Title

August W. Schlegel, Comparaison entre la Phèdre de Racine et celle d'Euripide: a digital edition (with translation)

Authors

Mastronarde, Donald J.
Allen-Hornblower, Emily

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AUGUST W. SCHLEGEL

COMPARAISON ENTRE LA PHÈDRE DE RACINE ET CELLE D'EURIPIDE

A digital edition
Version 2

by
Donald J. Mastronarde
Department of Classics
University of California, Berkeley

with an English translation
by
Emily Allen-Hornblower
Department of Classics
Rutgers University

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INTRODUCTION

August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767-1845) was one of the most prominent literary scholars of the Romantic period in Germany. Along with his more prolific brother Friedrich (1772-1829), he promoted the study of world literature and did much to set the course of literary history in the nineteenth century and beyond. For students of ancient Greek literature, the Schlegels are especially important because they endorsed, consolidated, and extended an ancient tradition that posited a growth and decay of genres, and in particular in the case of Greek tragedy they offered assessments of and distinctions between Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides that are still echoed in scholarship and popular criticism to this day. The Schlegels were major exponents of the so-called "nineteenth-century *damnatio*" of Euripides (cf. E. Behler in *Greek Roman and Byzantine Studies* 27 (1986) 335-67).

August Schlegel published *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literature* in 1809, and already in 1815 that book was translated into English as *A course of lectures on dramatic art and literature*, and it was frequently reissued thereafter. Earlier, however, in 1807, he published in French a long essay comparing Racine's *Phèdre* to Euripides' *Hippolytus*. In the Schlegels and a generation earlier in the dramatic criticism of Lessing, we can observe the tendency of the German intellectuals to react again the dramas and poetics of the classical French tradition and to stake out in opposition a new aesthetic for German literature based on a return to the Greek classics. Schlegel's comparison of these two plays is a provocative contribution to such a program. It is also rather piquant to observe Schlegel here showing such enthusiastic appreciation for a specimen of Euripides' work.

This essay is neither included in the German editions of A. W. Schlegel's collected works nor widely available in libraries. *Comparaison entre la Phèdre de Racine et celle d'Euripide* first appeared as a separate volume in 1807; a reprint of the 1807 edition was issued by A. L. Pollard, Old Marston, Oxford, in 1962. In 1842 Schlegel reprinted his essay, with some minor revisions of wording, in a collection of his French essays, *Essais littéraires et historiques*, where it has an alternative short title "Comparaison des deux Phèdres." The 1842 version is now available as a free Google book.

My interest in this work stems from years of teaching Euripides in general and often his *Hippolytus*, Seneca's *Phaedra*, and Racine's *Phèdre* in the same class, as well as from a longstanding interest in the reception of Greek tragedy from the Renaissance onward. The intention of the present edition is to make this text more widely available and, through the annotations and glossary, more accessible to modern readers. For the same reason, an English translation has been added in the current version, so that the work can be used easily in English-speaking classes, where the two plays can usefully be studied side by side in English translations.

The translation is the work of Emily Allen-Hornblower, with a few suggestions from me that contributed to her final revision of the piece. (The translation of the 1842 preface which appears at the end of this edition is originally my work, but with corrections and suggestions from Emily in the final revision.)

The text presented here is basically that of the 1842 revision, for which Schlegel made no substantial changes of content or argument, but introduced a few refinements of wording and

used a more modern system of spelling (the 1807 edition had forms like *avoit*, *sentimens*, *puissans* for *avait*, *sentiments*, *puissants*) and punctuation (e.g. 1807 *tout-à-fait*, 1842 *tout à fait*). I have collated the two editions, and the endnotes indicate the different wording of the earlier version (but I do not record differences of spelling and punctuation). I have also tacitly corrected the two Errata noted on p. xxvii of the 1842 edition and corrected one other manifest typographical error introducted in 1842. During the process of translation, Emily Allen-Hornblower detected a few typographic errors that were present in my Version 1 edition, and these have been corrected.

The following items have been added to the original text:

(a) I have numbered the paragraphs with numbers between parentheses in bold type, from **(1)** to **(67)**, to facilitate reference to and within this edition, since the pagination may change in later revisions. Similarly , the paragraphs of the Avant-Propos are numbered with roman numerals between parentheses in bold type.
(b) The pagination of the 1807 edition is indicated by the number in square brackets, from [3] to [108], placed in the text before the first word or syllable of the page.
(c) The pagination of the 1842 edition is indicated by the number in braces in italics, from *{87}* to *{170}*, placed in the text before the first word or syllable of the page.
(4) In square brackets I have inserted line references for the quotations in the form [*Ph*. I.v, 355] or [*Ph*. III.i] or [*Hipp*. 373], meaning respectively "Racine, *Phèdre*, Act I, scene v, line 355" (that is, line 355 of the 1654 lines of the play as indicated in most modern editions of the French text), "Racine, *Phèdre*, Act III, scene I," and "Euripides, *Hippolytus*, line 373" (that is, line 373 of the 1466 lines of the play as indicated in modern editions of the Greek text and in some English translations).
(5) I have added superscript uppercase N in the text at the end of any phrase on which there is an annotation.

In Version 2, I have also added links within the PDF. First, each paragraph number in the French and the English contains a link to the same paragraph in the other language. Second, the endnote numbers (for textual variants) are linked to the endnotes. Third, most proper names are linked (on their first occurrence only) to an entry in the Glossary: simply place the cursor over a proper name, and if the cursor changes to a pointing hand, there is a link. Fourth, for the annotations, each superscript N is linked to the appropriate page of notes.

Donald J. Mastronarde
Version 2 (April 2011)

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The following translation was made possible through the generous support of professor Donald J. Mastronarde, whom I would like to thank warmly for providing me with the opportunity to ponder August Schlegel's present essay as I translated it — a sometimes awkward, and always provocative, aesthetic treatise.

In the present translation, I have sought to provide as close a rendering of Schlegel's writing and style as possible, including any inaccuracies, particularly in his translations of Euripides' *Hippolytus*, which at times stray from the original Greek. I thought it worthwhile to record his overtranslations, interpretive choices, and downright mistakes. Likewise, in §24 I translate Schegel's version of Winckelmann, not Winckelmann's text itself.

Similarly, I have kept the Latinized names of the gods, which he preferred to their Graecized alternatives in the French.

The translations of Racine's *Phèdre* into English are those of Robert Bruce Boswell, now in the public domain, available at http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1977/1977-h/1977-h.htm#one. An exception is "the trembling Hippolytus" in §29, which is my own version, since Boswell's does not convey the idea of trembling that is central to Schlegel's point here.

Emily Allen-Hornblower
(January 2011)

[1]

COMPARAISON
ENTRE
LA PHÈDRE
DE RACINE
ET CELLE
D'EURIPIDE,

PAR A. W. SCHLEGEL

PARIS,
CHEZ TOURNEISEN FILS, LIBRAIRE,
Rue du Seine Saint-Germain, N.^{O} 12.

1807

The 1842 title page reads:

Essais
littéraires et historiques
par
A. W. de Schlegel
Professeur de Littérature et de l'Histoire des Beaux-Arts
à l'Université Royale de Bonn; Directeur du Musée des Antiquités
Rhénanes; Chevalier de l'Ordre de l'Aigle Rouge 3e cl. avec
le Nœud; Commandeur de l'Ordre Britannique et Hanovrien des
Guelphes; Chevalier des Ordres de St. Wladimir, de Wasa et
de la Légion d'Honneur; Membre Ordinaire de l'Académie Royale
des Sciences à Berlin; Membre Honoraire de l'Académie Impériale
à St. Petersbourg, de l'Acad. R. à Munich, de l'Acad. R. des
Beaux-Arts à Berlin, des Sociétés Asiatiques de Calcutta,
de Paris et de Londres, Etc. Etc.
Bonn,
Chez Edouard Weber Libraire.
1842.

[3]*{87}*

Comparaison
entre
la Phèdre de Racine
et celle d'Euripide.[1]

(1) RACINE est le poète favori des Français, et Phèdre est l'une de ses pièces les plus admirées. On jouit sans comparer, et l'on se persuade facilement[2] que l'objet de notre prédilection est incomparable. Les lecteurs français surtout s'attachent de préférence aux détails de la diction et de la versification: ils ne relèvent que de beaux morceaux, dans des ouvrages qui devraient être sentis et jugés dans leur ensemble. Un parallèle avec une pièce écrite sur le même sujet dans une autre langue, peut donc être utile, en ce qu'il donne à l'attention une direction toute opposée. Les beautés du style et de la versification[3], dans des langues différentes, ne peuvent se comparer entre elles; ainsi la comparaison doit tomber nécessairement sur les caractères et leurs rapports mutuels, sur l'art de conduire [4] l'action et sur l'esprit de la composition en général.

(2)*{88}* Le sentiment complet de la langue du poète n'est pas nécessaire pour l'examen de ces derniers points, auxquels je me bornerai exclusivement. On pourra donc écouter là-dessus un étranger et opposer des arguments aux siens; mais on ne saurait le récuser d'avance comme incompétent. Quand même, d'après son point de vue, il se croirait obligé, dans la comparaison des deux Phèdres, d'accorder la préférence à celle d'Euripide; les admirateurs de Racine n'auraient pas lieu d'en être choqués, puisque cela ne concerne nullement l'objet principal de leur admiration, c'est-à-dire les inimitables beautés d'une diction poétique et harmonieuse. J'ai d'autant moins hésité à publier les réflexions suivantes, que deux savants français fort estimables, le Père Brumoi et l'abbé Batteux, le premier dans son *Théâtre des Grecs*, le second dans les *Mémoires de l'Académie royale des inscriptions et belles-lettres*, ont traité ce sujet à peu près dans le même sens. Cependant leur comparaison est beaucoup moins développée que la mienne. Si j'ai cru pouvoir ajouter quelque chose de nouveau à leurs remarques judicieuses, c'est [5] parce que la théorie des beaux-arts et de la poésie et l'étude du génie de l'antiquité ont fait des progrès depuis le temps où ils écrivaient, et parce que la connaissance des autres théâtres modernes m'a donné l'occasion de réfléchir beaucoup sur l'art dramatique. J'ai tâché du moins de distinguer ce qui constitue son essence, d'avec les convenances, les habitudes, les préjugés même de *{89}* tel siècle ou de telle nation, qui le bornent et le modifient de mille manières.

(3) Il se trouve dans les diverses littératures des ouvrages qui, bien qu'ils portent le même nom et soient censés appartenir au même genre, sont d'une nature si hétérogène et sont placés dans des sphères tellement différentes, que tous les efforts pour les comparer par leurs qualités essentielles seraient vains. C'est ce que nous n'avons pas à craindre dans l'essai que nous nous proposons; du moins si l'opinion établie est fondée. Car la prétention ordinaire des littérateurs

français, c'est que le théâtre de leur nation, et surtout le théâtre tragique, repose sur les mêmes principes que celui des Grecs, et qu'il en est comme la continuation, quoiqu'il soit infiniment plus parfait. Cependant les auteurs dramatiques français se sont [6] vus lancés dans cette rivalité peu à peu, et d'abord presque sans le vouloir. Corneille soupçonnait à peine l'excellence du théâtre grec, il ne pensait pas à l'imiter; il avait en vue, principalement au début de sa carrière[4], des modèles espagnols qui sont aussi loin qu'il est possible du genre grec. À la fin, voyant que la Poétique d'Aristote jouissait, de même que tous[5] les autres écrits de ce philosophe, d'une autorité souveraine, Corneille se mit à démontrer après coup que ses pièces étaient ordonnées selon les règles d'Aristote, et s'acquitta de cette tâche tant bien que mal par des interprétations forcées. Il y aurait parfaitement réussi, que cela ne prouverait pas la *{90}* ressemblance de ses compositions avec la tragédie grecque, dont Aristote n'a pas du tout saisi le véritable génie; si toutefois on peut le considérer comme l'auteur de cette poétique, dont le texte est fort corrompu, et qui n'est qu'un fragment d'un extrait mal fait de l'ouvrage original. Racine, quoiqu'il connût fort bien les poètes grecs et qu'il en profitât souvent, a suivi pourtant en général la pratique du théâtre, telle qu'il la trouva établie. Si dans ses deux dernières pièces[N] il a introduit des chœurs, c'est plutôt une occasion particulière qui l'y a engagé, [7] que le désir de se rapprocher des usages de la scène grecque. Voltaire, avec une connaissance médiocre des anciens, a essayé le premier de donner une théorie de la tragédie antique. Il s'explique amplement dans ses préfaces sur les moyens de s'en rapprocher et de réformer par là le théâtre français. Dans sa Mérope, il a pour ainsi dire voulu refaire une tragédie grecque perdue. Il serait curieux de montrer que, malgré tout cela, il n'y a rien de plus dissemblable, de plus diamétralement opposé, que la tragédie grecque et la tragédie française; cette opinion ne serait peut-être pas très difficile à soutenir, si on allait au fond des choses sans se laisser tromper par quelques conformités extérieures et accidentelles.

(4) Mais, en laissant cela de côté, il n'y a point d'inconvénient à comparer une pièce d'un auteur français avec celle d'un auteur grec, quand le premier lui-même reconnaît celle-ci pour son *{91}* modèle, quand il avoue y avoir puisé les principales beautés de la sienne, et qu'ainsi il a voulu seulement adapter un ouvrage qu'il admirait, aux mœurs de son siècle, au goût de sa nation. En cas que cette obligation l'eût poussé à gâter et rapetisser la [8] pièce originale, il serait encore jusqu'à un certain point personnellement excusable, parce qu'il pourrait avoir agi contre sa conviction. Toujours le poète, surtout le poète dramatique, est modifié par le public; aucun génie ne saurait se soustraire entièrement à l'influence de ce qui l'entoure: mais j'observerai qu'en général nous jugeons le mérite d'un poète solidairement avec celui de sa langue, de sa nation et de son siècle; nous ne demandons pas comment il s'est formé, mais ce qu'il est devenu. Ainsi, sachant d'un côté qu'Euripide a été le poète favori de ses contemporains[N], admettant de l'autre, comme nous le devons certainement, que Racine était l'auteur le plus habile et le plus exercé dans la pratique du théâtre français, et qu'il réunissait dans la culture de son esprit les traits les plus saillants et les plus raffinés du siècle de Louis XIV; notre parallèle de l'original et de l'imitation

contiendra nécessairement un jugement indirect sur la valeur comparative du siècle d'Euripide et de celui de Racine. Mais quel qu'en soit le résultat, gardons-nous bien de tirer de la comparaison de deux pièces isolées, une conclusion générale sur la préférence à accorder à la littérature tragique [9] de l'une des deux nations. Racine est le poète tragique *{92}* le plus estimé du théâtre français; il est peut-être le plus parfait. Euripide n'était ni l'un ni l'autre, par rapport à ses rivaux dans la même carrière. Je n'ignore pas que la plupart des écrivains modernes, et surtout des français, lui assignent le premier rang parmi les tragiques grecs. Ils se fondent, je crois, sur le mot d'Aristote qui appelle Euripide le plus tragique des poètes[N]. Cela signifie seulement qu'il porte le plus à l'émotion de la pitié, qu'il présente le tableau des calamités les plus accablantes[6] et les plus universelles (comme dans les Troyennes), mais point du tout qu'il est le poète tragique le plus accompli. Et l'eût-il voulu dire, l'autorité d'Aristote ne devrait pas nous en imposer. La persécution infatigable d'Aristophane seule suffit pour[7] nous convaincre que beaucoup de contemporains apercevaient dans l'objet de la faveur publique la dégénération de l'art. La proposition de Platon[N] d'éconduire poliment les poètes dramatiques hors de sa république, *parce que*, dit-il, *ils accordent trop aux écarts de la passion et trop peu à la fermeté d'une volonté morale, et qu'ils rendent les hommes efféminés par les plaintes excessives dans le* [10] *malheur, mises dans la bouche de leurs héros*; cette proposition se rapporte principalement à Euripide[N] et aux poètes qui composaient dans le même esprit: car certes, appliquée, par exemple, au Prométhée d'Eschyle, c'eût été le reproche le plus mal fondé. Nous avons perdu une quantité de poètes tragiques grecs, d'une excellence peut-être égale *{93}* ou presque égale aux trois seuls dont quelques ouvrages nous soient parvenus: cependant dans ceux-ci nous pouvons clairement distinguer les époques principales de l'art tragique, depuis son origine jusqu'à sa chute. Le style d'Eschyle est grand, sévère et souvent dur; le style de Sophocle est d'une proportion et d'une harmonie parfaite; celui d'Euripide, enfin, est brillant, mais désordonné dans sa facilité surabondante: il tombe souvent dans un goût maniéré[8]. Je ne parle pas ici de style dans le sens de la rhétorique; mais j'emploie ce terme de la même façon que l'on s'en sert dans les arts du dessin. Comme en Grèce aucune circonstance accidentelle n'a interrompu ni altéré le développement des beaux-arts, on y observe dans leur marche régulière les plus grandes analogies. Eschyle est le Phidias de l'art tragique, Sophocle en est le Polyclète; et cette époque de la sculpture [11] où elle commençait à s'écarter de sa destination primitive et à donner dans le pittoresque, où elle s'attachait plus à saisir toutes les nuances du mouvement et de la vie, qu'à s'élever au beau idéal des formes, époque qui parait avoir commencé par Lysippe, répond à la poésie d'Euripide. Dans celui-ci, les traits caractéristiques de la tragédie grecque sont déjà effacés en partie; enfin, c'est le déclin et non pas la perfection. Euripide est un auteur fort inégal, soit dans ses différentes pièces, soit dans leurs diverses parties: tantôt il est d'une beauté ravissante; d'autres fois il a pour ainsi dire une veine vulgaire. *{94}* Je conviens cependant qu'Hippolyte est une de ses meilleures pièces parmi celles qui nous restent.

(5) Le sujet des deux tragédies est l'amour incestueux de Phèdre pour son beau-fils. Hippolyte, et la catastrophe que cet amour amène. Toute passion, quand elle est suffisamment forte et accompagnée de grandeur d'âme, peut devenir tragique: nous connaissons une tragédie sublime, l'Ajax de Sophocle, dont l'unique mobile est la honte. Cependant, les poètes tragiques grecs des deux premières époques paraissent avoir exclu entièrement l'amour de leurs compositions[N], ou tout au plus [12] l'y avoir introduit d'une manière subordonnée et épisodique. La raison en est claire: la tragédie étant principalement destinée à faire ressortir la dignité de la nature humaine[N], ne pouvait guères se servir de l'amour, parce qu'il tient aux sens que l'homme a en commun avec les animaux. L'antiquité, franche en tout, déguisait beaucoup moins cette partie de l'amour que les nations modernes, chez qui la galanterie chevaleresque et les mœurs du Nord en général ont introduit un culte plus respectueux pour les femmes, et chez qui l'enthousiasme du sentiment s'efforce, ou de subjuguer les sens, ou de les purifier par sa mystérieuse alliance. C'est pourquoi l'amour devenu romantique peut et doit jouer un beaucoup plus grand rôle dans nos compositions sérieuses et mélancoliques, que dans celles des anciens, où cette passion se montre avec des caractères purement naturels, tels que les produit le Midi. Mais quelque délicat *{95}* que soit l'amour, tant qu'il est innocent et heureux, il ne fournit que le sujet d'une idylle. Pour s'élever à la hauteur tragique, il faut qu'il paraisse causé par une fatalité irrésistible, et par conséquent qu'il s'éloigne du cours ordinaire des choses; qu'il soit en lutte avec de grands obstacles phy[13]siques et moraux, et qu'il entraîne des suites funestes. Tout cela se trouve réuni dans la passion de Phèdre pour Hippolyte. Supposons un peuple chez lequel les lois permettraient à une belle-mère d'épouser son beau-fils: le sujet ne sera plus tragique. Dégageons cette préférence donnée à un jeune homme sur son père, préférence qui, dès qu'elle n'inspire point d'horreur, risque de devenir ridicule; dégageons-la encore davantage de toutes les répugnances de la nature et des liens du devoir; supposons un homme d'un certain âge qui fait la cour à une femme sans obtenir du retour, tandis que cette femme réussit tout aussi mal dans les avances qu'elle fait à son fils: et la situation sera tout à fait comique.

(6) Il est donc de la plus haute importance, pour l'effet et la dignité de la tragédie, de marquer fortement combien la passion de Phèdre est criminelle, et de tenir l'horreur de l'inceste[N] toujours présente à l'imagination du spectateur. La sévérité morale coïncide à cet égard avec le besoin poétique. Nous verrons tout à l'heure lequel des deux poètes a le mieux su satisfaire à l'une et à l'autre.

(7) La tragédie d'Euripide a pour titre *Hip*[14]*polyte* (l'épithète de *stéphanéphore*, c'est-à-dire por*{96}*teur d'une couronne de fleurs, a été ajoutée seulement pour la distinguer d'une autre du même nom[N]); et en effet toute la composition tend à célébrer la vertu de ce jeune héros[N], et à émouvoir sur son malheureux sort, dont Phèdre n'est que l'instrument. Elle a cessé de vivre vers le milieu de la pièce, sans que pour cela l'intérêt se refroidisse le moins du monde; même les scènes les plus pathétiques viennent après. La pièce de Racine, au contraire, porte, dans les

premières éditions, le titre de *Phèdre et Hippolyte*: ensuite on a omis entièrement ce dernier nom, et avec raison; car Hippolyte, ainsi que tout ce qui le concerne, est effacé et pâli, tandis que le poète a employé toute la magie de son pinceau pour prêter à son héroïne des grâces et des qualités séduisantes, malgré un égarement aussi monstrueux.

(8) Dans Euripide, tout est traité par grandes masses; point de ces incidents minutieux qui éparpillent l'attention, et empêchent le spectateur d'apercevoir d'un coup d'œil tous les rapports. L'ordonnance du rôle de Phèdre est de la plus grande simplicité; elle n'a qu'une seule entrée, et reste en scène jusqu'au moment [15] ou elle se retire dans son palais pour se donner la mort. Elle ne parle point à Hippolyte, qui ne lui adresse pas non plus la parole, quoiqu'ils soient en présence[N]; elle ne voit point Thésée, qui ne revient qu'après qu'elle a péri; surtout elle ne se mêle pas d'affaires d'état. Tous ses aveux se passent entre elle, sa nourrice, et, selon la coutume grecque, le chœur composé *{97}* de jeunes femmes trézéniennes. Cela est conforme à son état, et l'on peut ajouter, tout à fait conforme à la sévère pudeur. Phèdre doit fuir l'œil des hommes; ce n'est que dans l'âme compatissante des femmes que peut s'épancher son cœur blessé à mort. Si après que son funeste secret lui est échappé, surtout après qu'Hippolyte l'a su, elle peut encore se relever pour agir avec présence d'esprit, pour former des projets, pour tramer des intrigues; elle n'était donc pas à l'extrémité quand elle a succombé, et sa seule excuse lui est ôtée.

(9) La Phèdre d'Euripide paraît d'abord mourante; elle est portée sur un lit de repos, entourée de ses femmes qui la soignent, précédée de sa nourrice, dont les plaintes sur les maux de la vie humaine, inspirées par la vieillesse, font un contraste touchant avec [16] les gémissements de la jeunesse languissante, atteinte d'un mal auquel elle seule est exposée. Il est difficile de donner à ceux qui ne connaissent pas le grec une idée de la beauté de ce passage: il est écrit dans cette mesure[N] qui, dans les tragédies grecques, occupe la place intermédiaire entre le dialogue et les morceaux lyriques, c'est-à-dire chantés. Surtout quand Phèdre s'abandonne aux égarements de son imagination, ce sont des accents brisés qui, en même temps qu'ils respirent la langueur et la volupté, font déjà pressentir le frisson mortel qui doit bientôt glacer les membres de la malheureuse victime. Sur les instances du chœur, la nourrice fait les plus grands efforts pour arracher à Phè*{98}*dre l'aveu de la cause secrète de sa maladie. Elle y réussit par ses supplications pathétiques, et s'en va désespérée et comme résolue à n'y pas survivre. Phèdre reste seule avec le chœur[N] et lui parle pour sa justification. Son discours est rempli de pudeur et de noblesse; il ne pèche que par le défaut ordinaire d'Euripide, de trop moraliser. La nourrice revient[N], elle a changé d'avis; elle emploie toutes les consolations, toutes les excuses prises de la fragilité humaine: mais Phèdre les repousse [17] constamment. Enfin, elle s'en va sous prétexte qu'elle connaît des moyens magiques de guérir la passion de sa maîtresse. Celle-ci lui enjoint expressément de ne pas dire à Hippolyte un mot de ses aveux. Après un chœur ravissant sur la pernicieuse puissance de l'amour, Phèdre entend une altercation qui s'élève dans l'intérieur du palais, entre Hippolyte et sa nourrice. Elle devine tout de suite ce que c'est, et se juge perdue. Peu

après, Hippolyte, dans la plus haute indignation, arrive suivi de la nourrice; il passe auprès de Phèdre, qui est toujours sur son lit de repos[N], sans lui parler, sans paraître la remarquer; il invoque le ciel et la terre contre l'horreur de ce qu'il a entendu; il repousse la nourrice suppliante qui lui rappelle le serment qu'il a fait de garder le silence; il se répand en invectives amères contre les femmes en général; il part enfin pour quitter une demeure où il ne peut rester sans se croire souillé à ses propres yeux, et pour n'y revenir qu'avec son père. Phèdre n'hésite pas *{99}* un instant sur le parti qu'elle doit prendre. Elle comble sa nourrice de malédictions; elle repousse ses conseils quand celle-ci veut lui persuader que son mal n'est pas sans remède: après avoir fait [18] jurer au chœur de ne la point trahir, elle sort, en indiquant le projet qu'elle a formé pour sauver son honneur et surtout l'honneur de ses enfants qui dépend du sien, et pour se venger des dédains d'Hippolyte.

(10) Dans la pièce de Racine, la première scène où Phèdre paraît est prise en entier du grec; elle n'en est, pour ainsi dire, qu'un extrait, qu'un sommaire, qui, considéré seul, est encore très-beau, mais qui devient sec et maigre à côté de l'original. Les plaintes de Phèdre, les symptômes de sa langueur, les égarements de son imagination, sa répugnance à confier sa passion, tout cela est beaucoup plus développé dans Euripide. Racine lui est redevable de ses vers les plus admirés, et même ses changements ne sont pas toujours heureux. Dans ceux-ci:

> Que ces vains ornements, que ces voiles me pèsent!
> Quelle importune main, en formant tous ces nœuds,
> A pris soin sur mon front d'assembler mes cheveux? [*Ph*. I.iii, 158-60]

il suppose que Phèdre s'est parée, apparemment dans le dessein de rencontrer Hippolyte. La Phèdre grecque est trop malade pour cela: elle demande uniquement qu'on [19] détache le lien de ses cheveux, parce que tout lui cause de la douleur [*Hipp*. 201-202]. Ces vers:

> *{100}* Dieux! que ne suis-je assise à l'ombre des forêts!
> Quand pourrai-je, au travers d'une noble poussière,
> Suivre de l'œil un char fuyant dans la carrière? [*Ph*. I.iii, 176-78]

sont l'abrégé de plusieurs strophes d'Euripide [*Hipp*. 208-31], où Phèdre désire, tantôt, puiser de l'eau à la source qui jaillit du rocher, tantôt, animer les montagnes sauvages par le tumulte de la chasse, tantôt, conduire de jeunes coursiers dans la carrière. Combien mal à propos le vers suivant a-t-il été conservé de l'original:

> Dans quels égarements l'amour jeta ma mère! [*Ph*. I.iii, 250]

L'habitude rendait les Grecs moins sensibles à ce que leur mythologie pouvait avoir de trop extravagant; et en général tout ce qui tient en quelque façon aux traditions religieuses ne blesse plus. Mais pour des spectateurs modernes, ou cette allusion est perdue, ou s'ils la comprennent, elle doit choquer excessivement. D'ailleurs, Racine tâche d'écarter le plus qu'il peut l'idée que la passion de Phèdre est incestueuse, et la comparaison, avec les amours infâmes de Pasiphaé, la [20] rapproche de tout ce qui est le plus contraire à la nature.

(11) La fausse nouvelle de la mort de Thésée[N], par laquelle Panope interrompt l'entretien de Phèdre et d'Œnone, est le principal incident que Racine ait inventé: c'est le pivot de son intrigue. Je montrerai dans la suite combien elle place Thésée désavantageusement, mais elle a aussi de graves inconvénients pour les autres personnages. C'est une situation embarrassante que d'être bien aise de la mort de quelqu'un à qui on était lié *{101}* de fort près, et que l'on devrait regretter selon la morale établie et l'opinion générale: on ne peut guère échapper au reproche, ou de la dureté, ou de l'hypocrisie. Un homme qui est au comble de la joie d'avoir hérité d'un riche parent, et qui affecte de s'affliger de sa mort, présente une situation fort comique, À la vérité, le deuil que Phèdre porte pour son époux n'est pas long; il se renferme dans ce seul mot, *Ciel!* Œnone lui développe tout de suite impudemment combien cet accident est heureux pour son union avec Hippolyte:

Vivez: vous n'ayez plus de reproche à vous faire. [*Ph*. I.v, 349]

Je pense pourtant que toutes les âmes bien [21] nées sentent des remords, quand une personne à qui elles étaient attachées par des liens sacrés et envers laquelle elles ont eu des torts, vient à mourir, parce qu'alors ces torts sont irréparables.

Votre flamme devient une flamme ordinaire [*Ph*. I.v, 350]

Une flamme ordinaire! Tant mieux pour Phèdre si c'était vrai, et mille fois tant pis pour le poète. Mais je ne sais pas où Œnone a pris sa logique:

Thésée, en expirant, vient de rompre les nœuds
Qui faisaient tout le crime et l'horreur de vos feux. [*Ph*. I.v, 351-52]

Si c'était un inceste auparavant, c'en est certainement encore un; si ce n'était point un inceste, ce n'était donc qu'une passion vulgairement vicieuse, qui ne méritait pas d'être annoncée comme l'effet du courroux céleste, et encore moins[9] de faire le sujet d'une tragédie. Quoi qu'il en soit, Phèdre *{102}* écoute les propos d'Œnone avec complaisance, elle consent à parler à Hippolyte, prenant son fils pour prétexte, mais avec des pensées bien plus coupables.

(12) On admire beaucoup la seconde scène où [22] Phèdre paraît [*Ph*. II.v], celle de la déclaration: sans doute les discours de l'héroïne sont très-éloquents, mais cela ne doit pas aveugler sur leur inconvenance, et sur le manque absolu de délicatesse qui y règne. Une femme qui pense à se remarier au moment où son mari vient de mourir, est jugée peu délicate; une femme qui déclare la première son amour à un jeune homme, se place dans une attitude peu convenable à son sexe: mais que dira-t-on d'une femme qui, ayant eu pour époux un héros presque divin, à peine instruite de sa mort, court séduire son fils vertueux, repousse les espérances que nourrit celui-ci que son père pourrait vivre encore, dégrade vis-à-vis de lui sa mémoire glorieuse*), et prétend continuer seulement la tendresse conjugale, parce que le fils ressemble au

*) M. de Laharpe nomine cela un *tour adroit*.[N]

père, tandis que l'ombre de cet époux, qu'elle a voulu outrager par l'adultère et l'inceste, devrait la persécuter comme une furie**)? Qu'importe qu'elle prémit d'abord pour prétexte un soin inquiet du sort de son fils, qu'elle sache inventer des tournures ingénieuses et même [23] touchantes, pour *{103}* exprimer ses sentiments d'une manière très-pure en apparence et qui lui ménage une retraite en cas de refus! Parce qu'elle a de la grâce, de l'éloquence et de l'habileté, en est-elle moins effrontée? Pense-t-on excuser tout cela par l'excès de sa passion? Mais la passion, fût-elle montée jusqu'à la frénésie, doit encore porter l'empreinte d'une âme originairement noble, pour laquelle certains procédés restent toujours impossibles, à moins qu'on ne veuille nous présenter une image dégradée de l'humanité[N]; ce qui certainement n'était point l'intention du poète, puisqu'il tâche de rendre Phèdre aussi séduisante qu'il le peut. Si la poésie est l'art de farder le vice, je conviens que cette scène mérite de grands éloges, car la plupart des lecteurs ne reconnaîtront pas, sous la politesse des formes et l'élégance des vers, ce qui, sans ce déguisement, les aurait choqués au plus haut point.

(13) Sans doute les caractères passionnés ont de grands privilèges dans la poésie, et le vif intérêt qu'ils inspirent est même, à quelques égards, un sentiment moral. Le délire de la passion ressemble à l'exaltation de la vertu, en ce qu'il rend incapable des calculs d'in[24]terêt personnel, qu'il fait braver tous les dangers et sacrifier tous les avantages. On pardonne à l'être égaré par la passion de causer les malheurs d'autrui, pourvu qu'il ne se ménage pas lui-même: c'est donc plutôt le moment que choisit Phèdre, la présence d'esprit qu'elle montre, la précaution qu'elle emploie pour ne pas se compromettre, enfin ce n'est pas le trop, mais *{104}* le trop peu de passion, que je blâme dans la première partie de sa déclaration. Elle touche vraiment lorsque dans son dernier discours elle abandonne tout artifice.

> Ah cruel! tu m'as trop entendue!
> Je t'en ai dit assez pour te tirer d'erreur.
> Hé bien! connais donc Phèdre et toute sa fureur:
> J'aime, etc.[*Ph*. II.v, 670-73]

Car alors elle se perd irrévocablement pour exhaler enfin cet amour, qu'elle n'est plus la maîtresse de contenir, et qui la remplit toute entière comme une âme nouvelle qui aurait subjugué la sienne.

(14) Je ne m'arrête pas aux détails de cette scène: je ne ferai qu'une observation sur les vers suivants, qui passent pour être d'une beauté extraordinaire:

> [25] On ne voit point deux fois le rivage des morts,
> Seigneur: puisque Thésée a vu les sombres bords,
> En vain vous espérez qu'un Dieu vous le renvoie;
> Et l'avare Achéron ne lâche point sa proie. [*Ph*. II.v, 623-26]

**) *L'épouse du mort déclare son amour au fils du mort*. Expression frappante de l'abbé Batteux.[N]

Toute cette pompe est prodiguée sur une tautologie, car ces vers ne disent autre chose, sinon que *si*[10] *Thésée est mort, il ne vit plus*. C'est à Hippolyte que des vaisseaux ont apporté la nouvelle de la mort de son père, Phèdre n'en a eu depuis aucune confirmation. Sans doute, si Thésée a péri, il ne reviendra point; mais il s'agit justement de savoir si ce rapport est fondé. On voit bien que c'est l'extrême envie que Phèdre a de savoir son époux mort, et d'en convaincre son beau-fils, qui lui fait tenir ce propos vide de sens. *{105}* Ensuite le poète, par l'emploi des phrases mythologiques, s'est engagé dans une étrange inconséquence.

On ne voit point deux fois le rivage des morts. [*Ph*. II.v, 623]

Cependant Hercule l'avait vu de son vivant, et Thésée avait imité en cela son frère d'armes. Phèdre dit elle-même l'instant d'après[N]:

Je l'aime, non point tel que l'ont vu les enfers,
Volage adorateur de mille objets divers,
Qui va du Dieu des morts déshonorer la couche [*Ph*. II.v, 635-37]

[26] Il est donc prouvé par l'exemple de Thésée même qu'on peut voir deux fois le rivage des morts, et que l'avare Achéron lâche sa proie. Faut-il dire encore que le désir de croire son époux mort fait oublier à Phèdre qu'il est revenu déjà une fois du séjour des ombres, et qu'ensuite le désir de le déprécier lui fait oublier qu'elle réfute son assertion précédente?

(15) La Phèdre de Racine ne se rebute pas au premier mauvais accueil; elle revient à la charge. Nous la voyons au commencement du troisième acte qui envoie Œnone vers Hippolyte, et qui lui recommande avant tout[11] de le tenter par l'appât de la couronne d'Athènes. Avec une passion purement sensuelle, on peut être indifférent sur le choix des moyens qui procurent la possession de l'objet aimé; mais Phèdre a montré de l'enthousiasme pour le caractère d'Hippolyte: elle ne devrait donc être satisfaite que d'un véritable retour de sentiment. En outre, elle est peu tendre envers son fils, pour lequel elle affecte tant de soin, *{106}* en lui donnant non seulement son frère pour beau-père, pour tuteur et pour régent, mais en voulant investir Hippolyte de la dignité royale. Une âme délicate aimera mieux [27] paraître blâmable qu'être hypocrite, en employant comme prétexte un sentiment qui lui devrait être sacré. Œnone revient et annonce le retour de Thésée. Les premiers discours de Phèdre ont assez de dignité, aussi sont-ils tirés en grande partie d'Euripide, et ce qu'elle dit sur l'honneur de ses enfants en est presque traduit. Seulement au lieu des vers suivants:

Mourons. De tant d'horreurs qu'un trépas me délivre.
Est-ce un malheur si grand que de cesser de vivre?
La mort aux malheureux, ne cause point d'effroi. [*Ph*. III.iii, 857-59]

le premier mot seul aurait mieux valu. Tout le reste est de trop. En s'exhortant au suicide par ces réflexions générales, Phèdre trahit une faible résolution de l'exécuter. Ensuite, lorsqu'Œnone, pour engager Phèdre à accuser Hippolyte la première, lui demande:

De quel œil voyez-vous ce prince audacieux? [*Ph*. III.iii, 883]

Phèdre répond:

> Je le vois comme un monstre effroyable à mes yeux. [*Ph*. III.iii, 884]

Elle avait exprimé le moment auparavant la tendresse la plus humble et la plus abandonnée, elle disait à Œnone:

> Presse, pleure, gémis, peins-lui Phèdre mourante;
> Ne rougis point de prendre une voix suppliante,
> Je t'avoûrai de tout.[*Ph*. III.i, 809-11]

[28] Qu'est-ce qu'Hippolyte a fait depuis pour mériter *{107}* cette haine? Est-ce sa faute si Thésée vit encore? Il est vrai, il y a une possibilité qu'il soit indiscret, mais il n'en a donné aucun signe; au contraire, il a montré une grande réserve dans la scène de la déclaration. Il faudra donc dire qu'elle abhorre Hippolyte, parce que dans ce moment elle le considère comme l'auteur de sa passion, dont l'horreur la frappe beaucoup plus depuis qu'elle sait que Thésée est en vie et de retour. Toutefois, cette rétractation non motivée de ses sentiments fait soupçonner que la peur exerce un prodigieux empire sur l'âme de Phèdre. Il y aurait eu plus de noblesse à répondre: Je ne l'adore pas moins, quoiqu'il ait le pouvoir de me plonger dans la honte et dans le désespoir. — Ne doit-on pas croire que Phèdre a résisté pendant quelque temps à sa passion, comme dangereuse et non pas comme criminelle, et qu'elle s'y est livrée aussitôt que par la mort de Thésée elle croyait pouvoir le faire en pleine sécurité? Racine lui-même, qui devait savoir lire dans l'âme de son héroïne, convient dans la préface « qu'elle n'aurait jamais osé faire une déclaration d'amour, tant qu'elle aurait [29] cru que son mari était vivant.» Le discours qu'elle adresse à celui-ci à son arrivée:

> Arrêtez, Thésée,
> Et ne profanez point des transports si charmants:
> Je ne mérite plus ces doux empressements;
> Vous êtes offensé. La Fortune jalouse
> N'a pas en votre absence épargné votre épouse.
> Indigne de vous plaire et de vous approcher,
> Je ne dois désormais songer qu'à me cacher. [*Ph*. III.iv, 914-20]

{108} ce discours artificieusement ambigu, par lequel Phèdre paraît s'accuser elle-même, tandis qu'elle prépare les calomnies d'Œnone contre Hippolyte, la fait connaître comme une femme intrigante qui transige avec la conscience de son déshonneur.

(16) La scène de la jalousie [*Ph*. IV.vi] est généralement considérée comme le triomphe du rôle de Phèdre. Cette scène fait certainement éprouver une grande émotion: en voyant une personne exposée à des souffrances aussi cruelles que celles qui mettent Phèdre hors d'elle-même, on oublie tout ce qui peut avoir inspiré de l'aversion contre elle. L'exécution des détails est brillante; les plaintes égarées de l'héroïne sont pleines de verve et d'une éloquence vraiment poétique. Mais n'oublions [30] pas à quel prix tout cela est acheté. Il fallait introduire le fade

personnage d'Aricie; il fallait surtout rendre Hippolyte amoureux, ce qui dénature son caractère et le range dans la classe nombreuse des héros soupirants et galants de la tragédie française. Parmi les plus beaux vers, il s'en est glissé un qui est inconvenant. Phèdre dit d'Hippolyte et d'Aricie:

Dans le fond des forêts allaient-ils se cacher? [*Ph*. IV.vi, 1236]

Racine, qui nous fait trop souvent ressouvenir de la cour de France, a-t-il voulu donner dans ce passage un échantillon du costume grec? Ne savait-il pas combien les femmes grecques vivaient retirées[N], qu'elles ne quittaient guère leurs appartements sans être voilées et accompagnées? Et une jeune fille, une princesse, la vertueuse Aricie, *{109}* aurait donné rendez-vous à son amant dans des lieux écartés des habitations humaines!

(17) La mort de Phèdre est tardive, sans aucun mérite de courage, sans aucune dignité; c'est un spectacle pénible par les traitements humiliants qu'elle éprouve. Dès le premier acte, elle assure qu'elle veut se laisser mourir; mais elle revit à la nouvelle de la mort de son [31] mari. Au second acte, elle tire l'épée d'Hippolyte pour se percer le sein, mais ce n'est qu'une démonstration théâtrale. Au troisième, elle dit à Œnone: *Mourons!* et elle n'en fait rien. Elle revient, au quatrième, demander grâce pour Hippolyte; elle s'en désiste en apprenant qu'il aime Aricie, et, après avoir exhalé ses fureurs jalouses, elle dit à Œnone:

Va, laisse-moi le soin de mon sort déplorable. [*Ph*. IV.vi, 1318]

Là-dessus elle prend en effet du poison, mais ce poison est d'une telle lenteur qu'on n'entend parler de son effet qu'à la fin du cinquième acte. Si la nécessité tragique exige que l'on peigne des caractères criminels en les rendant d'une certaine façon intéressants, qu'ils soient au moins d'une trempe forte, qu'une faiblesse et une vacillation continuelle ne les mettent pas au-dessous des situations où leurs propres passions effrénées les ont engagés. Qu'y a-t-il de pis que d'être audacieux pour le crime et pusillanime pour ses suites? C'est bien au repentir de Phèdre que l'on peut appliquer ce vers de Dryden:

Repentance is the virtue of weak souls.[N]

Le repentir est la vertu des âmes faibles.

[32]*{110}* Irrésolue entre la vengeance et la justice, elle se décide toujours mal à propos. Elle n'a pas le courage d'accuser Hippolyte directement; mais elle laisse faire Œnone. Lorsque Thésée est irrité au point de ne vouloir rien entendre, elle sent des remords et va lui parler en faveur de son fils; cependant assez faiblement. À peine Thésée a-t-il dit un mot de l'amour d'Hippolyte pour Aricie, qu'elle ne respire plus que la vengeance. Enfin, après avoir pris le poison, elle retourne encore une fois au repentir, sans aucun nouveau motif quelconque[N]; quand il est trop tard pour sauver Hippolyte, elle vient perdre sa renommée et celle de ses enfants, pour laquelle elle prétendait en partie avoir consenti à la trame ourdie contre lui.

(18) La Phèdre d'Euripide, avant de se tuer, écrit une lettre dans laquelle elle accuse Hippolyte de l'avoir déshonorée par la force. Il fallait bien qu'elle poussât son accusation jusque-là: si l'attentat avait été prévenu, elle n'aurait plus eu de motif pour le suicide. Elle n'en croit pas

moins son honneur sauvé, parce que l'essence de l'honneur réside dans une volonté qui n'a jamais été souillée. Racine s'applaudit d'avoir borné l'accusation contre Hip[33]polyte à un dessein criminel. «J'ai voulu,» dit-il, «épargner à Thésée une confusion qui l'aurait pu rendre moins agréable aux spectateurs.» Je ne sais pas si l'erreur de Thésée, quand il croit sa femme déshonorée, aurait pu nuire à sa dignité aux yeux des spectateurs français. Mais le cas est bien différent dans les deux tragédies. Chez Eu*{111}*ripide, on n'apprend la fausse accusation que lorsque Phèdre est déjà morte; la lettre qui la contient est trouvée attachée à sa main, et devient fatale à Hippolyte. Voilà sans doute une action atroce: mais avant que le spectateur l'apprenne, la femme coupable a déjà fait justice d'elle-même. Son motif principal est de sauver son propre honneur et celui de ses enfants; et elle a le caractère assez énergique pour vouloir les moyens en voulant le but. Aussi les dédains d'Hippolyte envers sa belle-mère sont-ils infiniment plus forts que dans Racine, où tout se passe en politesses entre ces personnes royales. L'Hippolyte d'Euripide témoigne une indignation sans bornes en présence de Phèdre; il la traite comme la dernière des créatures. La résolution de Phèdre de se donner la mort, est rapide comme l'éclair; on peut supposer que s'il y avait en plus d'in[34]tervalle jusqu'à l'exécution, la première effervescence du ressentiment se serait calmée, et qu'elle aurait reculé devant sa funeste calomnie. Toutefois son action nous donne plutôt la mesure de son désespoir, que de ce qu'elle aurait été capable de faire dans un état moins violent.

(19) C'est cependant d'après ce trait de la Phèdre grecque, que Racine, malgré tout ce que je viens de développer, se flatte d'avoir rendu la sienne moins odieuse. Il dit dans la préface; « J'ai même pris soin de la rendre un peu moins odieuse qu'elle n'est dans les tragédies des anciens, où elle se résout d'elle-même à accuser Hippolyte. *{112}* J'ai cru que la calomnie avait quelque chose de trop bas et de trop noir pour la mettre dans la bouche d'une princesse qui a d'ailleurs des sentiments si nobles et si vertueux. Cette bassesse m'a paru plus convenable à une nourrice qui pouvait avoir des inclinations serviles, et qui néanmoins n'entreprend cette fausse accusation que pour sauver la vie et l'honneur de sa maîtresse, Phèdre n'y donne les mains que parce qu'elle est dans une agitation d'esprit qui la met hors d'elle-même; et elle vient un moment après dans [35] le dessein de justifier l'innocence et de déclarer la vérité». Je ne m'arrête pas à cette manière de courtisan de rejeter les bassesses dont on peut avoir besoin dans une tragédie, sur les personnages d'un rang inférieur: mais Racine avait-il donc oublié cette maxime triviale du droit et de la morale, que chacun est censé avoir fait lui-même ce qu'il a fait faire par un autre? et Phèdre ne dit-elle pas clairement à Œnone:

> Fais ce que tu voudras, je m'abandonne à toi. [*Ph*. III.iii, 911]

Il est vrai que la première proposition d'accuser Hippolyte vient de sa confidente; mais toute la résistance de Phèdre se borne à ce vers:

> Moi, que j'ose opprimer et noircir l'innocence! [*Ph*. III.iii, 893]

qui ne se rapporte qu'à sa répugnance pour prendre elle-même la parole dans cette accusation. De plus, ne compte-t-on pour rien le discours avec lequel elle reçoit Thésée, ce discours d'autant plus révoltant qu'il décèle plus de présence d'esprit? Si la Phèdre de Racine agit moins directement que *{113}* celle d'Euripide, ce qu'elle fait doit être tout autrement [36] apprécié, parce qu'elle est encore loin du dernier terme du désespoir. Ce qu'il y a de pire[12], c'est que dans ce procédé elle est visiblement inspirée par la peur, tandis que la Phèdre grecque n'a plus rien à craindre. Celle-ci entraîne Hippolyte dans l'abîme où elle s'est jetée la première.

(20) Un autre trait fort odieux de la Phèdre de Racine, c'est sa conduite envers sa confidente. Le caractère d'Œnone, pour le dire en passant, est dessiné de façon à n'y rien reconnaître; il n'a aucune cohérence[N]. Elle entend avec horreur le premier aveu de sa maîtresse. Quelques instants plus tard[13], sur la nouvelle de la mort de Thésée, rien ne lui paraît plus facile et plus simple que l'union de Phèdre avec son beau-fils. Après la déclaration, elle donne les conseils les plus salutaires à Phèdre, elle l'exhorte à retourner à la vertu; et tout de suite ayant appris le retour de Thésée, elle s'offre d'elle-même pour accuser Hippolyte, tout en disant qu'elle en sent quelques remords. Enfin, dans la scène de la jalousie, lorsqu'il y a vraiment un entassement d'impossibilités qui s'opposeraient aux désirs de Phèdre si elle les nourrissait encore, l'amour d'Hippolyte pour Aricie, sa [37] première répugnance pour sa belle-mère, accrue par son ressentiment d'une accusation mensongère, la présence de Thésée, et sa surveillance excitée par le désordre qu'il a trouvé dans sa famille: alors, dans cette situation désespérée, Œnone conseille à sa maîtresse de ne point se gêner *{114}* dans ses sentiments, et de considérer son amour comme une faiblesse humaine très-excusable, et même autorisée par l'exemple des Dieux. Après ce discours [*Ph*. IV.vi, 1295-1306], qui est extrait d'Euripide [*Hipp*. 437-476] mais étrangement déplacé[N], et qui doit plutôt paraître absurde que dangereux, Phèdre accable Œnone des reproches les plus violents, et ces reproches ne sont qu'à demi-mérités. *Chère Œnone*, a-t-elle dit au commencement de la scène [*Ph*. IV.vi, 1214]; et à présent, sans que rien se soit passé depuis, elle l'appelle un monstre exécrable. La nourrice, dans la pièce grecque, a des torts bien plus graves; toutes les paroles de séduction sont venues d'elle, elle a parlé à Hippolyte sans le consentement de sa maîtresse: cependant celle-ci ne se sert pas d'un terme aussi dur. «Puisses-tu périr», dit-elle, «ainsi que tous ceux qui s'empressent de servir malhonnêtement leurs amis malgré eux!» [*Hipp*. 693-94] Et ensuite: «Cesse de [38] parler, car auparavant aussi tu ne m'as pas bien conseillée et tu as entrepris le mal: mais va-t-en loin de mes regards, et prends soin de toi-même; pour moi, je saurai disposer honorablement de mon sort». [*Hipp*. 706-709] Combien cela est plus modéré et plus noble que toutes les invectives de la Phèdre française! Cependant, on peut encore excuser celle-ci dans la scène de la jalousie, parce qu'elle est dans la fureur du désespoir. Ce qui la condamne entièrement, c'est la manière dont elle rejette, dans sa dernière confession, sa faute sur sa confidente. Œnone s'est déjà donné la mort. Il est lâche d'accuser une personne qui ne peut plus se défendre.

{115} La détestable Œnone a conduit tout le reste. [*Ph*. V.vii, 1626]

Cela n'est pas vrai, puisque Phèdre a déclaré elle-même sa passion.

Elle a craint qu'Hippolyte, instruit de ma fureur,
Ne découvrît un feu qui lui faisait horreur.
La perfide, abusant de ma faiblesse extrême,
S'est hâtée à vos yeux de l'accuser lui-même. [*Ph*. V.vii, 1627-30]

En cela Phèdre était au moins sa complice.

Elle s'en est punie, et, fuyant mon courroux,
A cherché dans les flots un supplice trop doux. [*Ph*. V.vii, 1631-32]

[39] *Un supplice trop doux!* Quelle atrocité de parler ainsi d'une personne qui a soigné son enfance et qui lui a été fidèlement dévouée toute sa vie! Si Œnone s'est rendue criminelle, elle ne l'a fait que par attachement pour sa maîtresse, ce qui est un sentiment bien autrement désintéressé qu'un amour incestueux.

(21) Passons à Hippolyte. La critique qu'on a le plus souvent répétée contre la pièce française, porte sur l'altération de ce caractère. Je me tiens pour assuré que Racine ne s'est fait aucun scrupule à cet égard. Il suppose dans la préface, comme une chose claire par elle-même, que c'est le caractère de Phèdre qui a fait le succès de la pièce d'Euripide. Ignorait-il que la beauté idéale du héros dont la tragédie porte le nom, et sa touchante destinée, en forment l'objet principal, et que Phèdre n'est pour ainsi dire que comme le mal nécessaire dans cette composition? La muse de Racine était la galanterie; il n'a écrit la plupart de ses tragédies que pour y peindre des femmes *{116}* aimables et surtout des femmes tendres, et les impressions qu'elles font sur le cœur des hommes. Qu'avait-il à faire d'un jeune héros qui [40] n'est pas amoureux, qui ne se soucie pas des femmes, qui repousse les avances de sa belle-mère, uniquement par sévérité de mœurs, et non pas parce qu'un autre sentiment l'occupe? Racine suivit donc à cet égard la maxime que son rival Pradon énonce si naïvement dans l'épître dédicatoire de sa Phèdre à la duchesse de Bouillon. «Ne vous étonnez pas, madame», dit-il, «si Hippolyte vous paraît dépouillé de cette fierté farouche et de cette insensibilité qui lui était si naturelle; mais en aurait-il pu conserver auprès des charmes de Votre Altesse? Enfin, si les anciens nous l'ont dépeint comme il était à Trézène, du moins il paraîtra comme il a dû être à Paris; et, n'en déplaise à toute l'antiquité, ce jeune héros aurait eu mauvaise grâce de venir tout hérissé des épines du grec dans une cour aussi galante que la nôtre.» Cela veut dire: Il faut travestir les héros de la poésie ancienne, parce qu'ils sont trop rustres pour qu'on puisse les peindre au naturel[14] dans un siècle si délicat et si raffiné. Lorsqu'en lisant la Phèdre de Pradon l'on se rappelle quel prodigieux succès cette pièce ridiculement plate a eu de son temps, de préférence à la Phèdre de Racine, succès trop [41] longtemps soutenu pour avoir été l'ouvrage d'une cabale[N], l'on ne saurait douter que ce qui a nui à Racine auprès de ses contemporains n'ait été d'avoir encore trop conservé de *{117}* la simplicité et de la hardiesse antiques. Pradon, ayant

réussi à réduire à une petite intrigue de boudoirs ce sujet dont la force et l'étrange nature se refusent aux raffinements maniérés, remporta la pluralité des suffrages, dans ce siècle tant vanté pour la pureté de son goût et la grandeur de ses pensées.

(22) Quoique d'une toute autre manière, Racine nous donne cependant aussi, à la place du véritable Hippolyte, un prince fort bien élevé, fort poli, observant toutes les convenances, rempli de sentiments honnêtes, respectueusement amoureux, mais du reste insignifiant, sans élan et sans originalité. À la vérité, il fait parler Hippolyte, et les autres personnages, de sa rudesse, de son humeur farouche, de son éducation dans les forêts, de son goût exclusif pour la chasse et les exercices guerriers; mais ce sont des discours qui ne tirent pas à conséquence, et qui sont démentis par sa conduite réelle. Ses manières et même ses sentiments ne le distinguent en rien des autres princes galants de Racine.

(23) Ce n'est pas tout. Dans la poésie tout est re[42]latif; une partie de la composition relève ou déprime l'autre. La règle des contrastes est bien connue; elle s'applique à tous les beaux-arts. Le poète français, en dénaturant et émoussant le caractère d'Hippolyte, a détruit le beau contraste qui existait entre lui et Phèdre. Pour mettre en plein jour les égarements d'une passion voluptueuse et criminelle, il fallait leur opposer le calme imperturbable et l'austère pureté d'une âme virginale. *{118}* L'on ne fait pas grande preuve de vertu en résistant aux séductions d'une femme, quand on en aime une autre. L'Hippolyte de Racine n'est pas seulement amoureux, mais il l'est aussi, comme la reine, en opposition avec des devoirs qu'il respecte, puisqu'il sait qu'il n'obtiendra pas le consentement de son père. La passion d'Hippolyte, quoique fort innocente en soi, n'est pas moins que celle de Phèdre délivrée d'une grande contrainte par la mort supposée de Thésée; ils profitent tous les deux de cette nouvelle, Phèdre pour déclarer son amour à Hippolyte, et Hippolyte pour déclarer le sien à Aricie. Il n'y manque autre chose, sinon que le grave Thésée soit aussi de son côté engagé dans un amour illicite, et il y échappe à peine. Théramène l'en soupçonne: mais pour cette fois-[43]ci il a aidé seulement son ami à enlever une femme. Ces doublures, ces répétitions affaiblies, causent une fatigante monotonie: c'est le moyen de décolorer les objets les uns par les autres, et de ne laisser rien de saillant. Il est vrai que l'intérêt n'est pas divisé, parce que la passion de Phèdre par sa violence l'emporte de beaucoup sur les sentiments mutuels d'Hippolyte et d'Aricie, mais en revanche ceux-ci sont réduits à une fadeur complète.

(24) Quant à l'Hippolyte d'Euripide, il a une teinte si divine que, pour le sentir dignement, il faut pour ainsi dire être initié dans les mystères de la beauté, avoir respiré l'air de la Grèce. Rappelez-vous ce que l'antiquité nous a transmis de plus *{119}* accompli parmi les images d'une jeunesse héroïque: les Dioscures de Monte-Cavallo, le Méléagre et l'Apollon du Vatican. Le caractère d'Hippolyte occupe dans la poésie à peu près la même place que ces statues dans la sculpture. Winckelmann dit[N] qu'à l'aspect de ces êtres sublimes, *notre âme prend elle-même une disposition surnaturelle, que notre poitrine se dilate*, qu'une partie de leur existence si forte et si harmonieuse paraît passer dans nous. J'éprouve [44] quelque chose de pareil en contemplant

Hippolyte tel qu'Euripide l'a peint. On peut remarquer dans plusieurs beautés idéales de l'antique, que les anciens voulant créer une image perfectionnée de la nature humaine, ont fondu des nuances du caractère d'un sexe avec celui de l'autre: que Junon, Pallas, Diane, ont une majesté, une sévérité mâle; qu'Apollon, Mercure, Bacchus, au contraire, ont quelque chose de la grâce et de la douceur des femmes. De même nous voyons dans la beauté héroïque et vierge d'Hippolyte l'image de sa mère l'amazone et le reflet de Diane dans un mortel.

(25) Il paraît d'abord rayonnant de jeunesse et de vigueur, jouissant en sécurité d'une vie expansive et surabondante. Il vient[15] de la chasse avec ses nombreux compagnons qui, à son exemple, entonnent un hymne à Diane, la plus belle des vierges qui habitent l'Olympe. Il s'approche ensuite de la statue de la déesse, pour lui offrir une couronne tressée, par ses propres mains, de fleurs choisies dans une prairie sacrée, que jamais le fer ni *{120}* les troupeaux n'ont osé violer, et où il n'est permis d'en cueillir qu'à des être purs, c'est-à-dire vertueux par penchant. «Ac[45] cepte», dit-il, «ô maîtresse souveraine, pour tes cheveux dorés, ce lien qu'une[16] main pieuse te présente. A moi seul parmi les mortels il est accordé d'être ton compagnon, et de jouir de nos entretiens mutuels; car j'entends ta voix, quoique mon œil ne te voie pas. Puissé-je terminer ma vie comme je l'ai commencée!» [*Hipp*. 82-87] Il est si heureux qu'il n'a point d'autre souhait à former que celui-là. C'est un contraste fort bien entendu avec la terrible catastrophe qui le menace. L'Hippolyte de Racine, au contraire, est abattu et embarrassé dès la première scène, n'osant pas s'abandonner à son sentiment pour Aricie.

(26) L'Hippolyte d'Euripide étant décrit comme inaccessible aux attraits de l'amour, pourrait être jugé dur et insensible, si le poète n'avait pas prévenu ce reproche en commençant par peindre son intimité mystérieuse avec la chaste déesse[N]. C'est donc uniquement parce qu'un enthousiasme plus pur et plus noble remplit toute son âme, que les séductions terrestres n'ont point de pouvoir sur lui. Un fidèle serviteur l'exhorte à honorer également la statue de Vénus, qui est placée vis-à-vis de celle de Diane. Il s'y refuse[17], dédaignant [46] une déesse dont le culte lui paraît contraire à la vertu, et il rentre dans le palais sans la saluer. Voilà la cause de son malheur, elle est tout à fait conforme à la manière des anciens de voir les choses *{121}* humaines. Ils croyaient qu'il n'y a rien de plus dangereux pour l'homme que le trop de confiance en ses propres forces, l'insouciance et l'orgueil du bonheur. Leurs divinités n'étant que les puissances personnifiées de la nature physique, intellectuelle et morale, l'homme qui en osait négliger une, qui ne s'avouait pas humblement soumis à l'influence de toutes, méconnoissait donc ses véritables rapports. Si les dons que la déesse de l'amour offre aux mortels, et en général a tous les êtres animés, ne touchaient pas Hippolyte, il devait pourtant avoir de l'indulgence pour ceux qui succombent à leur attrait. S'il eût montré quelque pitié pour l'état de Phèdre mourante, si, tout en la fuyant et lui ôtant l'espérance de réussir, il l'eût rassurée sur la crainte de voir sa honte révélée, peut-être n'aurait-elle pas été poussée par le désespoir à l'accuser et le perdre. C'est ainsi qu'on peut presque toujours réduire l'intervention des Dieux à l'enchaînement des causes naturelles;

mais il ne faut recourir à cela que [47] pour justifier la fiction, et non pas pour la détruire.

(27) Du reste, après le prologue de Vénus, cet appareil de la chasse, ces chants d'allégresse, cette offrande à Diane, ouvrent la scène d'une manière animée et magnifique, bien autrement que la froide conversation entre Hippolyte et Théramène. Je prévois l'objection qu'on va me faire que cela ressemble à une ouverture d'opéra. Si l'opéra ne se distinguait de la plupart des tragédies régulières qu'en nous faisant voir une quantité de choses qui *{122}* sont seulement racontées dans celles-ci, il en serait très-fort à louer. Je ne citerai pas les vers si connus d'Horace[N], qui appuient cette opinion. Ce qui constitue les bases d'un sujet dramatique doit avant tout être[18] présenté bien clairement aux yeux des spectateurs; et, puisque l'enthousiasme exclusif d'Hippolyte pour Diane, ses dédains pour Vénus et le ressentiment de la déesse sont le mobile de tout ce qui arrive; le poète a montré une parfaite intelligence de son art, en commençant par faire ressortir ces diverses circonstances, et en plaçant en vue les deux puissances rivales qui se disputent la destinée du héros. C'est méconnaître toutes les règles de [48] la proportion dramatique que de nous faire voir des effets dont les causes sont absentes, et connues seulement par des narrations qui font peu d'impression sur l'esprit des spectateurs. On se contente beaucoup plus volontiers du simple récit d'un événement que l'on a vu préparer devant ses yeux. Je crois pouvoir assurer que les poètes grecs ont presque toujours agi d'après cette maxime. Au théâtre français, souvent les causes, aussi bien que leurs effets, ne sont mises qu'en récit.

(28) J'ai déjà parlé de la seconde scène d'Hippolyte, celle où il revient après que la nourrice s'est fait médiatrice auprès de lui. Je ne doute pas qu'elle ne paraisse dure à la plupart des lecteurs modernes: car en effet Hippolyte n'y garde aucun ménagement pour Phèdre, qui est présente et dans un état qui pourrait inspirer de la pitié. L'art *{123}* des réticences et des déguisements dont nous avons tant besoin pour cacher à nos propres yeux combien la corruption universelle est hideuse, était beaucoup moins cultivé dans la vie sociale des Grecs. Leur commerce était franc; il n'y avait point entre eux cette barrière du cérémonial et de la gêne mutuelle qui cachent l'homme à l'homme. Ensuite Euripide a voulu [49] peindre une grande élasticité morale qui repousse le vice avec une violence tout à fait involontaire. Hippolyte et sa belle-mère dans la pièce de Racine sont sur le pied de l'étiquette; ils se font des visites de devoir: de là on ne passe pas si facilement à se laisser aller aux impressions naturelles; par conséquent, Hippolyte, quand il s'aperçoit de la passion dénaturée de Phèdre, répond avec politesse et retenue. Mais la manière dont aussitôt après[19] il maîtrise ses impressions lorsqu'il se trouve seul avec son ami intime Théramène, convient plus à l'âge mûr d'un homme du monde qu'à la jeunesse fougueuse d'un héros. Dans la scène d'Euripide dont je parle, se trouve ce vers fameux[N]: *Ma langue a fait le serment, mais non pas mon âme*; vers dont Aristophane a tant raillé le poète, et dans lequel, en effet, la restriction mentale des casuistes paraît anticipée. Mais on conçoit[20] qu'il est facile de donner une interprétation odieuse à un passage, en le prenant isolément. Certes, Euripide, dans cette tragédie, n'a rien voulu insinuer contre l'autorité du serment, puisque Hippolyte périt plutôt que de trahir le

sien. Il a voulu montrer son héros telle*{124}*ment pénétré d'horreur pour ce qu'il vient d'entendre, que dans le pre[50]mier instant le serment même qu'il a prêté de garder le silence, ne lui paraît plus obligatoire. À la fin de la scène, il s'est déjà calmé, il dit à la nourrice: «Sache, ô femme, que ma piété seule te sauve; car si je n'étais pas enchaîné par des serments sacrés, rien ne m'aurait empêché de découvrir ceci à mon père.»

(29) Hippolyte dans Euripide ne paraît devant son père qu'après l'accusation, ce qui rend leur entrevue beaucoup plus frappante. [*Hipp*. 899-1101] Dans Racine, au contraire, il entre avec Thésée au troisième acte [*Ph*. III.iv-v], et reste auprès de lui après le départ de la reine. Il débute par des paroles de mauvais augure pour sa défense, en s'appelant *le tremblant Hippolyte* [*Ph*. III.v, 925]. Pourquoi trembler avec le sentiment de son innocence, n'étant encore accusé de rien et ne devant pas craindre de l'être? Son amour pour Aricie, désapprouvé par son père, pourrait seul en être le motif; mais dans le moment où il se donne cette humble épithète, il n'y pense pas, car il demande seulement à être éloigné de Phèdre. La scène de Racine qui répond à la scène grecque où Thésée bannit son fils, et qui peut être comparée à celle-ci dans ses détails, c'est-à-dire la seconde du quatrième acte, paraît [51] bien faible auprès de l'original, surtout si l'on en retranche plusieurs vers extraits ou traduits d'Euripide. Ce n'est pas que le poète français n'ait assez prodigué la rage et les injures. La véritable énergie est *{125}* plus voisine de la douceur que l'emportement sans force. Dans la poésie aussi bien que dans la sculpture des anciens, il règne encore, même dans les situations les plus violentes, une certaine modération, qui provient de la magnanimité. Ces âmes énergiques, a dit un grand connaisseur de l'antiquité, ressemblent à la mer[N], dont le fond reste toujours calme, quoique la surface soit agitée par des orages. Le Thésée de Racine dit à son fils, avant de l'avoir écouté:

> Monstre qu'a trop longtemps épargné le tonnerre,
> Reste impur des brigands dont j'ai purgé la terre! [*Ph*. IV.ii, 1045-46]

Il menace de le tuer de ses propres mains, s'il ne craignait pas de se souiller; il adresse, en présence de son fils, à Neptune, sa malédiction rhétoriquement amplifiée. Le Thésée d'Euripide ne fait rien de tout cela, mais ses paroles sont empreintes d'un chagrin amer d'avoir été trompé par l'hypocrisie de son fils; il se borne au bannissement, et il n'en prononce la sentence qu'à la fin d'un discours dans lequel il [52] démasque la fausse vertu d'Hippolyte, et expose les preuves incontestables de son crime. La malédiction a été prononcée dans le premier accès de colère, avant l'arrivée du fils. Ce qui nuit plus qu'autre chose[21] à la scène de Racine, c'est qu'Hippolyte passe tout de suite de sa défense, pleine de dignité et d'énergie en elle-même, à l'aveu de son amour pour Aricie. Il ne devrait point avoir de pardon à demander à son père, pour qu'on ne pût pas soupçonner que c'est par ce motif, et non par respect filial, qu'il sup*{126}*porte patiemment toutes les injures dont il est accablé; dans le moment surtout où le sort du père et du fils se décide, il ne devrait pas être question d'un intérêt aussi subalterne.

(30) Dans Euripide, Hippolyte, sur la nouvelle de l'arrivée de son père et de la consternation que le suicide de Phèdre a répandue dans la maison, accourt du lieu de sa retraite. Il voit sa belle-mère morte; Thésée gardant le silence, il a le temps de lui adresser des paroles affectueuses sur ce malheur inattendu. Les premières insinuations ténébreuses de son père le troublent; mais lorsqu'il a entendu son accusation et la terrible sentence, reprenant toute sa tranquillité, il répond par un discours [53] d'une éloquence admirable et rempli du courage de l'innocence. «Vois-tu ce ciel et cette terre?» dit-il: «ils ne contiennent point, quoi que tu puisses dire, d'homme plus vertueux que moi.» [*Hipp*. 993-95] C'est-là où Racine a puisé l'idée de ce vers tant vanté:

Le jour n'est pas plus pur que le fond de mon cœur. [*Ph*. IV.ii, 1112]

Ensuite, après avoir montré toute l'invraisemblance de l'accusation, il finit par les serments les plus solennels. Dans le reste de la scène [*Hipp*. 1038-1101], Hippolyte montre un mélange extrêmement touchant d'une fierté inflexible et d'un attendrissement profond, pas autant sur son malheur que sur la persécution que subit l'innocence dans sa personne. D'abord il paraît vouloir irriter son père, il lui dit: «Mon père, ta conduite m'étonne; car si tu étais le fils et que je fusse le père, je t'aurais tué et non pas *{127}* puni par l'exil, si tu avais osé attenter à mon épouse.» [*Hipp*. 1041-44] Bientôt il revient à le prier de différer, pour que le temps éclaircisse le fait, et de consulter les devins. Tenté de rétorquer[22] l'accusation sur la femme coupable, il s'écrie: «O Dieux! n'ouvrirai-je donc pas la bouche, quand vous me perdez, vous que je révère? Mais non: je n'obéirais pas aux lois [54] consacrées; je romprais témérairement les serments que j'ai faits.» [*Hipp*. 1060-63] Il invoque les témoins muets, les murs du palais; il s'adresse à l'ombre de sa mère: il n'a pas honte de pleurer d'être tant méconnu. Mais quand le père ordonne à ses serviteurs de le chasser de force, il déclare qu'ils ne s'approcheront de lui qu'aux dépens de leur vie. Enfin il dit un adieu pathétique à sa patrie, en invoquant sa déesse chérie, et en priant ses compagnons de le suivre jusqu'à la frontière dans sa fuite douloureuse.

(31) Les anciens avaient plus que nous un sentiment religieux de la vie. Ils s'arrêtaient à ses époques décisives, soit heureuses, soit malheureuses, en jetant un regard contemplatif sur le passé et l'avenir; ils célébraient ces époques avec une certaine solennité. De plus, ils ne confondaient jamais l'héroïsme avec l'insensibilité; ils croyaient qu'à côté de la magnanimité, il restait encore assez d'espace pour la douleur. Comment veut-on que l'injuste condamnation de Hippolyte de Racine touche les spectateurs, puisqu'il n'en est pas ému lui-même? La malédiction de son père devrait lui faire dresser les cheveux sur la tête; il devrait *{128}* avant tout le conjurer de la rétracter: au lieu [55] de cela, il ne paraît y faire aucune attention; il répond avec assez de sang-froid sur l'accusation de Phèdre; on dirait qu'il ne croit guère en Neptune. La seule partie du dialogue où il y ait du mouvement est la suivante:

HIPPOLYTE.

Quel temps à mon exil, quel lieu prescrivez-vous?

THÉSÉE.

Fusses-tu par-delà les colonnes d'Alcide,
Je me croirais encor trop voisin d'un perfide.

HIPPOLYTE.

Chargé du crime affreux dont vous me soupçonnez,
Quels amis me plaindront quand vous m'abandonnez?

THÉSÉE.

Va chercher des amis dont l'estime funeste
Honore l'adultère, applaudisse à l'inceste;
Des traîtres, des ingrats, sans honneur et sans loi,
Dignes de protéger un méchant tel que toi. [*Ph*. IV.ii, 1140-48]

Ces vers sont d'une rare beauté; mais les idées sont prises d'Euripide [*Hipp*. 1053-54, 1066-69]. Enfin, Hippolyte part d'une manière tout à fait humiliante et désavantageuse, sans répliquer un mot à la menace de Thésée de le faire chasser honteu[56]sement, comme s'il avait peur qu'elle ne fût exécutée.

(32) Je conçois cependant pourquoi l'Hippolyte moderne est si apathique sur la sentence de son exil: c'est qu'il a un projet en tête, fondé sur cet exil même. Il veut engager Aricie à fuir avec lui et à l'épouser; il veut lui susciter de puissants protecteurs chez l'étranger, et, qui sait? faire la *{129}* guerre à son père en faveur des prétentions d'Aricie au trône d'Athènes. Le passage suivant peut à peine s'expliquer autrement:

De puissants défenseurs prendront notre querelle;
Argos nous tend les bras, et Sparte nous appelle:
À nos amis communs portons nos justes cris;
Ne souffrons pas que Phèdre, assemblant nos débris,
Du trône paternel nous chasse l'un et l'autre,
Et promette à son fils ma dépouille et la vôtre. [*Ph*. V.i, 1365-70]

Certes l'Hippolyte d'Euripide, quoique plus réfractaire dans ses propos, n'aurait jamais conçu une pensée pareille. Mais donnons à ces mots l'interprétation la plus ménagée; supposons que ce n'est qu'après la mort de son père qu'Hippolyte veut réclamer l'héritage d'Aricie et le sien: en tout cas, quand même la scène entre lui et Thésée aurait pro[57]duit quelque attendrissement, on est parfaitement tranquille sur Hippolyte, puisqu'il a si bien pris son parti dans sa disgrâce.

L'occasion est belle, il la faut embrasser, [*Ph*. V.i, 1371]

dit-il; en effet il est exilé, mais il ne sera plus gêné dans son mariage. Dans Euripide, la terrible catastrophe est annoncée sans qu'on ait revu Hippolyte depuis ses touchants adieux; ce qui rend l'effet beaucoup plus frappant.

(33) Le récit de Théramène [*Ph*. V.vi, 11498-1593] peut être considéré comme une traduction libre ou une imitation du grec. Le mérite principal du poète moderne consiste dans la

beauté des vers et de la diction, et j'ai prévenu d'avance que je ne m'occuperais point de cette partie que je laisse aux critiques français. *{130}* Je ferai observer[23] seulement que les ornements poétiques sont beaucoup plus prodigués dans le morceau de Racine, que dans l'original. Il y a une grande différence entre une narration exacte, circonstanciée, et par là même pittoresque, conçue dans un style noble, mais simple, qui est supposé le langage naturel des personnages tragiques, et un récit pompeux, surchargé d'exagérations déclamatoires[N]. Celui d'Euripide est du pre[58]mier genre: il n'y a rien de trop. Tout tend à faire voir comment est arrivé ce malheur inévitable. D'ailleurs ce n'est qu'un simple esclave qui fait son rapport à Thésée; et celui-ci, croyant toujours son fils coupable, n'a donné aucun signe de résipiscence à la première nouvelle. Le récit de Racine figurerait bien dans un poème épique; mais il sort de la ligne dramatique. Il est déplacé dans la bouche de Théramène, que la perte de son ami ne devait pas rendre si éloquent vis-à-vis d'un père déjà attendri sur le sort de son fils, et confus de l'avoir injustement condamné. La malheureuse Aricie vient encore refroidir ce récit comme tout le reste. Hippolyte, dans ses dernières paroles, est beaucoup plus occupé d'elle que de son père, et du souhait que son innocence soit reconnue par lui; et un appendice de la narration nous apprend qu'Aricie est tombée évanouie sur le corps de son amant. Voilà bien de quoi s'attendrir au moment où l'on est pénétré des funestes et irrévocables destinées de l'innocence et de la vertu! Le poète, il est vrai, ne pouvait pas éviter de faire mention *{131}* d'Aricie dans cette circonstance, mais c'est une nouvelle preuve de l'inconvénient qu'il [59] y avait à placer ce faible rôle entre des intérêts supérieurs.

(34) Dans Racine, on ne revoit plus Hippolyte: dans Euripide, il est rapporté mourant sur la scène; et quoique sa piété, sa tendresse filiale et sa magnanimité se montrent alors dans le plus grand jour, je me réserve de parler de ce morceau, le plus beau, le plus pathétique de toute la tragédie, lorsque je comparerai le but et l'impression générale des deux compositions.

(35) Il nous reste encore à examiner le caractère de Thésée, celui de tous que Racine a le plus maltraité. Pour que la situation où il se trouve ne nuisît pas à la dignité d'un héros aussi fameux, pour que la passion criminelle de Phèdre, ses efforts pour séduire Hippolyte, et l'attentat supposé de celui-ci fussent sentis dans toute leur horreur, il fallait peindre Thésée respectable comme époux et comme père, et ne pas laisser effacer ces sacrés caractères par ses propres vices. Racine a fait tout le contraire. Dès la première scène Théramène se permet une conjecture injurieuse sur la cause de son absence:

> Qui sait même, qui sait si le roi votre père
> Veut que de son absence on sache le mystère?
> [60] Et si, lorsqu'avec vous nous tremblons pour ses jours,
> Tranquille, et nous cachant de nouvelles amours,
> Ce héros n'attend point qu'une amante abusée……. [*Ph.* I.i, 17-21]

Hippolyte, après avoir interrompu son ami par un prétendu respect pour son père, n'en revient pas *{132}* moins à blâmer sur ce même point la conduite de Thésée:

> Mais quand tu récitais des faits moins glorieux,
> Sa foi partout offerte, et reçue en cent lieux;
> Hélène à ses parents dans Sparte dérobée;
> Salamine témoin des pleurs de Péribée;
> Tant d'autres dont les noms lui sont même échappés,
> Trop crédules esprits que sa flamme a trompés!
> Ariane aux rochers contant ses injustices;
> Phèdre enlevée enfin sous de meilleurs auspices……. [*Ph*. I.i, 83-90]

Ce catalogue de femmes séduites et abandonnées ne finit pas; cependant Hippolyte y a prudemment omis sa propre mère. Il moralise fort bien; mais il pouvait se proposer une conduite sage, sans rappeler les écarts de son père, sur lesquels sa naissance même devait l'engager à jeter un voile. Cependant Théramène manque encore beaucoup plus à toutes les convenances dans sa réponse. Il exhorte son élève à se livrer à un penchant que celui-ci croit devoir combattre par respect pour son père:

> [61] Ah seigneur! si votre heure est une fois marquée,
> Le ciel de nos raisons ne sait point s'informer.
> Thésée ouvre vos yeux en voulant les fermer;
> Et sa haine, irritant une flamme rebelle,
> Prête à son ennemie une grâce nouvelle.
> Enfin, d'un chaste amour pourquoi vous effrayer?
> S'il a quelque douceur, n'osez-vous l'essayer? [*Ph*. I.i, 114-20]

On voit que cette cour est en train de devenir galante, puisque les gouverneurs y prêchent aux jeunes princes le fatalisme amoureux.

> *{133}* En croirez-vous toujours un farouche scrupule?
> Craint-on de s'égarer sur les traces d'Hercule? [*Ph*. I.i, 121-22]

Théramène ne pouvait point citer d'exemple plus malheureusement choisi, pour autoriser un amour timide et délicat. *Les traces d'Hercule* en ce genre pourraient mener loin: ce héros débuta par les cinquante filles de Thespius; fut, en habits de femme, esclave d'Omphale; mit une ville à feu et à sang pour enlever Iole, et finit par être victime de la jalousie fondée de Déjanire.

> Quels courages Vénus n'a-t-elle pas domptés?
> Vous-même où seriez-vous, vous qui la combattez,
> Si toujours Antiope à ses lois opposée,
> D'une pudique ardeur n'eût brûlé pour Thésée? [*Ph*. I.i, 123-26]

[62] Ces vers avaient peut-être pour but de compléter la liste des amours de Thésée; mais tout cet argument est ridicule, et surtout cette tournure: *Vous-même, où seriez-vous?* me paraît digne de Pradon.

(36) Ismène parle de l'absence de Thésée dans le même sens que Théramène:

> On dit que, ravisseur d'une amante nouvelle,
> Les flots ont englouti cet époux infidèle. [*Ph*. II.i, 381-82]

Phèdre ne l'épargne pas davantage:

> Oui, prince, je languis, je brûle pour Thésée:
> Je l'aime, non point tel que l'ont vu les enfers,
> Volage adorateur de mille objets divers,
> Qui va du dieu des morts déshonorer la couche.... [*Ph*. II.v, 634-37]

Un homme qui a commis tant d'infidélités, doit avec raison craindre des représailles dans le mariage. Si l'on croit justifier Racine en disant qu'il *{134}* n'a fait autre chose en cela que suivre la mythologie, je réponds que, même chez les Grecs où la mythologie tenait à la religion, le droit n'a jamais été contesté aux poètes dramatiques de l'altérer, à plus forte raison d'en voiler quelques parties et de les soustraire à l'attention des spectateurs. Que nous fait ici la vie précédente de Thésée? Nous [63] l'oublierons facilement si la maladresse du poète ne nous y ramène pas, et nous jugerons le héros tel qu'il se montre dans la pièce. Sans se prévaloir de la morale du siècle héroïque, peu sévère à cet égard, Euripide a soigneusement écarté toute allusion aux amours de Thésée, excepté celle qu'il ne pouvait pas éviter, en faisant mention de la naissance illégitime d'Hippolyte.

(37) Dans les deux pièces Thésée est d'abord absent; mais dans le grec, la cause en est digne et simple: c'est un voyage saint, entrepris pour consulter un oracle, ou pour célébrer une fête dans un temple étranger. Racine fait du premier législateur d'Athènes un roi vagabond[N] qui court le monde sans que personne sache où il est; on le soupçonne même, telle est sa réputation, d'être à la poursuite d'une intrigue amoureuse. Ce soupçon n'est pas injuste, car Thésée en revenant avoue qu'il a voulu aider un ami à enlever la femme d'un autre roi, qu'il a échoué et failli périr dans cette entreprise:

> Je n'avais qu'un ami. Son imprudente flamme
> Du tyran de l'Épire allait ravir la femme.
> *{135}* Je servais à regret ses desseins amoureux;
> Mais le sort irrité nous aveuglait tous deux.
> [64] Le tyran m'a surpris sans défense et sans armes.
> J'ai vu Pirithoüs, triste objet de mes larmes,
> Livré par ce barbare à des monstres cruels
> Qu'il nourrissait du sang des malheureux mortels.
> Moi-même il m'enferma dans des cavernes sombres,

Lieux profonds et voisins de l'empire des ombres.
Les Dieux après six mois, enfin m'ont regardé:
J'ai su tromper les yeux par qui j'étais gardé.
D'un perfide ennemi j'ai purgé la nature:
À ses monstres lui-même a servi de pâture. [*Ph*. III.v, 957-70]

Il se peut que le roi d'Épire ait été un tyran; mais dans le fait rapporté, le droit était tout à fait de son côté. Pirithoüs et son ami n'eurent que ce qu'ils avaient mérité, et pour cette fois les chevaux carnivores furent bien employés. Il est curieux de voir un aventurier usurper le langage d'un champion de la justice; mais il y a encore plus de niaiserie que de jactance au fond de ce récit magnifique.

Le tyran m'a surpris sans défense et sans armes. [*Ph*. III.v, 961]

Ne savait-il pas que dans de pareilles entreprises il faut être sur ses gardes?

Moi-même il m'enferma dans des cavernes sombres,
Lieux profonds et voisins de l'empire des ombres. [*Ph*. III.v, 965-66]

Si le compagnon d'Hercule a encouru cette [65] disgrâce par sa propre faute, qu'est-ce qui l'engage à en faire l'aveu devant son fils? En général ce motif de l'absence de Thésée est très-mal imaginé. L'autorité de la mythologie n'excuse rien; il faut que le poète fasse un choix judicieux entre les *{136}* traditions fabuleuses; car souvent même elles se contredisent. La croyance des Athéniens, qui rendaient des honneurs divins à Thésée comme à leur héros tutélaire, était sans doute très-différente de celle que rapporte Virgile dans sa description des tourments de l'enfer:

— — — — *Sedet aeternumque sedebit*
Infelix Theseus.[N]

(38) J'ai déjà observé l'inconvénient qu'entraîne le bruit de la mort de Thésée. Tout le monde était fort aise de cette nouvelle, tout le monde est consterné par son retour: il est le trouble-fête universel. Pour tout accueil Phèdre le quitte froidement après quelques phrases obscures; Hippolyte, au moment de l'arrivée de son père, lui demande la permission de partir de Trézène; Œnone s'explique enfin plus clairement par une dénonciation mensongère. Mais qui peut compatir à la confusion de Thésée? Il n'est que juste que celui qui [66] a quitté sa famille pour mettre le désordre dans celle d'autrui, à son retour trouve chez lui le même désordre.

(39) Combien l'arrivée du roi dans Euripide est plus digne! Il vient la tête couronnée de feuilles, costume de ceux qui faisaient un voyage saint. Ce signe de fête qu'il jette loin de lui quand il apprend la funeste nouvelle, forme un beau contraste avec la consternation qu'il trouve répandue dans son palais. Son inquiétude avant de savoir ce qui est arrivé, sa désolation en apprenant la mort de Phèdre, et à l'aspect douloureux de son *{137}* corps inanimé, le font connaître comme le plus tendre des pères et des époux. Ses lamentations sont les simples accents de la nature[N], sans éloquence recherchée, et d'autant plus touchants. «Ce sont les ténèbres», dit-il, «les ténèbres souterraines que je veux habiter désormais. Je veux me plonger dans l'ombre de la

mort, malheureux que je suis, privé de ta douce intimité.» [*Hipp*. 836-38] Et ensuite: « Ma maison est déserte, mes enfants sont orphelins. Tu m'as quitté, tu m'as quitté, ô la plus chérie des femmes, et la meilleure qu'aient vue le soleil et l'astre qui éclaire la nuit!» [*Hipp*. 847-51] Il aperçoit enfin la lettre attachée à [67] la main de Phèdre, il suppose qu'elle contient la prière de rester veuf en faveur de ses enfants. «Sois tranquille, infortunée!» s'écrie-t-il: «jamais aucune femme n'entrera dans la maison et le lit nuptial de Thésée.» [*Hipp*. 860-61] Y a-t-il rien de plus touchant que cette tendre sollicitude qui sanctionne d'avance les dernières volontés d'une épouse, à l'instant même où celle-ci l'a trompé par une horrible calomnie contre son beau-fils?

(40) Comparons la conduite des deux Thésées à l'égard de la condamnation d'Hippolyte. La présomption contre celui-ci est en effet extrêmement forte dans Euripide. Phèdre s'est tuée de désespoir, une lettre de sa main accuse son beau-fils d'être la cause de son suicide. Thésée ne saurait imaginer quel motif elle pouvait avoir pour inventer en mourant un affreux mensonge, puisque sa mort même paraît attester la pureté de ses sentiments. Cependant il est coupable de précipitation *{138}* en refusant d'attendre les éclaircissements du temps. Mais le Thésée de Racine agit absolument comme un insensé. Phèdre est en vie; elle emploie une personne subalterne pour accuser Hippolyte, et Thésée ne l'oblige pas à s'expliquer elle-même. Quand son fils, [68] connu autrefois pour vertueux, proteste de son innocence, il ne confronte pas l'accusatrice avec l'accusé, ce qui aurait infailliblement révélé la vérité par le trouble de la femme coupable. Hippolyte assure qu'il aime Aricie, et Thésée n'examine point si cet aveu est sincère[24]. Phèdre vient demander la grâce de son beau-fils, et, au lieu de l'écouter, il court au temple de Neptune, presser l'accomplissement de sa malédiction. L'épée d'Hippolyte laissée entre les mains de Phèdre, invention que Racine a empruntée de Sénèque, ne fournit qu'une faible excuse d'un aveuglement aussi inconcevable.

(41) Le Thésée d'Euripide, puisqu'il revoit son fils mourant, a quelques moyens de réparation, en lui montrant son profond repentir et toute l'étendue de son désespoir. Le Thésée de Racine n'a que des paroles infructueuses, qui, d'ailleurs, sont trop froides pour réconcilier le moins du monde les spectateurs avec lui.

(42) Nous avons vu par l'examen précédent que le poète moderne a altéré les caractères principaux; qu'il les a dégradés non-seulement dans leur valeur morale, mais qu'il a même affaibli l'énergie et la grandeur qui est com[69]patible avec le crime, et surtout, qu'il les a dépouillés de cette beauté idéale *{139}* qui fait le charme des chefs-d'œuvre antiques[N], et semble nous introduire au milieu d'une race de mortels plus noble et presque divine. Voyons maintenant quel rapport existe entre les deux pièces pour le but et l'impression générale.

(43) Racine est extrêmement satisfait de la moralité de cette tragédie[N]. «Ce que je puis assurer» dit-il, «c'est que je n'en ai point faite où la vertu soit plus mise en jour que dans celle-ci. Les moindres fautes y sont sévèrement punies; la seule pensée du crime y est regardée avec autant d'horreur que le crime même; les faiblesses de l'amour y passent pour de vraies faiblesses; les

passions n'y sont présentées aux yeux que pour montrer tout le désordre dont elles sont cause; et le vice y est peint partout avec des couleurs qui en font connaître et haïr la difformité.» Cette dernière assertion n'est aucunement fondée, au contraire Racine a rendu sa Phèdre aussi séduisante qu'il a pu. Dans la déclaration de son amour, il a voilé par la délicatesse des formes ce que cette démarche a de contraire à la pudeur; il a émoussé le reproche d'une atroce calomnie en le partageant arti[70]ficieusement entre la confidente qui ne s'en charge que par dévouement, et la maîtresse qui ne fait que consentir sans agir elle-même. Dans Euripide le crime est beaucoup plus franc dans ses démarches, aussi bien dans la médiation de la nourrice auprès d'Hippolyte, que dans l'accusation de Phèdre. Ce que Racine vante en premier lieu, c'est ce qu'on appelle communément la justice *{140}* poétique, chose triviale et très-facile à établir dans une tragédie où tout se passe au gré du poète. Cette doctrine que toujours les méchants sont punis, et les bons récompensés dans cette vie, est absolument erronée; mais fût-il possible de la persuader aux hommes par des fictions dramatiques, elle serait plutôt nuisible qu'utile à la vraie morale. Car la morale douce de l'amour, c'est-à-dire de la bienveillance universelle, aussi bien que la morale austère du devoir, réprouve tous les motifs intéressés. L'homme vertueux, ce n'est pas celui qui fait le bien parce qu'il espère en recueillir des avantages pour lui, mais qui le fait quoique menacé de la souffrance, de la persécution, et peut-être d'une mort cruelle. Les punitions et les récompenses terrestres ne servent qu'à dominer des êtres dont le sens moral est encore en[71]gourdi, ou en d'autres mots, chez qui la voix de la conscience ne se fait pas entendre; elles peuvent fonder des habitudes qui ressemblent extérieurement à la vertu, mais qui n'ont rien de commun avec son essence. Nous voyons souvent le méchant prospérer pendant une longue carrière: inaccessible aux remords, indifférent à l'estime des hommes, ne sentant aucun besoin des jouissances que les sentiments nobles peuvent seuls donner, il arrive au terme sans avoir éprouvé le moindre revers. Si, toutefois, l'on[25] voulait soutenir que l'ordre des choses amène des punitions et des récompenses dans cette vie, il faudrait bien se contenter d'une réaction tardive du sort,[26] de cette peine *au pied boiteux, qui quitte rare{141}ment le scélérat qu'elle poursuit*[N]. Si l'on fait cette concession,[27] le principe de la justice poétique n'en sera pas plus admissible dans le système dramatique français, dont les règles exigent une stricte observation des vraisemblances, et restreignent en même temps l'action d'une tragédie à la durée d'un seul jour. Je demande donc si ce n'est pas choquer toutes les vraisemblances[N], que de nous représenter les actions humaines les plus importantes, punies et récompensées dans un si court espace de temps?

(44) [72] Mais admettons pour un moment le principe, réduisons la poésie à jouer le rôle de la justice criminelle. Pour qu'elle le joue bien, il faut du moins que les peines soient proportionnées aux délits, et que les bons ne soient pas enveloppés dans la même catastrophe avec les méchants. Examinons à cet égard la pièce de Racine. Phèdre, par son indulgence pour sa passion criminelle et par son consentement à une calomnie atroce, a sans doute mérité sa mort violente et désespérée; Œnone de même. Thésée a mérité la perte d'un fils vertueux, par la

précipitation qui lui fait oublier tous les devoirs d'un juge équitable. Mais Hippolyte, l'innocent, le vertueux Hippolyte, qu'a-t-il commis de si grave qui doive lui attirer une mort prématurée dans les tourments les plus affreux? «J'ai cru», dit Racine[N], «lui devoir donner quelque faiblesse qui le rendrait un peu coupable envers son père, sans pourtant lui rien ôter de cette grandeur d'âme avec laquelle il épargne l'honneur *{142}* de Phèdre et se laisse opprimer sans l'accuser. J'appelle faiblesse la passion qu'il ressent malgré lui pour Aricie, qui est la fille et la sœur des ennemis mortels de son père.» Mais le sentiment est involontaire; Hippolyte ne cède au sien que lorsqu'il croit son [73] père mort; et quand il propose à Aricie de fuir avec lui et de l'épouser, Thésée a en effet renoncé, par le bannissement perpétuel de son fils, à l'autorité paternelle qu'il pouvait avoir sur son mariage. Et Aricie, parce qu'elle répond à un sentiment honorable et se soustrait à l'oppression injuste de Thésée, a-t-elle mérité d'être punie par la perte de ce qu'elle a de plus cher sur la terre?

(45) Les innocents sont donc punis aussi sévèrement que les coupables. Ce n'est pas tout. Ces derniers sont entraînés dans l'abîme, non pas par leurs mauvaises actions, mais par leurs bons mouvements. Œnone se tue pénétrée de repentir d'avoir contribué à perdre sa maîtresse, et de douleur de s'être attiré son exécration: moins dévouée, elle pouvait très-probablement se sauver. Phèdre, avec une conscience plus endurcie et des sentiments plus haineux contre celui qui l'avait dédaignée, pouvait survivre à Hippolyte, dont la mort écarte tout danger que la vérité ne soit révélée, et paraît sanctionner la sentence de Thésée par la vengeance céleste: elle pouvait continuer de jouir de l'affection de son époux et d'une réputation intacte. Hippolyte même, si dans sa défense il ne s'était pas [74] abstenu, par délicatesse, d'accuser direc*{143}*tement sa belle-mère, pouvait peut-être ébranler son père, et lui donner le temps de s'éclaircir. Que dis je! s'il s'était laissé séduire par Phèdre, une liaison si contraire à la nature pouvait vraisemblablement rester cachée à tous les yeux, et l'on en aperçoit la punition au plus dans un lointain très-vague. En général, pour éviter les malheurs de ce monde, le froid calcul et la prudence mènent beaucoup plus loin que la stricte vertu.

(46) Convenons que la morale de la pièce que Racine croit si rigoureuse, examinée selon le principe qu'il pose lui-même, est au moins fort équivoque. Je le répète, la soi-disant justice poétique n'est point du tout essentielle à une bonne tragédie, quoiqu'elle puisse y être observée accidentellement. Ce n'est pas que la poésie ne doive agir toujours de concert avec la morale, mais c'est un lien bien moins grossier qui l'unit à celle-ci, c'est d'une manière bien plus sublime qu'elle doit épurer les sentiments des hommes. Je ne blâmerai pas la pièce de Phèdre parce que le vertueux y périt avec le criminel; mais comme cela est un spectacle très-douloureux, je m'attends à des dédommagements qui rétablissent l'équi[75]libre dans l'âme. Voyons si ces dédommagements s'y trouvent en effet, et si l'on peut quitter cette tragédie avec la satisfaction que doit produire l'impression générale d'un ouvrage de l'art quelconque[N], même du genre le plus sérieux et le plus austère.

(47) Ceci me conduit à des réflexions générales sur le but et la nature de la tragédie: question *{144}* souvent traitée, le plus souvent mal résolue, et qui à la vérité n'est pas si facile à résoudre. Il y a de quoi s'étonner que nous, êtres naturellement compatissants, entourés des malheurs réels de la vie qui nous touchent, et auxquels nous ne pouvons pas remédier, nous voulions[28] encore nous contrister par la représentation de maux imaginaires. Répondra-t-on que nous y trouvons plaisir par la comparaison de notre état tranquille avec les bouleversements causés par les passions, comme on regarde du rivage une tempête sur mer avec le sentiment de la sécurité? Cette comparaison si connue de Lucrèce:

Suave, mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis, etc.[N]

s'applique fort bien, comme Lucrèce l'a voulu, à un philosophe qui, croyant être parvenu à cette conviction stable qui accompagne l'évi[75]dence, contemple avec tranquillité les agitations du doute et de l'erreur; mais elle ne convient nullement au spectateur sensible d'une tragédie. Celui-ci, s'il s'intéresse fortement aux personnages tragiques, ne fera point de retour sur lui-même, ou s'il ne s'oublie pas, c'est un signe qu'il s'y intéresse peu, et que la tragédie manque son effet. Dira-t-on que c'est le besoin de nous tirer de l'engourdissement de la vie habituelle par des émotions vives, quelles qu'elles soient, qui a produit l'art tragique? Je conviens que ce besoin existe; il a donné naissance aux combats d'animaux, spectacle favori chez plusieurs nations: les Romains ont même poussé ce goût jusqu'à voir avec plaisir des hommes se *{145}* battre à outrance entre eux ou avec des bêtes féroces; mais ces hommes, c'étaient des criminels ou des esclaves auxquels on n'accordait pas les droits de l'humanité. Et nous qui sommes moins endurcis qu'eux, nous, portés à des plaisirs plus délicats, tout en n'admettant sur la scène tragique que des caractères exaltés, voudrions-nous que ces demi-dieux, ces héros descendissent dans l'arène sanglante de la tragédie, comme de vils gladiateurs, uniquement pour ébranler nos nerfs par leurs [77] souffrances? Non, ce n'est pas le spectacle de la souffrance qui fait l'attrait d'une tragédie, ni des jeux du cirque, ni même des combats d'animaux; car dans ces derniers on voit se déployer l'agilité, la force et le courage, enfin des qualités qui ont déjà de l'analogie avec les facultés intellectuelles et morales de l'homme. Je crois que ce qui, dans une belle tragédie, fait ressortir une certaine satisfaction du fond de notre sympathie avec les situations violentes et les peines représentées, c'est, ou le sentiment de la dignité de la nature humaine, éveillé dans nous par de grands modèles, ou la trace d'un ordre de choses surnaturel, imprimée et comme mystérieusement révélée dans la marche en apparence irrégulière des événements, ou la réunion de ces deux causes.

(48) La force et la résistance donnent l'une la mesure de l'autre. C'est le besoin qui fait déployer toutes les ressources. Dans les grands malheurs une âme noble et énergique découvre au fond d'elle-même et met en œuvre ce dépôt de senti*{146}*ments invincibles que le ciel paraît y avoir placés[29], pour ces occasions là; elle découvre alors qu'en dépit des bornes d'une existence passagère, elle touche à l'infini. Les coups de la [78] douleur, en frappant cette âme

courageusement concentrée dans elle-même, en font jaillir l'étincelle divine. C'est pourquoi la tragédie, celui de tous les genres qui aspire le plus à l'idéal dans les caractères, est et doit être remplie de situations difficiles, de collisions compliquées entre le devoir et la passion, ou entre différentes passions, ou entre différents devoirs; de revers imprévus, de terribles catastrophes. Sénèque dit qu'un grand homme luttant contre l'adversité est un spectacle digne des dieux[30N], et si cette sentence paraît dure au premier abord, plusieurs tragédies antiques peuvent nous en faire saisir le véritable sens. La poésie tragique peut s'écarter de ces sublimes modèles de deux manières: tantôt, en peignant superficiellement la douleur par une froide déclamation et non pas par ses accents naturels, en ne lui laissant porter que des atteintes légères et qui ne pénètrent pas jusqu'au centre de l'existence, en étouffant sa première expression par un héroïsme prodigué, qui dès-lors ne terrasse plus qu'un ennemi chimérique; tantôt, en tâchant de produire un attendrissement efféminé, qui amollit l'âme au lieu de lui donner une trempe plus forte. Le premier défaut est [79] souvent celui de Corneille, presque toujours celui d'Alfieri: les plus anciens exemples du second se trouvent dans Euripide; Meta*{147}*stase en est rempli; en général, les poètes modernes y sont fort sujets par la pente universelle de leur siècle.

(49) Mais la partie de l'art tragique dans laquelle les modernes ont le plus péché, parce qu'ils n'avaient point d'idées claires et fixes sur la nature et le but de la tragédie, c'est la tendance générale qui doit se manifester dans l'ensemble. On a cherché les marques distinctives de ce genre dans des circonstances absolument accidentelles, comme le dénoûmeut malheureux ou la dignité royale des personnages. La définition la plus reçue[N] est qu'une tragédie est la représentation sérieuse, et dialoguée dans un style élevé, d'une action une, complète et capable d'inspirer la terreur et la pitié. On croit l'action complète quand on trouve à la fin de la pièce un point de repos souvent assez précaire pour l'imagination ou le sentiment. Quant à l'unité d'action, ce terme est très-vague. L'action tragique se compose nécessairement d'une multitude d'actions partielles; on peut donc la resserrer ou l'étendre à volonté: car une série d'actions [80] occasionnées les unes par les autres, quelque prolongée qu'elle soit, pourra toujours être rassemblée sous un seul point de vue, et désignée par un seul nom. Mais sans insister davantage là-dessus, je ferai observer[31] qu'un personnage dramatique n'agit pas seulement, mais qu'il éprouve à son tour l'influence des actions d'autrui[32], lesquelles ne dépendent pas de lui; sous ce point de vue, on peut considérer ce qui se passe dans une *{148}* tragédie comme une suite d'événements, tout aussi bien que comme une suite d'actions. En un mot, la scène tragique nous présente, non-seulement les caractères humains, mais encore les destinées humaines. Et qu'est-ce qui réglera ces destinées dans la fiction du poète tragique? Veut-on que ce soit le hasard, c'est-à-dire qu'il n'y ait aucune règle quelconque? Je vois bien qu'une quantité de tragédies sont faites ainsi: on serait fort embarrassé d'y découvrir une tendance inhérente à la nature de la chose même, et un autre but que celui de produire à l'aventure des émotions souvent discordantes entre elles. Mais je crois que la marche des événements doit se lier à une pensée; que c'est là ce qui

constitue la véritable unité d'une tragédie. Ce n'est point une théorie faite en [81] l'air; je me fonde sur l'exemple des Grecs, dont les tragédies représentent généralement une pensée unique bien clairement énoncée, et tellement dominante qu'elle est, pour ainsi dire, l'âme et le génie de tout le genre.

(50) Ce principe invisible, cette pensée fondamentale et motrice dans la tragédie grecque, c'est la fatalité[N]. Elle était comprise dans la croyance religieuse des anciens; on pouvait s'attendre à des faveurs ou à des hostilités de la part des dieux, suivant qu'on se les était rendus propices ou contraires: mais ces êtres finis, quoique puissants, n'étaient pas les souverains arbitres du sort des humains; ils obéissaient eux-mêmes à une destinée aussi inévitable qu'inconcevable, et n'étaient sou*{149}*vent que les aveugles ministres de ses décrets. Cette doctrine peu consolante, puisqu'elle ne fournit à l'homme vertueux aucune assurance qu'il soit placé sous la protection spéciale de la divinité, peut jeter dans un abattement total les caractères pusillanimes: mais elle donne un nouveau ressort aux âmes fortes, en les obligeant à se replier sur elles-mêmes, et à ne plus compter que sur leurs propres moyens; elle leur inspire la ferme résolution de supporter le mieux qu'il sera possible ce qui [82] est sans remède, et d'opposer au coup fatal une conscience pure et un courage inflexible. C'est à l'influence de cette doctrine qu'il faut attribuer le génie éminemment tragique des poètes grecs à l'époque où la raison sociale étant parvenue à sa maturité, les opinions religieuses étaient encore en pleine vigueur.

(51) Les Romains, avec des institutions plus sévères et une morale plus stoïque, n'ont cependant jamais montré un génie original dans la tragédie. L'on pourrait croire que cela vient uniquement de ce que le développement de leur littérature ne coïncide pas avec l'intégrité des mœurs républicaines. Cependant leurs plus anciens poètes, qui ne faisaient que traduire des pièces grecques, vivaient du temps des guerres puniques. Il y a une raison plus profonde à donner de ce manque d'une tragédie vraiment nationale chez les Romains: c'est qu'ils avaient transporté le tragique dans l'histoire du monde. Arbitres du sort des peuples, ils y jouaient le rôle de cette fatalité destructive *{150}* qui préside aux tragédies grecques; ils avaient vu crouler tous les empires, et enfin leur propre liberté, par la même pente fatale. Les rois enchaînés et menés en triomphe, les frappaient bien plus immédiatement par le [83] spectacle des terribles vicissitudes humaines, que ne pouvait faire la catastrophe d'une tragédie. Blasés sur les merveilles de la fable tragique des Grecs, ils voulurent renchérir sur leurs modèles, et tombèrent dans des déclamations ampoulées.

(52) La fatalité est directement opposée à notre croyance religieuse; le christianisme lui a substitué l'idée de la providence. Il pourrait donc être mis en doute si un poète chrétien, en voulant faire passer dans ses ouvrages la manière de voir qui est en rapport avec sa religion, ne se trouverait pas dans l'impossibilité de composer une véritable tragédie, et si la poésie tragique, création de l'homme abandonné à ses propres forces, ne disparaît pas, comme les autres fantômes nocturnes d'une imagination superstitieuse, devant l'aurore de la révélation. II faudrait répondre

par l'affirmative, si la religion nous enseignait que la providence fait constamment prospérer les bons et punit toujours les méchants dans cette vie. Mais les voies de la providence sont impénétrables, il n'y a qu'une piété inspirée qui puisse en saisir les traces: tout ce que nous savons, c'est qu'une félicité éternelle dédommagera l'homme religieux de ses souf[84]frances terrestres; que, dans le grand combat entre le bien et le mal qui se renouvelle sans *{151}* cesse dans ce monde, le bien doit triompher finalement, et que tout doit aboutir à la gloire de Dieu. Un tel ordre de choses admet donc une infinité de situations où l'héroïsme religieux, quoique modifié autrement que celui de la simple vertu naturelle, peut se déployer dans toute sa force; il admet les événements les plus pathétiques, bien que leur ensemble fasse entrevoir, comme dans une sphère plus élevée, une pensée consolante.

(53) Le système tragique des Grecs est fondé sur un développement de la morale, presque entièrement indépendant de la religion. La dignité de l'homme y est maintenue comme en dépit de l'ordre surnaturel des choses: la liberté morale dispute à la fatale nécessité, qui est supposée gouverner le monde, un sanctuaire intime dans l'âme; et quand la nature humaine est trop faible pour remporter dans ce combat une complète victoire, on lui ménage du moins une honorable retraite. L'idée de la providence n'est devenue une opinion populaire que depuis l'introduction du christianisme; mais les anciens les plus éclairés en ont eu des lueurs, comme [85] de plusieurs autres vérités révélées. La terreur domine dans les tragédies d'Eschyle, et la fatalité y plane au-dessus des mortels dans tout son sinistre éclat. Cependant Agamemnon, les Choéphores et les Euménides, ces trois pièces d'Eschyle qui composent une *trilogie* (c'est-à-dire une suite de tragédies destinées à être réunies dans la représentation), quoique, *{152}* considérées isolément, elles soient tout à fait conformes au système de la fatalité, prises ensemble, laissent apercevoir quelque chose qui ressemble à la providence. Dans la première pièce, Agamemnon est immolé par Clytemnestre: c'est une vengeance du sacrifice d'Iphigénie, lequel, à son tour, lui avait été imposé parce qu'il avait involontairement offensé Diane[N]. Dans la seconde, Oreste venge son père en assassinant sa mère. Cette suite de vengeances, en même temps justes et criminelles, pourrait se prolonger à l'infini[N], si, dans la troisième pièce, la sagesse divine, sous la forme de Minerve, n'y mettait pas un terme et ne rétablissait l'équilibre moral, en faisant absoudre, par un tribunal, Oreste, après qu'il eut[33] expié sa révolte contre la nature par la longue persécution des Furies. Dans Prométhée enchaîné, nous voyons un être di[86]vin, le bienfaiteur du genre humain, opprimé par la tyrannie du sort[N]: mais il est probable que la seconde tragédie d'Eschyle sur ce sujet, Prométhée délivré, servait à adoucir un peu l'impression terrible que laisse la première.

(54) Dans les différentes pièces de Sophocle, il trouve des gradations encore plus remarquables à l'égard de la rigueur avec laquelle la fatalité y règne. Sa tragédie d'Œdipe Roi semble écrite exprès pour inculquer ce dogme, pour faire connaître la nature de la fatalité par l'exemple le plus complet et le plus frappant. Un homme est destiné à commettre les crimes les plus atroce: *{153}* toutes les précautions que prennent ses parents dès sa naissance, celles qu'il

prend ensuite lui-même, ne servent qu'à amener l'accomplissement des oracles. La même fatalité l'entraîne enfin à la découverte de ces crimes longtemps ignorés: du haut d'une vie glorieuse et pure en apparence, il est plongé sans ressource dans l'opprobre et dans un affreux désespoir. Mais dans Œdipe à Colone, nous voyons ce même homme, un vieillard aveugle, pauvre, banni, errant sur la terre, trouver enfin un lieu de repos, où il est délivré de cette malédiction céleste qui a si longtemps [87] pesé sur sa tête: nous le voyons dans ses derniers moments exerçant l'autorité paternelle contre un fils dénaturé, entouré de la tendresse de ses filles, protégé et honoré par un illustre héros, enfin sanctifié par une mort miraculeuse et solennelle; et la tombe de celui dont on détournait avec horreur le regard pendant sa vie, devient une bénédiction pour le pays qui la conserve. Les dieux qui ont choisi cet innocent pour offrir un exemple de l'aveuglement des mortels, lui doivent et lui accordent cette réparation d'honneur à la face du monde. C'est encore la fatalité: mais elle a déposé son aspect terrible pour se montrer douce et équitable; c'est la fatalité déguisée en providence. En général, Sophocle, quoique ses ouvrages respirent la grandeur, la grâce et la simplicité antiques, est peut-être de tous les poètes grecs celui dont les sentiments ont le plus d'analogie avec l'esprit de notre religion.

(55) *{154}* Dans Euripide, on peut distinctement apercevoir un double personnage: le poète, dont les productions étaient consacrées à une solennité religieuse et qui, étant sous la protection de la religion, devait la respecter à son tour; d'autre part[34] le sophiste à prétentions philosophiques, qui, [88] au milieu des merveilles fabuleuses, liées à la religion, dans lesquelles il devait puiser les sujets de ses pièces, tâchait de glisser ses doutes et ses opinions d'esprit fort. Dans ce temps, la poésie tragique, soit par le relâchement des mœurs, soit par l'influence des doctrines philosophiques, commençait à s'altérer. Euripide a souvent des scènes qui s'approchent beaucoup du drame bourgeois, ou même de la haute comédie: il fait entrer dans son tableau de la vie héroïque la morale de la vie sociale de ses contemporains; il préfère assez souvent l'attendrissement efféminé au pathétique mâle: il court après les effets brillants et sacrifie le tout à la partie. Avec tous ces défauts, c'est un poète d'une admirable facilité et d'un génie éminemment aimable et séduisant.

(56) Comme les modernes, en vertu de leur religion, ont une manière de voir les rapports moraux et la destinée de l'homme, très-opposée à celle des anciens, il n'est pas étonnant qu'en voulant imiter la tragédie antique ils se soient plus attachés aux formes qu'à la base sur laquelle repose tout ce superbe édifice. Nous ne remarquons dans Euripide que de la vacillation: mais les modernes souvent manquent décidément de tendance gé[89]nérale; *{155}* ils naviguent sans boussole sur la vaste mer des combinaisons tragiques possibles. Quand ils ont traité des sujets mythologiques, ces fictions nous ayant été transmises, modifiées par les poètes anciens dans le sens de la fatalité, celle-ci s'est introduite quelquefois dans leurs compositions, sans qu'ils en aient eu l'intention, peut-être même à leur insu[35]. D'autres fois, quelque idée de compensation[36], ou même de providence, paraît dans leurs ouvrages; mais isolément, à la surface, et sans qu'elle

soit identifiée avec le tout. Mais le plus souvent, lorsqu'ils ont rencontré une fiction ou un fait historique quelconque qui paraît leur offrir des situations pathétiques et une catastrophe frappante, et qu'ils sont parvenus à l'arranger dans le cadre usité des cinq actes, en observant l'unité de temps, de lieu, et les autres convenances théâtrales, ils croient avoir rempli leur tâche, sans se soucier d'un but ultérieur.

(57) Les idées chrétiennes peuvent cependant fournir à la tragédie une base aussi sublime et bien plus consolante que celle que les anciens tiraient de leur religion. L'essai en a été fait: les poètes espagnols ont composé beaucoup de pièces chrétiennes; Calderon [90] surtout, dont l'inspiration était toute religieuse, a donné des chefs-d'œuvre dans ce genre, pour l'appréciation desquels, à la vérité, il faut entrer dans le système dramatique admis au théâtre espagnol. La tragédie chrétienne n'est pas étrangère non plus à la scène française. Sans parler de Polyeucte, d'Esther et d'Athalie[N], que leur *{156}* sujet range dans cette classe, je crois qu'Alzire[N] peut mériter le titre d'une tragédie chrétienne. L'orgueil oppressif et la dureté de Gusman[N] paraissent devoir aliéner du christianisme les esprits des Péruviens, et produisent cet effet sur Zamore[N]; les malheurs que ces mêmes défauts attirent à Gusman, et qu'il considère comme un châtiment du ciel, lui font manifester dans ses derniers moments des sentiments généreux et charitables: ce miracle opéré par la religion convertit Zamore, et par son moyen sans doute tous ses adhérents. Voilà donc un enchaînement de causes et d'effets où même les imperfections humaines tournent finalement au service de la religion.

(58) Je conçois un troisième système tragique, dont l'exemple a été donné par le seul Shakespeare; ce poète à intentions profondes, qu'on a singulièrement méconnu en le pre[91]nant pour un génie sauvage, produisant aveuglément des ouvrages incohérents. J'appellerai Hamlet une tragédie philosophique ou, pour mieux dire, sceptique. Elle a été inspirée par une méditation profonde sur les destinées humaines, et elle l'inspire à son tour. L'âme ne pouvant acquiescer à aucune conviction, cherche vainement à sortir du labyrinthe par une autre issue que par l'idée du néant universel. La marche à dessein lente, embarrassée et quelque fois rétrograde de l'action, est l'emblème de l'hésitation intellectuelle qui est l'essence du poème: c'est une réflexion non terminée et interminable sur le but de l'existence, une réflexion dont la mort *{157}* tranche enfin le nœud gordien. Ce genre de tragique est peut-être le plus sombre de tous: car la nature humaine demande à s'appuyer fermement sur une persuasion quelconque; l'irrésolution de la raison lui répugne, et il faut que les ressorts moraux soient extrêmement relâchés, pour que l'homme puisse se complaire dans un scepticisme apathique sur les vérités qui devraient l'intéresser le plus. La tragédie de Lear a beaucoup d'analogie avec celle de Hamlet: elle est même plus forte dans le [92] même genre. Ce qui est exprimé par toute cette composition n'est plus le doute, c'est le désespoir de pouvoir découvrir dans les voies de ce monde ténébreux le moindre vestige d'une idée consolante. Ce tableau gigantesque nous présente un bouleversement du monde moral, tel qu'il paraît menacer du retour du chaos; ce n'est pas une tragédie individuelle; elle[37] embrasse le

genre humain. Macbeth, au contraire, est écrit dans le système de la tragédie ancienne, malgré l'extrême disparité des formes. La fatalité y règne; nous y retrouvons même ces prédictions qui deviennent la cause de l'événement qu'elles annoncent, ces oracles perfides qui, tout en s'accomplissant à la lettre, trompent l'espérance de celui qui s'y est fié.

(59) Après cette discussion épisodique, mais qui contribuera, j'espère, à rendre plus claires les observations que je vais faire, je rentre dans mon sujet. Dans la pièce d'Euripide que nous avons analysée, la partie de la fatalité est très-bien ordonnée. D'abord il assigne à des événements aussi *{158}* extraordinaires une cause surnaturelle; la colère de Vénus en est le mobile, et pour preuve qu'aucune prévoyance humaine n'aurait pu les prévenir, [93] la déesse les annonce dans le prologue. Ces prologues, qui instruisent le spectateur d'avance de ce qui va se passer sous ses yeux, et dont Euripide seul, parmi les tragiques grecs, a fait usage, sont fort contraires à notre goût: sans vouloir les justifier, je remarquerai seulement que la tragédie grecque ne connaissait guère l'intrigue, et qu'un poète dramatique aurait tort de compter beaucoup sur l'attrait de la curiosité, puisque cet attrait est usé dès la première représentation. Du reste Euripide pouvait avoir besoin de ces prologues pour familiariser les spectateurs avec ses fictions, parce qu'il se permettait d'altérer la mythologie dans des points fort essentiels. Quoi qu'il en soit, Phèdre est reconnue pour être une victime de la haine fatale de Vénus, puisque cette déesse déclare elle-même qu'elle l'enflamme d'une passion criminelle, uniquement pour se venger d'Hippolyte. Phèdre ainsi devient plutôt l'objet de la pitié que de l'indignation des spectateurs. Racine l'a bien senti; il fait parler sa Phèdre plusieurs fois de la colère de Vénus contre elle et toute sa famille; mais comme cette colère n'est point expliquée, et que Phèdre pouvait bien la supposer dirigée contre elle, seulement [96] pour son excuse, cela ne fait qu'une faible impression.

(60) Quoique l'Hippolyte d'Euripide s'attire le courroux de Vénus jusqu'à un certain point par sa *{159}* propre faute, c'est-à-dire parce qu'il néglige le culte extérieur de cette déesse, il y a néanmoins de la fatalité dans son malheur. Vénus est blessée aussi de son indifférence pour[38] les plaisirs de l'amour, qui provient de ce qu'il y a de plus original et de plus intime dans le caractère d'Hippolyte: cette chaste pureté de l'âme qui le rend l'adorateur enthousiaste et le favori de Diane. Cependant la protection spéciale de cette dernière ne peut le sauver de sa perte; car, comme Diane le dit exprès [*Hipp*. 1328-30], aucune divinité n'osait contrarier les vues d'une autre à l'égard d'un mortel. C'est donc par la rivalité nécessaire et éternelle entre ces deux déesses opposées, qu'Hippolyte périt. Il y a encore de la fatalité dans ces trois demandes accordées d'avance par Neptune à Thésée, sans doute avec l'intention de l'exaucer miraculeusement pour son propre bonheur. Voilà la seule influence surnaturelle que Racine ait conservée. Il pensait apparemment que la mythologie ancienne n'étant [95] pas un objet de notre croyance, il fallait, en la traitant, mettre de l'économie dans l'usage du merveilleux. Mais un miracle isolé se concilie plus difficilement l'imagination, que tout un ordre de choses où les miracles sont habituels. Du reste le malheur d'Hippolyte dans la pièce française n'arrive

assurément pas par la colère de Vénus, puisqu'il lui rend hommage par son amour pour Aricie. Aussi Racine a-t-il cru devoir le rendre un peu coupable envers son père par cette faiblesse, afin de ne pas choquer le sentiment par l'infortune d'un *{160}* jeune héros parfaitement vertueux; intention manquée, comme je l'ai montré plus haut. Il dit: «Pour ce qui est du personnage d'Hippolyte[N], j'avais remarqué dans les anciens qu'on reprochait à Euripide de l'avoir représenté comme un philosophe exempt de toute imperfection; ce qui faisait que la mort de ce jeune prince causait beaucoup plus d'indignation que de pitié.» Cette critique contre Euripide est tout à fait injuste. Il est vrai qu'il a doué Hippolyte de toutes les vertus morales: mais enfin il lui fait traiter Vénus avec dédain, et cela seul doit le perdre. Car selon les anciens, il ne suffisait pas d'être vertueux pour [96] plaire aux dieux: on leur supposait des passions humaines; il fallait donc mettre du soin à les flatter personnellement. C'est à cette doctrine religieuse que les censeurs devaient s'en prendre, et non pas au poète.

(61) Cependant dans les deux tragédies l'innocence périt également par un supplice affreux, comme foudroyée par la vengeance divine: chez Euripide, sous la domination de la fatalité; chez Racine, dans un ordre de choses où semblerait plutôt régner la providence, puisqu'il prétend y avoir établi de justes dispensations[39]. Voyons quels adoucissements les deux poètes ont mis à cette terrible catastrophe, pour apaiser la sensibilité révoltée du spectateur, et lui laisser, au lieu d'une impression pénible, un souvenir cher et attendrissant.

(62) Voici la marche d'Euripide. Thésée croyant encore son fils coupable, raffermi même dans sa *{161}* persuasion par la rapidité avec laquelle Neptune l'a exaucé, écoute le récit de son désastre avec une attitude ferme, quoique les entrailles d'un père commencent à s'émouvoir en lui[N]. Il ordonne qu'on apporte devant ses yeux Hippolyte blessé à mort. Alors Diane paraît; elle appelle Thésée, elle lui révèle [97] l'innocence, la piété de son fils et la trame à laquelle il a succombé; elle lui reproche, sans ménagement quelconque, le sort funeste et irréparable d'Hippolyte. Ses paroles, empreintes d'une majesté sévère, et qui, avec une brièveté admirable, rapprochent de notre imagination le tableau des événements passés, sont autant de coups de poignard pour Thésée: il est anéanti, il n'a que des exclamations de désespoir pour toute réponse. La déesse ajoute à la fin, comme excuse et consolation, que Vénus courroucée a voulu ce malheur, et a plongé Thésée dans un aveuglement involontaire. Sur ces entrefaites, Hippolyte est apporté par ses compagnons. Il faut se rappeler ici la construction des théâtres anciens, où le *proscenium* était fort large, de sorte que des acteurs, qui ne venaient pas du fond, mais d'un des côtés, étaient vus de loin, et avaient besoin de quelque temps pour arriver au milieu de la scène. Ce temps se passe en gémissements et en plaintes déchirantes, que l'excès de la douleur arrache à l'intrépide Hippolyte. Il supplie ses compagnons de le porter doucement, parce que chaque secousse renouvelle ses tourments: il demande une épée pour les finir; il invoque [98] la mort. Lorsque *{162}* le triste cortège est arrivé devant le palais, et que le brancard sur lequel on apporte

Hippolyte est posé à terre, Diane s'approche de lui[N], et il se passe entre eux et Thésée une scène que je vais traduire en entier. [*Hipp*. 1389-1461][N]

(63) DIANE.
O malheureux! dans quelle calamité as-tu été enveloppé! La noblesse de ton âme t'a perdu. [*Hipp*. 1390]
HIPPOLYTE.
O souffle divin! quoique dans les douleurs, je t'ai senti et je suis soulagé. — Sachez que la déesse Diane est dans cette enceinte.
DIANE.
Oui, malheureux, la divinité la plus amie est près de toi.
HIPPOLYTE.
Vois-tu, ma souveraine, l'état déplorable où je suis?
DIANE.
Je le vois; mais les larmes sont interdites à mes yeux.
HIPPOLYTE.
Tu n'as plus ton chasseur, ton fidèle serviteur...
[99] DIANE.
Hélas, non! tu péris bien cruellement.
*{163}*HIPPOLYTE.
Ni le conducteur de tes coursiers, ni le gardien de tes images.
DIANE.
La perfide Vénus a ourdi cette trame. [*Hipp*. 1400]
HIPPOLYTE.
Ah! Je reconnais enfin la déesse qui m'anéantit.
DIANE.
Elle était blessée de tes dédains, et haïssait ta sagesse.
HIPPOLYTE.
Je le comprends; Vénus nous a perdu tous les trois.
DIANE.
Vous tous: toi, ton père et son épouse.
HIPPOLYTE.
Je gémis aussi sur l'infortune de mon père.
DIANE.
Il fut trompé par les desseins d'une divinité.
HIPPOLYTE.
O mon père, que tu es malheureux de cet événement!

[100] THÉSÉE.
C'en est fait de moi, mon enfant, toute la joie de ma vie est détruite.
HIPPOLYTE.
Je pleure bien plus ton erreur que mon sort.
{164} THÉSÉE.
Que ne puis-je mourir à ta place, mon enfant! [*Hipp*. 1410]
HIPPOLYTE.
O dons amers de ton père Neptune!
THÉSÉE.
Plût au ciel que je n'eusse jamais prononcé de tels vœux!
HIPPOLYTE.
Eh quoi? tu m'aurais peut-être tué toi-même dans ton courroux.
THÉSÉE.
Oui, les Dieux avaient égaré ma raison.
HIPPOLYTE.
Hélas! la race humaine est donc sous la malédiction des Dieux.
DIANE.
Calme-toi, car la colère de Vénus offensée, quoi qu'elle fasse, ne peut plus t'atteindre au sein des té[101]nèbres souterraines; ta piété et tes sentiments vertueux te protègent. Je te vengerai sur elle de ma propre main, [*Hipp*. 1420] en frappant de cet arc infaillible le mortel qu'elle chérira le plus. Mais toi, infortuné, pour les peines que tu souffres, je t'accorderai les plus grands honneurs dans la ville de Trézène. Dans les siècles à venir, les jeunes filles avant leurs noces couperont leur chevelure en ton honneur, te vouant leur deuil profond et leurs larmes. L'accord mélodieux de voix virginales te célébrera toujours, et l'amour mémorable de Phèdre pour toi ne tombera jamais dans l'oubli. [*Hipp*. 1430] Mais toi, fils du *{165}* vieillard Égée, prends ton fils dans tes bras, et serre-le contre ton cœur: car tu l'as perdu involontairement; il est naturel que les hommes pèchent quand les Dieux les induisent en erreur. Et toi, Hippolyte, je t'exhorte à ne point détester ton père; car c'est ta destinée qui t'a fait périr. Reçois mon dernier salut. Il ne m'est pas permis de voir les morts, ni de souiller mon regard par des exhalaisons mortelles; et déjà je te vois approcher du moment fatal.
HIPPOLYTE.
Salut à toi aussi, vierge bienheureuse, [*Hipp*. 1440] et puisses-tu quitter sans peine notre longue intimité! Je fais ma paix avec mon père, puisque tu le veux; car de tout temps j'ai obéi à tes paroles. (*Diane s'éloigne*.) Ah! ah! déjà les

ténèbres se répandent sur mes yeux. Prends-moi dans tes bras, mon père, et soutiens mes membres brisés.
THÉSÉE.
Hélas, mon enfant! quelle douleur tu me prépares!
[102] HIPPOLYTE.
C'en est fait de moi; je vois les portes de l'enfer.
THÉSÉE.
Et tu laisses mon âme chargée d'un crime?
HIPPOLYTE.
Non assurément, puisque je t'acquitte de ce meurtre.
THÉSÉE.
Que dis-tu? tu me décharges du sang versé? [*Hipp*. 1450]
HIPPOLYTE.
J'en atteste Diane et son arc invincible.
{166} THÉSÉE.
Enfant chéri, que tu te montres généreux envers ton père!
HIPPOLYTE.
Adieu donc, mon père! mille fois adieu!
THÉSÉE.
Ah, que ton âme est bonne et pieuse!
HIPPOLYTE.
Prie les Dieux de t'accorder des fils tels que moi.
THÉSÉE.
Ne m'abandonne pas, mon enfant, fais encore quelque effort.
[103] HIPPOLYTE.
Tous mes efforts sont finis; je me meurs, mon père. Voile à l'instant mon visage de ton manteau. (*Il meurt*.)
THÉSÉE.
O Athènes, illustre contrée de Pallas, de quel homme es-tu privée! Infortuné que je suis! [*Hipp*. 1460] ô Vénus, je me ressouviendrai éternellement de tes coups!

(64) Telle est cette scène imparfaitement traduite et dépouillée du charme de la diction et de l'harmonie des vers. Je n'en connais point de plus touchante dans aucune tragédie ancienne ou moderne: tout y paraît simple et naturel; cependant l'art des contrastes y est admirablement employé. Nous voyons la majesté immortelle auprès de la *{167}* jeunesse expirante, les déchirements du repentir auprès des émotions d'une âme pure. Diane montre pour les maux des

humains toute la pitié qui est compatible avec son essence divine; mais il y a néanmoins dans ses paroles je ne sais quelle empreinte d'une sérénité céleste. À l'approche de la déesse tutélaire les douleurs d'Hippolyte s'apaisent: il se meurt; mais il ne souffre plus. Elle sanctifie par sa présence la dernière heure de son favori[40], et son départ annonce solennellement ce moment mysté[104]rieux qui nous attend tous, et dont personne ne sait se former une idée. Le jeune héros, en quittant une si belle vie, n'en regrette pas les jouissances terrestres: c'est le culte de Diane qui était son plus cher partage; c'est pour son père qu'il s'afflige. Quelle douceur, quelle noblesse, quelle piété filiale dans tout ce qu'il dit à Thésée! Il faudra bien convenir ici que les anciens ont quelquefois deviné les sentiments chrétiens; c'est-à-dire, ce qu'il y a de plus aimant, de plus pur et de plus sublime dans l'âme. Enfin, et c'est l'essentiel pour l'impression totale que produit cette tragédie, la dure fatalité est adoucie autant qu'il était possible. Hippolyte mourant est entouré de toutes les consolations imaginables: son père, repentant et désespéré, lui montre une tendresse sans bornes; une déesse le soulage, le plaint et lui promet les honneurs immortels d'un héros; image aussi vivante de la félicité éternelle obtenue en échange d'une existence passagère, que la religion des anciens pouvait l'admettre.

(65)*{168}* Qu'est-ce que Racine a mis à là place de tant de beautés? Rien, absolument rien. Dans sa pièce, Hippolyte meurt sans savoir si son innocence sera jamais reconnue, sans revoir même [105] Aricie, et plein d'inquiétude sur le sort de son amante. Phèdre, en mourant, lui fait réparation d'honneur; Thésée se repent de son injustice: mais tout cela est tardif, et en outre faiblement énoncé. Il est vrai, le poète ne nous rend pas témoins des souffrances d'Hippolyte et de sa mort, qui n'est mise qu'en récit; il nous affecte donc beaucoup moins fortement: mais le fond de la chose, c'est-à-dire l'affreux sort de l'innocence, reste le même. Les anciens avaient peut-être des nerfs moins délicats que nous, mais certainement une sensibilité plus vraie et plus naturelle: ils voulaient bien, dans les ouvrages de l'art, se livrer à la pénible sympathie pour la douleur physique, pourvu qu'il il eût une compensation morale. Je crains que les modernes qui ont traité les sujets tragiques tirés de l'antiquité, ne les aient rendus souvent plus choquants et plus atroces dans le fond, en même temps qu'ils en affaiblissaient l'effet et polissaient la surface.

(66) Sans doute Racine, par égard pour les convenances théâtrales exigées de son temps, n'a pas osé introduire sur la scène un homme mourant de ses blessures; ce que pourtant, [106] après lui, d'autres poètes français se sont permis: beaucoup moins a-t-il osé faire paraître une déesse, de peur qu'un tel miracle visible ne devînt ridicule. Cela prouve *{169}* seulement quel désavantage il y a pour le poète à tirer son sujet d'un monde merveilleux, dont les fictions ont perdu leur vie et leur réalité pour les spectateurs actuels, à moins qu'ils ne veuillent l'y suivre de bonne volonté et avec une imagination docile. Dira-t-on, pour justifier Racine, qu'Hippolyte, dans toute la pièce, n'inspire qu'un intérêt médiocre, que tout est absorbé par l'intérêt pour Phèdre, et que la mort de celle-ci est la véritable catastrophe? Je ne crois pas que le sujet ait gagné à être retourné ainsi; mais, en tout cas, l'ayant pris dans ce sens, le pompeux récit de Théramène n'est plus qu'un hors-

d'œuvre: au lieu de renchérir sur la mort horrible d'Hippolyte, il fallait en affaiblir l'impression; il valait peut-être mieux laisser son sort dans le vague. C'est trop peu dire, il n'y avait aucune nécessité de le faire mourir. Phèdre pouvait se tuer, persuadée que la malédiction de Thésée pousserait Hippolyte à sa perte: Thésée pouvait être éclairé à temps sur l'innocence de [107] son fils; il pouvait révoquer ses vœux adressés à Neptune. Hippolyte pouvait revenir sur la scène, s'étant vu sauvé au moment où il croyait périr; il pouvait se réconcilier avec son père après la mort de la femme coupable. Aricie pouvait être unie à son amant, et on aurait vu l'amour vertueux récompensé, tandis que l'amour criminel eût été puni. Si la beauté principale de la pièce consiste dans le rôle de Phèdre, comme on en convient, cela n'aurait pu lui nuire aucunement. Après toutes les émotions causées *{170}* par sa passion, le dénoûment aurait été plus satisfaisant, les impressions en général plus harmonieuses, et le but moral de l'auteur mieux rempli. Les anciens se sont permis des déviations de la mythologie établie, tout aussi grandes; et les droits d'un poète moderne, à cet égard, sont encore plus étendus, parce que les traditions de la fable ne sont plus des articles de foi.

(67) Je termine ici ma comparaison des deux pièces, et je laisse au lecteur à juger si l'assertion de M. de Laharpe[N] est fondée, que *Racine a partout substitué les plus grandes beautés aux plus grands défauts*. Quels que soient les [108] arguments que l'on veuille opposer au résultat de mon examen, je souhaite qu'il puisse mener à des pensées, fécondes pour l'art dramatique, sur le différent esprit de la tragédie grecque et de la tragédie française.

COMPARISON
between Racine's *Phaedra* and that of Euripides[1]

(1) RACINE is the most prized of poets among the French, and *Phaedra* among those of his plays that are most admired. All enjoy the play tremendously, and easily come to persuade themselves[2], without so much as comparing it to others, that the object of their predilection is without equal. French readers in particular have a tendency to focus on the details of diction, prosody and meter; and so they merely pay heed to the purple patches, in dealing with works they should be seeking to grasp and judge in their entirety. Drawing a parallel with a play written on the same subject in another language will therefore prove useful, in that it offers us an entirely different vantage point. The qualities of style and meter[3] cannot be compared when you move from one language to another; the comparison, therefore, must revolve around the characters and their relationships, the art of plot construction, and the spirit generally underlying the works.

(2)*{88}* It is not necessary to perfectly master the poet's language in order to examine the latter aspects, to which I shall limit my examination. Thus, my reader can perfectly well pay heed to a foreigner's opinions on these matters, and counter my arguments with his own; but he cannot dismiss them out of hand on the grounds that I am not up to the task at hand. And even if my opinion, in comparing the two Phaedras, has led me to feel compelled to give preference to Euripides' version, Racine's admirers should not be upset, since my judgment does not apply to the main object of their admiration: namely, the inimitable beauty of Racine's poetic and harmonious diction. I was all the less hesitant to publish the following reflections as two highly reputable scholars, Father Brumoi and the abbot Batteux (the former in his *Theater of the Greeks*, the latter in the *Memoirs of the Academy of Inscriptions*), examined the topic from a somewhat similar angle. Their comparison, however, is far less developed than mine. I thought I could add something new to their pointed remarks, [5] because theory in the realm of fine arts and poetry, along with the study of antiquity's creative genius, have both made great progress since the time when they were writing, and because my knowledge of other contemporary drama has led me to reflect at length on dramatic art. At any rate, I have sought to distinguish what constitutes the latter's essence from what is merely the result of the established conventions, habits, and even prejudices of such and such a century or such and such a nation — all of which constrain and modify it in countless ways.

(3) In all the discrete literatures that exist, one finds works which, though they are called by the same name and supposedly belong to the same genre, are of so heterogeneous a nature, and are placed in such widely different spheres, that any effort to compare their essential qualities would be vain. There is no danger of this happening in the present essay — if, that is, the common opinion on the matter is well-founded. For the French *literati* generally claim that their

theater – tragedy in particular – obeys the same principles as the ancient Greeks', and that theirs is the latter's successor, as it were, though in a far more perfected form. French dramatists, however, were [6] gradually brought into this competition, at first almost inadvertently. Corneille barely had any sense of the brilliance of Greek theater, and did not seek to imitate it. He was mainly looking to Spanish models, especially at the beginning of his career[4] – a drama that is as alien to Greek theater as can be. In the end, when he realized that Aristotle's *Poetics* had acquired unconditional authority (as did all[5] of his other works), he began to retroactively prove that his plays followed the Aristotelian principles, and succeeded in his endeavor to some extent, through forced interpretations. Even if he had succeeded perfectly well, it still would not be proof of any *{90}* resemblance between Greek tragedy and his own works, whose true creative genius entirely eluded Aristotle — if, that is, the latter can truly be considered to be the author of this poetic treatise, whose text is very corrupt, and which only amounts to a fragment of a poorly selected excerpt of the original work. Racine knew Greek poetry well, and often benefited from this knowledge; yet in general he chose to follow the established practice of his time with regard to theater. He did choose to introduce a chorus in his last two plays[N], but this was as a result of a particular circumstance that led him to do so [7], rather than the fruit of any desire to align himself with the rules of Greek drama. Voltaire was the first, despite his very mediocre knowledge of the ancients, to try and offer a theory of ancient tragedy. He expounds at length in his prefaces on how to become more similar to them and thus reform French drama. In writing his *Merope*, he sought to recreate a lost Greek tragedy, so to speak. It would be a worthwhile endeavor to show that, despite all this, nothing is more different from, and more diametrically antithetical to Greek tragedy, than French tragedy. This stance could easily be defended, if we examine things in depth and do not allow ourselves to be misled by purely superficial correspondences that are the result of chance.

(4) Be that as it may, it is not erroneous to compare a play written by a French playwright and one written by a Greek, when the former himself recognizes the latter as his *{91} model*, and confesses to having drawn most of the beauty in his work from it, thereby conceding that he set out merely to adapt a work which he admired to his time and to the tastes of his country. If this obligation were what led him to spoil and cheapen the original [8] play, he would still be excusable to a certain extent, for he may have done so against his own convictions. A poet, and especially a dramatist, is always altered by his audience. No great mind can ever entirely escape the influence of those around him; but in general we judge a poet's merits in conjunction with those of his language, his country and his time; we ask not how his talent developed, but what became of it. Thus, if we keep in mind on the one hand that Euripides was his contemporaries' favorite poet[N]; and if we recognize, on the other — as one must, no doubt — that Racine was the most skillful and practiced poet in the art of French drama, and that his cultured mind harbored the most salient and refined characteristics of the era of Louis XIV, then our parallel between the

original and its imitation will inevitably also comprise an indirect judgment regarding the relative value of the age of Euripides and that of Racine. Whatever the result, however, let us carefully avoid drawing, any general conclusion regarding which of the two nations deserves to be granted preference when it comes to tragic literature, based solely on the examination of these two individual plays [9]. Racine is the most esteemed tragic poet *{92}* among all French playwrights; and he is perhaps the most perfect. Euripides was neither, relative to his rivals in the same career. I am well aware that most modern writers, especially French writers, grant him first place among Greek tragic playwrights. This opinion is based, I think, on Aristotle's statement that Euripides is the most tragic of all poets[N]. All this means is that he is the one who most rouses the feeling of pity in his audience, and portrays the most heart-rending[6] calamities, as well as the most universal (such was the case with *Trojan Women*); in no way does it mean that he is the most accomplished of all tragic poets. Even if Aristotle *had* meant to say this, we should not accept his authority without question. Aristophanes' unrelenting persecution of Euripides alone is sufficient[7] to persuade us that many of his contemporaries perceived the favor he found with the broader public to be a sign of the degradation of dramatic art. Plato suggested[N] that all dramatic poets should politely be driven out of his republic, *because*, he says, *they grant too much importance to the vagaries of passion and too little importance to the steadfastness of moral willpower, and because they make men effeminate when they show heroes lamenting excessively in the midst of* [10] *adversity*. Such a suggestion was mainly aimed at Euripides[N] and those poets who wrote in the same vein : for if such a reproach had been applied, say, to Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, it would have been entirely unwarranted. We have lost a great many tragic Greek poets, of perhaps equal, or close to equal, elegance *{93}* to the only three poets of whom we have a handful of works; yet we are able, via the latter, to clearly distinguish the main stages in the evolution of the art of tragedy, from its origin to its fall. Aeschylus' style is grand, severe and often harsh; Sophocles' style is perfectly proportioned and harmonious; finally, Euripides' style is brilliant, but his excessive facility causes him to be undisciplined: he often is reduced to a highly affected style.[8] I do not mean « style » in the rhetorical sense here; rather, I use the term in the same way one uses it regarding the art of drawing. Because no accidental circumstance in Greece ever interrupted or altered the development of the fine arts, one can distinguish in the latter's regular progression forward the greatest analogies with the progression of dramatic art. Aeschylus is the Phidias of tragic art, Sophocles, the Polyclitus. And that phase in which sculpture [11] began moving away from its original aim and lapsing into a picturesque style which was more intent on capturing all the nuances of movement and life, than on raising its forms to a beautiful ideal (a phase which appears to have begun with Lysippus) – that phase corresponds with Euripides' poetry. In the latter, traits that are characteristic of Greek tragedy already are beginning to disappear; it is, in the end, decline, not perfection. Euripides is a highly uneven author, both from one play to the next and in the different parts of one given play: sometimes his writing is

enchantingly beautiful; other times, he writes, as it were, in a vulgar vein. *{94}* I will concede, however, that *Hippolytus* is one of the best plays of his among those that have reached us.

(5) The subject of both <Racine's and Euripides'> tragedies is the incestuous love of Phaedra for her stepson, Hippolytus, and its catastrophic consequences. Any form of passionate love can become tragic, provided it is overwhelming enough and fostered by a magnanimous soul: we all know a sublime tragedy, Sophocles' *Ajax*, whose driving force is shame alone. Yet the tragic poets of the first two phases seem to have entirely excluded love from their works[N], or, at best, to have included it as a secondary matter, and only occasionally. The reason for this is obvious: tragedy, in being mainly concerned with bringing out the dignity in human nature[N], could hardly deal with love, which involves those senses which mankind shares with animals. The men of antiquity were candid in all matters, and concealed this animalistic component of love far less than modern nations, who developed a more respectful veneration of women, as a combined result of chivalry and Northern *mores* in general, and who sought, in their rapt devotion to sentiment, either to tame the senses, or to purify them, through some mysterious blending of the two. Therefore love, now romanticized, can, and indeed must, play a far greater role in our own solemn and melancholy works, than it did in the ancients' works, where passion is depicted with purely natural characteristics, as are created by the South. Decorous *{95}* as it may be, however, love merely provides a subject for an idyll, as long as it is innocent and untroubled. In order to reach tragic grandeur, it must appear to have been caused by some irresistible stroke of fate, and thus be steered away from its common course; it must be faced with great phy[13]sical and moral obstacles, and provoke fatal consequences. All of these elements are combined in Phaedra's passion for Hippolytus. Imagine a people whose laws would allow a stepmother to marry her stepson; as a result, the subject matter is no longer tragic. Let us separate off the stepmother's preference for a young man over his father, a preference that, the moment it no longer inspires horror, is well on its way to becoming a laughing matter. Divest this preference further of any context wherein natural laws and the bonds of duty are offended. If you then imagine a middle-aged man courting a woman without success, while she in turn fails in her attempts to seduce his son: the situation becomes flat out comical.

(6) For our tragedy to be effective and preserve its dignity, therefore, it is of the utmost importance that the criminal nature of Phaedra's passion be heavily emphasized, and that the horror inspired by incest[N] always be kept at the fore of the spectator's mind. Moral rectitude and poetic necessity overlap in this respect. Presently, we will see which of the two poets was most able to meet both of these requirements.

(7) The title of Euripides' tragedy is *Hip*[14]*polytus* (the epithet *stephanephoros*, "who wears*{96}* a crown of flowers," was only added in order to distinguish the play from another by the same name[N]), and the entire work is, in fact, devoted to celebrating the young hero's virtue[N], and to move the audience as they witness his misfortune, while Phaedra merely serves as a

catalyst of the latter. She is dead by the middle of the play, and yet the viewer's interest is by no means lessened as a result; in fact, the most *pathos*-laden scenes come later. Racine's play, on the other hand, was entitled *Phaedra and Hippolytus* in the first editions. The latter name was subsequently dropped, and with good reason, given that Hippolytus, and every element that pertains to him in the play, is washed out and colorless, while the poet at the same time used every last bow in his quiver to endow his heroine with charming and attractive qualities, despite the monstrous nature of her passion.

(8) Euripides treats everything in large blocks; thus, there are no insignificant incidents which scatter the spectator's attention and impede his ability to have an overall view of the relationships in his play. Phaedra's character is portrayed with the utmost simplicity: she only comes on stage once, and remains there until [15] she withdraws into the palace to kill herself. She does not speak to Hippolytus, who does not talk to her either, even when they are in each other's presence[N]. She does not see Theseus, who returns home only after she has died; and most importantly, she does not interfere in matters of state. Every one of her confessions is kept between her nurse, herself, and — in keeping with the ancient Greek convention — the chorus of *{97}* young women of Troezen. Such behavior is appropriate for someone of her status; one might even add that it complies with the strictest rules of modesty. Phaedra must flee the gaze of men; only to women's compassionate souls can she pour out her fatally wounded heart. Once she has given away her grievous secret, and above all once Hippolytus has been informed of it, if she still is capable of picking herself up in order to take action in a self-possessed manner, contriving new plans and working out new schemes, then clearly she was not at the end of her tether when she gave in, and her only excuse is gone.

(9) Euripides' Phaedra appears near death from the onset: she is carried about on a daybed, surrounded by the women who attend to her, preceded by her nurse, whose complaints concerning life's miseries, elicited by her old age, establish a moving contrast with [16] the groans of her young mistress as she languishes in pain, having fallen prey to a torment uniquely her own. It is difficult to give those who do not know Greek an adequate sense of the beauty of this passage: it is written in the meter[N] which, in Greek tragedy, comes between dialogue and lyric (that is, sung) passages. Especially during those moments when Phaedra lets her imagination run wild, her broken inflections exude a langorous voluptuousness, even as they foreshadow the fatal shudder soon to chill the wretched victim's limbs. Responding to the chorus's entreaties, the nurse goes to every length to extract a confession from Phae*{98}*dra as to the secret cause behind her malady. She succeeds in doing so through her pathetic entreaties, and leaves the stage in a state of desperation, seemingly unwilling to survive the revelation. Phaedra remains alone with the chorus[N] and talks to its members, in an attempt to defend herself. Her speech is filled with modesty and nobility. Its only fault lies in what constitutes Euripides' usual weakness: its tone is excessively moralizing. The nurse then returns[N]. She has changed her mind, and resorts to every

possible source of solace and excuse to be found in the frailty of human nature. But Phaedra invariably rejects [17] them. Eventually, the nurse leaves the stage, alleging that she knows some magical means of curing her mistress's passion. The latter expressly enjoins her not to speak a word of her confession to Hippolytus. Following an exquisite choral passage concerning the destructive power of love, Phaedra overhears a quarrel rising up within the palace, between Hippolytus and her nurse. She immediately guesses what the quarrel is about, and deems herself ruined. Shortly thereafter, Hippolytus arrives on stage in a state of utter outrage, followed by the nurse. He passes close by Phaedra, who is still lying on her daybed[N], without speaking to her or even seeming to notice her. He calls upon sky and earth to witness the horrors he has just heard. He pushes the nurse away when she supplicates him, reminding him of the oath he took to keep silent. He launches into a bitter invective against all women. Finally, he departs so as to quit a dwelling where he can no longer remain without feeling himself to be polluted. He will only return with his father. Phaedra does not hesitate *{99}* one single moment as to what decision she must make. She heaps curses upon her nurse and rejects the latter's admonishments when she tries to persuade her mistress that her malady is not incurable. Having sworn the chorus to secrecy, she exits the stage, announcing the plan of action she has devised in order to save her honor, and, most importantly, that of her children, which hinges on her own, and in order to exact revenge for Hippolytus' scorn.

(10) In Racine's play, the first scene in which Phaedra appears is entirely based on the Greek original; it is, so to speak, a mere excerpt, a summary which, if considered on its own, is still supremely beautiful, but which seems cold and inadequate when compared with the original. Phaedra's complaints, the signs of her listlessness, the wanderings of her imagination, her reluctance to uncover her passion to anyone — each of these is far more developed in Euripides' play. Racine owes him his most widely appreciated lines; even the changes he makes to the Euripidean original are not always felicitious. In the following lines,

> Ah, how these cumbrous gauds,
> These veils oppress me! What officious hand
> Has tied these knots, and gather'd o'er my brow
> These clustering coils? [*Ph.* I.iii, 158-160]

he implies that Phaedra has adorned herself, ostensibly with the intention of meeting Hippolytus. The Greek Phaedra is too ill for that: she merely asks that her hair band be removed, because everything is a source of pain [*Hipp*. 201-202]. These lines :

> *{100}* O Sun! ... Would I were seated in the forest's shade!
> When may I follow with delighted eye,
> Thro' glorious dust flying in full career,
> A chariot— [*Ph*. I.iii, 176-78]

are an abridged version of several Euripidean strophes [*Hipp*. 208-31], wherein Phaedra expresses the desire, now to draw water from a source gushing forth from a rock, now to make the wild mountainside come alive with the tumult of the chase, now to drive young steeds around the race-course. The following line was preserved from the original in an entirely unsuitable manner:

> O fatal animosity of Venus!
> Into what wild distractions did she cast
> My mother! [*Ph*. I.iii, 250]

Through force of habit, the ancient Greeks had become somewhat inured to the more extravagant elements of their myths; and any reference to traditional religious practices was thus devoid of any potential to shock. Modern spectators, however, either miss the allusion altogether, or, if they do understand it, are bound to be excessively shocked. In fact, Racine strives to steer as clear as possible from the idea that Phaedra's passion is an incestuous one; yet the comparison with Pasiphae's shameful love affair likens Phaedra's [20] to all that is most aberrant.

(11) The false news of Theseus' death[N], with which Panope interrupts the exchange between Phaedra and Oenone, is the principal new incident which Racine introduces in the plot and which constitutes its *crux*. I will later show how it casts Theseus in a negative light; but the incident also brings about serious disadvantages for the other characters as well. It is an awkward affair to be seen delighting in the death of someone very close — someone whose death both common morality and public opinion expect one to mourn; one can scarce avoid being taxed with either coldheartedness or duplicity. One who is supremely content to have inherited from a rich relative, but feigns to be distraught by their death, offers great comic potential. In fact, Phaedra's mourning of her husband does not last long; it is reduced to one single word: *Gods!* Immediately, Oenone has the impudence to describe to her mistress what a felicitious happening this accident is in terms of her potential liaison with Hippolytus:

> Live, your guilt is gone... [*Ph*. I.v, 349]

And yet I believe all noble [21] minds feel remorse when someone they were closely tied to, with sacred bonds, and whom they had done harm to, passes away, because at that point the harm done is irreparable.

> No blame attaches to your passion now. [*Ph*. I.v, 350]

No blame! The better for Phaedra if that were true, and a thousand times the worse for the poet. But what the basis of Oenone's logic is, I know not:

> The King's decease has freed you from the bonds
> That made the crime and horror of your love. [*Ph*. I.v, 351-52]

What was incestuous once remains incestuous at that point, without a doubt. But if Phaedra's passion was not actual incest, then it was just a vulgar sort of perversion, unworthy of being attributed to heavenly wrath, and even less worthy[9] of being chosen as the subject of a tragedy. Be that as it may, Phaedra *{102}* is pleased to hear Oenone's words, and agrees to speak with

Hippolytus, under the false pretense of discussing her son, but with far more blameworthy motives in the back of her mind.

(12) Phaedra's second appearance on stage — the scene in which [22] she declares her love to Hippolytus — is much admired. There is no question that the heroine's utterances are very eloquent, but such an eloquence must not leave us blind to their impropriety and the utter lack of scruples underlying them. Any woman who considers remarrying the moment her husband dies is held to be rather shameless; and a woman who is first to declare her love to a young man puts herself in a position that is hardly suitable to her sex. What, then, of a woman who has been married to a semi-divine spouse, and who, the moment she hears of his death, rushes to seduce his virtuous son, dashing the latter's hopes that his father might still be alive and diminishing the hero's posthumous glory[*]) in his son's eyes, while pretending to be merely extending to the son the conjugal tenderness she felt for her husband because the son looks like his father? The dead husband's phantom, given that she has undertaken to dishonor him by both adultery and incest, should pursue her like an avenging fury![**]) Never mind that she first puts forward as a pretext an apprehensive concern for her son, and that she skillfully devises ingenious, and even [23] heartwarming turns of phrase, to *{103}* express her feelings in a way that seems pure and also leaves her room to back out, should her advances be rejected! Because she is graceful, eloquent and adroit, is her boldness any less shameless? Can one truly consider exonerating her of all this, because her passion is so intense? A heroine's passion, even in its wildest form, must still show some sign of the natural nobility of her soul — a soul that simply cannot contemplate certain actions — unless, that is, the poet intends to present us with a degraded image of the human race[N], which clearly is not the case, since he makes every effort to render Phaedra as attractive as possible. If poetry is the art of concealing vice, then I admit this scene deserves the highest praise, for most of its readers will not perceive, beneath the veneer of the phrasing and the elegance of each line, something that would have utterly shocked them, had it not been thus camouflaged.

(13) There is no doubt that characters of a passionate nature have the upper hand in poetic works. The keen interest they rouse is, in some respects, a sort of moral sentiment. Passion's frenzy has all the hallmarks of virtue at its most exalted, in that it leaves its victim unable to think in terms of his or her own interests, and leads him or her to brave all dangers and surrender all advantages. Whomever passion causes to stray and hurt others in the process is forgiven, as long as they do not seek to shield themselves from harm. Hence it is the particular moment chosen by Phaedra, the self-possession she exhibits, the caution she uses so as not to discredit herself — in a word, it is not Phaedra's excess of passion, but *{104}* her lack thereof, that I find reprehensible in

[*]) M. de Laharpe refers to this as a *clever trick*.[N]

[**]) *The dead man's spouse declares her love to the dead man's son.* Such is the striking expression used by the abbot Batteux.[N]

the first part of her declaration of love. She only really touches us in her last utterance, when she ceases from any form of artifice.

> Ah! cruel Prince, too well
> You understood me. I have said enough
> To save you from mistake. I love, etc. [*Ph*. II.v, 670-73]

For at this point, Phaedra brings about her own ruin, when she pours forth the love she no longer has the power to repress, and which permeates her entire being, like a new soul that has subdued her own.

(14) I shall not dwell on the details of this scene: there is but one comment I will make, regarding the following lines, which are widely held to be extraordinarily beautiful:

> He who has seen the mansions of the dead
> Returns not thence. Since to those gloomy shores
> Theseus is gone, 'tis vain to hope that Heav'n
> May send him back. Prince, there is no release
> From Acheron's greedy maw. [*Ph*. II.v, 623-26]

So much pomp, lavished on a tautology! For these lines say nothing more than that, *if*[10] *Theseus is dead, then he is no longer alive*. Hippolytus is the one to have heard the news of his father's death from the ships that brought it to him; Phaedra meanwhile has received no confirmation of the fact. No doubt indeed that, if Theseus has died, he will not return; but the question lies, precisely, in whether or not this account is verifiable. It is clear that it is Phaedra's supreme desire both that her husband be known to be dead and that his son be convinced of it, which is why she resorts to meaningless words here. *{105}* Subsequently, the poet, through his use of mythological references, begins a strange sequence of inconsequential tidbits.

> He who has seen the mansions of the dead
> Returns not thence. [*Ph*. II.v, 623]

Yet Hercules did see them, while he was alive, as did Theseus, who thus emulated his comrade-in-arms. Phaedra herself says, a moment later[N]:

> Ah, yes, for Theseus
> I languish and I long, not as the Shades
> Have seen him, of a thousand different forms
> The fickle lover, and of Pluto's bride
> The would-be ravisher... [*Ph*. II.v, 635-37]

[26] So Theseus himself provides an example of the fact that it is possible to see the mansions of the dead twice, and that greedy Acheron does release its catch. Must we be led to believe that her hope that her husband is truly dead leads Phaedra to forget that he once before returned from the world of shadows, and that her desire to belittle his achievements then leads her to pay no heed to the fact that she is here disproving her previous statement?

(15) Racine's Phaedra is not put off by the first hostile response she receives; she tries again. At the beginning of the third act, we see her sending Oenone to Hippolytus and recommending most of all[11] that she tempt him with the lure of being king of Athens. A merely physical sort of passion may be indifferent to the means used to secure the possession of the object of its ardor; but Phaedra has shown some admiration of Hippolytus' character, and therefore should only be content if he genuinely requites her love. Moreover, she hardly shows any sort of tenderness toward her son, whom she claims to care for so much: *{106}* she not only forces him to take his brother as a stepfather, tutor and regent, but also wants to grant royal power to Hippolytus. A scrupulous mind would prefer to be seen as [27] blameworthy than to act duplicitously, as she does, in using a feeling she should consider sacred as a pretext for her actions. Oenone returns, and announces that Theseus has come back. Phaedra's first utterances remain relatively dignified — they are, in fact, mostly based on Euripides' play, and her speech concerning the honor of her children is practically a translation of the latter. But instead of the following lines,

> Death only can remove
> This weight of horror. Is it such misfortune
> To cease to live? Death causes no alarm
> To misery. [*Ph*. III.iii, 857-59]

the first word, on its own, would have been preferable. All the rest is superfluous. By exhorting herself to commit suicide with such universally applicable considerations, Phaedra belies how little resolve she has to go through with it. When Oenone subsequently asks Phaedra, in an effort to get her to accuse Hippolytus before he accuses her,

> How look you now on this contemptuous prince? [*Ph*. III.iii, 883]

Phaedra answers,

> As on a monster frightful to mine eyes. [*Ph*. III.iii, 884]

A moment earlier, she had expressed the most humble tenderness, with complete abandon, when she told Oenone,

> Urge him with groans and tears; show Phaedra dying.
> Nor blush to use the voice of supplication...
> I'll sanction all you say. [*Ph*. III.i, 809-11]

What has Hippolytus done in the interim to deserve *{107}* such hatred? Is it his fault if Theseus is still alive? True, there is a possibility he might show some lack of discretion, but he has given no sign of any intention of doing so; on the contrary, he showed great restraint in the scene where Phaedra declared her love to him. Hence one must assume that she loathes Hippolytus because at this particular moment, she considers him responsible for her passion — and the horror of her passion has struck her far more powerfully since she has heard that Theseus is alive, and has returned. Yet this unprovoked disavowal of her feelings suggests that fear has tremendous power

over Phaedra's soul. It would have been more noble for her to respond: "I adore him no less, though he has the power to cast me into a state of shame and despair." Is it not clear that Phaedra has struggled against her passion for a time only because it was dangerous, and not because it was disgraceful, and that she gave in to it as soon as she was led to believe that she could do so without any risk? Racine himself, who must have been in a position to read his heroine's mind, concedes in his preface that "she never would have dared to declare her love to him, as long as she [29] believed her husband to be alive." Her words to him when he arrives,

> Stay, Theseus!
> Do not profane endearments that were once
> So sweet, but which I am unworthy now
> To taste. You have been wrong'd. Fortune has proved
> Spiteful, nor in your absence spared your wife.
> I am unfit to meet your fond caress,
> How I may bear my shame my only care
> Henceforth. [*Ph*. III.iv, 914-20]

{108} these craftily elaborated, equivocal words, through which Phaedra seems to be laying the blame on herself, even as she is dreaming up the defaming words of Oenone as a means of libeling Hippolytus, show her to be a conniving woman, who is making a compromise of sorts with her conscious awareness of the disgrace that is upon her.

(16) The jealousy scene [*Ph*. IV.vi] is generally considered to be the climax of Phaedra's role. There is no question that the scene provokes intense emotion: on seeing someone exposed to such severe suffering as Phaedra, who loses her mind as a result of it, one forgets what may have caused us to feel hostility towards her character. Every detail is superbly crafted: the delirious heroine voices her lamentations with ardor and truly poetic eloquence. But let us not forget [30] at which cost this comes. The insipid character of Aricie had to be added; more importantly, it was necessary to make Hippolytus' character fall in love, a detail which is at variance with his character, and puts him in the ranks of the many wooers and suitors who form the bulk of the heroes of French tragedy. Among the most beautiful lines, an erroneous one has crept in. Regarding Hippolytus and Aricie, Phaedra asks:

> Did they seek the shades
> Of thickest woods? [*Ph*. IV.vi, 1236]

Was Racine — who too often evokes the French Court — trying to tinge this passage with Greek color? Did he not know what a secluded life Greek women led[N], and that they did not leave their women's quarters unless they were veiled and chaperoned? And yet here we are to believe that a young woman — a princess! — the virtuous Aricie, *{109}* was meeting her lover in places far from any habitation!

(17) Phaedra's death comes late in the play, without any display of meritorious courage or dignity on her part; in fact, the humiliating treatment she endures is painful to see. As early as act I, she vows she wants to let herself die; but she is regenerated by the news of her husband's [31] death. In act II, she draws Hippolytus' sword in order to stab herself in the breast, but this is just histrionics. In act III, she tells Oenone: "Let me die!" — and does no such thing. In act IV, she is back on stage, asking Hippolytus for forgiveness; she then recants when she hears of his love for Aricie, and, after erupting with fierce jealousy, she tells Oenone:

> Go, hateful monster;
> Away, and leave me to my piteous fate. [*Ph*. IV.vi, 1318]

At this point, she does take poison, but the poison is so slow that we don't hear of its effect until the end of act V. The laws of tragedy require that blameworthy characters be made interesting to the audience by granting them strength of character, so that weakness and constant ambivalence should not to lead them to be overwhelmed by the situations their own frenzied passion drew them into. For what could be worse than to be bold in committing an offense, but cowardly when facing the consequences? The following line by Dryden well describes Phaedra's repentance:

> "Repentance is the virtue of weak souls."[N]

[32]{*110*} Unable to decide between revenge and justice, she always makes the wrong decision. She does not have the courage to accuse Hippolytus to his face; but she does allow Oenone to do so. When Theseus is so angered he does not want to listen, she feels remorseful, seeks him out and defends his son — albeit rather feebly. But as soon as Theseus breathes a word to her about Hippolytus' love for Aricie, she aspires only to revenge. When, at last, she takes the poison, she repents once more, without having any new reason for doing so[N]. And when it is too late to save Hippolytus, she returns to destroy her reputation and that of her children — a reputation whose preservation she claimed was part of the reason she agreed to the plot hatched against him.

(18) Euripides' Phaedra, before killing herself, writes a letter in which she accuses Hippolytus of having coerced and dishonored her. She had to push her accusation that far: if his attempt had been averted, she would no longer have had a reason to commit suicide. She nonetheless believes that her honor is untouched, because honor, at its core, lies in one's ability to always maintain one's resolve unspoiled. Racine is proud to have restricted Phaedra's accusation against Hip[33]polytus to a mere intention of evil. "I wanted to spare Theseus an embarrassment which would have made him less likeable to the audience," he says. I doubt that Theseus' mistake, when he believes his wife to have been dishonored, could diminish his respectability in the French audience's eyes. But the situation is very different in the two tragedies. In Eu{*111*}ripides, we only hear of the false accusation once Phaedra is already dead; the letter which reveals it is found tied to her hand, and proves fatal for Hippolytus. This is a heinous deed, no doubt; but before the spectator hears of it, the guilty woman has already exacted justice by turning against herself. Her main motive for doing so is to save her honor and her children's

honor; and her character is forceful enough to will the means when she wills the end. Hippolytus' contempt for his stepmother is thus far greater in Euripides than it is in Racine, where every interaction among these royal folk is perfectly courteous. Euripides' Hippolytus shows immeasurable outrage when in Phaedra's presence; he treats her like the most despicable of creatures. Phaedra's resolve to commit suicide is fast as lightning; it is possible that, had there been more of a time lag before the accomplishment of the act, the initial intensity of her bitterness might have subsided, and she might have backed away from formulating her ruinous slander. But her deed gives us a sense of the depth of her despair, rather than of what she might have been capable of, in a less distressed a frame of mind.

(19) And yet, despite what I have just related, it is this very characteristic of the Greek Phaedra which Racine flatters himself to have used to make his Phaedra less detestable. In his preface, he writes: "I even took great care to make her a little less loathsome than she is in the ancients' tragedies, where she resolves on her own to accuse Hippolytus. *{112}* I thought the slander was too base and too dark to be put in the mouth of a princess who otherwise displays such noble and virtuous feelings. Such baseness seemed more appropriate for a nurse who could possess servile inclinations, and who nonetheless only undertakes the false accusation in order to save her mistress' life and honor. Phaedra only takes part in it all because her agitation has put her out of her mind; and a moment later, she returns, intending to [35] defend Hippolytus' innocence and to tell the truth." I will not dwell on the way Racine, in a prototypical courtier's fashion, turns base deeds — which can be necessary in tragedy — over to characters of an inferior rank; but had Racine forgotten, then, that commonplace precept of law and ethics, which states that whoever has something done by another, is considered to have done it himself? And does Phaedra not clearly say to Oenone,

> Do what you will; I trust
> My fate to you [*Ph*. III.iii, 911] ?

True — the initial plan to accuse Hippolytus comes from her confidante; but Phaedra's only resistance lies in this single line:

> What! Would you have me slander innocence? [*Ph*. III.iii, 893],

which refers merely to her reluctance to voice the accusation herself. What is more, can one forget to take into account the speech with which she welcomes Theseus home — one that is all the more appalling as it reveals even greater presence of mind on her part? Racine's Phaedra may be less directly implicated in the actual deeds than *{113}* is Euripides,' but what she does do must be judged entirely differently [36], because she is still far from the depths of despair. The worst[12] in this whole process is that she is clearly driven by fear, while the Greek Phaedra has nothing left to fear: for the latter drags Hippolytus into the abyss she threw herself into first.

(20) Another entirely detestable characteristic of Racine's Phaedra is the way she treats her confidante. Let me say in passing that Oenone's character is depicted in a thoroughly confusing

manner[N]; it is not in the least bit consistent. She listens to her mistress's first confession with horror. Moments later,[13] when the news of Theseus' death reaches them, nothing seems easier and simpler to her than bringing Phaedra and her stepson together. After Phaedra declares her love to Hippolytus, Oenone gives her very helpful advice, by exhorting her to revert to virtuous behavior; and yet as soon as she hears of Theseus' return, she spontaneously volunteers to make an accusation against Hippolytus, while at the same time admitting that she feels some remorse. Lastly, in the jealousy scene, the accumulation of obstacles is such that it would prevent Phaedra from satisfying her desire (if she still felt any): there is Hippolytus' love of Aricie; Hippolytus' initial revulsion towards his stepmother, which is further increased by the acrimony he feels for having been falsely accused; and Theseus' presence, and vigilance, prompted by the chaos he found when he returned to his family. At this point in time, despite the desperate nature of the situation, Oenone advises her mistress not to feel any distress *{114}* concerning her feelings, and to consider her love to be a human weakness that is most pardonable, and even legitimized by the example set by the gods. This speech, [*Ph*. IV.vi, 1295-1306] is culled from Euripides [*Hipp*. 437-476], but inserted in a strange context[N], and seems more absurd than threatening. After it, Phaedra heaps reproaches of the most violent sort on her nurse, and which are only somewhat deserved. "Dear Nurse," she says, at the beginning of the scene [*Ph*. IV.vi, 1214]; but now, though nothing has occurred since, she calls her a hateful monster. The nurse in the Greek tragedy is far more blameworthy; all the words aimed at seduction come from her, and she speaks to Hippolytus without her mistress' permission: and still the latter does not use any word as severe as Racine's does. "May you perish, you and all others who seek to do good to their friends against their will, to no good end!" [*Hipp*. 693-94] And then: "Stop talking [38] to me! For on another occasion you also gave me poor advice and undertook evil deeds. Go away! Out of my sight! Take care of yourself; as for me, I will deal with my own problems, honorably." [*Hipp*. 706-709] How much more moderate and noble this is than the French Phaedra's vituperations! Yet one may forgive the latter in the jealousy scene, because she is in a frenzy of despair. But the manner in which she lays the blame entirely on her confidante in her final avowal makes her irrefutably guilty. Oenone has already killed herself: it is cowardly to incriminate one who can no longer come to her own defense:

> *{115}* And vile Oenone's cunning did the rest. [*Ph*. V.vii, 1626]

This is not accurate, since Phaedra herself was the one who declared her passion to Hippolytus.

> She fear'd Hippolytus, knowing my madness,
> Would make that passion known which he regarded
> With horror; so advantage of my weakness
> She took, and hasten'd to accuse him first. [*Ph*. V.vii, 1627-30]

In this matter, Phaedra was, at the very least, her accomplice:

> For that she has been punish'd, tho' too mildly;
> Seeking to shun my wrath she cast herself
> Beneath the waves. [*Ph*. V.vii, 1631-32]

[39] "Tho' too mildly"! How ghastly to speak thus of one who took care of her in her childhood, and remained faithfully devoted to her throughout her life! Oenone only committed shameful deeds out of love for her mistress — a far more disinterested feeling than that of incestuous love!

(21) Let us now turn to Hippolytus. The most frequently voiced criticism leveled at the French play pertains to the changes made to his character. I am certain that Racine had absolutely no scruples in this regard. In his preface, he holds the fact that it is Phaedra's character who made Euripides' play successful to be self-evident. Did he not realize that the idealized beauty of the hero whose very name is the title of the tragedy, and this hero's poignant fate, lie at the play's very core, while Phaedra is but a necessary evil in this composition, so to speak? Racine's muse was the business of courting; he wrote most of his plays with the sole purpose of depicting women *{116}* who are attractive and above all of an amorous temperament, and the impressions these women make on men's hearts. What could he do with a young hero who [40] is not in love, who does not care for women at all, and who spurns his stepmother's advances, not because his heart is otherwise taken, but out of sheer scrupulousness? In this regard, Racine was complying with the precept formulated with such innocence by his rival Pradon, in the dedicatory epistle to the duchess of Bouillon preceding his *Phaedra*. "Let not the fact that Hippolytus may seem to you to be devoid of the proud aloofness and indifference which were so much a part of his nature be a surprise to you! Would he have maintained them when faced with your Highness's charms? Moreover, since the ancients portrayed him as he was in Troezen, we on the other hand shall show him to be the way he should have been, had he been in Paris. And whether the ancients like it or not, the young hero would have been most uncouth to enter into as genteel a court as ours with the rough edges of his Greek model." In other words, one has to distort the heroes of ancient poetry, because they are too rough to be depicted with their true colors[14] in so sophisticated and refined an era as his own. When, on reading Pradon's *Phaedra*, one but thinks of the enormous success the ludicrously insipid play was in its time — it was better liked than Racine's, and its success lasted too [41] long to have been the work of a cabal[N] — then there is no doubt that what was harmful to Racine among his contemporaries was that he had still retained too much of the *{117}* simplicity and boldness of antiquity in his own work. Pradon, who successfully downgraded to a petty little *boudoir* love affair a subject whose forcefulness and strange nature are quite alien to refined mannerisms, proved most popular, in that very era which has been so greatly praised for the purity of its taste and the loftiness of the thoughts it gave rise to.

(22) Though in an entirely different manner, Racine nonetheless also has given us, not the true Hippolytus, but a very well-mannered, very polite prince, who is always mindful of proprieties, full of honorable feelings, and respectfully enamored — but otherwise nondescript, and lacking both in vigor and originality. True, he does make Hippolytus and the other characters mention his crudeness, his wild temperament, his upbringing in the forest, his exclusive interest in hunting and martial exercises; but these are mere words, which never translate into any actions, and are discredited by his actual behavior. His manners and even his feelings are no different from those of other gallant princes found elsewhere in Racine's work.

(23) That is not all. Everything is re[42]lative when it comes to poetry: each section either enhances or eclipses the other. The contrast rule is well known: it applies to all the fine arts. The French poet, by deforming and taking the edge off of Hippolytus' character, thus destroyed the graceful contrast that existed between him and Phaedra. In order to properly bring out the madness that results from a sensual and illicit passion, he needed to oppose it to the coolheaded calm and the austere integrity of a virginal soul. *{118}* It is no great show of virtue for a man to spurn a woman's charms if he is in love with another. Racine's Hippolytus is not only in love; he is, moreover, in love with one whom his duty — a duty he respectfully observes — forbids him to love, just like the queen; for he knows he will not receive his father's blessing. Thus, Hippolytus, because of his passion, which is quite innocent in and of itself, is nonetheless relieved, just as much as Phaedra is, of a considerable impediment by the news of Theseus' supposed death. Both of them take advantage of the news: she seizes the opportunity to declare her love to him, and he to declare his to Aricie. All we need at this point is for the solemn Theseus to be also involved in an illicit love affair on his end, and it very nearly is the case. Theramenes suspects as much: but for this time [43] around, he merely assisted his friend in kidnapping a woman. These characters — who stand in for each other — these weak repetitions, that is, result in a dreary monotony. Creating a lack of contrast among the characters is the best way to drain the color out of each subject, and to eliminate any salient trait in them. It is true that our interest is not divided between these different subjects: Phaedra's passionate love, because of its ferocity, completely upstages the feelings of Hippolytus and Aricie for one another; but the latter two seem completely drab as a result.

(24) Euripides' Hippolytus, on the other hand, is so abundantly suffused with divine traits that, in order to perceive him in all his glory, one must be an initiate into the mysteries of beauty, as it were, and to have breathed the air of Greece. Think of the most perfect emblems of heroic youth which antiquity has passed on to us: the Dioscuri of Monte Cavallo, or the Meleager and Apollo in the Vatican. Hippolytus' character occupies roughly the same place in the world of poetry as these statues do in the world of sculpture. Winckelmann says[N] that, on seeing these sublime beings, *our soul takes on a superhuman dimension*, *our chests expand*, and that part of the highly powerful and harmonious lives these beings lead seem to transfer over to us. I feel [44]

something similar when I contemplate the figure of Hippolytus as depicted by Euripides. It is remarkable that many models of ideal beauty from antiquity were given a combination of traits belonging to both sexes, which the ancients fused together in an effort to create a more perfect image of human nature. Thus, Juno, Pallas, and Diana have a male sort of majesty and gravity, while Apollo, Mercury, and Bacchus, on the other hand, are endowed with some degree of female grace and gentleness. In the same way, we see in Hippolytus' heroic, chaste beauty a mirror image of his mother, the Amazon, and a reflection of Diana in a mortal man.

(25) When he first appears on stage, he is glowing with youth and vigor, enjoying an unbounded and plenteous life in total safety. He has just returned[15] from a hunt with his numerous companions, who follow his lead and join in a hymn to Diana, the most beautiful virgin to inhabit Olympus. He then approaches the goddess's statue, to present her with a braided crown as an offering, made with his own hands, from flowers selected from a sacred meadow, which neither iron nor *{120}* livestock ever desecrated, and where only the pure, that is, those who are virtuous by natural inclination, can pick flowers. "Beloved mistress, he says, pray accept[45], for your golden hair,[16] this fillet which a pious hand presents to you. I alone of mortals have this honor: to be your companion, and to enjoy conversation with you; for I hear your voice, though I cannot see you. May I end my life as I began it!" [*Hipp*. 82-87] He is so content that he has no other wish to voice than this one. Therein lies a stark contrast, of course, with the horrible catastrophe awaiting him. Racine's Hippolytus, on the other hand, is dispirited and unsettled from the very first scene on, because he dares not give in to his feelings for Aricie.

(26) Given that he is described as inaccessible to the allure of romantic love, one might think Euripides' Hippolytus strict and insensitive, had the poet not preempted such a criticism by beginning with the portrayal of his mysterious intimacy with the chaste goddess[N]. It is only because a purer, more noble form of ardor fills his soul, then, that worldly seductions have no power over him. A faithful servant urges him to also honor the statue of Venus, which is placed across from that of Diana. He refuses[17], thus scorning [46] a goddess whose cult seems contrary to virtue in his eyes, and goes back into the palace without acknowledging her. Therein lies the source of his misfortune — a source that is entirely in keeping with the ancients' conception of the human *{121}* condition. To them, nothing was more perilous for man than to place too much trust in one's own strength, to be carefree, and to revel in one's good fortune. Their gods were none other than the personified powers of the physical, intellectual, and moral worlds; whoever dared to neglect any of them, and did not recognize himself to be humbly subjected to each one's influence, therefore, was mistaken as to his true position in relation to them. Even if the gifts of the goddess of love to mortals and all living creatures did not have an impact on Hippolytus, he should nonetheless have shown some understanding towards those who do give in to their alluring charm. If he had shown any pity for Phaedra's condition while she was dying, and dispelled her fear of seeing her shame made public, while at the same time avoiding her and

making clear to her that there would be no chance of her ever winning him over, then maybe she would not have been driven by despair to level accusations against him and ruin him. And so divine intervention can almost always be explained away as a sequence of natural causes; but such an explanation should only [47] be resorted to in order to account for, not to destroy, the events of fiction.

(27) Moreover, after Venus' prologue, the hunting apparatus, the hymns of joy, and the offering to Diana constitute a lively and superb beginning to the play, entirely unlike the cold conversation between Hippolytus and Theramenes. I can already hear the objection some will level at me here: namely, that this scene bears semblance to an opera overture. If opera only differed from most conventional tragedies in that it makes the spectator see a number of things which *{122}* are only reported in the latter, it would deserve the highest praise for that very reason. I will not quote Horace's very famous lines[N], which support this opinion. Whatever forms the basis of a dramatic plot needs to be clearly[18] presented before the spectators' eyes. Since Hippolytus' exclusive ardor for Diana, his disdain for Venus, and the latter's disgruntlement are the reason for all that follows, the poet proved that he had perfectly grasped the workings of his art by making these discrete background elements manifest from the start, and by prominently featuring the two rival forces which clash over the hero's fate. Showing us the outcome of causal forces that are nowhere to be seen, and are only made known to us through reports which make no great impression on the spectator, betrays a complete lack of understanding of all the rules of dramatic composition. The audience is much more ready to follow the spoken report of an event which was prepared before its very eyes. I think it can be said that Greek poets almost always wrote with this precept in mind. But in French theater, often both the causes behind events and their outcome are only reported in speeches.

(28) I have already discussed the second scene in which Hippolytus comes on stage — the one where he returns after the nurse has come to him to serve as a go-between. No doubt the scene seems harsh to most modern readers, for in it Hippolytus does not hold back in the least in the way he speaks of Phaedra, who is both present on stage and in a state that might have roused his pity. The art of restraint and dissembling — which we as a society are so much in need of, in order to keep out of our sight the extent of the horror of universal corruption — was far less cultivated in the social life of the Greeks. They were frank in their interactions; there was no ceremonial barrier between them, nor any of the shared embarrassment which prevents men from seeing each other as they are. On top of that, Euripides wanted [49] to depict the sort of moral forcefulness that rejects vice with an entirely involuntary fervor. In Racine's play, Hippolytus and his stepmother follow etiquette to a fault: they dutifully pay each other visits. One does not progress so easily from this point to the expression of one's natural emotion. Thus Hippolytus, when he becomes aware of Phaedra's perverse passion for him, responds to her with politeness and reserve. But the mastery he immediately afterward[19] shows of his emotions when he finds

himself alone with his close friend Theramenes would be more appropriate for a mature man of the world than for an impassioned hero in his youth. In the Euripidean scene I have been discussing we find the following notorious line[N]: "My tongue swore, but my mind was not bound by oath" — a line for which Aristophanes mocked the poet to no end, and in which the narrow-mindedness of casuistry seems foreshadowed. Yet one can understand[20] that a passage taken out of context can easily be interpreted to have a vile meaning. It is certain that Euripides in his tragedy did not mean to undermine the authority of oaths, given that Hippolytus prefers to die rather than to break the one he swore. Rather, he was intent on showing that his hero is so utterly *{124}* horror-struck by what he has just heard that in his [50]initial reaction the oath he has sworn to keep silent no longer seems binding. At the end of the scene, he has already calmed down, and tells the nurse: "Be sure, woman, that it is my piety alone that saves you now; for if I were not bound by sacred oaths, nothing would have stopped me from revealing this to my father."

(29) In Euripides, Hippolytus comes before his father only after he has been accused by Phaedra; their exchange is a far more striking one as a result. [*Hipp*. 899-1101] Conversely, in Racine's play, he enters the stage with Theseus in the third act [*Ph*. III.iv-v], and stays by his father's side after the queen leaves them. He begins with inauspicious words in his defense, referring to himself as "the trembling Hippolytus" [*Ph*. III.v, 925]. Why is he trembling in the face of his own innocence, since he has not yet been accused of anything, and has no reason to assume that he might be? Only his love for Aricie, which his father disapproves of, could be the basis for this; but at the time at which he uses this humble epithet, he is not thinking of this, for he is merely asking that he be kept away from Phaedra. Racine's scene, which corresponds to the Greek one in which Theseus banishes his son, and which can be compared to the latter in its details — namely, the second scene of act IV — seems quite weak when set side by side with the original, especially if one takes away several lines that are either excerpted or translated from Euripides. To be sure, the French poet was not miserly when it comes to the profusion of outrage and abuse in the scene. But true vigor is *{125}* more akin to gentleness than an explosion that lacks forcefulness. In the ancients' poetry as well as in their sculpture, a certain degree of moderation, which stems from their magnanimous nature, still reigns, even in the most violent situations. As a great connoisseur of antiquity once said, these exuberant souls are similar to the sea[N], whose depths are always calm, even if the surface is caught in the tumult of a storm. Racine's Theseus tells his son, before having even heard a word from him:

> Monster, whom Heaven's bolts have spared too long!
> Survivor of that robber crew whereof
> I cleansed the earth. [*Ph*. IV.ii, 1045-46]

He threatens to kill his son with his own hands — only he fears pollution. In front of his son, he calls Neptune to witness his rhetorically inflated curse. Euripides' Theseus does not do any of this, but his words are permeated with a bitter sorrow for having been deceived by his son's

duplicity. He goes no further than banishing him, and only utters the sentence of banishment after a speech in which [52] he uncovers Hippolytus' false virtue, and reveals incontrovertible proof of his offense. His curse is uttered when anger first hits him, before his son arrives on stage. The most damaging[21] element in Racine's scene is the fact that Hippolytus immediately jumps from defending himself, in a manner full of dignity and vigor in and of itself, to confessing that he is in love with Aricie. He should not be put in a position where he must ask for his father's forgiveness, in order for it to be impossible for us to imagine that it is because of this, and not out of filial devotion, that he patiently en*{126}*dures all the abuse heaped upon him. But most importantly, so subordinate an issue should not be raised at the crucial moment where the fates of father and son are being decided.

(30) In Euripides' play, Hippolytus, on hearing of his father's arrival and of the dismay that the news of Phaedra's suicide has brought upon the palace, rushes back from his place of retreat. He sees his stepmother dead; and since Theseus remains silent, he has time to offer up some caring words to him regarding this unexpected blow. His father's first dark intimations trouble him; but once he has heard the accusation brought against him and the terrible sentence, he regains his composure and answers with a remarkably eloquent speech [53], full of the boldness characteristic of those who are innocent. "Do you see this sky and this earth? he asks. Among these, there is no man more chaste than I, no matter what you may say." [*Hipp*. 993-95] This is where Racine got the idea for his much praised line,

> The daylight is not purer than my heart. [*Ph*. IV.ii, 1112]

Then, after having shown just how implausible the accusation is, he ends with highly solemn oaths. In the rest of the scene [*Hipp*. 1038-1101], Hippolytus displays an extremely touching mixture of intractable pride and great compassion, not so much for his own misfortune as for the oppression of innocence that is taking place through his example. At first, he seems to want to vex his father, when he says: "Father, I wonder at you; for if you were the son and I the father, I would have killed you, not *{127}* punished you with exile, if you had dared to touch my wife." [*Hipp*. 1041-44] Soon he reverts to begging him to put off the exile, to give time a chance to shed light on what happened, and to consult the oracles. He is tempted to throw[22] the accusation back at the guilty woman, and cries: "O Gods! Am I not to open my mouth, when I am being destroyed by you, whom I revere? But no — I would be disobeying the sacred [54] laws; I would recklessly be breaking the oaths I have sworn." [*Hipp*. 1060-63] He invokes silent witnesses: the walls of the palace; he addresses his mother's shade; he feels no shame in lamenting the fact that he has been so sorely misunderstood. But when his father orders his servants to expel him by using force, he states that they will only come near him if they are willing to risk their lives. In the end, he voices a pathetic adieu to his fatherland, invoking his beloved goddess, and begging his companions to accompany him to the border as he painfully enters into exile.

(31) The ancients experienced their lives with a more acute religious sense than we do. They paused at its decisive moments, both the happy or unhappy ones, and cast a contemplative glance on the past and the future; they celebrated these moments with a certain solemnity. Moreover, they did not ever confuse heroism with a lack of sensitivity; they believed that there was still room for suffering alongside great-heartedness. How is the unjust accusation levelled at Hippolytus in Racine supposed to touch the audience, if he himself remains unaffected by it? His father's curse should make his hair stand on end; he should *{128}* first and foremost implore him to rescind it. Instead [55], he seems to pay it no heed: he delivers his response to Phaedra's accusation with a certain amount of self-control, and seems not to believe in Neptune. The only point at which the dialogue contains some level of excitement is in the following exchange:

HIPPOLYTUS.
What is my term and place of banishment?
THESEUS.
Were you beyond the Pillars of Alcides,
Your perjured presence were too near me yet.
HIPPOLYTUS.
What friends will pity me, when you forsake
And think me guilty of a crime so vile?
THESEUS.
Go, look you out for friends who hold in honour
Adultery and clap their hands at incest,
Low, lawless traitors, steep'd in infamy,
The fit protectors of a knave like you. [*Ph*. IV.ii, 1140-48]

The beauty of these lines is extraordinary; but the ideas are taken from Euripides [*Hipp*. 1053-54, 1066-69]. In the end, Hippolytus leaves the scene in an entirely humiliating and disadvantageous manner: he does not offer a single word to counter Theseus' threat of having him driven away in [56] shame, as if he were afraid it might be done.

(32) Yet I can imagine why the modern Hippolytus is so apathetic in the face of his sentence of exile : it is because he has a plan in mind, which hinges on this very exile. He wants to enjoin Aricie to flee with him and marry him; he wants to find her some powerful foreign protectors and, who knows? perhaps even wage *{129}* war against his father, and thus bolster Aricie's aspirations to rule over Athens. The following passage can hardly receive any other explanation:

Pow'rful defenders will maintain our quarrel;
Argos spreads open arms, and Sparta calls us.
Let us appeal for justice to our friends,
Nor suffer Phaedra, in a common ruin

Joining us both, to hunt us from the throne,
And aggrandise her son by robbing us. [*Ph*. V.i, 1365-70]

Surely Euripides' Hippolytus, though more recalcitrant in his words to his father, would never have conceived of such an idea. But let us grant these words the benefit of the doubt to the greatest extent possible; let us suppose that it was only *after* his father's death that Hippolytus set his sights on claiming his inheritance and Aricie's: at any rate, even if the scene between him and Theseus had pro[57]voked some sort of tender feeling for him, Hippolytus has not left even a shadow of a doubt in our hearts, since he shows himself so capable of turning his disgrace to his advantage.

Embrace this happy opportunity, [*Ph*. V.i, 1371]

he says. Indeed — he may be exiled, but he will no longer meet with any impediment to his marriage. In Euripides' play, the dreadful catastrophe is announced without our having seen Hippolytus again after he delivered his touching adieux; and the effect of the news is thus far more powerful.

(33) Theramenes' account [*Ph*. V.vi, 1498-1593] can be considered a free translation or imitation of the Greek. The modern poet's main merit lies in the beauty of the lines and the diction; I mentioned earlier that I would not be dealing with this aspect of the question, which I leave to the French critics. *{130}* I will merely call attention to the fact[23] that poetic ornamentation is far more abundantly used in Racine's passage than in the original. There is a big difference between an accurate, finely detailed, and thereby vivid sort of account, formulated in a noble but simple style, which is supposed to be the intrinsic language of tragic characters, and a pompous report, packed with declamatory hyperbole[N]. Euripides' account is of the fi[58]rst variety: there is nothing in excess in it. Every word aims to show how this ineluctable disaster came to be. In fact, a mere slave is the one to report the story to Theseus; and he, since he still thinks his son is guilty, gives no sign of remorse on first hearing the news. Racine's narrative would be fitting in an epic poem; but it does not have its place in a dramatic context. It sounds incongruous coming from Theramenes, who would not have been so articulate after the loss of his friend, in addressing a father whose heart is already touched by his son's fate, and who is mortified at the thought of having condemned him unjustly. Regrettably, Aricie comes along and makes the account colder still, as all the other details of the scene already have. In his last words, Hippolytus is far more concerned with her than he is with his father, and any desire that the latter should recognize his innocence. An epilogue to the report of his death informs us that Aricie has fainted over her lover's body. What a way to warm our hearts, when they are filled with the news of the disastrous and irrevocable fate that has befallen the innocent and virtuous! True, the poet could not but mention *{131}* Aricie in such circumstances, but it is yet another element of proof that it was [59] inopportune to have introduced such a weak role in the midst of issues of far greater importance.

(34) In Racine, that is the last we see of Hippolytus; in Euripides, he is brought back on stage dying; and though his piety, filial affection, and nobility are most apparent at that moment, I will leave off discussing this passage — the most beautiful and most pathetic passage of the entire tragedy — for later, when I compare each of the two works' goals as well as the general impression made by them.

(35) I have yet to examine Theseus' character — the one who is most abused by Racine of all his characters. In order for the circumstances in which he finds himself not to damage the dignity of so illustrious a hero, and in order for Phaedra's shameful passion and her efforts to seduce Hippolytus (along with the latter's alleged assault on her) to be appreciated to the full extent of their monstrosity, it was imperative that Theseus be depicted as a respectable spouse and father, and not allow vices of his own to make us lose sight of such holy character traits. Racine did exactly the opposite. As early as the very first scene of the play, Theramenes allows himself to voice an insulting conjecture as to the reason for Theseus' absence:

> Who knows if the King, your father,
> Wishes the secret of his absence known?
> Perchance, while we are trembling for his life,
> The hero calmly plots some fresh intrigue,
> And only waits till the deluded fair... [*Ph*. I.i, 17-21]

Hippolytus, who interrupts his friend supposedly out of respect for his father, also ends up *{132}* criticizing Theseus's behavior in this regard:

> But when you told me of less glorious deeds,
> Troth plighted here and there and everywhere,
> Young Helen stolen from her home at Sparta,
> And Periboea's tears in Salamis,
> With many another trusting heart deceived
> Whose very names have ' scaped his memory,
> Forsaken Ariadne to the rocks
> Complaining, last this Phaedra, bound to him
> By better ties... [*Ph*. I.i, 83-90]

The catalogue of women who were seduced and then abandoned continues; yet Hippolytus nonetheless cautiously leaves out his own mother. He preaches quite well; but he could just as well have set out a wise way of life for himself without recalling his father's straying, which the story of his own birth should have led him to draw a veil over. But Theramenes violates all the rules of propriety still further in his answer to him. He urges his pupil to give in to a penchant which the latter believes he must choke back out of respect for his father:

> [61] The gods, dear prince, if once your hour is come,
> Care little for the reasons that should guide us.

Wishing to shut your eyes, Theseus unseals them;
His hatred, stirring a rebellious flame
Within you, lends his enemy new charms.
And, after all, why should a guiltless passion
Alarm you? Dare you not essay its sweetness? [*Ph*. I.i, 114-20]

Clearly, this royal court is on its way to becoming favorable to romance, since tutors sermonize young princes regarding the inescapable nature of love.

{133} <Do you> follow rather a fastidious scruple?
Fear you to stray where Hercules has wander'd? [*Ph*. I.i, 121-22]

Theramenes could not have picked less felicitous an example to sanction a timid and frail love affair. Following in Hercules' footsteps in this realm could go far: the hero started off with the fifty daughters of Thespius; as Omphale's slave, he dressed as a woman; he sacked a city in order to abduct Iole, and in the end fell victim to Deianeira's well-founded jealousy.

What heart so stout that Venus has not vanquish'd?
Where would you be yourself, so long her foe,
Had your own mother, constant in her scorn
Of love, ne'er glowed with tenderness for Theseus? [*Ph*. I.i, 123-26]

[62] These lines were perhaps intended to complete the catalogue of Theseus' intrigues; but the whole argument is ridiculous. Above all, the turn of phrase "where would you be?" seems to me worthy of Pradon.

(36) Ismene's words concerning Theseus' absence are in the same vein as Theramenes':

Some say that, seizing a new bride,
The faithless husband by the waves was swallow'd. [*Ph*. II.i, 381-82]

Phaedra is no more merciful than they are :

Ah, yes for Theseus
I languish and I long, not as the Shades
Have seen him, of a thousand different forms
The fickle lover, and of Pluto's bride
The would-be ravisher... [*Ph*. II.V, 634-37]

One who has been so frequently unfaithful must fear retribution in his marriage with good reason. If one were to answer for Racine by saying that in these passages he *{134}* was merely adhering to the myths, I would counter that, even among the Greeks, whose myths were related to their religion, no poet was ever denied the right to change or even mask certain details and withhold them from us spectators. How is Theseus' past relevant here? It can easily be forgotten, if the poet does not commit the blunder of bringing it to our attention; we can then judge the hero based solely on his actions in the play itself. Euripides does not avail himself of the heroic era's moral standards, which are quite forgiving in this regard. He carefully steers clear of any allusion to

Theseus' love affairs, except for the one he could not avoid mentioning, when he makes reference to Hippolytus' illegitimate birth.

(37) In both plays, Theseus is absent at first; but in the Greek play, there is a worthy and plain reason for this absence : he is on a sacred journey, undertaken in order to consult an oracle, or to celebrate a religious festival in a foreign temple. Racine turns the first Athenian lawmaker into a wandering ruler[N] who roams the world without anyone knowing where he is; he is even suspected — such is his reputation ! — of pursuing a love interest. This is not an unfair suspicion, given that Theseus admits when he returns that he wanted to help a friend abduct another king's wife, that he failed, and that he almost died in the process :

> My sole friend, misled by passion,
> Was bent on robbing of his wife the tyrant
> Who ruled Epirus. *{135}* With regret I lent
> The lover aid, but Fate had made us blind,
> [64] Myself as well as him. The tyrant seized me
> Defenceless and unarm'd. Pirithous
> I saw with tears cast forth to be devour'd
> By savage beasts that lapp'd the blood of men.
> Myself in gloomy caverns he inclosed,
> Deep in the bowels of the earth, and nigh
> To Pluto's realms. Six months I lay ere Heav'n
> Had pity, and I 'scaped the watchful eyes
> That guarded me. Then did I purge the world
> Of a foul foe, and he himself has fed
> His monsters. [*Ph*. III.v, 957-70]

The king of Epirus may have been a tyrant; but in the account given here, he was entirely in the right. Pirithous and his friend only got what they deserved, and, on this occasion, the flesh-eating horses were put to good use. It is strange to see an adventurer make use of language that would be appropriate for a defender of justice; but this self-aggrandizing account is even more foolish than it is pompous.

> The tyrant seized me
> Defenceless and unarm'd. [*Ph*. III.v, 961]

Did he not know that one needs to be on one's guard in such endeavors ?

> Myself in gloomy caverns he inclosed,
> Deep in the bowels of the earth, and nigh
> To Pluto's realms. [*Ph*. III.v, 965-66]

If Hercules' companion brought this [65] dishonor upon himself, why does he feel compelled to confess the truth about it to his son ? Generally speaking, the motif of Theseus' absence is very

poorly conceived. The myths and their authority cannot excuse any of it, for it is up to the poet to make some discerning choices from among the various *{136}* fabled traditions, and even they often contradict one another. The Athenians, who honored Theseus as their tutelary hero as they would a god, no doubt conceived of him very differently from Vergil, who gives us the following description of his agony in the underworld :

— — — — *Sedet aeternumque sedebit*
Infelix Theseus.[N]

(38) I have already mentioned the disturbance brought on by the news of Theseus' death. Everyone was quite pleased about it, and everyone is dismayed by his return: he is the all-embracing killjoy. Phaedra welcomes him coldly with merely a few obscure utterances; Hippolytus, the moment his father arrives, asks him for permission to leave Troezen; Oenone at last makes matters somewhat clearer by voicing a false accusation. But who can empathize with Theseus' bewilderment? It is only fair that the one who [66] left his family to create havoc in another's should find that same havoc in his own house when he returns.

(39) How far more dignified is the king's arrival in Euripides! His head is crowned with leaves, the garb worn by those who have completed a sacred journey. This festive symbol, which he tosses far away from himself on hearing the dismal news, establishes a stunning contrast with the distress he finds has overrun his palace. His anxiety before he learns what has happened, along with his despondency on being informed of Phaedra's death and on bearing the painful sight of her *{137}* lifeless body, all contribute to show him to be the most loving of fathers and spouses. His laments are spoken in a simple, natural manner[N], and devoid of any recherché eloquence, which makes them all the more moving. "The gloom, he says, the gloom below the earth, that is where I want to live from now on. I want to immerse myself in the darkness of death, wretched that I am, bereft of your society, that I loved most of all." [*Hipp*. 836-38] And then: "My house is bereft, my children are orphans. You left me, you left me, most beloved of all wives, and the best the sun and star that shines at night ever saw!" [*Hipp*. 847-51] At last, he sees the letter attached to [67] Phaedra's hand, and assumes it must contain her wish that he remain a widower, for the sake of her children. "Be not afraid, wretched one," he cries, "never will another woman enter the house nor the nuptial bed of Theseus." [*Hipp*. 860-61] Could anything be more moving than such loving concern for his wife, whose final wishes he subscribes to without question, while she has deceived him by abominably defaming her stepson?

(40) Let us compare the two Theseus' behavior in announcing the condemnation of Hippolytus. In Euripides, his inclination to believe that the latter is guilty is very strong : Phaedra killed herself in despair, with a letter written by her own hand accusing her stepson of being the cause of her suicide. Theseus is not likely to imagine any reason she might have had to fabricate an awful lie as she died, since her death in and of itself seems to be a clear testimony of the purity of her heart. However, he is guilty of being too hasty *{138}* in his actions, by refusing to await the

clarification of the facts that comes with time. But Racine's Theseus behaves completely mindlessly. Phaedra is still alive, and resorts to a subordinate in order to level her accusation at Hippolytus; yet Theseus does not compel her to tell all herself. When his son, who has acquired a reputation for his virtue in the past, solemnly professes his innocence, he does not bring the accuser and the accused face to face — an encounter in which the guilty woman's discomfiture would undoubtedly have revealed the truth. Hippolytus maintains that he loves Aricie, and yet Theseus does not attempt to examine whether his admission is sincere[24]. Phaedra comes to ask him to forgive Hippolytus; but he does not listen to her; instead, he runs to the temple of Poseidon, to hasten the fulfillment of his curse. The fact that Hippolytus' sword was left in Phaedra's hands — an innovation Racine borrowed from Seneca — merely provides a weak excuse for such unthinkable blindness.

(41) Euripides' Theseus sees his son again as the latter is dying, which offers him an opportunity to make amends by showing him how deeply remorseful he is, and the full extent of his desperation. Racine's Theseus only proffers a few ineffective words, which anyway are too cold to mollify the audience the slightest bit in their feelings towards him.

(42) In my earlier analysis, we saw how the modern poet altered the main characters : not only has their moral code been debased, but he has also diminished their vigor and greatness — the sort of greatness that is com[69]patible with culpable deeds. Above all, he has divested them of the idealized sort of beauty *{139}* that gives ancient masterpieces their appeal[N], and creates the impression that we are entering a world where the mortal race is nobler, and quasi-divine. Let us now examine what the relationship between the two plays is in terms of their overarching goal and of the general impression each of them makes.

(43) Racine is supremely satisfied with the morals of his tragedy[N]. "One thing I can say for certain, he says, is that I have never written a play where virtue was more prominently featured than in this one. Even the smallest offenses are severely punished. The mere thought of committing an evil deed is considered just as appalling as the deed itself. The lack of moral strength in those who are in love is shown to be a serious lack. Passion is only displayed before our eyes in order for us to see all the chaos that ensues as a result of it; and vice is depicted everywhere in colors that enable us to both detect and detest its monstrosity." The latter statement is entirely unfounded: on the contrary, Racine made his Phaedra as attractive as he could. In the scene where she declares her love, he has cloaked the unseemliness of her endeavor in highly refined turns of phrase, and diminished the severity of our disapproval by arti[70]ficially splitting the heinous calumny between the confidante, who only takes it into her own hands out of devotion for her mistress, and the mistress herself, who merely agrees to it, without taking action herself. In Euripides, the offense is far more blatant at each step, both in the nurse's role as a go-between seeking out Hippolytus, and in the accusation Phaedra levels at him. What Racine flaunts first and foremost is what is commonly called poetic *{140}* justice, something highly trivial which

it is very easy to establish in a tragedy where everything happens according to the poet's will. Its tenet, according to which the bad are always punished and the good are always rewarded in this life, is completely misguided. Even if it were possible to make men believe it through the inventions of drama, it would be more harmful than beneficial to truly moral standards of behavior. For the gentle morality of love — that is, general kindheartedness — as well as the austere morality of duty both castigate self-interested motives. The virtuous man does not do good because he hopes to reap some advantage for himself from doing it, but does it even if he is in danger of suffering, persecution, and perhaps even a cruel death, as a result. Earthly punishments and rewards serve only to control those whose moral sense is still mu[71]ted — in other words, those who cannot hear the voice of conscience within them. They can form habits that look like virtue from the outside, but that share none of its essence. We often see the evil prosper throughout a long career, remaining impervious to remorse, indifferent to others' respect, experiencing no need to feel the pleasure that can only be provided by noble sentiment, and ultimately reaching the end without having experienced the slightest setback. However, if one[25] were to insist that the order of things brings about punishment and reward in this life, one would have to be content with a belated reaction on the part of fate[26], with the sort of retribution *equipped with a lame foot, that rarely {141} ever leaves the scoundrel it is after*.[N] But even if one does make such a compromise,[27] the principle of poetic justice will be no less unacceptable within the French dramatic system, where the rules require a strict observance of verisimilitude, and also limit each tragedy to a time span of one single day. One may well ask, then, whether the depiction of the most important human deeds punished and rewarded within such a short amount of time, does not go against all the rules of verisimilitude[N].

(44) [72] But let us go along with this precept for a moment, and reduce poetry to playing the role of a criminal justice system. To play that role well, at the very least the penalties have to be commensurate with the offenses committed, and the good must not be drawn into the same disastrous situations along with the bad. Let us examine Racine's play in this regard. Phaedra, because of her weakness in the face of her forbidden passion and because she gives her consent to the voicing of heinous calumny, no doubt deserves her violent and wretched death. The same goes for Oenone. Theseus deserves to lose a virtuous son, because of his haste, which made him forget all of the responsibilities of an equitable judge. But Hippolytus? The innocent, virtuous Hippolytus? What grave crime has he committed to deserve a premature and most painful death? "I thought it necessary, Racine says[N], to attribute some form of weakness to him, that would make him somewhat blameworthy in the eyes of his father, without undercutting at the same time the noble nature of his heart, which leads him to spare Phaedra's honor *{142}* and to endure abuse without leveling an accusation against her. By weakness, I mean the passionate love he feels for Aricie despite himself — Aricie, who is the daughter and sister of his father's mortal enemies." But the feeling is not deliberate, and Hippolytus only gives in to it when he believes his [73]

father to be dead; and when he proposes to Aricie that she flee with him and marry him, he does so at a point when Theseus has relinquished any paternal authority he might have had over his son's marriage, by banishing the latter forever. And what of Aricie? Just because she reacts to an honorable feeling, and escapes Theseus' unjust abuse, does she deserve to be punished with the loss of what is dearest to her on this earth?

(45) The innocent are thus punished as severely as the guilty. But that's not all. The guilty are driven into the abyss, not by their evil deeds, but by their good impulses. When Oenone kills herself, she is full of remorse for having contributed to her mistress' ruin, and of pain for having made herself an object of loathing to the latter; had she been any less devoted to her, she quite probably could have escaped. If Phaedra had had a more hardened consience and more hateful feelings toward the one who had scorned her, she could very well have survived Hippolytus, whose death removes any threat that the truth be divulged, and appears to sanction the sentence issued by Theseus with a vengeance sent from above. She could have continued to enjoy the tender love of her husband, and an untarnished reputation. Even Hippolytus might have shaken his father and given him the time needed to find out the truth, had he not [74], during his defense, refrained from direc*{143}*tly accusing his stepmother out of tact. What! If he had only allowed Phaedra to seduce him, such an unnatural liaison would likely have remained hidden from all, and one would see its punishment loom only in a murky, far-away future. Generally speaking, cold calculation and caution get one much farther than strictly followed virtue when one wants to avoid the miseries of this world.

(46) Let us agree then that the morals of the play, which Racine believes to be so rigorous, when examined according to the precept he himself established, are, at the very least, quite ambiguous. Let me repeat that so-called poetic justice is not at all essential for a tragedy to be good — though chance may lead to its being realized. This is not to say that poetry should not always seek to be congruent with morality, but the relationship between the two is far more complex, and it must go about purging the emotions in a far loftier manner. I will not condemn the Phaedra play because in it, the virtuous die alongside the wrongdoers; but since this is a very painful spectacle, I expect some form of compensation, that reestablishes a balan[75]ce in our minds. Let us see if we can indeed find such compensation within the play, and whether we can leave this tragedy behind with the feeling of satisfaction that any work of art must generate in us with the overall impression it makes[N], even those of the most serious and austere variety.

(47) This leads me to some general reflections on the goal and nature of tragedy — a question *{144}* that is often discussed, and most often poorly answered, and which in fact is not so easy to answer. We have grounds for some surprise in the fact that we, who are naturally compassionate creatures, and who are surrounded by the real misfortunes of life that affect us without our being able to remedy them, should want[28] to cause further grief to ourselves through the representation of imaginary ills. Can one offer the explanation that we find pleasure in

comparing our undisturbed state with the sort of upheaval caused by passion, as when we gaze out at a storm at sea from the shore with a feeling of safety? The very famous comparison drawn by Lucretius:

Suave, mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis, etc.[N]

is most appropriate — as Lucretius wanted it to be — for a philosopher who, believing he has reached the sort of firm conviction that comes with clear evidence, contemplates the agitation that accompanies doubt and error with calm; but it is not at all fitting for the compassionate spectator of tragedy. The latter's mind will not revert back to himself, if he is highly interested in the tragic characters; while if he does *not* forget himself, it is a sign that he lacks interest in the play, and that the tragedy is falling short of meeting its goal. Could one say that it is a need to be removed from the dreariness of our daily lives by powerful emotions, whichever they may be, that brought forth the art of tragedy? This need exists, I admit. It is what gave birth to animal fights, the favorite spectacle of many nations: the Romans even pushed this liking so far as to enjoy watching men fighting one *{145}* another or ferocious beasts to the end; but these men were criminals or slaves who were not granted the rights of humanity. And so we who are less desensitized than they were, and who are drawn to more subtle pleasures — while we only allow elevated characters to enter the tragic stage, would we want these demi-gods and heroes to descend into the bloody arena of tragedy as vile gladiators, solely for the purpose of rattling our nerves with their [77] suffering? No, it is not the spectacle of pain that makes tragedy, or circus games, or even animal fights, appealing; for in these one sees agility, strength, and courage deployed — in a word, qualities that already share some common ground with man's intellectual and moral faculties. I believe that the reason we derive a certain amount of satisfaction from the compassion we experience before the violent situations and sorrows depicted in a beautiful tragedy is either that, through them, we are made aware of the dignity of human nature, which is stirred up inside us by great role models, or that we perceive in them the trace of a supernatural order of things, that is embedded and, as it were, mysteriously revealed in the way events seemingly randomly unfold; or perhaps it is a combination of these two.

(48) Strength and endurance can be measured in light of one another. When in dire need, man turns to all available recourses. In the midst of great adversity, a noble and spirited heart discovers and avails itself of the supply of unassailable nobility of senti*{146}*ment at its core, which heaven seems to have placed[29] there specifically for such circumstances; at that moment, it discovers that, despite the confines of man's ephemeral existence, it can come into contact with eternity. When the blows of [78] suffering strike the heart of those who courageously bury their feelings within themselves, the divine spark hidden within them burgeons forth. That is the reason why tragedy, which aims more than any other genre to present idealized characters, is, and must be, full of challenging situations and complex conflicts between duty and desire, or between different passions, or different duties, and full of unexpected setbacks and horrible disasters.

Seneca says that a great man struggling against adversity is a spectacle worthy of the gods[30N]. Though the saying may seem merciless at first glance, many a Greek tragedy can help us grasp its true meaning. Tragic poetry can stray from these exemplary models in two ways. First, by depicting suffering in a superficial manner, through cold disquisition rather than through the expression of the natural inflections of the human heart. Such a depiction allows the suffering to touch us but faintly, without penetrating our existence to its core, and thus stifles the suffering in a lavish display of heroism, which appears to be overcoming nothing more than an imaginary opponent. The other way in which it can stray from these models is by seeking to produce an effeminate sort of tenderness of feeling, which enervates the soul instead of making it stronger in character. The first is a blunder [79] often committed by Corneille, and almost always by Alfieri. The oldest examples of this second sort of blunder can be found in Euripides, and Meta*{147}*stasio's work is full of them; generally speaking, modern poets are forcefully driven to commit them as a result of the prevalent taste of their time.

(49) But the aspect of the art of tragedy in which modern poets have most erred because they did not have any clear, established ideas about the nature and goal of tragedy, is the general tendency that must be made manifest throughout the work. People have searched for the distinctive attributes of the genre in highly serendipitous details — for instance, a sorrowful ending, or the regal nobility of the characters. The most commonly accepted definition[N] is that a tragedy is the serious depiction, through dialogue in an elevated style, of a single action that is complete and whole, and which can inspire fear and pity. The action is considered complete when a moment of tranquillity is found at the end of the play, albeit one that is often unsettling for one's imagination and emotions. As for unity of action — the term is very vague. The dramatic action in tragedy is inevitably made up of a multitude of secondary plots. Hence, it can be tightened or broadened as much as necessary, for a series of actions [80] that are triggered by each other, however drawn out that series might be, can always be grouped under a single umbrella and identified by a single label. Without further harping on this, I would merely like to point out[31] that a dramatic character does not merely take action, but is also in turn influenced by others' actions[32], which do not depend on him. From this standpoint, one can consider what happens in a *{148}* tragedy to be a series of events, just as well as a series of actions. In short, the tragic scene presents us not only with human characters but with human destinies. What will govern these destinies in the fictional world created by the tragic poet? Do we want it to be chance, which means that there are no rules governing them whatsoever? It is clear to me that a number of tragedies were written in this way: it would be quite a challenge to discern any sort of inherent, natural direction in them, or any goal in them other than that of provoking at random a number of often conflicting emotions in us. I, however, believe that the progression of events must all be tied to one idea, and that therein lies the source of true unity in a tragedy. This is not a theory pulled out of thin [81] air; here, I follow the example of the Greeks, whose tragedies

generally represent one, single idea that is clearly articulated, and is so dominant that it becomes the soul and guiding genius of the entire genre.

(50) This invisible principle, this fundamental, driving idea in Greek tragedy is that of fate[N]. Fate was a part of the religious beliefs of the ancients. One could expect favors or hostility from the gods, depending on whether one had propitiated them or not; but these finite beings, though powerful, were not the sovereign masters of human fate. They themselves obeyed a destiny that was both ineluctable and unimaginable, and of*{149}*ten were no more than the blind executors of its orders. This rather disheartening doctrine, whereby the virtuous man receives no guarantee whatsoever of any special protection from the divine, can throw men of a cowardly nature into a state of utter hopelessness; but it brings renewed determination to the stouthearted, by forcing them to turn to themselves, and to rely strictly on their own resources. They are inspired with a firm resolve to withstand the [82] irremediable as best they can, and to face the blows dealt by fate with a pure conscience and unyielding courage. The influence of this doctrine is what led to the Greek poets' eminently tragic creative genius, at a time when, though social reason had reached maturity, religious beliefs still held considerable power.

(51) The Romans, whose institutions were stricter and whose morals were more stoic, nonetheless never exhibited any sort of original genius in their tragedies. One might think that this stems from the fact that their literature did not fall during the period when their Republican mores were still intact. Yet their oldest poets, who were merely translating Greek plays, were living in the time of the Punic wars. So there is a deeper underlying reason for the lack of any specifically Roman kind of tragedy: namely, that the Romans had transferred the tragic to the realm of world history. As arbitrators of the fates of the peoples they conquered, they played in history the presiding role that destructive fate *{150}* plays in Greek tragedy. They had seen all empires, and, ultimately, their own freedom, crumble, all falling down the same fatal slope. Hence kings in chains, paraded in a triumphal procession, struck them far more vividly than any catastrophe in a tragedy could, by offering them a spectacle of the awful vicissitudes of human life. They had become unimpressed with the wonders of the Greek tragic fable and wanted to surpass their models — and lapsed into pompous declamation as a result.

(52) The notion of fate is directly at variance with our own religious beliefs: Christianity substituted the idea of providence in its stead. This could raise the question, then, whether a Christian poet, in wanting to introduce in his works a perspective in keeping with his own religion, would find it impossible to write a veritable tragedy, and whether tragic poetry — a creation of man left to his own devices — does not disappear, along with the other nocturnal ghosts imagined by the superstitious, with the dawn of revelation. One would have to agree that this would indeed be the case, if religion taught us that providence consistently makes the good prosper and always punishes the evil in this life. But the ways of providence are unfathomable: only a divinely-inspired form of piety might be able to discern its path. All we know is that

eternal happiness will repay the religious man for his earthly suf[84]fering, and that, in the great battle between good and evil which is constantly *{151}* renewed in this world, good must ultimately triumph, and all must lead to the glory of God. Such an order of things thus allows for an infinite number of situations in which religious heroism, though somewhat differentiated from the heroism that stems from an inborn form of virtue, can be deployed in full force; and it still allows for the most pathetic incidents to happen, though as a whole they point to a consoling thought, from a more elevated sphere, as it were.

(53) The Greek tragic system is based on a development of morality that is almost entirely independent from religion. In it, man's dignity is maintained almost despite the supernatural order of things: moral freedom struggles with the necessity of fate, which is supposed to rule the world, for the possession of an intimate sanctuary within the soul; and when human nature is too weak to win an indisputable victory in this battle, it is at least given an honorable retreat. The idea of providence has become a popular notion only since the rise of Christianity; but the most enlightened among the ancients had caught glimpses of it, as [85] they had of several other revealed truths. Terror dominates in Aeschylus' tragedies, and in them fate looms over mortals in all its sinister splendor. Though *Agamemnon*, *Choephori* and *Eumenides* — the three Aeschylean plays that form a *trilogy* (that is, a series of tragedies intended to be produced on stage together) — *{152}* fully abide by the rules of the system of fate when considered individually, when they are taken altogether, they allow us to detect something that bears a resemblance to providence. In the first play, Agamemnon is sacrificed by Clytemnestra: this is revenge for the sacrifice of Iphigeneia which, in turn, had been forced on him because he had inadvertently offended Diana[N]. In the second play, Orestes avenges his father by killing his mother. This cycle of acts of revenge that are both just and culpable could continue indefinitely[N], were it not for divine wisdom's intervention in the third play, in the guise of Minerva, who puts a stop to it and restores moral equilibrium by having Orestes absolved by a tribunal after he has atoned[33] for his unnatural act by being persecuted by the Furies at length. In *Prometheus Bound*, we see a di[86]vine being, the benefactor of mankind, crushed by the tyranny of fate[N]; but in all likelihood, Aeschylus' second tragedy on this subject, *Prometheus Unbound,* was meant to soften somewhat the horrifying impression made by the first play.

(54) In Sophocles' various plays, the playwright offers even more noteworthy gradations when it comes to the rigor with which fate rules in each play. His *Oedipus Rex* tragedy seems to have been written specifically for the purpose of instilling this belief in fate, and of making the nature of fate known by offering the most thorough and striking example of its power. A man is fated to commit the most ghastly offenses: *{153}* every precaution taken by his parents from the time of his birth, and all of those he himself takes afterward, only lead to the fulfillment of the oracles. This same fate ultimately leads him to the discovery of the offenses he was unaware of for so long: from the heights of a magnificent, seemingly pure life, he is plunged, without any

recourse, into the depths of opprobrium and dreadful despair. But in *Oedipus Colonus*, we see this same man — an old, blind man, poor, banished, wandering the earth — find a resting place at last, where he is delivered from the heavenly curse that hung over his head [87] for so long. We see him in his last moments, exercising his paternal authority over a corrupt son, his loving daughters at his side; he is protected and honored by an illustrious hero, and ultimately consecrated by a miraculous and solemn death. Thus the tomb of one whose mere sight all avoided with abhorrence during his lifetime becomes a blessing for the place that preserves it. The gods, who chose this innocent man as a way of offering an example of mortals' blindness, both owe and grant him the restitution of his honor in the face of the world. This is still fate at work, but it has cast off its frightful side to show itself to be gentle and equitable: this is fate disguised as providence. Though his works are suffused with the grandeur, the grace, and the simplicity of antiquity, Sophocles generally speaking is perhaps of all Greek poets the one whose perception of things is closest to the outlook of our own religion.

(55) *{154}* In Euripides, one can clearly distinguish a double persona. On the one hand, there was the poet, whose plays were produced and consecrated at a religious festival, and who was obligated to respect religion, as he himself was protected by it. On the other hand[34], there was the sophist with philosophical pretensions, who [88] sought to slip some of his doubts and free-thinker's opinions into the fabulous marvels which he had to draw on as inspiration for the subject of his plays, and which had ties to religion. At that time, tragic poetry, either because of a degeneration in social mores or as a result of the influence exerted by philosophical doctrines, had begun to change. Euripides often presents scenes that are very akin to bourgeois drama, or even to high comedy. Into his tableaux of heroic life, he introduces the morals governing the social life of his contemporaries. He often prefers effeminate tenderness to male pathos. He chases after dazzling effect and sacrifices the whole for the part. And yet, despite all these flaws, he is a poet who writes with remarkable ease, and whose brilliance is eminently agreeable and alluring.

(56) Since modern poets, on account of their religion, conceive of morality and man's destiny in a way that is very much at variance with the ancients, it comes as no surprise that, in wanting to imitate ancient tragedy, they focused on form rather than on the actual basis that holds up the entire, magnificent edifice. In Euripides, we only see some wavering; but modern poets often decidedly lack an all-embracing di[89]rection: *{155}* they sail the wide sea of possible tragic combinations without so much as a compass. When they deal with mythical subjects — that is, with the fictitious tales that have been passed on to us by the ancient poets, who modified them to accentuate the role of fate — this fate sometimes creeps into their works without their intending it[35], and perhaps even without their being conscious of it at all. Other times, some form of the idea of recompense,[36] or even providence, appears in their works; but in isolation, on the surface, without its being linked to the work as a whole. But most often, once they have come upon a fictional story or any historical event which seems to present pathetic situations and a

striking sort of disaster, and once they have managed to lay it out within the commonly used framework of five acts, and to obey the unity of time and place along with the other theatrical conventions, they believe they have completed their task, without concerning themselves with any other goal.

(57) Christian ideas can, however, supply as sublime a basis for tragedy, and a far more comforting one, than the one the ancients drew from their own religious beliefs. This has been attempted already: Spanish poets have written many Christian plays. Calderon's inspiration [90], above all, was entirely religious in nature, and he presented many masterpieces in that genre. To fully appreciate them, truth be told, one must enter into the dramatic system that is accepted in Spanish theater. Christian tragedies are not unheard of on the French stage either. *Polyeucte*, *Esther* and *Athalie* need hardly be mentioned[N] — these plays' *{156}* very topics put them in that category; but I believe *Alzire*[N] deserves to be called a Christian tragedy as well. Gusman's[N] tyrannical pride and harshness seem to have been meant to alienate Peruvian minds from Christianity: such is their effect on Zamore[N]. But the misfortunes brought upon Gusman by these same flaws, which he believes to be a punishment sent from heaven, lead him to show magnanimous and charitable feelings in his final moments. This miracle accomplished by religion leads to Zamore's conversion, and through him, no doubt, to all of his followers' as well. Thus, we have here a series of causes and effects wherein even human faults ultimately serve to uphold religion.

(58) I see a third tragic system, of which Shakespeare is the sole representative — a poet with profound aspirations, who has been signally mis[91]understood when interpreted as a wild sort of genius who blindly produced incoherent work. I would call *Hamlet* a philosophical tragedy, or, better, a skeptic's. It was inspired by deep meditation on human destiny, and inspires others to meditate on it in turn. In it, the soul cannot endorse any article of faith, and seeks in vain to exit the maze by another exit than through the idea of a universal void. The deliberately slow, vacillating, sometimes even regressive movement of the plot is emblematic of the intellectual hesitation that makes up the poem's essence: it is an unfinished and never-ending reflection on the goal of life, forming a Gordian knot which, in the end, death *{157}* cuts. This may be the darkest sort of tragedy; for human nature demands that we rely firmly on some form of conviction: it is averse to reason's dithering, and a man's moral predisposition must be very enervated indeed for him to indulge in apathetic skepticism regarding aspects of truth that should be of the utmost interest to him. The tragedy *King Lear* has a lot in common with *Hamlet*: it even goes further in the [92] same genre. It is no longer doubt that is conveyed in this work, but the abandonment of all hope of our ever being able to discover the slighest trace of a comforting thought along the paths of our gloomy existence. This gigantic tableau presents us with a complete upheaval of the moral world, so much so that it appears to be threatening to bring back chaos. It is not a tragedy about a sole individual: rather, it[37] encompasses all of humanity.

Macbeth, on the other hand, is in keeping with the tragic system of the ancients, despite the tremendous differences in form. Fate governs the play: in it, we even find the same sorts of prophecies which become the reason for the event which they predict, those treacherous oracles which, even as their every last detail comes true to the letter, continue to mislead the hopes of whoever has put his trust in them.

(59) After such free-flowing considerations, which will nonetheless contribute, I hope, to the clarity of the observations to come, I come back to the core of my subject. In the Euripidean play I have analyzed, the role of fate is superbly well orchestrated. First of all, he assigns a supernatural cause to such *{158}* extraordinary events: Venus' wrath is the motivating force behind them, and we are given proof that no human form of prediction could have prevented them from happening, [93] since the goddess announces them in the prologue. These prologues, which inform the spectator in advance of what is going to happen before his eyes, and which Euripides was the only one among all Greek tragedians to make use of, are quite at variance with our taste. I do not seek to provide some justification for their existence: I simply want to point out that Greek tragedy did not allow much room for surprise in its plots, and that any dramatic poet would be mistaken if he were to try and rely on any appeal to curiosity, since that appeal is used up the very first time the play is brought before the public. What is more, Euripides may have needed these prologues to familiarize the spectator with his stories, since he took the liberty of altering certain key points within the myths he used. Be that as it may — Phaedra is identified as a victim of Venus' deadly hatred: the goddess herself proclaims that she is igniting an illicit passion in her only as a means of getting revenge on Hippolytus. As a result, Phaedra becomes more of an object of pity than a source of indignation for the audience. Racine was well aware of this: he has his own Phaedra mention Venus' wrath against her and her whole family several times. Yet, since the motivations for this wrath are not explained, and since Phaedra could just as well have imagined it to be directed at her merely [96] as a way of excusing her behavior, it makes but a weak impression.

(60) Though Euripides' Hippolytus rouses the wrath of Venus against himself to some extent through his *{159}* own fault — namely, because he neglects to honor her ritually speaking — fate is also at work, to some degree, in bringing about his misfortune. For Venus is also hurt by his indifference to[38] the pleasures of love, an indifference which stems from the most original and intimate aspect of Hippolytus' character: the pure chastity of his soul, which has made him the enthusiastic worshipper and protégé of Diana. Yet having the latter's special protection does not save him from ruin, for, as Diana expressly points out [*Hipp*. 1328-30], no divinity would dare to thwart another's intentions with regards to a mortal. Hippolytus dies, then, because of the inevitable and unremitting rivalry between these two antagonistic goddesses. Fate is at work again in the three requests Neptune grants Theseus in advance, no doubt with the intention of miraculously answering his wishes, for the sake of his own happiness. This is the only

supernatural influence which Racine has retained. He apparently believed that, because ancient myths are [95] not part of what we believe in, in dealing with them one had to keep the marvelous to a minimum. But it is harder for the imagination to accept one, isolated miracle than an entire order of things within which miracles are common. Moreover, in the French play, it is clear that Hippolytus' misfortune does not come about as a result of Venus' wrath, since he pays homage to her through his love for Aricie. Racine thought it necessary to make him somewhat blameworthy in the eyes of his father by this weakness of his, so as not to cause feelings of outrage in the audience by portraying the misery of a *{160}* perfectly virtuous young hero — a failed attempt, as I demonstrated above. He writes: "As far as the character of Hippolytus is concerned[N], I had noticed that the ancients reproached Euripides with having depicted him as a philosopher, devoid of any imperfection whatsoever; which resulted in the young prince's death causing far more indignation than it did pity." This criticism levelled at Euripides is completely unfair. It is true that he endowed Hippolytus with all moral virtues; but he has him treat Venus with disdain, and that alone must lead to his ruin. For according to the ancients, it was not enough to be virtuous to [96] please the gods: they were thought to feel human passions, and thus one had to make a special effort to flatter each of them personally. It is this religious belief which detractors should have attacked, not the poet.

(61) In both tragedies, however, innocence perishes in the same way: in horrible agony, as though struck by a bolt of divine vengeance. In Euripides, fate looms large; in Racine, the order of things seems to grant a primary role to providence, since he claims to have doled out recompense[39] according to justice in his play. Let us examine how the two poets softened this horrible calamity, in order to appease the appalled spectators' sensitivities, and leave them with warm and tender memories rather than a painful impression.

(62) Euripides adopts the following approach: Theseus, who still believes his son is guilty, and whose *{161}* belief has been further corroborated by the promptness with which Neptune has granted his wish, hears the account of his son's disastrous end without faltering, though, as a father, he begins to feel some emotion deep inside[N]. He orders that Hippolytus, who has been fatally wounded, be brought before him. Diana appears then; she addresses Theseus, and reveals to him [97] his son's innocence, his piety, and the snare he fell into; and she reproaches him bluntly for Hippolytus' calamitous and irreparable fate. Her words, pitiless and imposing, bring the events that have taken place most vividly before our mind's eye, with remarkable brevity; each is like a stab to Theseus' heart. He is crushed, and exclamations of despair are the only response he is able to give. The goddess adds, in the end, as an excuse and a consolation, that Venus in her wrath had wanted this misfortune, and that it was she who led Theseus to be blind in all this, despite himself. Hippolytus thereupon is carried in by his companions. At this point one must recall how ancient theaters were built: the *proscenium* was quite large, so that the actors, when they came on stage, not from the back, but from one of the sides, could be seen from afar,

and needed some time to reach the middle of the stage. This time is filled with the moaning and heartbreaking laments which the extreme pain he is undergoing wrests out of the valiant Hippolytus. He begs his companions to be gentle as they carry him, because each new jolt brings agony. He demands a sword to put an end to it; and he calls [98] on death. When *{162}* the unhappy convoy arrives before the palace, and the litter on which Hippolytus is being carried is set to the ground, Diana approaches him[N], and between them and Theseus unfolds a scene which I have translated in full [*Hipp*. 1389-1461].[N]

(63) DIANA.
O wretched one! What calamity has overtaken you! The nobility of your soul has ruined you. [*Hipp*. 1390]
HIPPOLYTUS.
O divine breath! Though in pain, I have felt you, and I am relieved. — Know that the goddess Diana is within these premises.
DIANA.
Yes, poor wretch, the divinity who is dearest to you is at your side.
HIPPOLYTUS.
Do you see, my queen, the deplorable state I am in?
DIANA.
I do; but tears are forbidden to me.
HIPPOLYTUS.
Gone is your hunter, your faithful servant...
[99] DIANA.
Alas, no! What a cruel death is yours.
{163} HIPPOLYTUS.
Gone the leader of your steeds, the protector of your image.
DIANA.
Treacherous Venus is the one who plotted this. [*Hipp*. 1400]
HIPPOLYTUS.
Ah! At last I know which goddess it is who is destroying me.
DIANA.
She was pained by your disdain, and detested your prudence.
HIPPOLYTUS.
I understand: Venus has ruined us, all three of us.
DIANA.
Yes, all of you: you, your father and his spouse.
HIPPOLYTUS.

I bemoan my father's misfortune as well.
DIANA.
He was deceived by the plans of a divinity.
HIPPOLYTUS.
O Father, what misfortune is yours in this affair!
[100] THESEUS.
It is all over for me, my child, all the joy in my life has been destroyed.
HIPPOLYTUS.
I deplore the delusion you were victim of far more than my own fate.
{164} THESEUS.
If only I could die in your stead, my child! [*Hipp*. 1410]
HIPPOLYTUS.
O bitter gifts of your father, Neptune!
THESEUS.
Would that I had never uttered such wishes!
HIPPOLYTUS.
What! You yourself might have killed me in your anger.
THESEUS.
Yes — the Gods had led my mind astray.
HIPPOLYTUS.
Alas! The human race is vulnerable to the Gods' curses.
DIANA.
Calm down, for offended Venus' anger, whatever she may do, can no longer reach you in the recesses of dark[101]ness below the earth. Your piety and virtuous feelings protect you. I myself will obtain revenge for you, [*Hipp*. 1420] by striking the mortal she loves most with this infallible bow. And you, unfortunate one, I will grant you the greatest honors in the city of Troezen for the pain you have been enduring. In centuries to come, young women before their marriage will cut their hair in your honor, dedicating their deep mourning and their tears to you. The melodious harmony of virginal voices will always celebrate you, and Phaedra's memorable love for you will never fall into oblivion. [*Hipp*. 1430] But you, son of *{165}* aged Aegeus, take your son in your arms, and hold him close to your heart: for you ruined him unintentionally. It is natural for men to commit wrongdoing when the Gods mislead them. And you, Hippolytus, I exhort you not to hate your father; for it is your destiny that made you perish. These are my words of farewell — for I am not allowed to see the dead, nor to pollute my gaze with mortals' last breaths, and I see you are already

nearing the fatal moment.
HIPPOLYTUS.
Farewell to you as well, blessed maiden, and may you [*Hipp*. 1440] leave our longtime intimate bond behind without grief! Let me make peace with my father, since that is your will; for I have always obeyed your words. *(Diana moves away.)* Ah! Ah! Already darkness spreads over my eyes. Take me in your arms, Father, and support my broken limbs.
THESEUS.
Alas, my child! What pain you are giving me!
[102] HIPPOLYTUS.
I am no longer; I see the gates of the underworld.
THESEUS.
And you leave behind my soul burdened with a crime?
HIPPOLYTUS.
No, indeed — for I acquit you of this murder.
THESEUS.
What are you saying? Are you setting me free of the blood spilled? [*Hipp*. 1450]
HIPPOLYTUS.
I call Diana and her invisible bow to be my witnesses.
{166} THESEUS.
Beloved child, how generous you are towards your father!
HIPPOLYTUS.
Adieu then, Father! A thousand times adieu!
THESEUS.
Oh, how good and pious your soul is!
HIPPOLYTUS.
Pray that the gods may grant you to have sons such as I was.
THESEUS.
Do not desert me, my child; endure your battle a bit longer.
[103] HIPPOLYTUS.
My battle is over; I am dying, Father. Now cover my face with your garment. (*He dies*.)
THESEUS.
O Athens, illustrious territory of Pallas, what a man you are deprived of!
Wretched am I! [*Hipp*. 1460]
O Venus, I will forever remember your blows!

(64) Such is the scene as it is when imperfectly translated and stripped of the charm of its diction and the harmony of its meter. I know of none that is more moving in any tragedy, ancient or modern: all seems simple and natural in it, and yet the art of contrasts is remarkably put to use throughout. We see immortal greatness alongside *{167}* dying youth, and the pangs of remorse alongside the emotions of a pure heart. Diana shows as much pity for human wretchedness as is compatible with her divine nature, but a certain celestial serenity nevertheless permeates her every word. When the tutelary goddess comes near, Hippolytus' pain subsides: he is dying, but he no longer suffers. Through her presence, she makes her protégé's last moments[40] sacred, and her departure solemnly heralds that mys[104]terious moment that awaits us all, and which none of us can grasp. The young hero, on leaving such a beautiful life, does not regret its earthly pleasures: it is the cult of Diana that he most loved to take part in, and it is his father's situation that aggrieves him. What gentle, noble feeling, what great filial piety there is in his every word to Theseus! One must concede here that the ancients sometimes intuited elements of Christian feeling: what is most loving, most pure and most sublime in the human heart. Lastly — and this point is essential for the overall impression made by the tragedy — harsh fatality is mitigated as much as possible. As he dies, Hippolytus is surrounded by every conceivable consolation. His father, both desperate and repentant, displays boundless affection for him; and a goddess alleviates his pain, grieves over his misery, and promises him all the immortal honors of a hero. This all constitutes as vivid an image of the eternal bliss obtained in exchange for an ephemeral existence as the ancients' religion could allow for.

(65)*{168}* What did Racine replace so many elements of beauty with? Nothing — absolutely nothing. In his play, Hippolytus dies without knowing whether his innocence will ever be recognized; he does not even see [105] Aricie again, and remains extremely anxious about her fate. Phaedra restores his honor when she dies, and Theseus feels remorse for his injustice, but this all comes late, and, moreover, is barely expressed. It is true that the poet does not make us witness Hippolytus' suffering nor his death, which we only hear of through a spoken account. It thus affects us far less powerfully; but the bottom line — the horrible fate of innocence — remains the same. The ancients' nerves may have been less fragile than ours, but their sensitivity was undoubtedly more sincere and more natural: in experiencing works of art they were willing to give themselves up to painful compassion when faced with physical suffering, provided there was some sort of moral compensation for doing so. Modern poets who deal with subjects borrowed from antiquity have, I am afraid, often made these more shocking and monstrous at a fundamental level, while at the same time weakening their effect and adding a veneer of refinement.

(66) Racine, no doubt out of respect for the theatrical conventions one was required to observe in his time, did not dare put forth on the stage a man who is dying from his wounds: yet [106] other French poets who came after him gave themselves free rein to do so. Still less did he

dare show a goddess, for fear so tangible a miracle might ultimately be laughable. This merely proves how *{169}* inconvenient it is for the poet to draw his subject from the realm of the fantastical; its chimerical elements have lost every last trace of vitality and reality for current spectators, unless the latter are readily willing to follow him into that realm, and to ply their imagination to his will. Could one defend Racine by claiming that Hippolytus throughout the play only awakens negligible interest in us, while all our attention is taken by Phaedra, and that the latter's death is the real disaster? I do not believe the subject benefitted from being thus switched around. Regardless — if one believes this to be the case, then Theramenes' pompous account should be no more than an *hors d'oeuvre*. That is, instead of laying further stress on Hippolytus' horrible death, Racine should have lessened its impact on us; perhaps he should even have let his fate remain in doubt. Nay, more: there was absolutely no obligation to make him die. Phaedra could have killed herself in the belief that Theseus' curse would lead Hippolytus to his ruin; Theseus could have been set right in time regarding his son's [107] innocence; and he could have rescinded the wishes he had voiced to Neptune. Hippolytus could have returned to the scene, witnessing his own salvation at the very moment he had thought he would be ruined, and he could have reconciled with his father after the guilty woman's death. Aricie could have been united with her lover, and we would have seen virtuous love rewarded, and illicit love punished. If the play's greatest attraction lies in the role of Phaedra, as people generally agree, this would not have been damaging to her in any way. After all the emotional turmoil brought about *{170}* as a result of her passionate love, the denouement would have been more satisfying, the impressions made on the spectator more harmonious, and the moral goal of the author more readily met. The ancients took the liberty of diverging just as much from established versions of myths as this version would have, and the rights of a modern poet in this regard are even broader, because the traditions of any given myth are no longer articles of faith.

(67) Here ends my comparison of the two plays. I leave it up to the reader to decide whether M. de Laharpe's assertion[N] is well-founded: that *Racine everywhere replaced the most flawed elements with the most beautiful ones*. Regardless what arguments may be levelled against the result of my investigation, I hope the latter will lead to fruitful thinking for the benefit of dramatic art, concerning the different spirit of Greek and French tragedy.

AVANT-PROPOS (1842)

Extracts from the preface of the 1842 collection of essays (pagination indicated by roman numerals in braces in italics):

{v} AVANT-PROPOS.

(i) Les essais que je présente au public en ce moment ont été écrits en différents pays à diverses époques, et imprimés de même séparément, l'un en Suède, un autre en Italie, le reste en France et en Angleterre. On ne les trouve que difficilement; soit que la première édition ait été épuisée ou qu'elle ne soit pas entrée dans la librairie. Quelques pièces aussi ont paru dans des journaux qui, comme l'on sait, passent avec le jour et n'ont point de lendemain: de sorte que ces écrits ballottés en l'air faute de lest, sans être des oracles, sont aussi dispersés que les feuilles de la Sibylle.[N]

(ii) Je les ai réunis en un seul volume, ayant en vue principalement de me rappeler au souvenir de quelques personnes qui m'ont autrefois témoigné une approbation bienveillante. {vi} Ces personnes sont aujourd'hui en très-petit nombre, puisque j'ai eu le malheur de survivre à presque tous mes amis. Je ne me flatte point d'acquérir beaucoup de nouveaux lecteurs: la jeune génération ne me connaît pas encore, et le public en général semble m'avoir oublié, du moins le public allemand; car je sais que dans plusieurs contrées européennes et même au-delà de l'Atlantique mon nom est encore vivant. Il y aurait de l'ingratitude de ma part à ne le pas reconnaître.

(iii) Les premiers entre ces écrits (le plus ancien date de 35 ans) ont été composés pendant une vie de distractions sociales et de voyages, au milieu desquels mon intérêt fut absorbé par les événements décisifs du jour, de sorte que je n'avais ni la tranquillité d'esprit ni le loisir nécessaires pour entreprendre un ouvrage de longue haleine. Les suivants ne sont que des épisodes, des délassements que j'accordais de temps en temps à mes travaux de critique philologique relatifs à l'Inde. Je ne les donne que comme des essais: mais je puis assurer que ces résumés ont été précédés de sérieuses études. Si, malgré cela, ils ne répondent pas à l'attente, l'inconvénient sera moindre à raison de leur peu d'étendue. La variété des matières que j'ai traitées pourra peut-être suppléer à l'insuffisance de l'exécution. J'ai voulu épargner aux con{vii}naisseurs qui seraient curieux de lire tel ou tel article, la peine de le chercher au loin, et aider les bibliographes à compléter leur catalogue. En aucun cas il n'y a grand mal à augmenter d'un modeste volume le nombre des livres existants qui se comptent aujourd'hui par millions. Les écrivains de métier qui font crier journellement leur marchandise dans la foire littéraire, deviennent importuns; mais en général, les livres de leur nature sont patients, et attendent en silence qu'on les lise.

(iv) II me sera permis de rappeler brièvement les circonstances qui ont occasionné ces écrits

et le but immédiat que je me proposais en les rédigeant. Cela servira à placer les lecteurs dans le point de vue d'où je peux espérer d'être jugé équitablement.

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*{xiv}***(v)** J'ai composé en France la *Comparaison des deux Phèdres*; la première édition imprimée à Paris en 1807 a été épuisée. C'était une expérience que je m'amusais à faire sur l'opinion littéraire, sachant d'avance qu'un orage épouvantable éclaterait contre moi, ce qui ne tarda pas d'arriver. En France, depuis la révolution, le goût a varié selon les phases de l'ordre ou du désordre social. Cependant la république n'a pas duré assez longtemps pour produire un nouveau genre de tragédies, destinées à inculquer la haine des rois, comme Chénier en avait donné le ton. Mais toutes les pièces de théâtre devaient être purgées des titres malsonnants à des oreilles républicaines. J'ai vu représenter dans le temps un opéra : *Raoul sire de Créquy*, dont le héros fut transformé en *citoyen de Créquy*. On n'aurait pas fait comprendre à un parterre patriotique, que Raoul n'était point de ces Sires criminels, mais un pauvre sire, châtelain dans un village. Bonaparte, aussitôt après son avènement, ordonna *{xv}* d'admirer derechef le siècle de Louis XIV: et le public, ayant obéi sur des points bien autrement importants, fut obséquieux dans son admiration. Un certain abbé Geoffroi qui rédigeait alors le feuilleton du théâtre dans le *Journal de l'Empire*,[N] était un vrai cerbère à la porte du goût classique. En voyant ma brochure, cet abbé s'écria d'un ton goguenard : «Voici un Allemand qui ose blâmer Racine et qui, néanmoins, montre assez d'esprit pour qu'il faille engager la discussion avec lui: c'est fort drôle!» Un autre collaborateur du même journal, Dussault[N], dit: «M. Schlegel se donne l'air de n'en vouloir qu'à Racine; mais au fond il veut déprécier toute la littérature française.» C'était me faire tort: j'y admire beaucoup de choses, et quelques-unes me semblent inimitables. D'autres honneurs encore me furent décernés: une princesse polonaise, grande admiratrice du poète tragique, foula ma brochure aux pieds, comme François I avait foulé la *Divine Comédie* qu'il se faisait expliquer par Annibal Caro, lorsqu'il fut arrivé à ce passage où le Dante[N] fait dire à Hugues Capet qu'il a été le fils d'un boucher parisien. Je reçus les surnoms: le détracteur de Racine; le Caligula ou le Domitien (c'est tout un) de la littérature française. Ce n'est pas mon usage de répondre aux attaques littéraires; autrement il m'eût *{xvi}* été facile de montrer que ma critique était très-mesurée en comparaison de la polémique de Lessing[N] qui avait, quarante ans plus tôt, accablé de ridicule trois célèbres tragédies: *Rodogune*, *Mérope* et *Sémiramis*. En effet, Lessing savait manier l'arme du sarcasme comme la massue d'Hercule.

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*{xxiii}***(vi)** On ne m'a guère reproché d'importuner le public en parlant de moi. Si je me suis départi cette fois-ci de mon habitude, si j'ai exposé les motifs qui m'ont engagé à prendre la plume, et les moyens que j'avais préparés de traiter des sujets si hétérogènes; si j'ai rappelé les situations personnelles où je me suis trouvé pendant une vie qui ne fut pas toujours celle d'un savant sédentaire, partagé entre sa chaire de professeur et son cabinet d'étude: j'espère qu'on y

verra plutôt une apologie qu'une prétention. Ces Essais sont comme des jalons plantés de distance en distance le long de ma carrière littéraire, vers la fin de laquelle je dois m'avouer à moi-même que j'ai beaucoup entrepris, et achevé peu de chose.

BONN, au mois de mars 1842.

{v} Preface

(i) The essays that I offer to the public at this time were written in different countries at different times and also published individually, one in Sweden, another in Italy, the remainder in France and England. Access to them is difficult, either because the first printing has been exhausted or because it was not taken up in the book trade. Some pieces also have appeared in newspapers, which, as everyone knows, are ephemeral and do not last long into the future: the result is that these writings are tossed about in the breeze for lack of ballast and, without being themselves oracles, are as scattered as the leaves of the Sibyl[N].

(ii)I have assembled these essays in a single volume, my main purpose being to reawaken memory of myself in the minds of certain people who in past time have responded to my ideas with generous approval. *{vi}* Today such persons are very few, since I have had the misfortune of outliving almost all my friends. I don't flatter myself with the expectation that I will gain many new readers. The younger generation does not yet know of me , and the public in general seems to have forgotten me—at least the Germans seem to have; for I know that in several European nations and even across the Atlantic my name is still remembered. It would be ungrateful of me not to acknowledge this.

(iii) The first of these compositions (the oldest dates back 35 years) were written during a life full of social diversions and travel, in the midst of which I found my interests dominated by the decisive events of the moment. As a result, I had neither the serenity of mind nor the leisure necessary to undertake any large-scale work. The following pieces are mere episodes, relaxing diversions that I occasionally allowed myself from my works of philological criticism relating to India. I offer them only as essays; but I can assure the reader that these summary discussions were preceded by serious investigations. If they nevertheless fail to meet readers' expectations, then the inconvenience caused to the latter will at least be more limited as a result of their brief nature.. Perhaps the variety of the subjects treated will be able to make up for the inadequacy of execution. I wanted to spare *{vii}* scholars who might be interested in reading one article or another the trouble of searching far and wide for it, and to help bibliographers complete their catalogue of works. There is never anygreat harm done in increasing by the addition of one modest volume the number of extant books, which are nowadays numbered in the millions. Professional writers who have their wares bruited every day in the book fair are becoming annoyingly obtrusive. But generally, books, by their very nature, are patient and quietly wait for someone to read them.

(iv)I shall take the liberty of recalling briefly the circumstances that prompted these writings and the immediate goal that I set for myself when composing them. That will serve to place the readers in a position from which I may hope to be judged fairly.

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*{xiv}***(v)** I wrote the *Comparison of the two Phaedras* in France. The first edition printed in Paris in 1807 was sold out. It was an experiment that I had found amusing to conduct concerning literary opinion, knowing in advance that a formidable storm would break out against me—which in fact was the case almost immediately. In France, since the Revolution, taste has changed, in keeping with the different phases of social order or disorder. The Republic, however, did not last long enough to produce a new type of tragedy, one intended to instill hatred of kings in the audience, following in the footsteps of Chénier. Yet all theater pieces had to be purged of titles that could prove offensive to republican ears. At that time I saw a production of an opera, *Raoul Lord of Créquy*: its eponymous hero was made into a "citizen of Créquy." It would not have been possible to make the patriotic audience understand that Raoul was not one of those villainous Lords, but a poor squire, and the mere lord of a manor in a village. As soon as he came to power, Bonaparte commanded *{xv}* that the age of Louis XIV be admired once more: and the general public, which had obeyed him in matters of far greater importance, was obsequious in its admiration. A certain abbot by the name of Geoffroi, who was editor at the time of the theater pages in the *Journal of the Empire*[N], proved a true Cerberus in guarding the portal of classical taste. When he saw my pamphlet, the abbot exclaimed, in a jeering tone: "Behold, a German who dares to find fault with Racine and who, none the less, displays enough wit to demand that one take up the debate with him: how truly amusing!" Another contributor to the same journal, Dussault[N], said: "M. Schlegel adopts the pose of being hostile only to Racine; but at bottom he wants to devalue all of French literature." That was unfair to me. I admire many works of French literature, and some of them seem to me inimitable. Still other honors were awarded to me: a Polish princess, a great admirer of the tragic poet, trampled my pamphlet underfoot, just as François I had trampled the *Divine Comedy*, which he was having Annibale Caro explain to him, when he came to the passage where Dante[N] has Hugues Capet say that he was the son of a Parisian butcher. I was given the titles of "detractor of Racine," and of Caligula or Domitian (it made no difference) of French literature. It is not my habit to reply to literary attacks. Otherwise, it would have *{xvi}* been easy for me to demonstrate that my criticism was quite measured in comparison with the polemic of Lessing[N], who forty years earlier had heaped ridicule on three famous tragedies: *Rodogune*, *Merope*, and *Semiramis*. Indeed, Lessing was adept at wielding the weapon of sarcasm just as if it were the club of Hercules.

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{xxiii} **(vi)** In the past I have scarcely been reproached with irritating the public by speaking of myself. If on this occasion I have departed from my usual way; if I have laid out the reasons which induced me to take up the pen and the means that I had readied for myself to deal with such varied subjects; if I have recalled the personal circumstances in which I found myself during a life that was not always that of a sedentary scholar who divides his time between his professor's chair and his study — I hope people will interpret this as an apologia rather than a mark of

pretension. These Essays are, as it were, markers planted at intervals throughout my literary career, towards the end of which I must confess to myself that I undertook a great deal, but accomplished very little.

BONN, March 1842

GLOSSARY OF PROPER NAMES

Achéron: river of the Underworld and by metonomy the Underworld itself.

Aeschylus: see Eschyle below.

Agamemnon: name of the first tragedy of Aeschylus' trilogy *Oresteia* (458 BCE) and of the Argive king, leader of the Greek expedition against Troy, who in the play is murdered by his wife Clytemnestra on the day of his return.

Ajax: tragedy by Sophocles on the subject of the warrior Ajax's suicide at Troy.

Alcide / Alcides: patronymic referring to Hercules / Heracles. The "pillars of Heracles" is a Greek term for the strait of Gibraltar, considered to be the western limit of the known world inhabited by humans.

Alfieri: Vittorio Alfieri (1749-1803), Italian dramatist.

Alzire: a tragedy by Voltaire (1736) and name of the lead female role in the play.

Annibal Caro / Annibale Caro: Italian poet (1507-1566).

Antiope: Amazon queen, for a while a consort of Theseus, mother of Hippolytus.

Apollon / Apollo: the god Apollo, son of Zeus, archer-god, oracle, and sun-god, represented in Greek art as an idealized youth.

Apollon du Vatican / Apollo in the Vatican : the so-called Apollo Belvedere, from its location in the Vatican, admired by Winckelmann and those inspired by him, like the Schlegels, as a supreme expression of Greek classical art, although it is now held in fairly low esteem; a Roman marble copy of a Greek bronze of ca. 330 BCE.

Argos: a major Greek city in the Peloponnese.

Ariane / Ariadne: daughter of Minos of Crete, fell in love with Theseus and helped him kill the Minotaur and escape the Labyrinth, then eloped with him, but was abandoned on the island of Naxos, where she lamented her betrayal on the rocky shore.

Aricie: a character invented by Racine to normalize Hippolyte by giving him a love-interest and to complicate the plot by the parallel between Phèdre's forbidden love and Hippolyte's desire that is contrary to his father's wishes, and by the motif of Phèdre's jealousy.

Aristophane / Aristophanes: (ca. 445-ca. 386) one of the greatest writers of Attic Old Comedy and the only one for whom complete plays have survived in the manuscript tradition. Aristophanes frequently quotes and parodies Euripides and uses him as a character in *Acharnians* (425), *Women at the Thesmophoria* (411), and *Frogs* (405); in the last of these Euripides loses a contest for best tragedian to Aeschylus, and this play turned out to be a major source for many subsequent assessments of the style and shortcomings of Euripides' drama.

Aristote / Aristotle: (384-322) immensely influential philosopher, student of Plato's Academy and then founder of the Peripatetic School at the Lyceum; among his works is the difficult, incomplete text of the *Poetics*, a theoretical and historical treatment of serious fiction (for him, epic poetry and tragedy).

Athalie: a late play of Racine on a biblical theme (see Racine).

Athènes / Athens: the city that Theseus rules, but in both Euripides and Racine he and his family are temporarily residing in Troezen, because Theseus needs to expiate the pollution of killing by a period of exile.

Bacchus: the god Bacchus or Dionysos, son of Zeus, god of wine, often represented in antiquity as a beautiful youth.

Batteux: abbé Batteux, Charles Batteux (1713-1780), critic, author of *Les principes de la littérature* (1774), *Les quatre poëtiques: d'Aristote, d'Horace, de Vida, de Despréaux* (1771), and *Les beaux arts reduits à un même principe* (1746). He published an essay entitled "L'Hippolyte d'Euripide et la Phèdre de Racine" in *Mémoires de l'Académie royale des inscriptions et belles-lettres* 42 (1786) 452-72.

Bonaparte: Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821), who in the last stages of the French Revolution emerged as authoritarian First Consul (1799) and later became Emperor (1804-1815).

Bouillon: the Duchess of Bouillon, Marie-Anne Mancini (1649-1714) and her brother the Duke of Nevers, Philippe-Jules Mancini (1641-1707), were niece and nephew of Cardinal Jules Mazarin (1602-1661), righthand man of Cardinal Richelieu and his successor as virtual regent of France from 1642 to 1661; the Duchess and Duke were the most powerful supporters of Pradon in his rivalry with Racine at the time of *Phèdre*.

Brumoi: le père Brumoy, Pierre Brumoy (1688-1742), author of *Le Théâtre des Grecs* (1730), a multi-volume work including translation of many plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes (and Seneca), with literary analyses and comparisons to French plays of Racine, Corneille, and Routrou.

Calderon: Pedro Calderon de la Barca (1600-1681), one of the greatest playwrights of Spain's Golden Age, who wrote both secular and religious plays.

Caligula: the Julio-Claudian emperor Gaius (ruled 37-41 CE), known in the historical and biographical tradition for his cruelty, murderousness, and possible insanity.

Capet: Hugh Capet (Hugues Capet), king of France 987-996, founder of the Capetian line of French kings; all subsequent kings through the end of the monarchy in the 19th century were descendants of Hugh Capet.

Cerbère / Cerberus: monstrous three-headed dog who guarded the gates of the Underworld in Greek and Roman mythology.

Chenier: Marie-Joseph Blaise de Chenier, 1764-1811, French poet, dramatist and politician, some of whose plays reflected the anti-monarchical fervor of the French Revolution.

Choéphores / Choephori: Greek *Choephoroi*, or *The Libation-Bearers*, the second tragedy of Aeschylus' trilogy *Oresteia* (458 BCE), in which Orestes kills his mother Clytemnestra to avenge his father Agamemnon.

Clytemnestre / Clytemnestra: Greek Klytaimestra, wife of Agamemnon and mother of Orestes, in Aeschylus' trilogy *Oresteia* (458 BCE).

Corneille: Pierre Corneille (1606-1684), second greatest tragedian of the classical French theater; his most famous play was *Le Cid* (1637); later in his career, he wrote *Trois discours sur le poème dramatique* (1660), propounding a theory of tragedy and defending his works as in line with the theories of the ancients.

Déjanire / Deianeira: wife of Heracles who caused his death, either deliberately to punish him for taking Iole as his concubine, or accidentally in trying to win back his love with a potion that turned out to be poison (see Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*).

Diane / Diana: the goddess Diana (Greek Artemis), virgin huntress.

Dioscures de Monte-Cavallo / Dioscuri of Monte Cavallo: very large double statue group of the two youthful sons of Zeus, the Dioscuri (Castor and Pollux), each standing beside and controlling a spirited horse; the two now flank an obelisk and overlook a fountain in the Piazza del Quirinale (formerly known as Monte Cavallo because of the statues) in Rome; they are Roman copies of classical Greek work, moved from the Baths of Constantine.

Domitien / Domitian: Flavian emperor (ruled 81-96 CE), known in the historical and biographical tradition for his cruelty, murderousness, and possible insanity.

Dryden: John Dryden (1631-1700), English playwright, poet, and critic.

Épire / Epirus: a coastal region in western mainland Greece.

Eschyle / Aeschylus: (ca. 525-456) the earliest of the three great Athenian tragedians whose works were most highly valued from the late fifth century BCE onwards; author of the tragic trilogy *Oresteia* (458), consisting of *Agamemnon*, *Choephori* (*The Libation-Bearers*), and *Eumenides* (*The Furies*). *Prometheus Bound* is another of the seven tragedies surviving in the medieval corpus of Aeschylus, but since Schlegel's time some scholars have concluded that the play is not by Aeschylus, but by an unknown fifth-century author. In the Schlegel's scheme of the history of the genre, Aeschylus is the rude genius of great power, preparing the way for the classical harmony and perfection of Sophocles.

Esther: a late play of Racine on a biblical theme (see Racine).

Euménides / Eumenides: also known as *The Furies*, the third tragedy of Aeschylus' trilogy *Oresteia* (458 BCE), in which Orestes is pursued by the punishing demons known as Furies but is saved by Athena, whereupon the Furies are reconciled to Athens and worshipped as Eumenides, "the kindly ones."

Euripide / Euripides: born ca. 485-480, died late 407 or early 406, one of the three great Athenian tragedians whose works were most highly valued from the late fifth century BCE

onwards. Seventeen of his tragedies survived in the manuscript tradition, the best known of which are *Medea* (431), *Hippolytus* (428), *Trojan Women* (415), and *Bacchae* (performed posthumously 405).

François: François I, king of France 1515-1547.

Furies: see Euménides.

Gusman: a chief character in Voltaire's *Alzire* (see annotation on §(**57**)).

Hélène / Helen: daughter of Tyndareus, the famous Helen of Troy; there was a myth in which Theseus kidnapped the young Helen years before her marriage to Menelaus and elopement with Paris.

Hercule / Hercules: Heracles, mightiest Greek hero, on whose exploits some of those attributed to Theseus were modelled, and who is supposed to have shared some adventures with Theseus.

Hippolyte / Hippolytus: illegitimate son of Theseus by an Amazon mother (Antiope), title character of Euripides' *Hippolytus* (428 BCE).

Horace: Quintus Horatius Flaccus (65-8 BCE), Roman poet of the Triumviral Period and Age of Augustus; among his works are verse epistles in dactylic hexameters related to the art of poetry, the longest of which is known as *de arte poetica*, a work highly respected in the Renaissance.

Iole: daughter of Eurytus, king of Oechalia, and sister of Iphitus; when dining as a guest in Eurytus' house, Heracles saw her and desired her; eventually, he sacked the city and killed her father in order to make her his concubine.

Iphigénie / Iphigenia: daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, lured to Aulis under false pretences and sacrificed there by her father in order to allow the Greek fleet to sail to Troy to begin the Trojan War.

Ismène: the confidante of Aricie, an invented character in Racine's *Phèdre*.

Journal de l'Empire: under Napoleon this was the title of the French newspaper more usually called *Journal des Débats* during its long run from 1789 to 1944.

Junon / Juno: the goddess Juno (Greek Hera), wife of Jupiter (Greek Zeus).

Laharpe: Jean-François de La Harpe (1739-1803), dramatist and critic, author of *Lycée, ou Cours de littérature ancienne et moderne* (1799-1805).

Lessing: Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781), German writer, philosopher, and critic. In his *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* (1767), a collection of theater criticism, he finds fault with contemporary dramatic fashions and calls for reform in accordance with a poetics of drama heavily indebted to Aristotle.

Louis XIV: (1638-1715) king of France 1643 to 1715, consolidated the power of the French monarchy and presided over a period of great political and cultural power (including the classical period of French theater, embracing the works of Corneille, Racine, and Molière).

Lucrèce / Lucretius: Titus Lucretius Carus (ca. 94-55 or 51 BCE), author of the didactic hexameter poem of Epicurean doctrine called *de Rerum Natura*, "On the Nature of Things."

Lysippe / Lysippus: Lysippos of Sicyon, bronze sculptor active ca. 370-315, noted for introducing changed proportions, a greater dynamism of bodily stance and emotion, tendencies that prefigured some of the best sculpture of the next two centuries. Schlegel's chronology comparing Aeschylus-Sophocles-Euripides to Phidias-Polykleitos-Lysippos is forced, since Phidias and Polykleitos are more or less contemporaries of Sophocles, and Lysippos follows half a century after the death of Euripides. Schlegel's notion that the third phase gives in to the picturesque could, however, be applied to some late fifth-century sculpture, such as that on the Nike balustrade on the Acropolis of Athens.

Méléagre / Meleager: statue of the hunter Meleager with his hound, a Roman marble copy of a Greek bronze original of the fourth century, now in the Belvedere of the Vatican.

Mercure / Mercury: Mercurius (Greek Hermes), son of Zeus, messenger-god.

Mérope: tragedy by Voltaire (1743).

Metastase / Metastasio: Pietro Metastasio (1698-1782), Italian playwright and librettist.

Minerve / Minerva: see Pallas.

Neptune: Neptunus, god of the sea (Greek Poseidon), believed to be the true father of Theseus, while Aegeus was his human father; because of this relationship, the god has promised to fulfill Theseus' prayers or curses.

Œdipe / Oedipus: king of Thebes and hero of Sophocles' famous *Oedipus the King* as well as his *Oedipus at Colonus* (telling of Oedipus' honorable and supernatural end, years after the disaster of his recognition of patricide and incest).

Œnone / Oenone: nurse and confidante of Phèdre in Racine's version, corresponding in many ways to the unnamed nurse found in the versions of Euripides and Seneca.

Olympe / Olympus: in Greek mythology and religion, most of the gods are imagined to have their homes on Mt. Olympus, where the palace of Jupiter / Zeus is located.

Omphale: queen of Lydia who purchased Heracles as a slave when Zeus ordered that he be sold into slavery for one year to atone for his underhanded murder of Iphitus, the brother of Iole.

Oreste / Orestes: son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, killer of his mother in vengeance for his father, and chief human character in the second and third tragedies of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (458).

Pallas: alternative name of Athena (Roman Minerva), Greek goddess of wisdom.

Panope: female palace attendant in Racine's *Phèdre*.

Pasiphaé: wife of King Minos of Crete, mother of Ariadne and Phaedra by Minos, and of the monstrous Minotaur by a bull after she was overcome with erotic infatuation with the animal; in a fragment surviving from Euripides' play *The Cretans*, Pasiphaë defends herself

by saying this infatuation came upon her through divine agency because a god had been angered by Minos and wanted to punish him.

Péribée / Periboea: daughter of the king of Salamis, according to some myths a sexual partner or wife of Theseus; more famous in standard myths as the mother of the hero Ajax.

Pirithoüs / Pirithous: (also Peirithoos) king of the tribe of the Lapiths in Thessaly, an agemate and favorite companion of Theseus, who accompanied Pirithous (in the more common form of the legend) on a quest to the Underworld to kidnap the goddess Persephone (whom Pirithous wished to marry); in Racine's play, a rationalized alternative version of the story is used, where the woman Pirithous seeks to steal is a mortal queen.

Phèdre / Phaedra: the title of Racine's most famous tragedy (first staged in 1677) and of the title character, Phaedra, daughter of Minos, king of Crete, and wife of Theseus, king of Athens.

Phidias: (or Pheidias) Athenian sculptor (ca. 490-ca. 432) whose greatest works were massive chryselephantine statues of Athena and Zeus, the former inside the Parthenon on the Acropolis of Athens (449-437), the latter inside the Temple of Zeus in Olympia (ca. 435). Schlegel may also have believed the marble sculptures of the Parthenon were his work, but nowadays they are usually considered the work of his pupils. By comparing Aeschylus to Phidias, Schlegel has in mind the stunning grandeur of Phidias's statues of the gods and the grandeur he ascribed to Aeschylus' dramatic conceptions and style.

Platon / Plato: (429-347) Athenian philosopher, pupil of Socrates and founder of the Academy; he famously refused entry to the tragedians and Homer in the ideal states he envisioned in *Republic* and *Laws*.

Pluto: god of the Underworld.

Poétique / Poetics: the *Poetics* of Aristotle, written in the second half of the fourth century BCE, one of the most influential texts in the history of western literary criticism.

Polyclète / Polyclitus: Polykleitos, bronze sculptor from Argos or Sicyon active in the years ca. 460-410, famous for his statues of male athletes or warriors, based on ideal proportions and featuring a harmonious combination of relaxation and tension. Proportion, harmony, and serene control of underlying emotion and tension are for the Schlegels the hallmarks of the height of classical style, which they saw embodied in Sophocles.

Polyeucte: play by Corneille on a religious theme (based on the life of the martyr Saint Polyeuctus), first performed in 1643.

Pradon: Nicolas Pradon (1644-1698), playwright who, at the urging of rivals and enemies of Racine (the *cabale* referred to in §**(21)**), composed a competing *Phèdre et Hippolyte*, which was brought to the stage shortly after Racine's in 1677 and enjoyed a brief success that surpassed that of the first run of Racine's version. Within a few years, however, Racine's play was greatly admired and frequently performed, while Pradon's was not.

Prométhée / Prometheus: a Titan (a god of the generation earlier than the Olympians) famous for stealing fire from the gods and giving it to mankind and thus earning punishment from Zeus. *Prometheus Bound* is the title of a tragedy transmitted among the works of Aeschylus, but believed by many modern scholars to be by an unknown author. Fragments also survive from *Prometheus Unbound*, a companion piece by the same author.

Racine: Jean Racine (1639-1699), greatest classical playwright of the French tradition; raised by his Jansenist grandmother and well educated in the classical languages at a Jesuit school; as young man, lived in Paris, wrote poetry, associated with leading patrons and intellectuals, and began to write plays on classical themes in 1664 (the first two were produced by Molière). The series of his great plays runs from *Andromaque* in 1667 to *Phèdre* in 1677. A spiritual crisis (or weariness of attacks on him) and a new job as the king's historiographer led him to abandon the theater for the last 22 years of his life, except for two plays (*Esther, Athalie*) on biblical themes written for students at the school in Saint-Cyr (near Versailles) founded by Madame Maintenon for girls of noble birth but limited means.

Raoul, sire de Créquy: perhaps the comic opera, libretto by Jacques Marie Boutet de Monvel, music by Nicolas Dalayrac, 1789.

Rodogune: tragedy by Pierre Corneille (1645).

Salamine / Salamis: island adjacent to Attica, the territory of Athens.

Sémiramis: tragedy by Voltaire (1748).

Sénèque / Seneca: Seneca the Younger, Lucius Annaeus Seneca (ca. 3 BCE-65 CE), courtier and adviser to the emperor Nero, philosopher, essayist, and author of Latin tragedies, including a *Phaedra*, to which Racine owes some features of his play.

Sophocle / Sophocles: (ca. 495-406) one of the three great Athenian tragedians whose works were most highly valued from the late fifth century BCE onwards and the one regarded by both Aristotle and the Schlegel as the classical master of the art. Author of *Oedipus the King* (date unknown, often assigned to 430-425) and *Oedipus at Colonus* (performed posthumously). Schlegel does not mention *Antigone*, which was Hegel's example of the finest possible tragedy.

Sparte / Sparta: major city in the Peloponnese.

Théramène / Theramenes: tutor of Hippolytus, character invented by Racine to serve as confidant for the young hero.

Thésée / Theseus: the hero Theseus, son of Aegeus and his successor as king of Athens, husband of Phaedra (with legitimate son(s) by her) and father of the illegitimate Hippolytus by an Amazon mother (Antiope).

Thespius: king of Thespiae who entertained Heracles during a long hunt for a lion and had one of his 50 daughters sleep with him each night so that all could bear children by Heracles.

Trézène / Troezen: a town in the Peloponnese, across the Saronic Gulf from Athens, linked to the story of Theseus' birth and childhood and thus the site of his temporary exile in both Euripides and Racine.

Troyennes / Trojan Women: a tragedy by Euripides (415 BCE).

Vénus / Venus: Greek Aphrodite, goddess of love.

Virgile / Vergil: (also Virgil) Publius Vergilius Maro (70-19 BCE), greatest Roman hexameter poet, author of the pastoral *Eclogues*, the didactic *Georgics*, and the epic *Aeneid*.

Voltaire: penname of François-Marie Arouet (1694-1778), French philosopher and essayist who also wrote literary works, including tragedies, the prefaces of which contain statements of his dramatic theory and criticism. His tragedy *Mérope* was published in 1743 and his *Alzire* dates from 1736.

Winckelmann: Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768), German art historian and archaeologist who lived in Rome from 1755 to 1768 and became the spokesman for a new classicistic movement based on appreciation of the achievements of the Greeks as distinct from the Romans, inspiring the "Greek Revival" and influencing the Schlegels, Hegel, Goethe, and other German intellectuals and scholars of the next generation.

Zamore: a chief character in Voltaire's *Alzire* (see annotation on §(**57**)).

ANNOTATIONS

§**(3) dans ses deux dernières pièces / in his last two plays:** *Esther* (1689) and *Athalie* (1691), plays on Old Testament subjects written for performance by the girls of the school at Saint-Cyr; both plays contain a chorus, in the style of Greek tragedy.

§**(4) Euripide a été le poète favori de ses contemporains / Euripides was his contemporaries' favorite poet:** After his death, Euripides soon became the most popular tragedian among theatergoers around the Greek world and eventually among readers. During his life he was clearly highly respected and constantly allowed to produce his plays at the major Athenian festival competition (City Dionysia) and was enthusiastically appreciated by a part of his audience, but he won only 4 victories in his lifetime (out of probably 21 productions spread over the years 455 to 408), many fewer than Sophocles, who was producing plays during that entire period, sometimes in the same competition with Euripides. So it is tendentious of Schlegel to say he was the favorite poet of his contemporaries.

§**(4) Aristote qui appelle Euripide le plus tragique des poètes / Aristotle's statement that Euripides is the most tragic of all poets:** Aristotle, *Poetics*, chapter 13, 1453a28-30: "Euripides, even if he does not manage the other aspects <of his art> well, appears to be the most tragic of the poets."

§**(4) La proposition de Platon / Plato suggested:** the words placed in italics by Schlegel are not a direct quotation of Plato, but a paraphrase of some of his key objections to poetry and mimesis. For Plato's expulsion of traditional poetry from his ideal state, see *Republic* 377b-403c (in Books 2-3) and 595-608b (in Book 10) and compare *Laws* 817. The passages that are most similar to Schlegel's paraphrase are found at *Rep*. 411a-b, 595b, and 605c-d.

§**(4) cette proposition se rapporte principalement à Euripide / Such a suggestion was mainly aimed at Euripides:** this is Schlegel's own tendentious opinion, not the opinion of Plato, who classes Homer with the tragedians in *Republic* and cites many passages of offensive material from Homer and Aeschylus. Schlegel may have in mind Plato's attack on the development of more complex musical styles and instruments (*Laws* 700-701): although Plato does not name any specific poet in that attack, Schlegel could have combined Aristophanes' mockery of "New Music" in Euripides with Plato's critique to conclude (wrongly) that Plato had Euripides in particular in mind. Schlegel claims that *Prometheus (Bound)* would be exempt from the Platonic criticism, but Plato would have considered that play subject to strong criticism for a different reason, its depiction of the gods as deceitful, lustful, and cruel.

§**(5) paraissent avoir exclu entièrement l'amour de leurs compositions / seem to have entirely excluded love from their works:** This is an exaggerated claim, since Clytemnestra's adulterous love for Aegisthus and the erotic attraction to Helen felt by

Menelaus and Paris are significant themes of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, and Eros and Aphrodite are the major force in the lives of Deianeira and Heracles as portrayed in *Trachinian Women* of Sophocles. But there is no denying that erotic themes are more frequent in Euripides and often treated in a different way.

§**(5) la tragédie étant principalement destinée à faire ressortir la dignité de la nature humaine / tragedy, in being mainly concerned with bringing out the dignity in human nature:** Schlegel elaborates on his conception of the aim and nature of tragedy later in §§47-58. The emphasis on the dignity of man is typical of the Enlightenment and the Romantics, and although there are aspects of Greek art and literature that may be read as evoking such dignity, it is a characteristic mistake of any classicistic approach to pay attention only to the dignity or grandeur and to overlook the weakness, pettiness, cruelty and fragility of man that are also portrayed in Homer and the tragedians. This idea of human dignity is intimately linked to the formulation of the tragic as a conflict between (human) freedom and (supernatural) necessity, which became a standard definition in the German academic tradition and still influences popular approaches to tragedy as a genre.

§**(6) l'horreur de l'inceste / the horror inspired by incest:** Schlegel puts a lot of weight on the notion of incest to champion Euripides over Racine, but this is a tendentious claim, and the social situation in Euripides is not very different from that in Racine. The shocking nature of Phaedra's desire in Euripides has more to do with the violation of the integrity of the family and of the loyalties and hierarchy of values within it than with the biological fact that Hippolytus is Theseus' son, since Phaedra is not a blood relation of Hippolytus (unlike the case of Jocasta and Oedipus and various Greek myths of father-daughter and brother-sister incest). Hippolytus' shock at the proposal does not have to do with incest, but with his overall rejection of sexuality and his sure belief that a liaison with his father's wife would be not only adulterous but impious in his relation to his father. For father and son sharing the same woman, compare Heracles' insistence in Sophocles' *Women of Trachis* that his concubine Iole be married to his son Hyllus after he dies; and the story of Phoenix's estrangement from his father in *Iliad* 9.447-480.

§**(7) pour la distinguer d'une autre du même nom / in order to distinguish the play from another by the same name:** Euripides' wrote two plays entitled *Hippolytus*, and in the later tradition they were sometimes distinguished with epithets as "Hippolytus veiling himself" (*kaluptomenos*) and "Hippolytus offering a crown" (*stephanias* or *stephanephoros*). Ancient scholars concluded that the former play, in which Phaedra apparently approached Hippolytus directly, was the earlier, and that our surviving play is the later, in which he "corrected what was unseemly and worthy of reproach." This reasoning of the ancient scholars may be mere inference, but our play nevertheless probably is the later of the two, in which case it was part of a victorious set of plays Euripides produced in 428.

§**(7) toute la composition tend à célébrer le vertu de ce jeune héros / the entire work is, in fact, devoted to celebrating the young hero's virtue:** Schlegel downplays the complexity of Euripides' portrayal of Hippolytus. While it is true that by the end of the play the audience is strongly invited to admire his integrity and purity and pity his suffering, many modern critics consider his behavior earlier in the play less sympathetic, because of his exclusivity, his blindness to the wise warning of his servant, and the very oddity in classical Greek culture of the idea of male devotion to virginity.

§**(8) quoiqu'ils soient en présence / even when they are in each other's presence:** Schlegel here assumes the interpretation favored by most critics: at line 600 of Eur. *Hipp*. Phaedra moves to the side of the door, where she has been eavesdropping on the shouts indoor, and remains outside a little to the side while the nurse and Hippolytus emerge and carry on the dialogue in 601-668, whereupon Phaedra moves to the center and sings lines 669-679. A less likely alternative view (reflected in the Loeb Classical Library translation) has Phaedra go indoors at 601 and come out again at 680 (with the nurse singing 669-679), so that Phaedra and Hippolytus do not share the stage.

§**(9) il est écrit dans ce mesure / it is written in the meter:** anapaests, which were usually chanted or intoned rather than sung like full lyric measures; the scene is *Hipp*. 176-266.

§**(9) Phèdre reste seule avec le chœur … La nourrice revient / Phaedra remains alone with the chorus … The nurse then returns:** The correct staging is rather that the nurse never leaves the stage, but hears Phaedra's long speech (*Hipp*. 373-430) and responds to that speech in her balancing argument (433-481), the two speeches forming an *agôn logôn* or "contest of speeches," a typical form in Sophocles and Euripides.

§**(9) qui est toujours sur son lit de repos:** It is much more probable that Phaedra rises from her sickbed before delivering the great speech at *Hipp*. 373ff. and remains upright until she goes in after line 731. At any event, she is certainly standing already when she moves closer to the door at 567 to eavesdrop.

§**(11) la mort de Thésée/ Theseus' death:** fragments 686 and 687 of Sophocles' play *Phaedra* (about which we know almost nothing) indicate that Theseus there has returned from the underworld, so this method of partially excusing Phaedra's revelation or declaration of her love for Hippolytus may go back to him. Seneca also uses the motif of Theseus' absence in the underworld. On this point as on several others in his discussion, Schlegel seems somewhat disingenous when he writes as though Racine had modeled his play solely on Euripides, whereas there are in fact various aspects of it influenced by Seneca's *Phaedra* instead. Schlegel was not unaware of Seneca's play, for in §**(40)** he does, exceptionally, refer to a motif that Racine took over from Seneca (Hippolytus' sword dropped by him and then used against him as evidence of assault).

§**(12) footnotes:** La Harpe's comment is in Parte II, Livre I, Chap. III, Section VII (6th paragraph) of his *Lycée, ou Cours de Littérature ancienne et moderne* (=vol. 3, p. 356 of the 1813 edition). To be fair to La Harpe, when he speaks of Racine's *tour adroit*, he is noting how Racine's version at this point adds a new twist to what was in his Senecan source. The quotation of Batteux is from "L'Hippolyte d'Euripide et la Phèdre de Racine" published in *Mémoires de l'Académie royale des inscriptions et belles-lettres* 42 (1786) 463. There he is discussing a "défaut de convenance" that he considers to be in the end excused by the depiction of Phèdre's passion. Schlegel's quotation is inexact. The original is: "Phèdre apprend que Thésée est mort, et elle prend ce moment pour faire un déclaration d'amour; l'épouse du mort au fils du mort!" ("Phaedra learns that Theseus is dead, and she picks this moment to make a declaration of love: the wife of the deceased to the son of the deceased").

§**(12) une image dégradée de l'humanité / a degraded image of the human race:** Schlegel's disapproval here is related to his insistence that tragedy intrinsically aims to display "human dignity" (cf. note on §**(5)**). Compare also his criticisms in §**(15)** "la peur exerce un prodigieux empire sur l'âme de Phèdre" ("fear has tremendous power over Phaedra's soul") and "il y aurait eu plus de noblesse" ("It would have been more noble"); §**(17)** "san aucun mérite de courage, sans aucune dignité" ("without any display of meritorious courage or dignity on her part") and "qu'ils soient au moins d'une trempe forte, qu'une faiblesse et une vacillation continuelle ne les mettent pas etc." ("granting them strength of character, so that weakness and constant ambivalence should not to lead them etc."); §**(35)** "la dignité d'un héros aussi fameux" ("the dignity of so illustrious a hero").

§**(14) Phèdre dit elle-même l'instant d'après / Phaedra herself says, a moment later:** Schlegel's argument here is captious. Phèdre refers to the current rumor that Thésée has gone to the underworld to help his friend abduct Persephone, wife of the god of the underworld, not to a previous journey to and return from the underworld. Racine, for seemliness, has in fact followed an ancient rationalistic reinterpetation of the myth meant to remove some of the impiety and all of the supernatural from the story: the story is taken to be a distortion of a more realistic episode, where the king whose wife is to be abducted or seduced is a human king and the imprisonment is in a subterranean vault, not the actual underworld. See Plutarch, *Life of Theseus*, 32.4-5: "paying back the service <of Pirithous' help in abducting Helen>, Theseus traveled with him to Epirus to get the daughter of Aidoneus, king of the Molossians, who had given the name Persephone to his wife, Kore to his daughter, and Cerberus to his dog, and who used to bid the suitors of his daughter to fight with the dog and the winner to take the girl as wife. Learning that Pirithous and his friend were coming not as suitors but to abduct the girl, he seized them, and he immediately used the dog to kill Pirithous, and he kept Theseus imprisoned."

§**(16) Ne savait-til pas combien les femmes grecques vivaient retirées? / Did he not know what a secluded life Greek women led:** A particularly captious criticism, since what we are interested in here is the torment of Phèdre and the distortion her desire creates in her perceptions. For a classically trained audience, moreover, such erotic encounters in the countryside have a long mythological and literary pedigree.

§**(17) Repentance is the virtue of weak souls:** slightly misquoted from the play *The Indian Emperor* (1667) by John Dryden, Act III, Scene 1 (from a dialogue planning assassination of the enemy general while he sleeps during a truce):

> ORBELLAN: Courage, which leads me on, will bring me back.--
> But I more fear the baseness of the thing:
> Remorse, you know, bears a perpetual sting.
> ALMERIA: For mean remorse no room the valiant find,
> Repentance is the virtue of weak minds;
> For want of judgment keeps them doubtful still,
> They may repent of good, who can of ill;
> But daring courage makes ill actions good,
> 'Tis foolish pity spares a rival's blood;
> You shall about it strait.

§**(17) elle retourne encore une fois au repentir, sans aucun nouveau motif quelconque / she repents once more, without having any new reason for doing so:** another captious criticism; Phèdre's action is the final testimony to her virtue, previously battered by her unwilling desire (and the absence of grace?), but now asserting itself in her commitment to truth and longing for purity.

§**(20) La caractère d' Œnone … n'a aucune cohérence / Oenone's character is depicted in a thoroughly confusing manner:** Racine's nurse/confidante reflects in part the devotion of Phaedra's nurse in *Hippolytus*, who has no understanding for her mistress's moral values but wants only to preserve her life, and the inconsistency of Seneca's nurse, who initially urges Phaedra to resist her desire but then cooperates in her approach to Hippolytus and the scheme of accusation. Schlegel seems disingenuous again in not referring to Racine's debt to Seneca.

§**(20) qui est extrait d'Euripide mais étrangement déplacé / is culled from Euripides [*Hipp*. 437-476], but inserted in a strange context:** in *Hipp*. 433-81, the nurse is arguing against Phaedra's decision that death is best in her circumstance, before the revelation to Hippolytus (which she makes against Phaedra's will). The displacement to such a late point is indeed odd, if one remembers the Euripidean passage, but the heightened shamelessness of the argument at this late point perhaps helps motivate Phèdre's change of mind, as she pulls back from her jealousy and finally determines to confess and punish herself.

§**(21) une cabale/ a cabal:** see glossary under Pradon and Bouillon.

§**(24) Winckelmann dit / Winckelmann says:** compare the famous description of the Apollo Belvedere: "Ich vergesse alles andere über dem Anblicke dieses Wunderwerks der Kunst, und ich nehme selbst einen erhabenen Stand an, um mit Würdigkeit anzuschauen. Mit Verehrung scheint sich meine Brust zu erweitern und zu erheben, …" ("I forget everything else when I gaze at this masterpiece, and I myself assume an elevated stance, in order to look on with dignity. My breast seems to enlarge and rise with admiration.") Source: p. 393 (2. Theil, IV.F.b.aa) of the 1764 edition (or p. 816 [2. Theil, V.B.e.hh] of the 1776 edition) of *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* [combined critical edition in Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Schriften und Nachlass*, Band 4.1, Mainz am Rhein 2002].

§**(26) pourrait être jugé dur et insensible, si le poète n'avait pas prévenu ce reproche en commençant par peindre son intimité mystérieuse avec la chaste déesse / one might think Euripides' Hippolytus strict and insensitive, had the poet not preempted such a criticism by beginning with the portrayal of his mysterious intimacy with the chaste goddess:** unlike Schlegel, many modern critics believe that Hippolytus is portrayed in a somewhat offputting way in his early scenes, since male devotion to chastity is less readily understandable in the Greek context than for those in a Christian tradition, and especially since before his appearance Aphrodite reveals her anger at him and the doom he faces for his lack of respect, and upon his appearance he soon re-enacts his disrespect when he is warned by a servant but refuses any attention at all to Aphrodite's statue.

§**(27) les vers si connus d'Horace / Horace's very famous lines:** Horace, *de art poetica* 179-182: aut agitur res in scaenis aut acta refertur. / segnius irritant animos demissa per aurem, / quam quae sunt oculis subiecta fidelibus, et quae / ipse sibi tradit spectator; "either action is carried out on stage or a thing done is reported. / The emotions are less forcefully stimulated by what enters through the ear / than by what is exposed to reliable eyes and what / the spectator himself delivers to himself."

§**(28) ce vers fameux / the following notorious line:** Eur. *Hipp*. 612, "My tongue has sworn, but my heart/mind is unsworn!" parodied skilfully against the comic character Euripides in Aristophanes' *Women at the Thesmophoria* 275-76 and *Frogs* 1471, and quoted or alluded to in many other ancient texts.

§**(29) Ces âmes énergiques, a dit un grand connaisseur de l'antiquité, ressemblent à la mer / As a great connoisseur of antiquity once said, these exuberant souls are similar to the sea:** compare J. J. Winckelmann, *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Mahlerei und Bildhauerkunst*:"Das allgemeine vorzügliche Kennzeichen der Griechischen Meisterstücke ist endlich eine edle Einfalt, und eine stille Grösse, so wohl in der Stellung als im Ausdruck. So wie die Tiefe des Meers allezeit ruhig bleibt, die Oberfläche mag noch so wüten, eben so zeiget der Ausdruck in den Figuren der Griechen

bei allen Leidenschaften eine grosse und gesetzte Seele." ("The universal outstanding characteristic of Greek masterworks is in the end a noble simplicity and a quiet grandeur, both in stance and in expression: just as the depths of the sea remain still at all times, however much the surface rages, so the expression in the figures of the Greeks reveal, amidst all passions, a great and serene soul.") Source: *Winckelmann's Werke* ed. Fernow (Dresden) Bd. 1 (1808) p. 31; or *Johann Winckelmanns samtliche Werke* ed. Eiselein (Donauoschingen) Bd. 1 (1825) p. 30 (§79).

§**(33) un recit pompeux, surchargé d'exagérations déclamatoires / a pompous report, packed with declamatory hyperbole:** again, Schlegel conceals the fact that the style and density of description in Racine's narrative owe much to Seneca, who exercised a great influence on the style of much 16th- and 17th-century drama.

§**(37) Racine fait du premier législateur d'Athènes un roi vagabond / Racine turns the first Athenian lawmaker into a wandering ruler:** in this point, Racine is following Seneca rather than Euripides, although Seneca uses the even more pejorative version of Theseus as an abettor in an impious attempt to abduct a goddess, while Racine uses the milder, rationalized version (see note on §**(14)**).

§**(37) Sedet aeternumque sedebit / Infelix Theseus:** "Wretched Theseus sits and will sit eternally": Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.617-18. During Aeneas' trip to the underworld to consult his dead father, the Sibyl describes for him what lies hidden behind the walls of the area reserved for punishment of sinners. One version of the myth told that for helping Pirithous try to abduct Persephone, both heroes were trapped on a stone seat. Vergil's lines declare that the punishment was permanent, but in some versions of the story Theseus or both Theseus and Pirithous were released by Heracles.

§**(39) Ses lamentations sont les simples accents de la nature / His laments are spoken in a simple, natural manner:** Winckelmann and his Romantic followers tended to identify their ideal of beauty with nature and to view idealized art as a true expression of "nature." The full passage of Theseus' laments, *Hipp*. 817-851, is in fact written in an artificial and stylized language and unusual lyric rhythm typical of Greek tragedy.

§**(42) de cette beauté idéale qui fait le charme des chefs-d'œuvre antiques / the idealized sort of beauty that gives ancient masterpieces their appeal:** it is typical of a classicistic approach to concentrate on ideal beauty, harmony, and balance and to disregard or downplay the significance of other aspects of ancient culture, art, and literature.

§**(43) Racine est extrêmement satisfait de la moralité de cette tragédie / Racine is supremely satisfied with the morals of his tragedy:** the quotation that follows is from the last paragraph of the preface Racine added to the published play. In treating the claims of the preface, Schlegel takes no account of the probabilty that Racine's remarks have a specific agenda of self-defense in a climate of strong moral condemnation of the theater and of

contemporary tragedy by some prominent Christians, and that this agenda may distort the interpretation offered.

§**(43) cette peine *au pied boiteux, qui quitte rarement le scélérat qu'elle poursuit* / retribution *equipped with a lame foot, that rarely ever leaves the scoundrel it is after*:** if this is a close translation of a Greek or Latin passage, its source has not yet been identified. The idea of slow or late but nevertheless certain punishment of a wrongdoer by the gods is often expressed in Greek literature. The most similar passage is Euripides, fragment 979, speaking of personified Justice (Dikê): "… but proceeding on her way in silence and with slow foot she will seize the wicked, whenever it may be." Schlegel may simply be paraphrasing or misremembering. In a famous passage of Homer, *Iliad* 9.502-507, it is the goddesses called Prayers (Litai) who are lame and follow slowly, while Ruin (Atê) races ahead of them "sound of foot and strong."

§**(43) choque toutes les vraisemblances / go against all the rules of verisimilitude:** although "probability" in fiction was an important criterion for Aristotle in some regards, an extreme insistence on verisimilitude is characteristic of many poetic theories from the Renaissance onwards, including sterile debates on whether the action of a play should be a representation of a time period equal to the time of performance before an audience. It is an artificiality of much excellent fiction and drama to concentrate events and tolerate coincidences for the sake of the story, and Schlegel's criticism of Racine here is one of his particularly captious stabs.

§**(44) «J'ai cru», dit Racine, etc. / I thought it necessary, Racine says:** the quotation is from the fourth paragraph of Racine's preface.

§**(46) la satisfaction que doit produire l'impression générale d'un ouvrage de l'art quelconque / the feeling of satisfaction that any work of art must generate in us with the overall impression it makes:** it is a longstanding question why people take pleasure in depictions of suffering and disaster, and one explanation especially popular in the Romantic period was that the observer of a tragic drama is consoled by the nobility or dignity of the victim or (in a more Hegelian vein) by the perception of abiding ethical or metaphysical values in the result. See B. Seidensticker, "Über das Vergnügen an tragischen Gegenständen," pp. 219-241 in A. Harder, J. Hofmann, eds., *Fragmenta Dramatica: Beiträge zur Interpretation der griechischen Tragikerfragmente und ihrer Wirkungsgeschichte* (Göttingen 1991).

§**(47) *Suave, mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis, etc.*:** from the opening of Book II of Lucretius, *de Rerum Natura*: Suave, mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis, / e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem, / non quia vexari quemquamst iucunda voluptas, / sed quibus ipse malis careas quia cernere suave est. "It is sweet, when on the vast sea winds roil the expanses of water, / to gaze from the land upon the great toil of another, / not because it

is a happy delight that someone is being afflicted, / but because it is sweet to observe from what troubles you are yourself free."

§**(48) un grand homme luttant contre l'adversité est un spectacle digne des dieux / a great man struggling against adversity is a spectacle worthy of the gods:** Seneca, *de providentia* 2.7-8: "Are you amazed if that god who is most loving of good men, who wants them to be as good and outstanding as possible, assigns to them a fortune with which to exercise themselves? I am not amazed, if sometimes the gods are eager to gaze upon great men struggling with some adversity. Sometimes we humans take pleasure if a brave-spirited youth has greeted an onrushing wild beast with a hunting-spear, if unafraid he has endured the attack of a lion, and this spectacle is all the more pleasing to the degree that the one who has done it is more distinguished. These are not the sort of things that can turn the gaze of the gods toward themselves, these childish delights suited to human levity. Here is a worthy spectacle toward which god might look, rapt at his work, here is a pairing worthy of a god, a brave man placed together with a bad fortune, particularly if the man has also challenged his opponent."

§**(49) La définition la plus reçue / The most commonly accepted definition:** this is a paraphrase of Aristotle's famous definition in *Poetics*, chapter 6: "Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and possessing magnitude; in embellished language, each kind of which is used separately in the different parts; in the mode of action and not narrated; and effecting through pity and fear the catharsis of such emotions." (tr. J. Hutton)

§**(50) la fatalité / fate:** Since the time of the Schlegels, the doctrine that Greek tragedy typically reflects a fatalistic view of the world has frequently been overemphasized in popular understanding of the plays and of Greek religion. In fact, no culture and no personal life can be based on a consistently applied fatalism, and the Greeks applied the concept inconsistently and intermittently, as a retrospective explanation (or consolation) for what could no longer be helped and as a structuring element in certain kinds of stories involving oracles of a certain type (different from the oracles that ancient Greek individuals and cities actually sought, for instance, from Delphi). In *Hippolytus* there are clear indications that the disaster that befalls the hero has been caused by his own choice to neglect and insult Aphrodite, and this coexists with Artemis' consolation that Hippolytus is simply meeting his "fate." In Racine's play, one might well see a great sense of *fatalité* in Phèdre's affliction, which is neither psychologically motivated nor justified by some specific past error on her part.

§**(53) lui avait été imposé parce qu'il avait involuntairement offensé Diane / had been forced on him because he had inadvertently offended Diana:** this represents a not uncommon but misleading rationalization of the suggestive narrative of the chorus in Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 104-257, where the reason for Artemis' anger is far from transparent, as her

intervention seems to operate on a symbolic or analogical basis that ignores the chronological sequence of events; and the mixture of freedom and compulsion in Agamemnon's consenting to the sacrifice of his daughter is also not meant to be neatly disentangled.

§**(53) pourrait se prolonger à l'infini / could continue indefinitely:** actually, in the case of the house of Atreus, if the Furies had succeeded in hauling Orestes off for eternal punishment in the underworld, the clan would have been wiped out and this particular chain of vengeance would have ended.

§**(53) opprimé par la tyrannie du sort / crushed by the tyranny of fate:** this claims appears to be based on careless application of the preconceived schema of freedom vs. necessity, since in *Prometheus* the hero-god is oppressed by Zeus and not by fate, and indeed Prometheus' knowledge of a conditional fate that awaits Zeus is a source of his strength and defiance in the play.

§**(57) sans parler de Polyeucte, d'Esther et d'Atalie / *Polyeucte*, *Esther* and *Athalie* need hardly be mentioned:** Corneille's *Polyeucte* (1680) was based on the story of a martyred saint; Racine's last two plays, *Esther* (1689) and *Athalie* (1691), used Old Testament stories.

§**(57) Alzire … Gusman … Zamore:** Voltaire's tragedy *Alzire, ou les Américains* (1760) tells a story of personal and cultural conflict in the relations between the Spanish conquerors and the natives of Peru; Gusman is an arrogant conqueror, Zamore a resisting native, and Alzire a woman caught in conflicting feelings and obligations; at the end of the play Gusman is brought on dying, but his dying speech on his Christian religion so impresses Zamore that he converts.

§**(60) Il dit: «Pour ce qui est du personnage d'Hippolyte etc. / He writes: "As far as the character of Hippolytus is concerned etc.:** the quotation is from the fourth paragraph of Racine's preface.

§**(62) quoique les entrailles d'un père commencent à s'émouvoir en lui / though, as a father, he begins to feel some emotion deep inside:** this is an overgenerous interpretation of Theseus' two short speeches after the messenger speech (*Hipp*. 1257-60 "Although because of hatred of the one who suffered these things I took delight in this report, now, out of respect for the gods and for him, because he is my offspring, I neither take pleasure in nor am vexed by these sufferings."; 1265-67 "Bring him here, so that face to face I may refute, both by words and by what the gods have caused, the man who denied that he defiled my bed."). Indeed, it is rather the Thésée of Racine who feels an involuntary disquiet even before he learns the truth, a rather Senecan touch (*Ph*. 1162 "Mes entrailles pour toi se troublent par avance."; 1455-57 "Mais moi-même, malgré ma sévère rigueur, / Quelle plaintive voix crie au fond du mon cœur? / Une pitié secrète et m'afflige et m'étonne.")

§**(62) Diane s'approche de lui / Diana approaches him:** The goddess Artemis appears above the stage (on the stage-building roof or suspended from the theater-crane) and does not interact physically with the humans on the lower plane of the stage; indeed, the audience is perhaps to understand that Artemis is not visible to Hippolytus, who recognizes her by her voice and fragrance.

§**(63)** Schlegel's translation is mostly accurate, but there are a few points to note. In 1398 "tu péris bien crudellement" he translates the incorrect variant *toi duspotmos* (found in many early editions) rather than the correct reading *moi prosphilês*, "you are dying as one very dear to me." In 1415 "Hélas! la race humaine est donc sous la malédiction des Dieux," he mistakes the contrary-to-fact wish construction for a realization of fact and gives the adjective *araion* a passive rather than active sense. The correct translation is: "Would that it were possible for the race of mortals to be the source of a curse upon gods." His version of the opening of Artemis' reply in 1416ff. ("la colère de Vénus offensée … ne peut plus t'atteindre …") is also mistaken (there is a similar error in one of the Latin translations widely available at Schlegel's time): it is rather "Not even when you are beneath the earth will the wrath that crashed down on you because of Aphrodite's zeal be unavenged, in recompense for your piety and noble mind. For I will exact vengeance from another …" In 1441, he translates the text with an optative ("puisses-tu quitter") as it appeared in most editions up to his time (based on poor or misread manuscripts), but the actual transmitted text is an indicative (more bittersweet in tone): "you easily [almost: "how easily you"] leave our long companionship." In 1455, the meaning is rather "Pray that you find your legitimate sons to be of such a character." In 1458 Hippolytus asks to be covered with his own robes, not with Theseus'.

§**(67) l'assertion de M. de Laharpe / M. de Laharpe's assertion:** this comment is in Parte II, Livre I, Chap. III, Section VII (2nd paragraph) of his *Lycée, ou Cours de Littérature ancienne et moderne* (= vol. 3, p. 354 of the 1813 edition).

Notes to Avant-Propos

§(i) les feuilles de la Sibylle / the leaves of the Sibyl: the image of the prophetic leaves of the Cuman Sibyl blown by the winds alludes to Vergil, *Aeneid* 3.441-452.

§(v) Geoffroi qui rédigeait alors le feuilleton du théâtre dans le *Journal de l'Empire* / Geoffroi, who was editor at the time of the theater pages in the *Journal of the Empire*: Julien Louis Geoffroy, 1743-1814, was the chief drama critic of *Journal des Débats* from 1800 to 1814 and inventer of the *feuilleton* (dramatic and literary notices printed in a bottom panel of a French newspaper); a royalist who detested Voltaire and the *philosophes*, he was a strong defender of classical French theater. I have not located the remark quoted here by

Schegel. Schlegel is not mentioned in the section on *Phèdre* in Geoffroy's collected dramatic criticism, *Cours de littérature dramatique, ou Recueil par ordre de matières des feuilletons de Geoffroy*, vol. 2 (Paris 1819) 118-141. Geoffroy may be the author of the brief notice about a performance of *Phèdre* in the feuilleton of the Dec. 28, 1807, issue of *Journal de l'Empire*, which remarks on the furor in the press over Schlegel's *Comparaison* and alleges that Schlegel didn't know French and his attackers didn't know Greek, so that the debate was sterile (the bulk of this notice then goes on to attack Voltaire's opinions about Racine). The section relevant to Schegel runs: "Ne voilà-t-il pas un étranger, un Allemand, qui s'est flatté d'avoir les yeux perçans pour découvrir quelques taches dans ce soleil! M. Schlegel, qui a de l'érudition comme un Allemand et de l'esprit comme un Français, s'est avisé de faire une comparaison entre l'Hippolyte d'Euripide et la Phèdre de Racine et non-seulement il n'a pas traité Euripide comme un sot et un barbouilleur, ainsi que Voltaire et M. de la Harpe ont coutume d'en agir, mais, et c'est son crime, il a donné au poète grec quelqu' avantage sur le poète français, par rapport au plan et au caractère; on n'a seulement pas daigné examiner ses raisonnemens, il étoit plus facile de les calomnier que de les réfuter. Toute la petite littérature française c'est soulevée contre le témeraire." ("Behold, a foreigner, a German, who has flattered himself that he has an eye sharp enough to uncover some faults in this brilliant work. M. Schlegel, who has erudition in the German style and intelligence in the French style, took it into his head to make a comparison of Euripides' Hippolytus and Racine's Phèdre, and not only did he not treat Euripides as a fool and bungler, as Voltaire and M. de la Harpe are accustomed to do, but (and this is his crime) he awarded a certain superiority to the Greek poet over the French poet, in the matter of plot-design and character; people have not so much as deigned to examine his reasoning, it was easier for them to slander it than to refute it. All the minor literati have risen against the reckless fellow.")

§(v) Un autre collaborateur du même journal, Dussault / Another contributor to the same journal, Dussault: Jean Joseph François Dussault, 1769-1824, an editor of *Journal des Débats* from 1800 (renamed *Journal de l'Empire* for some years of Napoleon's rule), author of many reviews published in it; criticism collected in his *Annales littéraires, ou Choix chronologique des principaux articles inserés par M. Dussault dans le Journal des Débats depuis 1800 jusqu' à 1817 inclusivement* (5 vols., Paris 1818-1824); vol. 2 (1818), 411-436 = reprint of three pieces on Schlegel's *Comparaison* printed in Feb. 16, Feb. 24, and March 4, 1808, issues of *Journal de l'Empire*. These notices, however, do not contain the quotation Schegel gives here.

§(v) à ce passage où le Dante etc. / to the passage where Dante etc.: Dante, *Purgatorio*, Canto 20, lines 19-123 tells of the encounter with Ugo Ciappetta in the fifth terrace of Purgatory (the theme is avarice vs. liberality); line 52 (*Figliuol fu' io d'un beccaio di Parigi*) is the

line that offended François I; the remark is based on a legend of the humble origins of Hugh's family, but in fact both he and his father Hugh the Great were titled nobility.

§(v) la polémique de Lessing / the polemic of Lessing: see Glossary under Lessing. In *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* Lessing discusses Corneille's *Rodogune* in sections 29-32 and 81-83; Voltaire's *Sémiramis* in sections 10-12, 26-27, 80; Voltaire's *Mérope* in sections 36-40.

ENDNOTES: TEXTUAL VARIANTS

[1] The 1842 edition has the full 1807 title in the table of contents on page xxv, but the chapter title on p. 87 and running head are instead "Comparaison des deux Phèdres," the title also used by Schlegel in his Avant-Propos.
[2] et l'on arrive bientôt à croire 1807 ("people soon come to believe")
[3] et des vers *added* 1807 ("and of the verses")
[4] avait devant les yeux, surtout dans le commencement de sa carrière 1807 ("had before his eyes, above all at the beginning of his career")
[5] comme tous 1807 ("like all")
[6] profondes 1807 ("profound")
[7] seule peut 1807 ("alone is able")
[8] dans le maniéré 1807 ("into the mannered")
[9] céleste, ni surtout 1807 ("heavenly wrath, nor above all")
[10] sinon: Si 1807 ("except: if")
[11] surtout 1807 ("above all")
[12] pis 1807 [adverb *worst* instead of adjective]
[13] L'instant d'après 1807 ("immediately afterward")
[14] les présenter tels qu'ils sont 1807 ("presented as they are")
[15] revient 1807 ("comes back")
[16] ce lien pour tes cheveux dorés, qu'une 1807 ("this fillet for your golden hair, which")
[17] Il le refuse 1807 ("he rejects it")
[18] doit être surtout 1807 ("needs to be above all")
[19] dont l'instant d'après 1807 ("in the immediate aftermath")
[20] Mais j'observe 1807 ("But I observe")
[21] nuit surtout 1807 ("the especially damaging element")
[22] repousser 1807 ("repel")
[23] J'observerai 1807 ("I will observe")
[24] est fondé 1807 ("is well-founded")
[25] Toutefois si l'on 1807 [change of word order]
[26] contenter d'une rétribution tardive, 1807 ("content with a tardy form of retribution")
[27] Avec cette concession-là, 1807 ("With that compromise/concession,")
[28] veuillions 1807 [change of archaic verb form]
[29] placé 1807 [correction of agreement]
[30] Dieux 1807 [change to lowercase]
[31] j'observerai 1807 ("I will observe")
[32] des actions des autres 1807 ("by the actions of the others")
[33] il a 1807 [correction of tense]
[34] d'autre part *added* 1842 ("on the other hand")
[35] même sans qu'ils l'aient su 1807 ("even without their having known it")
[36] rétribution 1807 ("retribution")
[37] mais elle 1807 ("but it")
[38] envers 1807 ("regarding")
[39] rétributions 1807 ("retributions")
[40] présence sa dernière heure 1807 ("his final hours")