the alternatives he faces are: betraying his father and thus making himself unworthy of Chimène, killing Chimène's father and losing her forever, or committing suicide. The code of honor of that time would allow no other.

Nietzsche said that a great part of the significance of tragic drama is its widest application to life, that is, attitudes toward living. He said further, that these attitudes are echoed, or reinforced by the drama. "We are to recognize that all that comes into being must be ready for a sorrowful end; we are forced to look into the terrors of individual existence."[17] Though Nietzsche is not specifically speaking of Corneille in this context, the dimension of tragic craftmanship which he is explaining can be seen in Corneille's treatment of Rodrigue's rôle.

Rodrigue knows that Chimène, because of her honor, must try to avenge her father. He knows that he will alienate himself from her by protecting his own honor. Thus he will wound himself mortally whatever he does. He is, then, alienated from himself. He is facing the "terrors of individual existence"

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[17]As quoted in Hallman, op. cit., p. 6.

mentioned by Nietzsche.

Another aspect of Rodrigue's tragic suffering is his innocence. He has committed no crime so as to deserve fate's cruel blow. Raphael says, "The poignancy of Tragedy comes out chiefly in the misery of innocence."[18] As Rodrigue is caught up in this tragic struggle with himself, only some inherent unshakeable strength able to come to the rescue of floundering reason can give him some directional force. True to the psychology of the time and of the play, family pride, part of a carefully taught code of honor, is the dominating force in his thinking.

> Mourir sans tirer ma raison!
> Rechercher un trépas si mortel à ma gloire!
> Endurer que l'Espagne impute à ma mémoire
> D'avoir mal soutenu l'honneur de ma maison!
> Respecter un amour dont mon âme égarée
> Voit la perte assurée!
> N'écoutons plus ce penser suborneur,
> Qui ne sert qu'à ma peine.
> Allons, mon bras, sauvons du moins l'honneur,
> Puisqu' après tout il faut perdre Chimène.[19]

This passionate conclusion to the lyric monologue mentioned above is the decisive point in the course of alienation, although, of course, it is not the climax of the play. This is the scene that makes a reconciliation appear impossible. Because of its own values and customs, much of the audience of 1636 does not now think Chimène should ever marry Rodrigue.[20]

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[18]Raphael, op. cit., p. 24.

[19]Act 1, sc. 4.

[20]One of the major criticisms brought against le Cid was

Act 1, then, closes on this tense, suspenseful note.

Alienation by Honor Protected

Chimène takes on a different significance in the scene of demanded vengeance, in view of Corneille's purpose of arousing admiration, as well as pity and fear. Rodrigue, her lover, has killed her father. In her heart she had known he would, if a duel erupted, because she had previously told l'Infante when asked, "Que crains-tu? d'un veillard l'impuissante faibless?"/"Rodrigue a du courage."[21] L'Infante replies that he is too young, and Chimène says the words so precious to an aristocratic mentality, "Les hommes valoureux le sont du premier coup."[22] This knowledge gives Chimène an element of preparation for her impassioned request to the king that her father be avenged. In the eyes of the audience of that time Chimène and Rodrigue are now alienated, and the truer Chimène is to her honor, the deeper their alienation will be. Thus the more eloquent her pleading for vengeance, the more the audience will admire her spirit, knowing all the while that her heart is bursting for fear of hurting Rodrigue. From this viewpoint her speech does not sound as barbarous:

> Sire, mon père est mort; mes yeux ont vu son sang
> Couler à gros bouillons, de son généreux flanc;
> . . .
> Ce sang qui tout sorti fume encore de couroux
> De se voir répandu pour d'autres que pour vous
> . . . .
> Je l'ai trouvé sans vie. Excusez ma douleur,

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[21]Act 2, sc. 3.

[22]Ibid..

Sire, la voix me manque à ce récit funeste.[23]

The influences of the précieuse société were very strong by the time of le Cid's presentation.[24] Many noblemen and women were already spending more time in Paris practicing eloquence than in their chateaux practicing power. Chimène aroused their unspeakable admiration with her deliberate eloquence in the midst of shattering grief. She had lost her father, and as a result, her lover. In the face of this she was following her code of honor with grace and spirit. She might well appear to represent the essence of refinement and préciosité.[25] The above speech very often horrifies today's American readers, but it enthralled Corneille's audience.

Notice how the passions which were a part of the code of honor have changed as the play progresses to a different kind of alienation. When Don Gomès slaps Don Diègue, the code of honor calls for vengeance, and this code of honor is supported by intense passion. The feelings then change. When Rodrigue faces Don Gomès and demands "raison", he has brought himself to do so reluctantly, and not with nearly so much hate as his

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[23]Act 2, sc. 8.

[24]Gustave Reynier, Le Cid de Corneille (Paris, 1966), pp. 153-154.

[25]Antoine Adam, L'Age classique (Paris, 1968), points out that the term précieux was not actually used until about 1654, and that the period before this was strictly speaking, "baroque". However, in defense of Reynier it should be pointed out that the psychology that came to be known as "préciosité" had already begun its development influenced by such works as Honoré d'Urfé's L'Astrée, published in 1608. See Lanson and Tuffrau, op. cit., pp. 169-176.

father felt. (Although Don Gomès nettles him by references to his youth and inadequacy, thus relieving Rodrigue of the situation of killing in cold blood, still his alienation from Don Gomès is not nearly so passionate as that of his father, because the man represents something dear to him, Chimène.)

The alienation which Chimène feels from Rodrigue is the most touching of all, because she knows Rodrigue has done what he had to do, and she is now simply doing what honor requires of her. The alienation progresses from pure malice to a reluctant contest, with neither side wishing to destroy the other.

A suitor of Chimène, Don Sanche, offers to duel Rodrigue and avenge her father, but she says, "J'offenserais le Roi, qui m'a promis justice."[26] Rodrigue secretly enters Chimène's house to speak to her, to assure her of his love, and offers to sacrifice his life in atonement for causing her grief. At first she reprimands him in vague terms, but gradually breaks down to a confession that she can wish him no real misfortune.

The development of this scene reveals the dramatic skill Corneille had learned, which was wonderfully new to the French stage.[27] First Rodrigue accosts her and dramatically offers

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[26]Act 3, sc. 2.

[27]Jodelle in the preceding century was accredited with the first classic drama. Garnier was credited with the first one which any normal audience could endure. The later dramas of Hardy did not "pack the house" by any means. Mairet just before Corneille, was but a slight improvement. Here was drama still on a cultural level, yet gripping as well as refined.

his life.

Chimène: Hélas!
Rodrigue: Ecoute-moi.[28]
Chimène: Je me meurs.
Rodrigue: Un moment.
Chimène: Va, laisse-moi mourir. . . [29]
Rodrigue: Ma Chimène. . . [30]

The emotions which the author wished to portray are quite evident to the modern reader, or audience, but the drama is not so discernable. To the foreign twentieth century reader it might appear humorous for Chimène to say "I am dying", and Rodrigue to say "one moment." Corneille, however, is using a technique of rapid dialogue called stychomathia, in order to build tension and constructed this scene to be one of the most dramatic of the play. Chimène has just ended the previous scene by saying, "Pour conserver ma gloire et finir mon ennui,/ Le poursuivre, le perdre, et mourir après lui." This is her avowed purpose, in reference to Rodrigue. Now Rodrigue has appeared, and one minute offers his life, the next is tenderly saying, "Ma Chimène." The question is, can Chimène hold true to her pledge, or will she break down under the strain? The added drama of knowing that Rodrigue heard these hard, threatening lines, as he hid in the shadows, is part of Corneille's symphony of alienation, and contributes to the

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[28]This line is a change from using the "vous" form to the "tu" form. It makes the scene tender and dramatic at the same time.

[29]In response, Chimène uses the "tu" form of the imperative. It softens her command to "leave!".

[30]Act 3, sc. 4.

absolute tension of this scene. Not only are the situation and words dramatic, but Corneille also uses poetry form to achieve a shock effect, followed by sustained suspense. He does this by means of the short, chopped, rapid-fire dialogue when Rodrigue first appears, then a lengthening of the dialogue as Chimène finally admits she cannot blame him for what he has done, and the drama is projected into the next acts by her statement,

> Ma générosite doit répondre à la tienne!
> Tu t'es, en m'offensant, montré digne de moi;
> Je me dois, par ta mort, montrer digne de toi.31

That this scene was as powerful as Corneille had intended is recorded by history, and triumphantly by Corneille himself:

> J'ai remarqué aux premières représentations qu'alors que ce malheureux amant se présentait devant elle, il s'élevait un certain frémissement dans l'assemblée, qui marquait une curiosité merveilleuse, et un redoublement d'attention pour ce qu'ils avaient à se dire dans un état si pitoyable.32

Reynier, a twentieth century student of Corneille at the Sorbonne, has no difficulty in appreciating Corneille's technique in this scene: "On relit toujours avec la même émotion cette scène incomparable, placée au coeur même de la tragédie, et qui en traduit mieux que n'importe quelle autre la signification."33

31Act 3, sc. 4.

32Rat, Théâtre de Corneille, "Examen du Cid," p. 14.

33Reynier, op. cit., p. 170.

Perhaps part of the reason this scene was, and is so dramatic is the increasingly powerful change in the directional force of the characters that has taken place. When the play had begun, Don Diègue had been slapped, told his son of it, and when the two enemies met, each was carried along by a stream of events that demanded he take a life in order to live in honor. Rodrigue does take a life, and then Chimène states forcefully that it is now her turn to be swept along in the destructive sequence of events. Rodrigue and Chimène though, appear to be in a different situation in this scene. They are now each offering their own life as the price of honor to the other. It is still alienation by a code of honor, but the alienation is from self, as well as from another, and they have each become their own enemy, the threat to their own existence. Chimène says, "Et cet affreux devoir, dont l'ordre m'assassine,/Me force à travailler moi-même à ta ruine."[34]

Thoughout the scene Rodrigue has offered his life repeatedly, and now one sees that it is quite possible that he actually intends for her to take his life when he says,

> Punis-moi par vengeance, ou du moins par pitié!
> Ton malheureux amant aura bien moins de peine
> A mourir par ta main qu'à vivre avec ta haine.[35]

They are struggling with an alienation which is the result of

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[34]Act 3, sc. 4.

[35]Ibid..

trying to protect the honor of the other. Chimène answers, "Va, je ne te hais point." But Rodrigue insists, "Tu le dois". When she pitifully answers "Je ne puis,"[36] Rodrigue continues in a way that subjects Chimène to tremendous emotional pressure. He brings up the spectre of her ruined reputation that she must endure if he lives, and the reward of a complete and ultimate victory over any detractors if it is her hand that takes his life.

At this point an understanding of the "préciosity" of this time must come to the rescue of the modern English reader because Chimène answers with such cogent and finely drawn logic that unreality seems to reign. Her answer would appear to be a climax to the long emotional dialogue, and it seems incongruous for brilliant logic to be the peak of all this emotional tension. The French audience of that time thought quite differently. Instead of her "esprit" seeming unreal, it simply enhanced their admiration for her.[37] She says regarding her honor,

> Elle éclate bien mieux en te laissant ta vie;
> Et je veux que la voix de la plus noire envie
> Élève au ciel ma gloire et plaigne mes ennuis,
> Sachant que je t'adore et que je te poursuis.[38]

A paradox has been presented--the offer of a solution to a seemingly insoluble dilemma. How can she live in honor and

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[36]Act 3, sc. 4.

[37]See an explanation of this mentality in Lanson and Tuffrau, op. cit., pp. 174-181.

[38]Act 3, sc. 4.

save Rodrigue's life? Rodrigue wonders the same thing, because he says, "A quoi te resous-tu?" A purist might immediately say, "This is not tragedy, this is melodrame. A happy ending is foretold here, and is accomplished later." However, a potent force of alienation is not totally lacking. Chimène sends him away with the words, "Si je n'obtiens l'effet, je t'engage ma foi/De ne respirer pas un moment après toi."[39] Because of her love for Rodrigue, Chimène is still her own enemy--she vows to destroy herself if Rodrigue dies--and because of her honor, she is still Rodrigue's enemy.

Now the situation has become so charged with emotional undercurrents, for the French viewer of that time, that the drama is ready to progress rapidly to the climax. Chimène is honor-bound to avenge her father; however, she has promised Rodrigue that if she cannot save him she will follow him in death. Some kind of unusual and dramatic action is obviously about to occur. It is necessary to relieve the situation. It will be one of the kind of exciting, glorious episodes that Corneille's time loved. The stage is set for Rodrigue's redemptive act.

Redemption by Honor Saved

The redemptive act takes place off stage, between acts 3 and 4. Since it involves the defeat of an attacking Moorish

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[39]Act 3, sc. 4.

army, taking two kings prisoners and thus saving the city, the king, and Chimène herself, its effect is quite remarkable on the course of the story. A tragedy to suit the purists would have Rodrigue die. Notice, however, that he does risk his life in a very real way. He exposes himself to death, but returns triumphant. He atones for the alienation and returns to life. Corneille is simply following Castro and the legend, taking the story of humanity past the redemptive sacrifice, and daring to construct a way toward continuation.

It is significant that an atoning death has already, physically, taken place. In the tragedies of ancient Greece, a man sometimes dies because he is guilty of hybris, excessive pride, and thus brings angry fate down upon him. Thus Hippolytus is dragged to death behind his horses. In this play it is Don Gomès who atones for his excessive pride. A literal tragedy does take place in le Cid, because a great man dies, and Rodrigue and Chimène die spiritually with the father. The order of development is simply different from the "regular" tragedy; instead of beginning with alienation and proceeding to a tragedy, le Cid begins with a tragedy and proceeds with alienation.

However, the act of redemption does not ease the strain on Chimène. In fact it submits her to a new ordeal. At the opening of Act 4, Chimène is breathlessly listening to an account of Rodrigue's explcits. She can let her pride show momentarily, because she is in the presence only of her

confidente. However, she knows that she must appear in public to continue seeking his death in order to save her honor and be worthy of him. How much more "tendresse" could be evoked in the audience than is by Chimène in such an emotionally difficult situation. She loves him, he has offered his life to her, he has now endeared himself to the public, and still in the midst of all the resulting flood of emotions she must appear to be his enemy! If she shows the slightest love for him, in public, she will not be worthy of him. Whether or not it was intentional, the point is strongly made that sometimes a code of honor can become ridiculous, or even destructive, if it is not expediently applied.

As has been stated, the idea Corneille obviously intends to convey is that Chimène is now subjected to an even more rigorous ordeal.[40] We know she is probably bursting with pride and admiration inwardly. Can she resolutely appear true to her father's memory in public and in purpose? Again, she mentally struggles, in poetry that has made her one of France's permanent heroines:

> Reprenons donc aussi ma colère affaiblie:
> Pour avoir soin de lui faut-il que je m'oublie?
> On le vante, on le loue, et mon coeur y consent![41]

She is trying to strike a delicate balance between wishing him ill and wishing him well. She is trying to remain true to her love and true to her honor at the same time--a finely drawn conflict that would appeal to the précieux. It is

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[40]Reynier, op. cit., p. 183. [41]Act 4, sc. 1.

important to notice that she is in the presence only of her confidente. Thus she is heroically sincere when she continues "Silence, mon amour, laisse agir ma colère:/S'il a vaincu deux rois, il a tué mon père."[42] She had just previously turned pale and asked if Rodrigue was wounded, as the news of the battle was revealed. Now, with determination she passionately reminds herself of her duty and honor.[43] Traditional criticism, following Lanson, has termed Corneille the portrayer of the power of the human will. Could it be possible that Chimène represents a society that has been conditioned to act, or to want to act in this way? Is her passion for honor, perhaps, the result of social pressure as much as her own personal desires? If she and Rodrigue were completely isolated, how strongly would she be bound to her code of honor? In the presence of her confidente she lets her pleasure show at the news of Rodrigue's victory: "Et la main de Rodrigue a fait tous ces miracles?/. . . Et le Roi, de quel oeuil voit-il tant de vaillance?"[44] However, before l'Infante she speaks quite differently, and as the princess praises Rodrigue Chimène answers, "Déjà ce bruit fâcheux a frappé mes oreilles."[45] She must give the appearance of being annoyed that Rodrigue was not killed, but safe.

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[42] Ibid..

[43] Hallman, op. cit., p. 76, says that when a heroine has encountered circumstances that make life illogical and meaningless, she becomes alienated from herself, and this produces guilt feelings.

[44] Act 4, sc. 1. [45] Ibid..

Thus the drama shows the code of honor to be not only destructive of human life, but tending toward the artificial and the insincere. This also widens the relevance of the alienation in the play, making a more general application than just to Rodrigue and Chimène. Man is sometimes uselessly alienated from himself and others by social pressures that force him to be an enemy to himself, and often, hypocritical. This is not to say however, that Corneille necessarily intended to convey such a far-reaching implication. A case can be made for it though, because of the fact that the circumstances were constructed in order to achieve alienation, and thereby dramatic appeal. In other words, Corneille used this obvious social pressure to produce a potentially tragic situation. He fully intended for it to be understood that Chimène's following of social requirements could result in tragedy. He may, then, have been implying that such artificial codes of honor are in themselves tragic.

The play did, indeed, rend the hearts of French audiences.[46] It would be difficult to assess the degree to which social comment aided in this, or how much Corneille intended for it to do so.

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[46]Herbert Fogel, The Criticism of Cornelian Tragedy (New York, 1967), p. 40, quotes La Harpe, Cours de littérature ancienne et moderne, (Paris, 1851), who cites Voltaire's appreciation of le Cid: ". . . . ce combat des passions qui déchire le coeur, et devant lequel toutes les autres beautés de l'art ne sont que des beautés inanimées."

The Success of le Cid: Admiration Evoked

The enduring admiration of the French for Chimène as the portrayal of the essence of feminine virtue and beauty is expressed by Maria Tastevin,

> Chimène est une de ces rares et délicieuses figures qui restent parées à jamais d'une radieuse et séduisante jeunesse. Depuis que, dans le premier épanouissement de son génie, Corneille la créa presque trois siècles sont passés; et cependant nous avons encore pour elle aujourd'hui les yeux amoureux de Rodrigue. Son nom est pour nous une évocation de grace virginale, de tendresse pudique et ardente, de passion et d'héroïme [sic].[47]

The passionate admiration evoked for Chimène was an important aspect of Corneille's triumph as well as of his technique of alienation. The audience not only sympathized with her, but loved her, thus making her possible tragic fate all the more gripping. That Chimène does not appeal to twentieth century non-French readers is not such a serious defect as one might imagine. It is possible that pieces that have audience appeal today in New York, London, and Paris may be less durable than the plays of Corneille.

The unprecedented number of people who crowded into the theaters of France in the seventeenth century to see le Cid attested to the admiration aroused by the play:

> La foule a été si grande à nos portes et notre lieu s'est trouvé si petite, écrit le 18 janvier 1637 Montdory à Balzac, que les recoins du théâtre qui servaient les autres fois comme de niche aux pages, ont été des places de faveur pour les cordons bleus et la scène a été d'ordinaire parée de croix de

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[47] Maria Tastevin, Les Héroïnes de Corneille (Paris, 1924), p. 1.

chevaliers de l'ordre.[48]

Evidently, that which was surpassingly beautiful in Paris, in 1637, cannot always be easily appreciated by other times and people. After le Cid, though, Corneille was acclaimed not merely as a writer of tragedy, but as the creator of poetic beauty, the author of a literary chef d'oeuvre.

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[48] As quoted in Rat, op. cit., p. vi.

CHAPTER III

HORACE, CINNA, POLYEUCTE: ALIENATION BY BETRAYAL

Horace: Betrayal of State

The State: Basis of Alienation

Horace was presented in 1640, at a time when France, after several years of war on all sides, was beginning to realize she had successfully challenged the encircling Hapsburg Empire. The Hapsburgs of Spain and Austria had controlled Piedmont, the Netherlands, Germany, Portugal, and many minor states on the borders of France. By 1640, however, Germany was a ravaged wasteland, Spain had lost her navy, Portugal and Catalonia had revolted, and France had taken full control of Artois. Instead of a smaller, surrounded kingdom, France had emerged as the major power in Europe. "The great tree of the House of Austria, which overshadowed all the rest of the earth, was shaken to its very roots."[1]

Thus a tragic drama built around some theme of patriotism was very timely. Horace is built around one of the many instances in Rome's history when she was in a desperate struggle to keep from being eclipsed by a powerful neighbor, in this case,

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[1]Fr. Funck-Brentano, editor, The National History of France, Jacques Boulanger, The Seventeenth Century (London, 1920), p. 77.

Alba Longa. The French audience was certain to identify with the piece, as France was beginning to win a long struggle against the empire that had surrounded her for over a hundred years. "There is little doubt that the play's success was due in no small measure to the fact that Corneille was drawing for his dramatic material upon attitudes which were widely held."[2] It is very significant that in the scene of Camille's death, just before Horace kills her, he indicts her for sympathizing with a "public enemy."

Horace is a Roman who has married a woman of Alba Longa, Sabine. Camille is the sister of Horace, and about to marry Sabine's brother, Curiace. These are the main characters of the tragedy. They play the principal rôles in the process of alienation. Rome and Alba Longa find themselves at war, and the stress of family loyalty struggling with patriotism builds the drama of the story. The story shows the effects of this strain on various personalities, with a contrast between the "relativism" of Curiace and Sabine and the "absolutism" of Horace and Camille. A tragedy occurs when Horace's absolutely passionate love for state clashes with Camille's equally passionate loyalty to her slain lover.

It will be seen that a consideration of Horace on the basis of a process of alienation will serve to defend Corneille against several criticisms advanced over the years.

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[2]W. H. Barber," 'Patriotism' and 'Gloire' in Corneille's Horace," The Modern Language Review, XLVI (July and October, 1951), 368-379.

Corneille was in no mood to defy the critics at the time of his writing Horace. After four years of "silence" he presented the play in the hope that it would be successful like le Cid, but not so controversial. He carefully observed the unities of time, place, and action, chose a subject from antiquity, observed vraisemblablence, and, except for the death of Camille, scrupulously avoided violation of the biensé́ances. The critics were much more pleased, the public, less.

After a disappointing opening, the tragedy gradually gained in popularity, however, and has experienced a revival in France during each period of war or national stress, especially during the Consulate and the Empire. Today, Horace is second only to le Cid in total number of presentations of a play of Corneille at the Comédie-Française.[3]

During the first few years both critics and public agreed that the most serious flaw was the death of Camille in Act 4. Audiences had not yet become accustomed to a tragedy having a tragic ending.

Corneille summarizes the first critical reaction to Horace in his Examen:[4] first, Camille should not be killed; second, the sequel of Camille's death puts Horace in a second peril, thus destroying unity of action; and third, Camille appears to be a minor character in the first three acts, then appears as

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[3]Solomon, op. cit., p. xxxiii, Horace had 863 performances between 1680 and 1966.

[4]Rat, op. cit., pp. 88-92.

a major character in the last two. Whereas, today, Horace is recognized by some as being Corneille's most "regular" tragedy, others maintain that it does not qualify. W. Moore, of Cambridge University says, "It is disconcerting to find half the experts telling us that it is not a tragedy at all."[5]

It is by seeing the story as a process of alienation that the historical basis for the play seems most probable, and it is in showing the process of this deepening alienation that Corneille reveals himself as a portrayer of human nature. The above method of analysis should defend Corneille against a number of critics. La Bruyère said, "Corneille peint les hommes comme ils devraient être."[6] Voltaire wrote, "Corneille est presque toujours hors de la nature."[7] He also commented on Corneille's choice of subject, "Je crois que les combats du coeur sont toujours plus intéressants que des raisonnements politiques et ces contestations, qui du fond sont souvent un jeu d'esprit assez froid. C'est au coeur qu'il faut parler dans une tragédie."[8] "L'observation de la nature ne l'occupait point," Guizot said.[9]

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[5]W. Moore, "Corneille's Horace and the Interpretation of French Classical Drama", The Modern Language Review, XXXIV (July, 1939), 382-395.

[6]As quoted in E. F. Jourdain, An Introduction to the French Classical Drama (Oxford, 1912), p. 178.

[7]Ibid..

[8]As quoted in Fogel, op. cit., pp. 38,39.

[9]Jourdain, op. cit., p. 178.

It will be seen, in contrast to the above statements, that it is precisely because of the nature and character of Horace and Camille that tragedy occurs. It will also be seen, in spite of what Voltaire said, that it is because of a conflict between state and a "matter of the heart", that alienation reaches a climax.

Patriotism under Stress: The Process of Alienation

Act 1 begins with Sabine explaining the pain in her heart over the fact that her husband is Roman, and yet she longs to see her home in Alba. In scene 2, Camille, who loves Curiace, the Alban, makes it plain that she is suffering no less. She also shows herself to be hot-tempered and less restrained than Sabine. Where Sabine had been in sorrow, Camille turns to anger: "Croit-elle ma douleur moins vive que la sienne?"

The story leads, through a series of dramatic turns of fortune, to a battle between the Horace brothers and the Curiace brothers. At first the two armies approach each other to join battle, but each sees so many relatives and loved ones in the ranks of the other that they cannot fight. They retire and decide to choose champions to decide the contest in combat on a smaller scale. During this interim the Horace brothers and Curiace brothers are greatly relieved, believing they will not have to fight each other. Horace and Curiace reveal their different ideas of patriotism in a famous dialogue. Horace says,

> Qui veut mourir, ou vaincre, est vaincu rarement;
> Ce noble désespoir périt malaisément.

Rome ouoi qu'il en soit, ne sera point sujette
Que mes derniers soupirs n'assurent ma défaite.10

Curiace shows himself to be less passionately patriotic, and more relative in his loyalties:

Hélas! c'est bien ici je dois être plaint.
Ce que veut mon pays, mon amitié le craint.
Dures extrémités, de voir Albe asservie,
Ou sa victoire au prix d'une si chère vie,
Et que l'unique bien où tendent ses désirs
S'achètent seulement par vos derniers soupirs!

A messenger brings the shocking news that the brothers of each family have been chosen as the champions, and still Horace shows his passion to be entirely for Rome, while Curiace shows that his patriotism is modified by affection for his enemies. Horace says haughtily, "Si vous n'êtes Romain, soyez digne de l'être," while Curiace says, "Je vous connais encore, et c'est ce qui me tue."11

The battle between the brothers, where the three Curiaces and two of the Horaces are killed, has been considered by some as the climax of the play. This is the basis for their objecting to the death of Camille and maintaining that it breaks the unity of action. However, it should be pointed out that neither in Rome nor in seventeenth century France was it considered a great tragedy to die for one's country. In fact, it was the Romans who were famous for their statement that it is sweet to die for one's country. In seventeenth century France the personal thirst for gloire was added to their kind of patrictism to produce a frame of mind that clamored for war and complained when

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[10]Act 2, sc. 1. [11]Ibid..

not often enough sent to battle. Commenting on this subject, the British scholar, Barber, says,

> Patriotism was then envisaged, at least by the young nobility, not so much as a social duty to which the personal desires must be sacrificed, as primarily an opportunity for self-assertion and self-fulfillment, for, through acts of valour that personal renown which remained, as in feudal times, the nobleman's dominant social ambition.12

The killing of a close member of the family, however, has been an age-old subject of tragic drama.[13] The battle between the brothers can be seen, then, as a part of the process of alienation that climaxes in the death of Camille. It is Camille, therefore, and not Horace who is in danger of real tragedy. Camille is the central figure of the tragedy, and her rôle gradually becomes more dominant as the process of alienation deepens. This would answer the criticism that she does not appear prominant enough in the first two acts.

Another criticism has been made, that Horace is not a classical tragedy because there is no warning of the coming death of Camille, that it is simply thrown in in a haphazard fashion.[14] This would tend to detract from the skillful use of alienation, in that it would not be portrayed until the last minute. Warnings of impending tragedy are closely connected with dramatic representation of deepening alienation. There is a warning though, a strong one.

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[12]Barber, op. cit., p. 370.

[13]Bodkin, op. cit., p. 215.

[14]Mandel, op. cit., pp. 37,38.

The first news to reach the family of the sad battle between the brothers is that two of the Horaces have been killed, and the third is fleeing. The old patriarch, Horace, aged though he is, says he will kill the son who has brought dishonor on Rome and his family through flight. Thus it is plain that no one can disgrace the family and live. In addition to this warning are the above-mentioned statements of young Horace showing that his love of country is absolute--blindly passionate.

Further warnings of coming tragedy are given in the dialogue between the victorious Horace and the grief-stricken Camille. The alienation builds to a climax as brother and sister are so embroiled in conflict that they are no longer capable of rational thought. When Camille asks Horace to let her weep, he replies that the deaths of her two brothers have been avenged, and there is no need to weep. Such a statement is a dire warning in itself. It seems to say, "You may have lost a lover, but any grief shown for him will be looked upon as treacherous." Some have advanced the idea that the killing of Camille was a deliberate, cold-blooded execution, calculated as a punishment for disloyalty.[15] However, it will be seen that Horace is not only passionate, but that he is transported--no longer in full control of himself. When she says that if it is not necessary to weep for her brothers, she will weep for her lover--for who has avenged him? Horace's violent anger erupts in a short, explosive sentence,

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[15]Lanson and Lemaître as quoted in Fogel, op. cit., p. 79.

"Que dis-tu, malheureuse?" As she continues to mourn Curiace, Horace lashes out: (If one doubts that Corneille was portraying passion, note the repeated exclamation marks).

> O, d'une soeur insupportable audace!
> D'un ennemi public dont je reviens vainqueur
> Le nom est dans ta bouche et l'amour dans ton coeur!
> Ton ardeur à la vengeance aspire![16]

A Clash of Personalities: The Final Tragedy

Here Horace is practically frothing at the mouth, but Camille shows herself to be as uncontrollably passionate as he and calls him a barbare! This word had communicated to the seventeenth century Frenchmen the immense insult it carried in Greek and Roman times.[17] It showed the completeness of her contempt for him and his Rome and her absolute loyalty to the memory of Curiace.

A clash of two very passionate personalities is taking place, quite obviously. However, some have maintained that vraisemblence is broken when Horace returns from the battle and expects praise from Camille. The criticism is that this weakens the credibility of the passion, making it an artificial scene.

However, one of the strong characteristics of Frenchmen at the time of Corneille was their avidity for gloire. In his Morales du grand siècle, Bénichou says, "Toujours l'estime,

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[16]Act 4, sc. 5.

[17]Racine used the same ultimate insult in a scene of high passion in Andromaque, when Hermione calls Oreste barbare, and he loses his mind shortly thereafter.

l'approbation publique, la gloire."[18] Barber says that the nobility was characterized by a desire for personal renown through acts of valor, and that this was, in fact, the nobleman's dominant ambition.[19] In accordance with this one can note the récits of the Cid and Don Sanche where they themselves recount their exploits in grand detail, and expect the outspoken admiration of their audiences.

Thus it does not seem so unrealistic for Horace to expect some commendation from Camille, distraught as she might be. The warrior had earned his gloire, had served his country, and the surest way to wound him to the quick would be to scorn his feat and his patriotism.

It is in portraying these two characters with family similarity of disposition, but which have opposing loyalties, that Corneille achieves his tragedy.

Corneille is far from being unreal in his representation of character. Brasillach sees in Horace a universal type, a picture of the mentality of people who made the Nazis what they were.[20] M. Petit de Julleville said, "Horace est avant tout un drame intérieur, qui nous montre avec une intensité profonde et un grand force d'analyse la lutte entre deux passions."[21]

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[18]See Bénichou, op. cit., pp. 82-87 for a fuller discussion.

[19]Barber, op. cit., p. 370.

[20]Brasillach, Corneille (Paris, 1961), p. 130.

[21]Petit de Julleville, Horace (Hachette, 1904), p. 37, as quoted in Moore, op. cit., p. 387.

Both Horace and Camille are the kind of people who have chosen a priority of interest and can accept no relativity. Any effort to soften them challenges their deepest sense of loyalty, and they react passionately to counteract insecurity. Their personalities are contrasted with the more humane Sabine and Curiace. "Horace is not just a symbol of patriotism, nor even of extreme patriotism. He shows the effect of patriotism in a highly individualized character."[22]

How Horace Qualifies as a Tragedy

In The Essence of Tragedy, O'Connor reasons that tragedy occurs when a protagonist becomes too individualistic and tries to rise above what is good for the masses.[23] Camille refuses to conform to the Roman brand of patriotism and thus fits this theory. In his Psychology of Literature, Hallman states his theory of the tragic sacrifice:

> The essence of the sacrifice is ritual murder. . . . Killing appears to cleanse, even when committed in anger upon a person we love, because what we have really murdered is the monster of aggression within ourselves. . . . The victim hardly matters, and the criminal often proclaims that he is glad he did it, and would do it again. What he means is that he has psychologically purged himself.[24]

After Horace has killed Camille, Sabine reproaches him, but he answers:

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[22]Moore, op. cit., p. 392.

[23]This theory was advanced by Hebbel in the nineteenth century, and his tragedies are some of the best examples of its execution.

[24]Hallman, op. cit., pp. 62,63.

Sèche tes pleurs, Sabine, ou les cache à ma vue.
Rends-toi digne du nom de ma chaste moitié,
Et ne m'accable point d'une indigne pitié.
Si l'absolu pouvoir d'une pudique flamme
Ne nous laisse à tous deux qu'un penser et qu'une âme,
C'est à toi d'élever tes sentiments aux miens,
Non à moi de descendre à la honte des tiens.[25]

Hallman's theory of the sacrificial tragedy would appear to be a better explanation of the above speech than the idea that Horace is a super-patriot, an idea that some major critics have had.[26] Further, the play can be seen to fit his theory easily and naturally, whereas the theory of duty triumphing over passion involves some difficult moral problems.

The recurring popularity of Horace in France during times of war lends weight to the Freudian hypothesis implied by Jung and Gilbert Murray and elaborated upon by Bodkin. The fundamental assumption is that these ancient stories of family conflict express or symbolize typical human emotions. The public presentation of the tragic drama then relieves these inner emotions, producing a lessening of inner tensions.[27]

Horace qualifies as a tragedy according to these theories and also by the defintion advanced by this thesis. It is a drama of ever-deepening alienation which leads to a decisive and fateful climax.

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[25]Act 4, sc. 7.

[26]Fogel, op. cit., p. 77.

[27]Bodkin, op. cit., p. 215.

Possible Themes in Horace

Just as critics have been unable to agree on the merit of Horace, they have disagreed as to its theme. One traditional interpretation is that it shows the triumph of patriotism over personal love. Such an interpretation would seem to sanction the murder of Camille, although the early critics who advanced this idea also objected to Camille's death being in the play. Another is that the inevitable chauvinism of the patriotic hero is shown. In answer to this it should be noted that the older Horace had also been a patriotic warrior in his day, but does not sanction the impulsive slaying of Camille.

Barber, a student of Corneille in the twentieth century, says the theme was taken right out of contemporary events. She maintains that Livy's history simply supplied the incident around which Corneille wove a drama taken from his own France.[28]

Such an approach to considering the theme of Horace is in accordance with Corneille's treatment of other plays. France was at war with Spain when he wrote le Cid, Rouen's leaders were in jail for conspiracy when he wrote Cinna, and the Fronde was in process when he wrote Nicomède. Such a consideration also makes Horace an authentic commentary on French psychology of the period. It is generally agreed that the characters in Corneille's plays often speak like seventeenth century Frenchmen instead of like Romans, or Armenians, or Syrians, or Greeks.

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[28]Barber, op. cit., p. 378.

Whether or not Corneille deliberately stripped his plays of local color would be difficult to ascertain. However, he does show certain characteristics of French society of that time in a dramatic way. The desire for personal renown based on valor, the growing, absolute demands of the state, devotion to the family in conflict with devotion to country,[29] all play a vital part in the wielding of the story. "Nowhere perhaps may certain main forces in French civilization be seen more clearly than in their strength and weakness in Horace."[30] Horace could well have been a reflection of the contemporary in the mirror of the past.

Cinna: Betrayal of Friend and Family

Possible Reasons for Writing Cinna

Cinna was undertaken by Corneille at about the same time as Horace, and was presented to the public shortly after it, in 1640. The reception was much more favorable to Cinna with its happy ending than to Horace with its tragic ending. It is possible that Corneille was experimenting with the two plays in order to see how public taste might have changed, or might be changed. The year, 1640, was one of violence outside of France, with continued wars on all fronts, and one of violence in France, with bands of insurgents looting and burning in the

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[29]Anne d'Autriche must have viewed with mixed emotions the victories of France over her relatives.

[30]Moore, op. cit., pp. 394-395.

countryside. Thus the public might have an aversion to the hint of bloodshed on the stage, or they might be mesmerized by it with its tragic appeal.

Cinna was generally acclaimed by the critics as a perfect tragedy from the time of its presentation until many years afterward. A century later, Voltaire said it was a chef d'oeuvre.[31] Corneille felt that he had discovered the best method of appealing to audiences:

> La facilité de concevoir le sujet, qui n'est ni trop chargé d'incidents, ni trop embarrassé des récits de ce qui c'est passé avant le commencement de la pièce, est une des causes sans doute de la grande approbation qu'il a reçue. L'auditeur aime à s'abandonner à l'action présente, et à n'être point obligé pour l'intelligence qu'il voit, de réfléchir sur ce qu'il a déjà vu, et de fixer sa mémoire sur les premiers actes, ce pendant que les derniers sont devant ses yeux.[32]

There is good evidence that Corneille was right, in view of the popularity of the piece. It was played at the court of Louis XIV no less than twenty-seven times,[33] and Corneille became known as the author of Cinna, as well as le Cid.

Corneille may have been writing Cinna with a polemic intent as well as for dramatic achievement. Cinna bears out the truth (where Horace and le Cid do not), of Lanson's statement; "Dans tous les facteurs internes de nos actes il isole un principe: la raison; une force: la volonté; il recherche comment la volonté

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[31]Rat, op. cit., p. 145.

[32]Ibid., p. 151.

[33]Ibid., p. 145.

fait triompher la raison."[34] In Cinna, the emperor through reason and will-power triumphs over his anger and lust for vengeance. There was good reason in 1640 for Corneille to want the King and Richelieu to show the same clemency.

The Norman revolt against increasing taxation and centralization of power raged throughout the countryside and erupted in Rouen in 1639. In reprisal, a powerful army arrived at their gates, "not to deliberate, but to execute the orders of the king."[35]

> On December 31, the troops of the King entered Rouen, and on New Year's Day Séguier rode through the gates. Again he was received by a number of delegates pleading for leniency, but he answered that "le Roy voulcit venger son auctorité blesée, lacuelle il avoit plu à Dieu luy mettre en main. Ceux qui avoient manqué se devoient asseurer que le Roy estoit résolu d'en faire un exemple proportionné à leur témérité." And the rigorous punishment, foreshadowed by the words of Séguier, fell heavily upon all classes of the Rouen population. The public bodies, the law-courts, the city council, and the Parlement itself were accused of being accomplices in the revolt. The Parlement, the Cour des Aides, the Bureau des finances, and the authorities of the town hall were revoked. The burgomaster, Godard du Becquet, was dismissed. The privileges of the city were abolished, the city hall closed, and the suspended authorities brought to Paris to be judged by the Upper Court. Hundreds of the terror-stricken inhabitants of Rouen, led by their priests, threw themselves on their knees before Séguier, begging forgiveness. Five leaders of the rebellion were executed without any form of trial. All the suspects of Rouen, were arrested, and for three weeks the counselors of state worked without ceasing on the trials of the rebels. Some were condemned to death, others banished to the galleys, a number were flogged in public and chased from the city, till the prisons were empty. The city of

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[34]Lanson, op. cit., p. 74.

[35]G. L. van Roosbroeck, "Corneille's 'Cinna' and the 'Conspiration des Dames'", Modern Philology, XX (August, 1922), 1-17.

> Rouen was condemned to a fine of one million and eighty-five thousand livres.
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> During this reign of terror Corneille wrote his Cinna ou la Clémence d'Auguste. In the midst of the distress of his city, and while many of his friends were being banished, he sang the praise of forgiveness and mercy, and pointed to the example of the great emperor Augustus, who pardoned the conspirators whom he held in his power. The very atmosphere of that year of blood and persecution must have suggested his subject to him.[36]

Perhaps it is significant that, after the great public reception of Cinna in 1640, the independence and full powers of the Rouen Parlement were restored in March, 1641, and several prominent leaders restored to their former positions.[37]

The Real Source of Alienation: A Woman

Emilie has long been famous for her implacable enmity toward Auguste, but different centuries have reacted differently to her rôle of alienation. The seventeenth century admired her persistance. Balzac described her as, "La belle, la raisonnable, la sainte et l'adorable furie."[38] The twentieth century, however, regards her as an obsessed woman who cannot forget the past:

> Emilie, les yeux fixés avec obstination sur le passé, Emilie qui dans Auguste ne considerait jamais qu' Octave, a vu dans son ennemi un ambitieux sans scrupules, un criminel sans remords, un tyran oppresseur de la Patrie.[39]

A possible reason for the seventeenth century's inability to see the tragedy of Emilie's alienating influence is that

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[36] Roosbroeck, op. cit., p. 5.

[37] Ibid., p. 8.

[38] As quoted in Tastevin, op. cit., p. 69. [39] Ibid., p. 70.

intriguing women in high places, often at considerable danger to themselves, were quite in style. For example one of the most famous and most beautiful of these was Richelieu's implacable enemy, la duchesse de Chevreuse. In The Classical Moment, Turnelle sees Corneille as reporting certain currents of activity in French society: "The interest that he shows in family feuds in the Cid, in political intrigue in Cinna, and religious dissensions in Polyeucte, is clearly a reflection of events that were going on around him."[40] Roosbroeck says:

> The characters are transposed and magnified: Emilie is an ideal Roman virgin, with some traits of the seventeenth century lady-conspirator; Cinna is impelled more by a point of honor in love than by personal hostility against Augustus.[41]

It can be observed that Emilie was assured of a reception characterized by lively interest from the seventeenth century nobility.

It is important to notice that the alienation is rather one-sided, with Emilie feeling the resentment, while Auguste loves her as his adopted daughter. This sets the stage for a betrayal of family. Cinna is a close friend of Auguste, and one in whom the emperor trusts completely. Unfortunately Cinna's loyalties are divided between Auguste and vengeance-seeking Emilie. This sets the stage for a betrayal by a friend. The alienation is perpetuated by Emilie, and it is she who nearly

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[40] Martin Turnell, The Classical Moment (London, 1946), p. 21.

[41] Roosbroeck, op. cit., p. 17.

brings destruction upon herself and Cinna. The fact that she is motivated through believing that she has, herself, been betrayed by Auguste is a side issue, as it is far in the past. That the alienation is not primarily a matter of loyalty to state is shown by Cinna's divided allegiance between Auguste and Emilie. The only reason Cinna finally agrees to lead the sedition is because Emilie says she will not marry him otherwise. Cinna answers,

> Mais voyez à quel prix vous me donnez votre âme:
> En me rendant heureux vous me rendez infâme;
> Cette bonté d'Auguste. . .

And Emilie replies,

> Il suffit, je t'entends,
> Je vois ton repentir et tes voeux inconstants:
> Les faveurs du tyran emportent tes promesses;
> Tes feux et tes serments cèdent à ses caresses.[42]

Emilie's desire for vengeance has persisted all through the play in spite of the kindness of Auguste, but even worse, in spite of the fact that she knows Cinna will probably die himself if he kills the emperor. As early as act one she said to herself,"Ah! Cinna je te perds".[43] Though she is concerned for the safety of Cinna, she is willing to sacrifice him to her hate. It is indeed a woman who is the alienating force in this play.

A Story of Alienation Healed: Redemptive Mercy

To the chagrin of the purists, Cinna ends on an optimistic note, almost blissful in its faith in redemptive mercy. However,

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[42]Act 3, sc. 4. [43]Act 1, sc. 4.

to be fair to the genius of Corneille, it should be observed that during the course of the conflict Auguste suffers in a very tragic way, and it is in his suffering that he shows that grandeur d'âme which was the object of tragic poets, Corneille in particular. It is only after a terrible inner struggle that Auguste finds mercy within himself, and asserts reason over passion.

Auguste suffers deeply when he finds himself betrayed,

> Quoi! mes plus chers amis! quoi Cinna! quoi Maxime!
> Les deux que j'honorais d'une si haute estime,
> A qui j'ouvrais mon coeur, et dont j'avais fait choix
> Pour les plus importants et plus nobles emplois!
> Apres qu' entre leurs mains j'ai remis mon empire,
> Pour m'arracher le jour l'un et l'autre conspire![44]

However deeply one feels the disappointment of Auguste, one is aware that the climax of his sorrow has not yet come. The tension is increased. The audience knows that Emilie, his beloved adopted daughter, is the fire of which he has as yet only seen the smoke. How will he react to disloyalty from such a close member of his family? Will his anger be the worse because she is near to him? Will she perish as so many already have who became his enemies? The tirade of act 4, scene 2, is famous for the soul-struggle it shows, the tragic suffering of a tragic hero. The emperor's disillusionment and anger are portrayed elequently as he recites the occasions of betrayal in the past. He balances between vengeance and abdication. A weight of grief and responsibility for bloodshed weighs down

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[44]Act 4, sc. 1.

upon him. Later, this scene was to move Louis XIV to the extent that he saw the piece again and again. Hopefully, the play had its desired effect in 1640.

In the next scene Livie, Auguste's wife, advises him toward mercy. The drama is whether he will heed this advice or be carried away with passion. In Corneille's day this drama was very real, a fact to which the families of the executed leaders in Rouen could attest. It is only today, in a different world, after Cinna has played for hundreds of years that Corneille's poetry becomes "ho-hum".

Auguste's suffering reaches a peak when he finds that Emilie is also involved in the plot against him. Without a previous knowledge of how the story will end, it looks like tragedy in the offing. It certainly portrays tragic suffering brought on through alienation, the more tragic because it is alienation by betrayal.

> Jusqu' à quand, ô ciel, et par quelle raison
> Prendrez-vous contre moi des traits dans ma maison?
> Pour ses débordements j'en ai chassé Julie,
> Mon amour en sa place a fait choix d'Aemilie,
> Et je la vois comme elle, indigne de ce rang.
> . . .
> Ô ma fille! Est-ce là le prix de mes bienfaits?
> . . .
> Songe avec quel amour j'élevai ta jeunesse.[45]

Emilie persists in her defiance of Auguste throughout the scene, and finishes by saying, speaking of herself and Cinna, "Ensemble nous cherchons l'honneur d'un beau trépas." The drama is sustained when Auguste ends the scene:

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[45]Act 5, sc. 2.

Oui, je vous unirai, couple ingrat et perfide,
Et plus mon ennemi qu' Antoine ni Lépide:
Oui, je vous unirai puisque vous le voulez:
Il faut bien satisfaire aux feux dont vous brûlez;
Et que tout l'univers, sachant ce qui m'anime,
S'étonne du supplice aussi bien que du crime.[46]

The alienation is now all in the open. Destiny has come to a turning point. All parties are aware of the other's feelings. Auguste knows that his most implacable enemy was his own adopted daughter. In view of the circumstances in France described above, there could hardly have been anyone in the audience who was not caught up in the drama. As for the reality of the situation to the audience, it could just as well have been Louis XIII or Richelieu on the stage surrounded by the nobles of France instead of Rome.

It is at this high-point of alienation that redemption takes place. Auguste reveals the fortunes of the protagonists in a famous speech where will triumphs over passion with ruthless power and poetic beauty,

En est-ce assez, ô ciel! et le sort pour me nuire,
A-t-il quelqu'un des miens qu'il veuille encore séduire?
Qu'il joigne à ses efforts le secours des enfers;
Je suis maître de moi comme de l'univers;
Je le suis, je veux l'être. O siècles, ô mémoire!
Conservez à jamais ma dernière victoire:
Je triomphe aujourd'hui du plus juste courroux
De qui le souvenir puisse aller jusqu' à vous.[47]

Corneille is saying with all the fire and poetry he can muster that all strength is not necessarily mastery over others but may be mastery of self. He was saying to a nation of despotic

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[46]Act 5, sc. 2. [47]Act 5, sc. 3.

rule that mercy is not necessarily weakness. His message was badly needed, but it was more than rhetoric; it was a dramatic triumph. Passions of admiration and idealism were stirred in his audiences. In fact, Corneille's message was so powerful that Cinna set the trend for the themes of tragedies right up to the presentation of Andromaque in 1667.[48]

A famous twentieth century dramatist has re-expressed the moral progress that Corneille tried to show. Maxwell Anderson says that the hero of a tragedy must go through an enlightening experience that makes him a better, more noble man. He says that audiences do not like plays that show a man changing for the worse.[49]

Corneille apparently intended for Cinna's betrayal to be the climax of the tragedy, with the weaknesses of Cinna's character being the primary cause of the conflict. The revealing of Cinna's treachery comes closer to the point in the play at which French classicists wanted a climax. (It is in the first scene of act 4). In contrast, the revelation of Emilie's treachery does not appear until the fifth act, which was supposed to be more of a sequel than a climax. Furthermore, in the scene of the famous "master-of-self" speech, Auguste turns first to Cinna and says, "Soyons amis, Cinna, c'est moi qui t'en convie:/ Comme à mon ennemi je t'ai donné la vie." Notice that the offer of mercy is made to Cinna, rather than to Emilie, although it

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[48]Fogel, op. cit., p. 85.

[49]Anderson, op. cit., p. 10.

obviously includes Emilie.

It is quite possible that Corneille was stressing reconciliation between men, made this his theme, and that the rôle of Emilie as the deepest alienating force was subordinated to his main purpose of portraying in a dramatic and poetically beautiful way, how alienation need not be fatal if will-power and reason come to the rescue.

Polyeucte: Betrayal of Christianity

The Cause of Alienation: Jealousy

The thesis that Polyeucte betrayed Christianity and thus produced alienation--tragic because it was unnecessary--will be slightly more difficult to demonstrate than the theses of the preceding criticisms. The principal difficulty will arise from the fact that Corneille could not make this source of alienation too obvious for several reasons. Polyeucte had been officially sainted as a holy martyr, and powerful men in the church would have been offended had Polyeucte been shown to have acted from unworthy motives. It is also quite possible that Corneille did not intend to show a betrayal of Christianity but an alienation through difference of faiths. Evidence will be presented to support the idea that, whether intentionally or not, Corneille dramatized an event in which a tragic flaw, unreasoning jealousy, caused the death of Polyeucte.

Corneille took the following incident from history. Polyeucte was a martyr during the rule of Emperor Decius, in 250 A.D. . He

was an Armenian of noble rank whose friend, Néarque, was a Christian. Polyeucte was the son-in-law of an official, Felix, who had received orders to carry out the emperor's edict against the Christians. Having been persuaded by Néarque to become a Christian, Polyeucte tore down the posted edicts, struck down the idols from the hands of worshipping priests, would not heed the tears of his wife, Pauline, and perished without any other baptism than that of his own blood.[50]

There are several exterior reasons to be examined before a textual criticism is made for believing according to the historical account that Polyeucte was acting from hot resentment rather than deep Christian faith. One reason is that he plunged headlong into his actions without officially becoming a Christian, without being baptized.[51] This would indicate impulse rather than the restraint characteristic of men of deep faith. Another reason for believing that an un-Christian passion motivated him is that there is no evidence that he was forced into a situation of having to choose between loyalties. History records that his acts were a voluntary attack on the sacred symbols of the Roman faith. Corneille does not change this.

The Christian scriptures do not justify this kind of offensive conduct. In the Apostle Paul's epistles to the persecuted Christians in Thessalonica, he said, "But we beseech you brethren

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[50]Rat, op. cit., "Examen de Polyeucte," p. 213.

[51]Corneille modified this in his play, so that Polyeucte could die as a baptized Christian.

. . . that ye study to be quiet, and do your own business,"[52] and, "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly . . . be patient toward all men."[53] To the same Christians, still being persecuted he wrote again, "Now we command you brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly."[54] The persecution under Decius was the first to systematically reach throughout the entire Roman Empire; thus it was the most devastating up to this time. Some Christians like Polyeucte were deliberately seeking death in order to be assured of heaven's reward. To combat this Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, wrote in 250 A.D., "Our Lord commanded us in times of persecution to yield and fly. He taught this, and he practised it himself."[55] The same Cyprian was later martyred. When he found himself in direct confrontation with no means of escape by wit or tact, he died rather than worship the heathen gods.[56]

Jesus Christ taught a gospel of "turning the other cheek", of "going the second mile", of being "wise as serpents and harmless as doves." The actions of Polyeucte do not accord with the admonishing of the Apostle Paul to the Thessalonians or with the words of Bishop Cyprian or with the general principles of conduct taught by Jesus Christ.

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[52] I Thessalonians 4:10,11. A.V. . [53] Ibid., 5:14.

[54] II Thessalonians 3:6. A.V. . It should be noted that in context this has a general application and not specifically to behavior toward persecutors.

[55] Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol. II (New York, 1927), p. 61.

[56] Ibid.

A final exterior reason for believing that Polyeucte acted from jealousy, thus betraying the Christian faith, is that the incident took place right after the return of his wife's former lover, Sévère. Interior textual evidence will show that Corneille made no attempt to hide the fact that Pauline was still very strongly attracted to Sévère, thus giving adequate reason for an emotional, impulsive husband to act irrationally. "Das Verhältnis der beiden Männer zueinander ist das einer noch naher zu bestimmenden Rivalität."[57] Finding himself at a disadvantage in this rivalry, Polyeucte may well have sought the one way of gaining more gloire than Sévère had--through martyrdom.

The Process of Alienation: A Passionate Desire for Death and Glory

The play opens with Polyeucte hesitating to become a Christian. Néarque is pressing him to delay no longer. Polyeucte is reluctant to frighten his wife, who has had a dream of fearful premonition and does not want him to become a Christian. Finally Polyeucte decides to become a Christian and leaves Pauline in a nervous condition.

The tragedy begins to take shape in scene 4 when Felix reveals that Sévère, the former lover of Pauline and once her intended husband, is not dead as they had thought. He is not only alive, but is the emperor's favorite and now approaching

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[57]Wilhelm Blechman, "Göttliche und menschliche Motivieren in Corneilles Polyeucte," Zeitschrift für französische Literatur, LXXV (September, 1965), 109-134.

Mélitène. Felix fears that Sévère will take violent vengeance upon them because Pauline was given to Polyeucte. Pauline's dream had shown Sévère returning for vengeance and saying, "Pleure à loisir l'époux que tu m'as préféré."[58]

Brasillach observes concerning Polyeucte,

> Dieu seul peut comprendre Pierre Corneille au moment où il écrit, Dieu seul peut comprendre sa jeunesse déçue, sa fougue, sa résignation à la paix, son dévouement, sa crainte. Tous les démons qu'il porte en lui, il les libère dans cette oeuvre.[59]

There is no easily observable indication in Polyeucte that Corneille disapproved of the heroe's actions. In fact, there is good reason to believe that the contradiction of the idea of personal gloire to the genuine Christian concept of humility was quite lost on most seventeenth century Frenchmen. Seeking martyrdom could well have appeared to Corneille as an honorable and righteous course of action for Polyeucte to follow, thus bringing gloire, personal renown to himself and relieving a painfully humiliating situation. Whether or not Corneille meant to glorify Polyeucte or not, posterity has not been entirely favorable to the character. Voltaire commented:

> De Polyeucte la belle âme
> Aurait faiblement attendri
> Et les vers chrétiens qu'il déclame
> Seraient tombés dans le décri,
> N'eût été l'amour de sa femme
> Pour ce païen son favori,
> Qui méritait bien mieux sa flamme
> Que son bon dévot de mari.[60]

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[58] Act 1, sc. 3.

[59] Brasillach, op. cit., p. 152.

[60] As quoted in Rat, op. cit., p. 208.

In fact, a fair percentage of the first audiences seemed indifferent toward the martyr. Brasillach points out that the main appeal of Polyeucte was romantic rather than religious: "Et les hommes et les femmes de 1640, ce qu'ils découvraient d'abord dans Polyeucte, comme pour les séduire, c'est un roman d'amour, mélancolique, chargé de regret, et le goût du mystère."[61] And the Cornelian scholar, Rat, endorses this: "Il semble en effet que le public du XVIIe siècle se soit beaucoup plus attaché à l'histoire "galante" des amours rompues de Pauline et de Sévère, qu'au drame même et au martyre de Polyeucte."[62]

The fact that Polyeucte did not win the general admiration of audiences is further evidence that according to some standard of conduct he fell short. Brunetière supports the idea that Polyeucte was not doing his Christian duty in throwing away his life,

> On a dit. . . que le principe du théâtre cornélien serait le triomphe du devoir sur la passion. Si cela n'est déjà qu'à moitié vrai du Cid, rien ne l'est moins d'Horace. . . ni de Polyeucte, dont le "devoir" serait de triompher de sa passion du martyre.[63]

It will be seen, in accordance with the above statement by Brunetière, that Polyeucte actually desired to die with an uncontrollable passion. It will be seen further that Pauline makes it quite plain that she still loves Sévère, thus giving Polyeucte the justification for jealousy.

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[61]Brasillach, op. cit., p. 154. [62]Rat, op. cit., p. 207.

[63]Ferdinand Brunetière, Histoire de la littérature française classique, t. 2, Le Dix-septième siècle (Paris, 1912), p. 190.

Pauline's feelings for Sévère become evident quite early in the play. When, in act 1, scene 4, her father fearfully predicts that Sévère will destroy them, she quickly says, "Il est trop généreux." Next, Felix suggests that she try to placate him herself, and she protests:

> Moi! Moi! que je revoie un si puissant vainqueur,
> Et m'expose à des yeux qui me perce le coeur!
> Mon père, je suis femme, et je sais ma faiblesse;
> Je sens déjà mon coeur qui pour lui s'intéresse,
> Et poussera, sans doute, en dépit de ma foi,
> Quelque soupir indigne et de vous et de moi.
> Je ne le verrai point.

Felix tells her, "Rassure un peu ton âme," but she replies with even stronger meaning,

> Il est toujours aimable, et je suis toujours femme;
> Dans le pouvoir sur moi que ses regards ont eu
> Je n'ose m'assurer de toute ma vertu.[64]

As the play proceeds Pauline and Sévère do, in fact, find themselves face to face, and it is quite obvious that they are still in love. (One significance of their long dialogue, filled with tendresse, is that Polyeucte later says he is aware of their talk together, and the nature of their feelings). When Sévère takes his leave from Pauline, he says, "Adieu, trop vertueux objet, et trop charmant," and Pauline bids him, "Adieu, trop malheureux et trop parfait amant."[65]

Not only is Polyeucte aware of their verbal exchange of affection, but when she encounters him afterward she openly admits that she can barely control her passion for Sévère.

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[64]Act 1, sc. 4.

[65]Act 2, sc. 2.

She tries to allay any jealousy in Polyeucte by saying that she has made Sévère promise not to see her again. Polyeucte says hotly, "Quoi! vous me soupçonnez déjà de quelque ombrage?"[66] The first fact that Corneille does not give Polyeucte any monologue to openly show his jealousy is not proof that none existed, even in the plot conceived by Corneille. He could not show Polyeucte as motivated by jealousy in the play for two reasons. Polyeucte was an official saint and had to be treated respectfully. Secondly, any indication by Polyeucte that he was jealous would ruin his opportunity to appear to be the perfect and courageous Christian martyr. Just as Polyeucte might never admit to himself the real motive for his actions, so Corneille may not have been fully aware of the conflict of Polyeucte's passionate actions with the principles of the Christian faith. Corneille lived in days when gloire was a virtue, and humility was little understood. Polyeucte appeared éclatant when he broke down the idols and shouted to a shocked multitude the foolishness of their religion. In order to appear glorious, he had to die, and the more passionate his longing for gloire and escape from a humiliating situation, the more determinedly he would seek death.

> An Polyeucte sind Liebe und Ruhm vorbeigegangen, und das ist um so smerzhafter für ihn, weil beides in seiner umittelbaren Nähe wächst. Polyeucte konnte die Pflicht-Liebe seiner Frau solange annehmen, als Sévère als tot galt.[67]

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[66] Act 2, sc. 4.

[67] Blechman, op. cit., p. 120.

Nadal supports the idea that Polyeucte is under stress although he does not maintain it is jealousy. He believes him to be a man turning to a better world: "Ce n'est pas l'image d'un saint qui nous est offerte, mais celle d'un homme en difficulté avec lui-même et se tournant vers Dieu."[68] It is probable that he was, to be sure, a man in difficulty, but also probable that he was wanting a "glorious death" believing that such a death was turning to God.

The fact that Polyeucte actually fervently wanted to die is shown in his dialogue with Néarque, the Christian, who gives him sound advice: "Ce zèle est trop ardent, souffrez qu'il se modère." When Polyeucte appears determined Néarque warns: "Vous trouverez la mort." Polyeucte replies, "Je la cherche pour lui."[69] This is, perhaps, the closest Corneille comes to allowing an un-Christian sentiment to escape Polyeucte's lips. Had he simply said, "Je la cherche," he would plainly have been about to commit suicide, a grievous sin. However, the words "pour lui" soften the implication into a defendable statement. The implication now is, "It would be an honor to die for Him." However, the words, "Je la cherche," are significant in showing Polyeucte's desire to die a noble death, not later, but now. This is especially true in view of Néarque's continued explanations that the death is unnecessary and Polyeucte's

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[68]Octave Nadal, Le sentiment de l'amour dans l'oeuvre de Pierre Corneille (Paris, 1948), p. 275.

[69]Act 2, sc. 6.

unwillingness to reason. It can be seen that Néarque reasons to prove a point, while Polyeucte argues to defend a position he has no intention of abandonning. Néarque says, "Voulez-vous donc mourir?" Polyeucte hedges, "Vous aimez donc à vivre?" From this one example of their conversation it can be seen that where Néarque asks him a relevent question Polyeucte parries with an accusation. He not only does not answer Néarque honestly, but makes an implication in his retort that is sure to sting a Christian in times of persecution, an accusation of prizing this earthly life too highly. Polyeucte's verbal thrust has the desired effect, and Néarque would rather go along with him than appear as one of the faithless and fearful.

In this way, Pauline's well-grounded fears prove to be justified.

> Et je n'ose penser que d'un oeil bien égal
> Polyeucte en ces lieux puisse voir son rival.
> Comme entre deux rivaux la haine est naturelle,
> L'entrevue aisément se termine en querelle;
> L'un voit aux mains d'autrui ce qu'il croit mériter,
> L'autre un désesperé qui peut trop attenter.
> Quelque haute raison qui règle leur courage
> L'un conçoit de l'envie, et l'autre de l'ombrage.70

Sévère had given up everything when he lost Pauline, and went to find a glorious death on the battlefield. Instead, by some miracle, he returned alive--and covered with glory. There was only one thing for Polyeucte to do. His glory must be absolute, so as to exceed Sévère's. He will compensate for his lack of stature in Pauline's eyes by a sublime act of courage

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70Act 3, sc. 1.

and self-denial.[71]

Polyeucte's Tragic Reward: Self-Satisfaction and Self-Destruction

After Polyeucte has blasphemed the Roman gods, is in prison under the threat of death, and Pauline has come to plead with him to recant he speaks a very revealing line. She has been trying to persuade him to grasp for the happiness she can give him in life, but he says he will be happier in death and another life. He emphasizes the infinitely higher joys of heavenly life to earthly. Finally she burst out, "Va, cruel, va mourir; tu ne m'aimas jamais." This brings out the revealing line, "Vivez heureuse au monde, et me laissez en paix."[72] This is not a faithful martyr speaking, but a sad and lonely man who feels that his wife will be happier with another man, and he justs wants to be left in peace, to follow the course he has chosen, to die a noble and glorious death. His previous rhetoric on the joys of heavenly life stands in contrast to, "Vivez heureuse." There is just a touch of bitterness and self-sacrifice in this statement which is explained when he tells Pauline and Sévère that he knows they love each other, and that they should marry after his death. Their possible marriage does not depend upon his approval, but he is giving himself some last-minute moral support before he dies. He may possibly realize that his previous actions had been impulsive, unnecessary, and un-Christian.

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[71] Blechman, op. cit., p. 121.

[72] Act 4, sc. 3.

Whether this be true or not, he is now casting himself as the perfect example of love who unselfishly gives up his life for another's happiness. Now he can die, not only as a martyr but filled with the satisfaction of having appeared unselfish to the end.

According to the ancient classical concept of tragedy where a hero perishes because of some flaw that is apparent to the audience but not to him, Polyeucte qualifies admirably. On the other hand, as a Christian drama meant to glorify the nobility of martyrdom, Polyeucte has paradoxically taken its place as one of France's greatest religious plays, if not the greatest. Whatever one's interpretation or whatever Corneille's motives and theme might have been, Polyeucte has permanently gained recognition as one of his masterpieces.[73] It would seem that the most relevant message from the play may be gained by the preceding analysis according to a psychology of alienation. According to this interpretation, Polyeucte appears as a certain type of character who, faced with a difficult and humiliating situation, chooses a rapid and hopefully noble escape rather than living on indefinitely under the burden of the problem.

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[73]Solomon, op. cit., p. xxxiii: Polyeucte had 708 performances at the Comédie-Française between 1680 and 1966.

CHAPTER IV

RODOGUNE AND NICOMEDE: ALIENATION BY AMBITION

Rodogune: Ambition for Self

Rodogune was presented by Corneille in 1644, and was an immediate success. It continued to be one of Corneille's most successful plays until the end of the ancien régime.[1] Many critics, however, have considered it to be more of a "melodrama" than a "tragedy", and have doubted its value as a classical drama. Most of the objections are to the over-importance of intrigue and suspense, which they believe, leads to a contrived dénouement in act 5.

Voltaire felt that the character of Cléopâtre was unrealistic, and that the plot based on her atrocious selfishness was thus unnatural:

> Je ne vois aucune nécessité pressante, écrit-il, qui puisse forcer Cléopâtre à se défaire de ses deux enfants. Antiochus est doux et soumis, Séleucus ne l'a point ménacée. J'avoue que son atrocité me révolte et quelque méchant que soit le genre humaine, je ne crois pas qu'une telle résolution soit dans la nature.[2]

Lockert, a twentieth century student and translator of Corneille, maintains that

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[1]Lancaster, op. cit., p. 498.

[2]Tastevin, op. cit., p. 169, quoting Voltaire's Remarques sur Rodogune, IV, 7, 16.

> Melodrama bears the same relation to tragedy that farce does to comedy; in both melodrama and farce the interest excited is found in the plot rather than in the characters . . . . Rodogune is a bad melodrama.3

If these evaluations of Rodogune are accurate and penetrating, its value as a drama of tragic alienation is, indeed, questionable. Voltaire's objection is actually quite effectively answered by exterior evidence. Cléopâtre is a verifiable historical figure whose ruthless ambition is recorded permanently. Appian Alexandrin was the source used by Corneille, and in his Examen he quotes from Appian's Guerres de Syrie. Brunetière points out that Justin in his thirty-sixth book and Josephus in his Anticuities provide information on the subject matter of Corneille's Rodogune.4

It will be the purpose of this part of the thesis to show that Lockert's evaluation can be challenged on the grounds of internal evidence, that is, Corneille's technique in creating characters is powerfully displayed in Rodogune. It will be seen that the play is not a domination of characters by plot, but rather a plot that is built around character study.

Lanson explains the harmony of plot and character portrayal in Rodogune on the basis of the two great innovations Corneille had made in French tragic drama:

3Lacy Lockert, The Chief Plays of Corneille (Princeton, 1957), p. 29.

4Brunetière, op. cit., p. 186. This Cléopâtre is not to be confused with a later Cleopatra, queen of Egypt, and mistress of Caesar and Anthony.

> Corneille fut créateur en deux choses, dans la forme et dans l'esprit de la tragédie. Il organise la pièce de théâtre comme un système ferme ou s'opère par un jeu visible de forces la production d'un état définitif appelé dénouement. . . . D'où, ayant déterminé que l'action tragique consisterait à chercher la solution d'un problème, Corneille en vint naturellement à concevoir que le problème devait être d'ordre psychologique: l'antagonisme des moyens et des obstacles deviendrait ainsi un conflit des volontés ou des sentiments favorables et contraires.[5]

In other words, the more powerfully Corneille portrayed great characters, the more he felt it was necessary to have a powerful plot.

Cléopâtre: Complete Alienation by Selfish Ambition

Whereas Lockert's criticism sees Rodogune as not qualifying as a "real tragedy" because it does not fit a set standard, an analysis of the play as a process of alienation will point out the various psychological qualities of the characters by means of their reactions to stress. It will point out their relationship to the plot, and the extent to which the drama builds to a tragic climax. In this way a relative appraisal may be made instead of a flatly arbitrary judgment, and thus the criticism may have a wider basis of meaning and relevance.

Knowledge of the historical basis of the play is an indispensable beginning of appreciation for Corneille's Cléopâtre. Corneille quotes the following information from Appian Alexandrin's The Syrian Wars, chapters fifty-seven through fifty-nine.

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[5]Lanson, op. cit., p. 73.

Demetrius Nicanor, king of Syria, made war against the Parthians, and having been taken prisoner, lived at the court of king Phraates, eventually marrying his captor's sister, Rodogune. In his absence a usurper seized the throne of Syria, but was defeated and killed by Nicanor's brother, Antiochus, after several years. Antiochus then married Cléopâtre, Nicanor's former wife, but was later killed in a battle with the Parthians. He had fathered two sons by Cléopâtre, who were sent to Egypt to grow up in the court of the Ptolemies. Nicanor finally having been released to return home was ambushed and killed by Cléopâtre.

By this time the two sons of Antiochus and Cléopâtre had grown up and returned to Syria, where Séleucus was crowned shortly after his father's death. Cléopâtre killed him in order to regain the throne, and plotted to poison her second son. He discovered her intention and punished her for her crimes by making her drink the poison she had prepared for him.[6]

Corneille cannot justifiably be accused of creating an unrealistically evil character in view of history's account of her deeds. In fact, it can be seen in the play that he made a deliberate effort to "soften" her actions. He shows the sons as being Nicanor's, and Nicanor as never marrying Rodogune. In order to justify Cléopâtre's marriage to Antiochus Corneille has Nicanor rumored as being dead. He made these changes in

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[6]Rat, op. cit., "Examen de Rodogune", p. 352.

order to avoid offending the audience's sense of propriety.[7]

Corneille does not reveal Cléopâtre's character at the beginning of the play. In fact, the story begins with the impending coronation of one of her sons, and whichever one receives the crown will also receive Rodogune as queen. Cléopâtre is to reveal dramatically which one of her twins is the older, and then relinquish the throne to him. Act 1 shows that Rodogune loves one of the princes, but fears Cléopâtre, who has held her captive for so long. This is a warning for a shock that will come with the opening of act 2, which begins with a monologue by Cléopâtre. In lines worthy of Lady MacBeth she opens a window to her mind, and what is revealed chills the blood. She pictures herself as reigning hand in hand with hate:

> Et vous, qu'avec tant d'art cette feinte a voilée,
> Recours des impuissants, haine dissimulée,
> Digne vertu des rois, noble secret de cour,
> Eclatez, il est temps, et voici notre jour.
> Montrons-nous toutes deux, non plus comme sujettes,
> Mais telle que je suis et telle que vous êtes.
> . . .
> Je hais, je regne encore.[8]

She ends her monologue with a threat to her "rival", Rodogune, and the revelation that she is willing to kill to keep the throne:

> Vois jusqu'où m'emporta l'amour du diadème,
> Vois quel sang il me coûte, et tremble pour toi-même:
> Tremble, te dis-je; et songe, en dépit du traité,
> Que pour t'en faire un don, je l'ai trop acheté.[9]

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[7] Rat, op. cit., p. 350.

[8] Act 2, sc. 1. [9] Ibid..

There is a hint of a later revelation that she has killed her husband, but the full shock of such a realization is not revealed, as she simply says the throne has already cost her some blood.

The next emotional shock that Corneille gives the audience in revealing Cléopâtre's character is the knowledge that she expects one of the sons to kill Rodogune as the price of the throne. She begins her conversation with them in a loving, motherly fashion: "Mes enfants, prenez place. Enfin voici le jour/Si doux à mes souhaits, si cher à mon amour."[10] She then persuasively explains how she has carefully guarded the throne for them against Tryphon the usurper, against Antiochus the presumptuous brother, and finally against Rodogune, who was really responsible for their father's death. The young men are dutifully grateful and propose to let her keep the throne and let them serve her. Then the thunderbolt comes when she carefully explains that all they have to do for her is kill Rodogune. The princes have both fallen in love with Rodogune, and as they are speechless Cléopâtre realizes they will not kill Rodogune so she turns on them in frustration:

> Vous ne répondez point! Allez, enfants ingrats,
> Pour qui je crus en vain conserver ces Etats:
> J'ai fait votre oncle roi, j'en ferai bien un autre;
> Et mon nom peut encore ici plus que le vôtre.[11]

Act 3, scene 3, recounts the killing of Nicanor by his wife, Cléopâtre, and further reveals her ruthless character.

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[10]Act 2, sc. 3.

[11]Ibid..

The audience's awareness of the absolute desire she has for the throne, and cunning and cruelty she will use to keep it is thus gradually built up in preparation for the dénouement of act 5. During the course of act 4, her hypocrisy is so skillful that at times even the audience is "taken in" and thinks she has had a change of heart. She even deceives her confidente! Her son, Antiochus, is easily misled by her show of generosity and joyfully cries,"Heureux Antiochus! heureuse Rodogune!/Oui, madame, entre nous la joie en est commune."[12] Little does he know that he is taking the first step into Cléopâtre's deadly trap. The audience's interest has been built to the point where act 5 is awaited with interest and dread. As the action is ready to proceed into the fifth act it can be seen that Cléopâtre has no emotional ties whatsoever with anyone. Her consuming ambition to retain the throne for herself has completely alienated her from every person close to her.

The importance of Cléopâtre's character in the drama has been pointed out by a number of authors. They attest to the realism with which Corneille draws her qualities, and the intense drama that is built around the revealing of her character. It can be seen that her force of alienation dominates the intrigue completely, thus exonerating Rodogune from charges of being merely a "melodrama".

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[12]Act 4, sc. 3.

Tastevin cites Geoffrey, Hémon, and Faguet in support of the realism of Cléopâtre's rôle, and points out the fact that she was obviously motivated by sheer hate, as well as calculating ambition.[13] Samuel Solomon regards Cléopâtre as "one of Corneille's most impressive dramatic creations."[14] Yarrow isolates one of her characteristics that makes her a character "type".

> The immoral realism of Cléopâtre is contrasted with the uprightness of her two sons and of Rodogune; and Cléopâtre, for all her shrewdness, never really understands the situation, because--like Felix in Polyeucte and Ptolomée and his advisers in Pompée--she never appreciates the different values and outlook of her adversaries.[15]

Cléopâtre is a creature resurrected from the dark and bloody past, and she is placed by Corneille in conflict with two young men of Christian morals and noble générosité. The drama shows the eternal conflict between those who cannot understand love because they have never really practised loving, and those who cannot understand complete selfishness because they have never tried to live completely selfishly.

The Two Sons: Heroic Resistance to Alienation

The affection that Antiochus and Séleucus have for each other is revealed in the first act, and they solemnly swear before the altars that they will never allow any suspicion or enmity to come between them. They reflect what has come to be

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[13] Tastevin, op. cit., pp. 172-173.

[14] Solomon, op. cit., p. x.

[15] P. J. Yarrow, Corneille (London, 1963), p. 114.

known as the "Cornelian hero". Séleucus expresses their common conviction, "Et ma raison sur moi gardera tant d'empire,/que je désavouerai mon coeur s'il en soupire."[16] They are faithful to their ideals throughout the play, and even resist alienation from their cruel mother. They try to tell her that they would be perfectly willing for her to continue ruling, but she is so caught up in her hate and her plans that she does not realize that they are not a challenge to her throne as long as she lives.[17]

Even after they learn that Cléopâtre is offering the throne to whoever will kill Rodogune, they remain loyal to each other, to their mother, and to Rodogune. Séleucus bursts out in disappointment, "O haines, ô fureurs, dignes d'une Mégère!/O femme que je n'ose appeler encore ma mère!" But Antiochus cautions him, "Gardons plus de respect aux droits de la nature,/Et n'imputons qu'au sort notre triste aventure." And Séleucus calms himself saying,

> Non que pour m'en venger j'ose entreprendre rien;
> Je donnerais encore tout mon sang pour le sien:
> Je sais ce que je dois; mais dans cette contrainte,
> Si je retiens mon bras, je laisse aller ma plainte.[18]

Corneille opposes their complete sincerity to Cléopâtre's unrelenting deviousness. That his idea of the Christian faith had worked its way into a message to the public is quite obvious. Coupled with the new faith in reason and Corneille's love of herces, one can see that Corneille was composing a

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[16]Act I, sc. 4.

[17]Act 2, sc. 3

[18]Act 2, sc. 4

message of morality and of hope for his audiences.

> It is easy, too, to see that the problems set in ancient Greece demanded a new answer. And this answer Corneille was prepared to give. To his mind the balance of the ancient tragic conflict had been altered by the introduction of the Christian idea into life. But he does not make the mistake of attempting to place problems on the stage which can only be resolved by the idea of a future life in which earthly wrongs may be put right and earthly omissions rectified.19

Corneille wanted to show that the answer to tragedy is courage and determination in prosecuting the Christian ideals. In Cinna, he affects a reconciliation through redemptive mercy. Auguste is able to show this mercy because he asserts his will over his passions. In Rodogune the theme is repeated and brought to a sublime climax in the midst of the wreckage of tragedy. After Cléopâtre has murdered Séleucus, has tried to poison Antiochus, and drinks the poison herself to induce him to do so, and spits hate as she begins to die, Antiochus refuses to be alienated from her, and takes her in his arms with the words, "N'importe, elle est ma mère, il faut la secourir." She tells him she hates him, and her only regret in dying is that he is not dying too, but still he persists in his heroic struggle against alienation: "Ah! vivez pour changer cette haine en amour."[20]

In this way the conflict is shown to be so very tragic, because it was unnecessary. Cléopâtre could have lived and ruled safely, served by her two faithful sons, had she not been

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[19]Jourdain, op. cit., p. 79.

[20]Act 5, sc. 4.

so extremely ambitious to reign by herself that she saw the very existence of other possible rulers as a declaration of war to the death.

The Climactic Horror of Tragic Alienation

Act 5 shows Cléopâtre at bay like a cornered tigress. She is defending herself against suspicion of having killed Séleucus. Corneille does not allow her to show a single moment of weakness, of repenting, of desire to turn to someone. He displays in her the grandeur d'âme that had caught his attention from the pages of history. He was not concerned at all with showing a story true to everyday life. He was drawn to the story of Cléopâtre by its unusual horror, its demonstration of an extreme type of character. He said, "Le sujet d'une belle tragédie doit n'être pas vraisemblable."[21] In Rodogune Corneille was not so much concerned with being believable as with being exemplary. His example of perfect love was silhouetted against a powerful and dark background of horror. The dominating figure of Cléopâtre trapped the sons into a nightmare struggle with alienation. The alienation ended in a dénouement that inspired the often critical La Harpe to say,

> Il n'y en a point où l'on ait porté plus loin la terreur. Ces mots terribles:
>
> . . . Une main qui vous fut bien chère. . .
> Madame, est-ce la vôtre, ou celle de ma mère?
>
> ces mots font frémir, et ce qui mérite encore plus d'éloges, c'est que la situation est aussi bien dénouée qu'elle est fortement conçue.[22]

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[21] Rat, op. cit., p. 347. [22] Ibid., pp. 345,346.

Cléopâtre continues the horror until the last. Where the sons had imposed upon themselves the will to be généreux, she has so much will to hate that death does not frighten her.

> Je maudirais les dieux s'ils me rendaient le jour.
> Qu'on m'emporte d'ici: je me meurs. Laonice,
> Si tu veux m'obliger par un dernier service,
> Après les vains efforts de mes inimitiés,
> Sauve-moi de l'affront de tomber à leurs pieds.[23]

Antiochus has finished his battle with horror, and must now face the memory. He doesn't know whether the way his mother lived or the way she died hurt him the most. But Corneille shows him beginning the responsibilities of a new life, and even as he is overcome with unhappiness he shows no hate for Cléopâtre.

Nicomède: Ambition for a Son

Nicomède was presented by Corneille in 1651, during a time when the Fronde had nearly killed tragic drama production. During such a period of high tension and intermittent street fighting the public was much more interested in being amused and diverted from tragedy than in facing its challenge on an intellectual level. There is no record of any successful tragic drama besides Nicomède during the Fronde.[24] The fact that Nicomède was a success during this time and has held its place during each following period of French history attests to its

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[23] Act 5, sc. 4.

[24] Georges Couton, Corneille et la Fronde (Paris, 1951), p. 62.

value as a drama of timeless appeal--at least in France.[25]

When the Thirty Years War ended in 1648, no doubt many people were ready for a time of peace and tranquility, for France had not only fought a war on all fronts but had suffered insurrections and factions internally.[26] Unfortunately she had barely regained her breath when the Fronde began, and it must have seemed then as if conflict would never cease. Perhaps this was perceived by Corneille, and perhaps this was the reason for the concert of eternal conflicts that is in Nicomède. Even as the play ends on a happy note one is aware of the continuing threat of Rome in the background, and the certainty that Nicomède will again, at some future time, find himself in tragic conflict.[27] At a time when strivings seemed to have no end Corneille produced a play filled with timeless conflict and alienation. The character of Nicomède was his answer to this alienation.

Themes of Eternal Conflict: Alienation Produced

Nicomède represents the maturing Corneille at his peak. It is in this play that he creates his ideal hero combining the virtues of several previous characters. Nicomède has the courage and valor of the Cid, the will power of Auguste, the

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[25] Couton, op. cit., p. 62.

[26] See above, p. 54.

[27] Lancaster, op. cit., p. 689. (Flaminius says at the very end of act 5, "C'est de quoi le sénat pourra délibérer," in answer to Nicomède's request for independence).

nobility of Sévère, the loyalty of Antiochus and Séleucus, and maintains these high virtues in the face of an avalanche of difficulties. Corneille had realized that one secret of his success was producing admiration for his characters.

> Mais le succès a montré que la fermeté des grands coeurs, qui n'excite que de l'admiration dans l'âme du spectateur, est quelquefois aussi agréable que la compassion que notre art nous ordonne d'y produire par la représentation de leurs malheurs. . . .
>
> Dans l'admiration qu'on a pour sa vertu, je trouve une manière de purger les passions, dont n'a point parlé Aristote, et qui est peut-être plus sûre que celle qu'il prescrit à la tragédie par le moyen de la pitié et de la crainte.[28]

One conflict that Nicomède faces, which has been the reason for many tragedies in history and literature, is the alienation of children from a father by a step-mother. This theme is in the ancient Semitic literature, in Greek, in Roman, in Teutonic folk-lore, in modern novels and short stories, and here in French drama. There is also the famous alienation between generations with the life of Nicomède in danger because of it. There is the conflict between the administrative ruler and the popular general repeated with Saul and David, Caesar and the Senate, and so many others in history, here intensified with the fact that the general is the ruler's son--a relationship that was not true of Condé and Mazarin! There is the conflict of an expanding, powerful nation with outlying, smaller nations who want to retain their independence. There is the age-old conflict of loyalty and treachery with Nicomède remaining loyal

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[28]Rat, op. cit., "Examen de Nicomède", p. 420.

to his father even at the risk of life, and Arsinoé deceiving her husband even at the risk of Roman domination. Another conflict is the one between openness and deviousness, with Nicomède hiding nothing from his father or from his avowed enemies, while Arsinoé sends two men to assassinate him, who are supposed to be caught in order to bring him back to the city, away from his army, where she can intrigue against his life. When Nicomède faces a mortal enemy, Flaminius, he warns the Roman openly, speaking of the death of Hannibal,

> Et quand Flaminius attaque sa mémoire,
> Il doit savoir qu'un jour il me fera raison
> D'avoir réduit mon maître au secours du poison,
> Et n'oublier jamais qu'autrefois ce grand homme
> Commença par son père à triompher de Rome.

The diplomat says, "Ah! c'est trop m'outrager!" and Nicomède answers with steady frankness, "N'outragez plus les morts."[29] On the other hand, when Arsinoé has been talking to her own son, Attale, Cléone says after he leaves, "Vous lui câchez, madame, un dessein qui le touche." Arsinoé replies,

> Je crains qu'en l'apprenant son coeur ne s'effarouche;
> Je crains qu'à la vertu par les Romains instruit
> De ce que je prépare il ne m'ôte le fruit,
> Et ne conçoive mal qu'il n'est fourbe ni crime
> Qu'un trône acquis par là ne rende légitime.[30]

And speaking of the death of Hannibal, Arsinoé says, "Un Romain seul l'a faite, et par mon artifice."[31] Another conflict is between selfishness and generosity. Where Arsinoé is prepared

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[29]Act 2, sc. 3.

[30]Act 1, sc. 5.

[31]Ibid..

to commit any crime to gain the throne for her son. Nicomède is willing to make any sacrifice to avoid unworthy acts. He could save himself and gain the throne by conspiring against his father, but is willing to die rather than be so selfish. Corneille said of his character, "La grandeur de courage de Nicomède nous laisse une aversion de la pusillanimitié."[32] A conflict which has universal appeal, but which does not receive a great deal of emphasis, is that between lovers and a hostile "establishment". Nicomède and Laodice want to marry, but the existing authority superior to them is plotting against it. Nadal says in regard to romantic love in Nicomède, "Il n'est guère analysé dans cette pièce où le portrait du Glorieux reçoit toute la lumière."[33] But when it does appear it is appealing and sublime in its simple sincerity; Laodice says,

> Quelques biens toutefois que le ciel me renvoie,
> Mon coeur épouvanté se refuse à la joie:
> Je vous vois à regret, tant mon coeur amoureux
> Trouve la cour pour vous un séjour dangereux.

When Laodice mentions that his parents and Flaminius are trying to persuade her to marry Attale, Nicomède assures her of his complete confidence in her:

> Plutôt, plutôt la mort, que mon esprit jaloux
> Forme des sentiments si peu dignes de vous.
> Je crains la violence et non votre faiblesse;
> Et si Rome une fois contre nous s'intéresse. . . [34]

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[32] Rat, op. cit., p. 420.

[33] Nadal, op. cit., p. 220.

[34] Act 1, sc. 1.

The Ever-Present Power of Rome: Alienation Supported

It can be seen from the above quotation that behind a hostile step-mother and a vascillating, ungrateful father is the underlying threat of Rome.

H. C. Lancaster said of Nicomède, "The play is a conflict between, on one side, Rome, represented by Flaminius. . .; on the other, liberty-loving Asiatics, represented by Nicomède . . . also by Laodice, with her people ready to come to his aid."[35] All of the eternal conflicts listed above are connected in some way with the threat of Roman domination. Flaminius represents the ever-present influence of her power, and Arsinoé represents the sympathetic elements of Bithynia, who together, are influencing Prusias to distrust and destroy his son. In his Au Lecteur Corneille said the purpose of Nicomède was to present a study of the political policy of the Roman republic.[36] In the midst of growing absolute monarchial power, and the subjugation of the aristocracy Corneille put in a word for freedom: "Nous vous la demandons hors de la servitude,"[37] Nicomède says concerning peace and friendship.

Arsinoé alienates her husband from Nicomède in the ambition that Attale will reign, but she relies for ultimate support on Flaminius and the Roman power.

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[35]Lancaster, op. cit., pp. 693,694.

[36]Rat, op. cit., pp. 417,418.

[37]Act 5, sc. 9.

Et je n'engage aussi mon fils en cet amour
Qu'à dessein d'éblouir le roi, Rome et la cour.
Je n'en veux pas, Cléone, au sceptre d'Arménie:
Je cherche à m'assurer celui de Bithynie;
Et, si ce diadème une fois est à nous,
Que cette reine après se choisisse un époux.
Je ne la vais presser que pour la voir rebelle,
Que pour aigrir les coeurs de son amant et d'elle.
Le roi, que le Romain poussera vivement,
De peur d'offenser Rome agira chaudement,
Et ce prince, piqué d'une juste colère,
S'emportera sans doute, et bravera son père.
S'il est prompt et bouillant, le roi ne l'est pas moins;
. . .
Mon entreprise est sûre, et sa perte infaillible.
Voilà mon coeur ouvert, et tout ce qu'il prétend.
Mais dans mon cabinet Flaminius m'attend.[38]

The above speech outlines Arsinoé's strategy, shows how unscrupulous she is, reveals the danger Nicomède is in, and concludes with, "Flaminius m'attend." Rome and Arsinoé are ready to work together to drive father and son apart, and destroy the son.

Nicomède is a loyal son, subject, and general. He has expanded the borders of his father's kingdom, defeated Bithynia's major enemies, and laid his prizes at his father's feet. Clearly Prusias is in a position to feel fatherly pride and gratitude; but he is also in a position to feel jealousy and a fear of losing some authority to his hero-son. Arsinoé plans to use this weak spot, plus his hot temperament, to alienate Prusias from Nicomède and establish her son on the throne. After she and Flaminius converse in her cabinet, he appears in a scene with Nicomède and Prusias where independence clashes with Roman

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[38]Act 1, sc. 5.

power, and Flaminius tries to appear as the true friend and counselor of Prusias, and Nicomède warns against him. Prusias protests, "Ah! ne me brouillez point avec la république;/Portez plus de respect à de tels alliés." Nicomède, however, is outspoken in his defiance and mistrust:

> Je ne puis voir sous eux les rois humiliés;
> Et, quel que soit ce fils que Rome vous renvoie,
> Seigneur, je lui rendrais son present avec joie.
> S'il est si bien instruit en l'art de commander,
> C'est un rare trésor qu'elle devrait garder,
> Et conserver chez soi sa chère nourriture,
> Ou pour le consulat, ou pour la dictature.[39]

With Nicomède Corneille abandonned romance and turned to the hard, real world of political relationships.[40] With penetrating foresight and biting irony, Nicomède has warned his father of what the future will bring from Rome.

A Noble Character: The Answer to Tragic Alienation

France had found herself struggling with an alienation between ruler and general, where the Prince de Condé was the general and put in prison by the ruler, Anne d'Autriche. Her counselor was Mazarin. The parallels between the rôles in Nicomède to current events were too striking to ignore. Just as Flaminius had advised Arsinoé to neutralize Nicomède, so Mazarin had advised Anne d'Autriche to imprison Condé. Just as the public favor was with Nicomède, so the public clamored for Condé. Just as Flaminius represented Rome in Bithynia,

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[39]Act 2, sc. 3.

[40]Yarrow, op. cit., p. 122.

Mazarin represented Rome in seventeenth century France. Nicomède had just returned victorious from a whole campaign of wars. Condé was likewise, "Jeune, couvert de gloire, 'preneur' de Philippsbourg et de Dunkerque, vainqueur de Rocroy, Nordlingen et Lens. . . ."[41] Nicomède's only crime was his renown and gloire, and likewise Condé: "Sa gloire était en vérité la seule charge qu'on put relever contre lui; sa longue détention ne pouvait se légitimer en droit et n'était motivée que par la Raison d'Etat."[42] To combat such injust tragic actions Corneille presented his idea of the perfect hero.[43] He built a play around him that would show the value of his high character. "Entre le 'généreux' cornélien et le Nicomède de l'histoire à qui on persuade sans trop de peine qu'il faut tuer son père, il n'y a guère de commun que le nom."[44] Such a fact is good evidence that Corneille had the rôle in mind before he found the historical character.[45]

Corneille's answer to tragic alienation is the contagion of générosite. Even though Nicomède is the perfect hero, he would perish were it not for the change that comes over Attale.

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[41]Couton, op. cit., p. 67.

[42]Ibid..

[43]Nelson, op. cit., p. 172.

[44]Couton, op. cit., p. 68,69.

[45]There was also a disparity between Corneille's Nicomède and Condé, who was, at times, arrogant, ruthless, selfish, and hot-tempered. See Boulanger, op. cit., pp. 148-160.

Lanson found one of the most appealing aspects of Nicomède in the portrayal of Attale's maturing--changing from a boy to a man of strength.[46] However, Attale requires contact with his brother before his character asserts itself. As he gradually attains more générosité and eventually decides to give up the the kingdom rather than murder his brother and live under Rome's domination, he saves Nicomède's life, and heals the alienation between them and between Nicomède and Prusias. Nicomède shows noble courage and loyalty in facing death, then partly through his influence, Attale shows nobility in facing moral responsibility. One hears echoes of Auguste, but Attale is even more noble than he, because he cannot be accused of "expedient morality." He was not motivated by Raisons d'Etat.

In act 5, scene 9, where Nicomède tells Attale he recognizes in him his "royal blood", this is aristocratic language for "the basic ingredients of a noble character."

After Attale saves Nicomède the play ends with peace possible if Rome will accept Bithynia's independent friendship. Flaminius will not commit himself, or speak for the Senate, and he says inimically that if Rome does choose enmity, at least she will have a worthy enemy in Nicomède and Bithynia. There is a strong lesson in such an ambivalent ending. Corneille has shown a possible answer, but there must be reciprocation or tragedy will still result.

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[46]Lanson, op. cit., p. 109.

As Corneille portrayed his noble characters, he liked to contrast those who were willing to struggle with their passions and those who gave them free rein. To say that he is the poet of duty is to leave out half of his art. In addition to the "Cornelian heroes", he liked to show by way of contrast "Racinian characters." Thus we see the difference between Don Gomès and Chimène, between Maxime and Auguste, Cléopâtre and Séleucus, very dramatically Horace and Camille as opposed to Sabine and Curiace, and now Attale and Arsinoé.

It can be seen, then, that once again Corneille had borrowed from history to speak his convictions on contemporary society. He was a rare combination of polemic and dramatic ability.

CHAPTER V

RECURRING THEMES OF ALIENATION IN CORNEILLE'S LESSER TRAGEDIES

Most of Corneille's less successful plays were written after Nicomède which marked his last notable triumph. Not all of his lesser works were failures although some of them were miserably so. Very little criticism has been written in detail on his minor works. Corneille's lesser works are usually not included when one speaks of Cornelian tragedy. Some of the reasons for this will become obvious in the following study. Each of his remaining tragedies will be briefly analyzed as to his use of "psychology of alienation", and the effect that this psychology has in the power of the drama and on audience appeal will be discussed.

Clitandre (1630-31), was Corneille's second play to be presented to the general public. It is a tragi-comedy which has never been taken too seriously, and which he claimed was not meant to be a serious drama. In his Examen he said,

> Un voyage que je fis à Paris pour voir le succès de Mélite m'apprit qu'elle n'était pas dans les vingt et quatre heures: c'était l'unique règle que l'on connut en ce temps-là. . . . Pour la justifier contre cette censure par une espèce de bravade, et montrer que ce genre de pièces avait les vraies beautés du théâtre, j'entrepris d'en faire une regulière (c'est-à-dire dans ces vingt et quatre heures), pleine d'incidents, et d'un style plus élevé, mais qui ne vaudrait rien du

tout: en quoi je réussis parfaitement.[1]

There is truly in Clitandre so much action and so little psychological conflict that it is difficult to isolate a strong theme of alienation. The play does not seem to come to a very decisive or fateful climax, in as much as the dénouement consists of the lovers being united, and the villain disappointed. Since Corneille himself did not take the play very seriously, its lack of stature may be taken as a justification for not attempting a serious analysis. It was not so much a drama as a theatrical game.[2] Rivaille puts forward the theory that Clitandre was written to help the maréchal de Marillac in a famous law-suit as well as to answer the critics.[3]

In 1635 Corneille broke away from a succession of comedies which had been encouraged by the success of his first play, the comedy Mélite, presented in 1629-30, and produced his first tragedy, Médée. The traditional legend of the outraged wife who murders her children and commits suicide is the basis for the alienation theme of betrayal, although Médée does not die in Corneille's play.

Jason is about to abandon Médée and marry Créuse, the princess of Corinth. Médée is justly outraged, having given

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[1]Pierre Corneille, Théâtre complet, Vol. I, Roger Caillos, editor (Paris, 1957), p. 227.

[2]Nelson, op. cit., p. 63.

[3]Louis Rivaille, Les débuts de P. Corneille (Paris, 1936), pp. 75-82.

up her home, betrayed her people by helping Jason steal the Golden Fleece, and having killed her brother to protect Jason. Since Médée has proved to be a burden now that Jason is back in Greece, he ambitiously decides to find a more suitable wife. Médée the barbarian takes barbarous revenge. She causes the death of her rival and kills her own children. Corneille shows complete and violent alienation in harmony with the best tradition of classic literature.

> Lève les yeux, perfide, et reconnais ce bras
> Qui t'a déjà vengé de ces petits ingrats:
> Ce poignard que tu vois vient de chasser leurs âmes,
> Et noyer dans leur sang les restes de nos flammes.[4]

Corneille profited from his experience with this piece. A year after his experiment with Médée he produced le Cid with its dramatic alienation, but with a less tragic ending, and therefore more suitable to the current taste.

In 1643 Corneille produced La Mort de Pompée, the same year in which his Polyeucte appeared. Although Pompée has not retained a permanent position as one of Corneille's very best plays, it was well enough suited to contemporary audiences. "Corneille obtint avec sa tragédie un franc succès. . . . la pièce fut accueillie avec faveur, et elle se soutint longtemps sur la scène. . . ."[5] In contrast to earlier tragedies, especially le Cid, Horace, Nicomède, and Rodogune the alienation does not seem to "progress" nearly as much. Perhaps as with Médée the

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[4]Médée, Act 5, sc. 6.

[5]Rat, op. cit., p. 281.

story was so encased in historical common knowledge that Corneille could not change it to fit his dramatic needs as he did with plays like Nicomède and Rodogune. In Pompée the reigning king of Egypt, Ptolomée, is afraid to befriend the fleeing Pompée for fear of incurring César's wrath. No characters take any strong action in the play. Pompée is killed by the fearful Ptolomée, Cléopâtre and César side against him, and he dies a just death in spite of their last-minute efforts to save his life. With such a lack of conflict in will or tragic suffering a theme of alienation does not appear to play a very powerfully dramatic rôle except in the case of Cornélie, Pompée's widow. She does not fight any psychological battles with herself like Rodrigue, Chimène, Emilie, Auguste, Pauline and so many of Corneille's characters, but she shows the single-minded loyalty and passion characteristic of Horace and Camille. When César tries to console her she will have none of it:

> Non pas, César, non pas à Rome encor:
> Il faut que ta défaite et que tes funérailles
> A cette cendre aimée en ouvrent les murailles;
> Et quoiqu'elle la tienne aussi chère que moi,
> Elle n'y doit rentrer qu'en triomphant de toi.
> Je la porte en Afrique; et c'est là que j'espère
> Que les fils de Pompée et Caton, et mon père,
> Secondés par l'effort d'un Roi plus généreux,
> Ainsi que la justice auront le sort pour eux.
> C'est là que tu verras sur la terre et sur l'onde
> Les débris de Pharsale armer un autre monde;
> Et c'est là que j'irai, pour hâter tes malheurs,
> Porter de rang en rang ces cendres et mes pleurs.[6]

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[6] La Mort de Pompée, Act 5, sc. 4.

It was principally the rôle of this passionate Cornélie that caused the success of Pompée.[7] Her alienation is projected in two different directions. Ptolomée had betrayed a friend in her husband. César had triumphed over an enemy with the death of her husband. Thus two themes of alienation may be seen in Pompée: betrayal of a friend, and desire for vengeance, although neither aspect is a moving dynamic stimulus to action in the drama.

After the success of Polyeucte Corneille made another attempt at dramatizing martyrdom producing Théodore in 1645. Unfortunately the bienséances did not permit the public discussion of prostitution and part of Théodore's suffering was the threat of prostitution. Théodore was thus doomed to failure. The forces of alienation, however, are dynamic and progress through the story with characters thinking and moving powerfully and eventually reaching a tragic and fateful climax.

The alienation theme in Théodore was a foreshadowing of that of Nicomède. Marcelle, the step-mother, destroys Placide, the step-son, partially through dominating her husband. The story, however, is very different from both Polyeucte and Nicomède in its frank implications and intensely tragic dénouement. Marcelle is determined that Placide will marry her daughter who is ill because of her love for Placide. Placide loves the Christian, Théodore, and refuses to give her up.

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[7]Rat, op. cit., p. 281.

Marcelle's enmity toward Théodore and Placide mounts from passion to passion until she has Théodore persecuted for being a Christian, and has her told that she will be forced into prostitution if she does not recant and give up Placide. The tragedy ends with the deaths of Théodore, Didyme (a Christian who loves her), Marcelle and her daughter, and Placide. Théodore certainly fits many definitions of a tragedy, and powerfully shows the alienation of betrayal, as Marcelle destroys the entire family in selfish frustration. Had she loved her husband she could have spared his son. Corneille ironically noted that Théodore enjoyed success in the provinces, while the upright people of Paris were shocked by it.[8]

Héraclius appeared in 1646-47, and was so complicated that many in the audiences could not follow the story.[9] In truth the play is more of an intrigue than a tragedy. There is little heroic action or suffering and not nearly so much grandeur d'âme as in Corneille's most successful tragedies. The outcome of the story depends upon a mistaken identity, and the interest is held more by a curiosity to see which "prince" is the real Héraclius than by tension of tragic suffering. Alienation is not a powerful theme in Héraclius and the climax is not fateful except to the tyrant, whose punishment one expects anyway.

In 1650 Corneille presented Andromède, called a tragedy,

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[8]Lancaster, op. cit., p. 519.

[9]Ibid., p. 525.

but actually a drame à machine. There is no firm theme of alienation building to a fateful climax, and the main attraction was the magnificent spectacle produced. La Toison d'Or (1660), was of the same genre, with gods and machines taking the place of dramatic tragic conflict.

After the success of Nicomède, which was astounding as it was the only tragedy to hold the boards during the Fronde,[10] Corneille attempted another triumph and failed so completely that he wrote, "La mauvaise réception que le public a faite à cet ouvrage, m'avertit qu'il est temps que je sonne la retraite."[11] This is indeed unfortunate in view of the powerful conflicts and tragic drama that is portrayed. Pertharite is the story of alienation by lust for power in the setting of the wars of the Lombards. Grimoald leads an army against the reigning Pertharite, defeats him, and establishes himself as king. He then begins a long unsuccessful wooing of Rodelinde, wife of Pertharite, foreshadowing the drama of Andromaque. Rodolinde believes her husband to be dead but even so will have nothing to do with Grimoald. Corneille portrays Grimoald as an honnête homme who will not consider marrying Rodelinde once Pertharite shows up alive and healthy. In Corneille's play the alienating force is not Grimoald but his supposed friend, Garibalde. Garibalde hopes to turn the same trick on Grimoald as Grimoald has done on

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[10] See above, p. 85.

[11] Corneille, Théâtre complet, Vol. II, p. 463.

Pertharite thus usurping the usurper. Meanwhile he poses as a friend and counselor and intrigues for the death of Pertharite so as to discredit Grimoald in the eyes of the people. Grimoald finally succeeds in smuggling Pertharite to safety, but Rodelinde thinks he has murdered him. Part of the tragic suffering is on the part of Grimoald, who cannot reveal that he has saved Pertharite for fear of Garibalde, and still must suffer the passionate reproaches of Rodelinde. The basically powerful motif of alienation by lust for power is somewhat obscured by Corneille's treatment. Neither the poetry nor the intrigue of Pertharite has impressed French audiences.

Oedipe broke a "silence" of eight years for Pierre Corneille after he had promised to "sound the retreat". Corneille maintained that he would not have attempted another drama except for the urging of the great minister of finance, Fouquet.[12] Again on a well-known historical incident Corneille took few liberties thus presenting essentially the same alienation as the original Oedipus. The main aspect of the Greek tragedy has usually been considered the suffering caused by fate. Thus the alienation is brought on by circumstances alone and has nothing to do with psychology, will-power, or character. This did not give Corneille much opportunity to exercise the powerful moral convictions that he had learned from the Jesuits and had woven into his greatest plays.[13]

In 1662 Corneille presented Sertorius, a story of stark

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[12]Corneille, Théâtre complet, Vol. II, p. 536.

[13]Rivaille, op. cit., pp. 460-465.

and tragic betrayal. He records the fact that the play did not receive a poor reception,[14] which was probably true because of the genuine drama that is portrayed. Sertorius is a Roman general in Spain who is allied with Marius against the dictatorship of Sylla in Rome. Pompée is loyal to Sylla and represents a threat to the power and safety of Sertorius. Perpenna is Sertorius' trusted lieutenant, and it is he who betrays Sertorius and causes his death. The role of the aged Sertorius raises the play to a high level of tragic meaning because of his love for a young woman from whom he realistically expects no return of affection, because he is courageously faithful to his purpose of opposing the dictatorship of Sylla. The play shows the alienation deepening on the part of Perpenna as his lust for power motivates him to cause eventually the tragic death of Sertorius.

Sophonisbe appeared in 1663, with very moderate success. The setting is in Carthage during the time of the Roman's campaign under Scipio. The plot is somewhat involved with the protagonist's fortunes changing too often but the play does represent some genuine alienation, a strong character in Sophonisbe, and a fateful climax. Sophonisbe is queen of Numidia, and daughter of a famous general of Carthage. The drama represents her determined struggle against the relentless power of Rome as she looses two husbands and her own life in

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[14] Corneille, Théâtre complet, Vol. II, p. 699.

the process. She continues her struggle through intense desire and strength of will to avoid the humiliation of Roman domination. When every recourse has finally failed she commits suicide. The theme might well be called, "alienation by proud independence".

Othon (1664), Agésilas (1666), and Attila (1667) all are centered around a theme of political ambition and jealousy, with a number of other conflicts modifying or sometimes obscuring the alienation. In all three plays Corneille showed an awareness of the coming vogue of passionate love and made a serious effort to incorporate this idea into his works.

Othon concerns a rivalry for the throne of the Roman Empire with romantic passion raising problems and conflicts along the way. The drama is upheld more by curiosity as to who will marry whom, and who will be emperor, than by tension or tragic suffering.

Agésilas shows the ungrateful young king of Sparta about to betray his faithful and famous general, Lysander. Agésilas feels that he is losing too much power to Lysander and is alienated through a desire for more power. Again there is a great deal of suspense as female characters intrigue and act to gain their respective choice of husbands. The play ends with each man getting the woman most suited for him and no really firm theme of alienation having led to a fateful climax.

Attila is based on Attila's lust for power, but Corneille

chooses the day before his marriage for his play and shows the possible marriage to Honorie, sister of the Roman Emperor, or Ildione, sister of the king of France. Thus the theme of ambition to rule is somewhat modified by the question of who the bride will be. Needless to say, Attila alienates himself from everyone by his arrogant ruthlessness, and finally dies choking in his own blood. The climax is brought by chance and not through a process of alienation.

Tite et Bérénice (1670), and Pulchérie (1672), are called comédies-héroïques in a concession to the then new distinction between plays with a "happy" ending and those with a "tragic" one. By this time Racine had captured attention of the theatre-going world with his tragic dramas of high passion and tension; therefore the alienation and dramatic value that does exist in Tite et Bérénice and Pulchérie was ignored. Both plays show a woman who gives up the man she loves for unselfishly noble reasons thus preventing tragedy rather than causing it. Bérénice voluntarily returns to Judea because she wants Tite to be a successful emperor, and she fears their marriage will compromise him in the eyes of his fellow Romans. Pulchérie does not marry the man she loves because she is Empress and must have a man whom the people will respect and support. She loves Léon but he is too young, and has too many jealous powerful rivals for him to be chosen. So in order to preserve Leon's personal safety Pulchérie dedicates herself to perpetual virginity and marries

the older Martian--in name only.

In 1674 Suréna represented Corneille's last effort in drama. Although the play was a miserable failure at that time, it has since been acclaimed by some critics and French audiences as being some of his most beautiful poetry.

> From the study of Racine and the resigned melancholy of his own heart, he drew the inspiration that was to end his dramatic career with the remarkable Suréna (1674), which though not fully appreciated in his own day struck after two and a half centuries a responsive chord in the hearts of his countrymen.[15]

Corneille can be seen to have generally succeeded with the plays that showed alienation which was dramatic and meaningful to the current audiences. Where his type of conflict was no longer in vogue, or the power of the alienation was too diluted to produce tension, his plays were failures.

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[15]Solomon, op. cit., p. xxviii.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Corneille's Message to the Seventeenth Century

Corneille was a good example of the type of writer whose literature became not just a means of entertainment or shock but a permanent social message.

> When a great poet uses the stories that have taken shape in the fantasy of the community, it is not his individual sensibility alone that he objectifies. Responding with unusual sensitiveness to the words and images which already express the emotional experience of the community, the poet arranges these so as to use their full evocative power. Thus he attains for himself vision and possession of the experience engendered between his own soul and the life around him, and communicates that experience, at once individual and collective, so far as they can respond adequately to the words and images he uses.[1]

Northrop Frye said, "The creation of literature may be and often is a lonely process, but the response to it becomes increasingly a community of understanding, a sharing of vision."[2]

Corneille was more than the forerunner of Racine--more than a great dramatist. He was a great moralist. He was an apostle of reason and self-control during a time of irrational hate and bloodshed. At the time he presented Rodogune the Thirty Years War had ravaged Germany and was still cintinuing; and the playwright portrayed two young men, Antiochus and Seleucus, who steadfastly refused to intrigue and kill and hate.

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[1]Bodkin, op. cit., p. 212.

[2]Northrop Frye, The Well-Tempered Critic (Bloomington, 1963), p. 153.

At the time Nicomède was presented the aristocracy had lost its independence to an absolute monarchy, and Corneille had his hero say that friendship and peace were desired without servitude. But Corneille was more than an ivory tower polemicist attacking social wrongs from a privileged sanctuary. He put himself "on the line" with Cinna in an eloquent request for mercy to his native Rouen and Normandy when some of his neighbors and colleagues had been executed without trial, flogged, banished, and sentenced to the galleys. In answer to that high-handed reprisal he had his Auguste say, "I am the master of myself; let us be friends."

Corneille was also a lonely man in some respects. His main purpose was not to entertain, but to speak, and to speak the truth.[3] It was inevitable that he would isolate himself as he came to perceive truths that audiences did not want to hear. Mandel said, "Voltaire thought that Shakespeare's heroes were barbarians. We often accuse Corneille's heroes of being rhetorical machines. The quarrel between the English and the French approach to tragedy illustrates the instability of the human receptor."[4]

However, as has been seen in the treatment of his alienation themes, especially in le Cid, Horace, Cinna, and Polyeucte, Corneille's idea of truth was not withdrawn from the everyday conflicts of life nor did he disregard the power of human emotions.

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[3]Rivaille, op. cit., p. 459, "Sa préoccupation de tous les moments est le recherche de la vérité."

[4]Mandel, op. cit., p. 87.

> Cette recherche de la vérité n'est pas uniquement l'oeuvre de son intelligence. Elle demande constamment le concours de sa volonté, soit que celle-ci sanctionne les propositions de l'intelligence, soit qu'elle la soutienne dans le labeur de sa poursuite ou l'excite à sa tâche. Vouloir, autant que savoir, est indispensable au bon exercice de l'esprit humain. Tous les personnages de Corneille sont conscients de l'effort volontaire que demande leur vie morale.[5]

It must be admitted though, that as great a poet and as responsible an author as Corneille was, he was not actually an original thinker. Though not an original thinker he reflected a unique mixture of the influences of his times. His idealism was diluted by gloire. His simple emotions and faith were laced with the baroque. His drama was anchored with maxims and his poetry sometimes weighed down with rhetoric. His love of reason was tempered by a love of the unusual, the unbelievable. Over and over he defended himself against those who attacked his vraisemblence: if it is true it does not have to be logical. Thus he achieved a balance that many original thinkers cannot find.

Corneille was a lover of harmony. He loved to take discordant themes and characters and give them harmonious expression.[6] With so many critics criticizing his "happy endings", they missed the point. He was not against showing tragic alienation but he wanted to contribute an answer to society's ills and he found a dramatic way of giving it. Corneille took on a long and lonely battle against threats to social cohesiveness.

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[5]Rivaille, op. cit., p. 459.

[6]Fogel, op. cit., p. 105.

Whether it be the code of honor in le Cid, the passion in Horace, or the lust for power in Rodogune, Corneille was giving an answer, showing possibility of social units holding together and avoiding tragedy in the face of forces of alienation.

Some have accused Corneille of having a taste for brutality particularly because of Médée, Rodogune, and Théodore.[7] It should be noted, however, that the worst characters and most brutal actions in his tragedies were taken from history or ancient drama. In the cases of Rodogune, Nicomède, and Théodore he softened the brutal aspects from the original truth. It could have been that he used brutal situations to speak his conviction against brutality. Péguy believed Corneille was incapable of creating a brutal character.[8]

Corneille's Message to the Twentieth Century

Since alienation is as much a problem now as it was in Corneille's time, or has ever been, it would appear that the commentary on alienation in Corneille's tragedies would be relevant and of value today.

It is ridiculous to expect Corneille's drama to understand twentieth century problems: so it is up to the enlightened reader, that is, one who has made an effort to understand Corneille in his race, milieu, and moment to make Corneille relevant to today. The degree of Corneille's relevance will

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[7]Fogel, op. cit., p. 111.

[8]Ibid..

depend upon the universality of his ideas and the degree of understanding of his world attained by the modern student.

In le Cid, whether intentionally or not, Corneille showed how a code of honor could lead to a very difficult and ridiculous situation. In other words, "The intelligence which creates cultural progress also creates the conditions for regress and even for death. . . the same institutional arrangements which protect man also alienate him from his world and from himself."[9] Corneille put forward as an alternative to a rigid code of honor reason and flexibility. Where Don Diègue would rather die than lose his honor, Chimène was induced by affection and sympathy to soften her stand. Love should indeed have precedence over personal pride--honor.

In Horace, Cinna, and Polyeucte, Corneille illustrated in a powerful way how uncontrolled passions can lead to betrayal of the most sacred relationships. Today's world needs to learn to put priority on reason over violent emotions.

In Horace Camille was unable to control her passionate expressions of loyalty to Curiace thus provoking her brother. Horace was unable to suppress his passionate resentment of any kind of attack on patrictism, and so betrayed the State and himself by a dishonorable act--taking the law into his own hands.

In Cinna Corneille showed his answer to passion's ravages--self-control. Not weakness, not cowardice, not softness, but

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[9]Hallman, op. cit., p. 12.

strength of will are what can control passion and prevent tragedy.

In Polyeucte, probably not intentionally, Corneille showed the tragic sacrifice of a human life by a man who mistook religion for a crutch instead of a challenge, and chose to escape the trials of this world for greener pastures rather than stay to use his strength and influence to face the problems of life.

In Nicomède and Rodogune Corneille dramatized the evils of ruthless ambition. And in each case he contrasted against the dark background of amorality his ideal--the unselfish and loyal character, the harmonizer of conflicts. He was trying to show that a noble ethic can heal alienation. In Nicomède, though, he gave the warning that such nobility of ethic must be reciprocated or tragedy will still ensue.

In Corneille's lesser works he either repeated themes from foreign and ancient drama, or repeated his own themes perhaps without realizing it. He wrestled again with the problems of loyalty and self-sacrifice as opposed to ruthless selfishness but his poetry and drama failed him.

Corneille's Craftsmanship in Using Alienation

Evaluators of Corneille's tragedies range from those who consider him to be among the world's greatest playwrights to those who think of him simply as a manifestation of baroque culture.

> Entre Shakespeare et Corneille, il n'y a pas à hésiter que je sache: la couronne de ce grand art appartient à Corneille! Sans doute il remplit une scène moins vaste que Shakespeare, il s'addresse à des crimes moins térribles, à des amours plus charmantes, il remplit moins d'espace, assurément, dans ce magnifique jardin de la nature. En revanche, il a plus d'âme, il a plus de coeur, il est plus un homme, il est plus un sage, un philosophe, un politique, un penseur.10

In opposition to the idea that Corneille had any real message or relevance one finds "romantically biased critics," and "new intellectualism" preferring to ignore Corneille's works.

> Brody sees classicism, "after fighting a life-time's defensive action against romantically biased critics," as now threatened with annexation by the partisans of the barcque, and fears that the concept will once more come to be identified with a lack of imagination and vitality in literature.11

It is in analyzing the themes of alienation in Corneille's tragedies in the light of an historical understanding of the psychology which the plays reflected and encountered that the power of his drama can best be evaluated. Corneille did not deal principally with tragedy by accident; he dealt with tragic conflicts. His heroes were not lamentable victims of sheer chance but actively made strong efforts to take part in determining their destiny.

Because of this dynamic aspect of Corneille's tragedies, in contrast to earlier tragedies, traditional criticism following in the wake of Lanson has isolated and identified the nature of

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[10]Fogel, op. cit., pp. 53,54 quoting Janin.

[11]D. A. Watts, "Review of French Classicism. A Critical Miscellany," French Studies, Vol. XXII (January, 1968), 61,62.

his heroes. The "new criticism" isolates and identifies his philosophy using a particular intellectual language. In contrast to these two polarized approaches the search for themes of alienation lays open his tragedies to the heart revealing the deepest meanings and relationships between his heroes and his philosophy. A "psychology of alienation" approach not only points out the manner in which the exercise of will-power is a prominent part of the rôle of the hero, or how Corneille was possibly a forerunner of such-and-such a philosophy, but reveals his treatment of the basic aspects of human nature and the variability of their interreactions. His portrayal of the freedom of the individual to react uniquely or unexpectedly to the blows of circumstance was one of Corneille's strong points in the use of alienation.

In order to enhance the dramatic appeal of his active heroes, who make steady progress along some course of alienation, he used stark contrast. His themes of alienation show the contrast between uncontrollable passion and reasoned action through will-power.

> One of the marks of a successful tragic drama is its ability to bring the imagination to play on the basic elements of human nature. Human nature tends to analyze itself, and finds its own constituents very interesting.12

Thus the characteristics of a Camille, of an Auguste, of a Cléopâtre interested the audiences by turning their minds inward, and as the alienation progressed in the play they saw themselves acting out the drama of life's conflicts and struggling

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12Bodkin, op. cit., p. 216.

vicariously with life's eternal alienating forces.

Thus it can be seen that traditional criticism dealt with the heroic nature of Corneille's dramas. Modern criticism has often dealt with the philosophies and morals presented, but this thesis has shown the connections between all of these facets through analysis of Corneille's craftsmanship in using alienation.

Today's world needs Corneille's optimistic faith that reconciliation is possible even in the face of highest passions. Today's world also needs Corneille's realistic knowledge that reconciliation will always have to struggle in conflict with alienation. Corneille's message is more than a doctrine of hero worship; it is a message of faith in man--a faith tempered by a deep understanding of the forces of alienation inherent in human nature.

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