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IRONY IN THE TRAGEDIES OF RACINE

by

CAROLYN LOUISE JACOBS

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Thesis Director's signature:

Philip Alwoodsworth

Houston, Texas

November, 1973
PREFACE

The more one reads the tragedies of Racine, the more words, lines, allusions, incidents and situations reveal ironic overtones. The sources of irony are numerous, the effects extremely varied. Irony as a literary category promises to be very fruitful in contributing to an understanding of Racine's theatre.

In this study, irony will be examined under two broad headings: first, the irony of communication, that is subjective verbal irony used intensively by the characters and directed toward one another and themselves; second, dramatic irony as developed through various characteristics of Racine's style as well as through the structure of the tragedies. Under the heading of stylistic irony we will see how certain patterns of language and vocabulary throw into relief the knowledge of the audience and the ignorance of the characters. Under the heading of structure we will examine the way dramatic irony is developed through aspects of plot or action—the legendary background, political and social circumstances intertwined with the timing and arrangement of incidents, and emotional patterns and their consequences. The ultimate purpose of the study will be to see how the various forms of irony contribute to the creation of tragedy and to the tragic emotion of the audience. I will use the term tragic irony to designate the tragic effects of both verbal and dramatic irony.

The classification of irony must be somewhat arbitrary since categories necessarily overlap and any one instance of irony may be seen in several lights. But classification for purposes of discussion will
ultimately permit us to see how all the different aspects of Racine's art work together. It must also be understood that the various types of irony occur to a greater or lesser extent in most of the plays. An attempt to discuss all the plays in terms of all the manifestations of irony would be repetitious and pointless. Therefore, each kind of irony will be discussed primarily in reference to one or two plays in which it seems to be particularly important, but the choice of plays is in no way intended to be exclusive. Alexandre and Esther will not be included in the study, and La Thébaide will be mentioned only briefly.

Passages quoted from Racine will be from the edition of Paul Mesnard, Oeuvres de J. Racine (2nd edition, Paris, Hachette). However, the spelling, particularly of the --ois verb endings, has been somewhat modernized.

I wish to express here my appreciation to my thesis director, Professor Philip A. Wadsorth, for his guidance and encouragement, to Professor Donald W. Tappan, whose seminar on Racine brought forth a term paper on irony in Phèdre which led to my dissertation topic, and to Professor Jamis Pallister, who, in my undergraduate days, first introduced me to the beauty of a Racinian line.
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CHAPTER I

TERMINOLOGY AND BACKGROUND

The term irony has a wide range of meanings. In general conversation it is used in two ways. First, it designates verbal communication in which the actual meaning of the words uttered is quite different from their apparent meaning—the speaker blames but appears to praise, condemns but seems to condone. This device provides subtle communication when propriety, sociability, or some other reason prohibits direct speech. Resulting in mockery or ridicule, verbal irony is generally used as a psychological weapon or shield. Of course, an appreciation of the irony depends on perceiving simultaneously the two contradictory meanings. When Andromaque characterizes Pyrrhus' offer to protect Astyanax as "un dessein si beau, si galant," it is obvious that because the motive for this offer is Pyrrhus' desire to bribe his way into Andromaque's affections, her opinion is quite the opposite of what she says. The second popular usage of irony, which might be called irony of fate or events, consists in qualifying as ironical a turn of events or an experience in which the outcome is the opposite of what was expected or the truth the contrary of what it was assumed or appeared to be. This usage would apply to the circumstances of Hippolyte's death—an excellent horseman is dragged to death by horses he raised and trained himself. In verbal irony the paradox is created or imposed by verbal manipulation, although it may be suggested by some ambiguity in external and observed events or circumstances. In irony of fate the paradox is seen as existing in the nature of things. It
is perceived, not contrived. These two popular uses of the term irony provide a basis for all the more sophisticated conceptions of the word.

A great deal has been written about the subject of irony. Critical applications of the word are various and not particularly consistent but they seem to fall into several broad categories, each of which may include a variety of related usages. The first, verbal irony in literature, takes several forms. There is the subjective irony of ambivalent language, whether used by characters in a dialogue or by an author commenting upon his characters, his work or life in general. This kind of "raillerie," called the "drye mock" by a sixteenth century writer, exists in the following remark of Andromaque which is similar to the one cited previously. When Pyrrhus tells her that the Greeks still fear Hector in his son, Andromaque replies: "Digne objet de leur crainte!" (I, iv, 270) She then makes her meaning explicit by describing Astyanax as an unfortunate child who is not yet even old enough to know that Pyrrhus is his master and that Hector was his father. She mocks both Pyrrhus and the Greeks and her remark conceals a deep resentment or perhaps hatred of both. It is possible for particularly subtle forms of verbal irony to go undetected. In speech, the tone of voice may serve to call attention to the irony but in print its interpretation depends on the choice, combination, and arrangement of words and on the alertness of the reader. Two specific forms of verbal irony are understatement—saying something is less than it is, and its sub-category litotes—making an affirmation by stating the negative of its opposite: "not bad" for "good." Thus, Monime hints at her love for
Xipharès, saying; "Pour me faire, Seigneur, consentir à vous voir/ Vous n'aurez pas besoin d'un injuste pouvoir" (I, ii, 221-222).

Irony of manner or character, often called Socratic irony, constitutes a second category. It is generally taken to mean dissimulation through understatement for a specific purpose. This use of irony is related to the supposed etymology of the word. Irony is derived from the Greek word eironeia which is thought to have evolved from eiron, the name given to a character in Greek comedy who was basically a dissembler, one who misrepresented himself through evasion and understatement, who pretended to be less than he was. In comedy the eiron was opposed to the alazon, an imposter who through boasting and exaggeration pretended to be more than he was. Neither character was considered admirable; however, the eiron traditionally triumphed over the alazon because he was sly, cunning and more clever. The eiron, then, can be said to have given rise to the notion of irony of manner, but in a pejorative sense. The term was applied to Socrates as a means of castigation by his enemies. It emphasized duplicity, deceptiveness, or a hypocritical sly nature. Socrates' habit of posing as a "mock-modest" questioner who pretended to agree in order, finally, to point out the incongruity of premises and conclusions would naturally have aroused resentment among those who were made to appear ridiculous—especially boastful types (the appropriateness of the eiron/alazon opposition is obvious). It was only later that the term came to be applied to Socrates in a favorable or positive sense.

Up until the time of Aristotle, then, irony was a negative term for a mode of behavior. In the Nichomachean Ethics Aristotle\(^5\) opposes
the braggart and the truthful man and places the ironical man somewhere in between, as one who denies or depreciates his merits. The truthful man will sometimes yield to understatement to avoid appearing pompous and this is only good taste, but for Aristotle over-modesty was actually a form of bragging. According to Sedgwick, Aristotle was the first to formulate a definition of irony in terms of a way of speaking characterized by understatement, although he still retained as well the broader meaning of irony as a way of behaving. Sedgwick also reports that Cicero was the first writer to have unreserved praise for Socratic irony, calling it "urbane pretense." Finally, in the Romantic period, Socratic irony was exalted to its present emphasis on dialectical irony and was applied to Socrates in the sense of feigned ignorance for the purpose of exposing the falsehood of boasters, and of skillful questioning for the purpose of getting at truth through dialogue.

A third category of irony is one specifically associated with drama. The terms irony of events, dramatic irony and Sophoclean irony are all used to refer to this category. Bishop Connop Thirlwall is credited with first introducing the terminology, although not of course the idea of irony into English dramatic criticism in an essay "On the Irony of Sophocles" published in 1835. In this essay he discussed verbal, dialectical [Socratic], and what he called practical irony which is irony of fate or circumstance—a discrepancy between appearance and reality pointed up by ambiguous language. He discussed these in relation to drama, and after his essay the three terms tragic, dramatic and Sophoclean irony came to be used more or less interchangeably.
to denote speeches of characters which have two meanings corresponding to their expectations as opposed to the fate in store for them. R. G. Moulton developed the use of the term dramatic irony, particularly in relation to Shakespeare, and today this is the term generally used to designate irony such as that in the following speech which Desdemona's father makes to Othello: "Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see. She has deceived her father, and may thee."

B. Brabantio, of course, has no inkling of how much Othello will come to believe that Desdemona has deceived him, nor of the consequences of this belief. A. R. Thompson remarks that this kind of language which points out an eventual ironic turn of the plot is the equivalent of a wink. We would have to say a cruel and malicious wink of fate, here, which makes no exceptions in the name of humanity.

The question of fate brings us to the subject of irony as a philosophical attitude which forms a fourth category. Philosophical irony is, in a certain sense, an outgrowth of Socratic irony in its search for Knowledge. It involves the continual perception of the contradictions of life, human behavior and history in a detached overview of things indicative of the observer's spiritual freedom. The idea of spiritual freedom is usually associated with the nebulous term Romantic irony which emphasized the power of the artist to sweep detached over the whole of life. Bishop Thirlwall states this conception when he speaks of the position of the playwright in relation to his plays as one of ironic philosophic detachment. It is sometimes considered man's salvation, as the Romantics tended to believe. On the other hand, it
is often seen as a source of weakness. A. R. Thompson views the tendency to perceive life ironically as a reflection of a divided soul, an inner discord which may be superficial or profound. He points out that, to a certain extent, this kind of tension between rational-spiritual and emotional-passional concerns whose mythic forms are the God of Light and the God of Darkness, Jehovah and the Devil, and so forth, is part of religious or philosophical awareness. This is in line with Worcester's statement that the central fact of intellectual experience is the conflict between good and evil. But Thompson sees the ironic disposition pushed to the extreme of a final stance or outlook as characteristic of doubters who use it as a defense. He sees a pattern of characteristics in ironists: high idealism resulting in unhappiness and hopelessness about man's fate, keen perceptivity and intelligence, a quick imagination constantly playing over incongruities, and melancholy. H. M. Chevalier in a fascinating study of the ironic temper, particularly of Anatole France, draws a similar conclusion. He sees irony as a "basic response to things themselves," and maintains that France is a great ironist in that without necessarily using verbal irony he relates the incongruities of life. Chevalier considers this philosophical irony to be more profound and powerful than verbal irony. At the same time he sees it as a weakness, an inability to choose and act, a kind of paralysis or passivity. David Worcester describes the attitude in another way with the term cosmic irony, deriving from the sentiment of infinite relativity which finally sees all human activity as vanity. With its themes of boredom, revolt against God and a vision of the earth as a
spack of dust, it represents the ultimate detachment from human life.

Contemporary literary criticism uses irony in a fifth way as an extension of philosophical irony, but with a positive thrust. It might well be termed dialectical irony, indicating its relationship to Socratic irony. States elaborates this concept in his book *Ironic and Drama: a Poetics*. Unlike irony as negativity, that is, reflecting a fatalistic or pessimistic view, this irony is the unlimited capacity to counter-balance ideas in a dialectical juxtaposition of opposites. It rises above fatalism and achieves "oppositional balance." States' view is really an expansion of Thirlwall's idea of the detached freedom of the dramatist. The character Hamlet is ironic in the negative sense. His double perception leads to pessimism and indecision. Shakespeare creating Hamlet is ironical in the second sense. As the creator of the paradoxes experienced by Hamlet, he remains outside them. States sees *Romeo and Juliet* as Shakespeare's greatest ironic drama because it constantly encompasses the conflicting notions of the perfection of love and death.

From the foregoing brief survey we can see that irony takes many directions and we may well wonder that all these forms are included in one term. Their common basis merits further discussion. The most obvious component of irony is the perception or expression of paradox. Words, situations, events seem to suggest one thing but actually mean something quite different. There is a disparity between statement and meaning, appearance and reality, expectation and realization, nature and destiny. It is the simultaneous view of the two sides of the coin that creates irony.

A second element, that of mockery or ridicule, is more controver-
sial. Verbal irony always implies satirical intent, whether it be directed toward the speaker himself or someone else. But there are differing views on this element in terms of irony of events or dramatic irony. A. R. Thompson criticizes the views of J. A. K. Thomson and Sedgewick whom he sees as equating irony with the detached view of the spectator who knows the outcome. Thompson feels this view makes dramatic anticipation or dramatic suspense the equivalent of dramatic irony. Thompson insists that there must always be the element of the painfully comic. His own idea of irony as having objective and subjective aspects actually seems to resolve the difficulty. The objective element is the contradiction which is intellectually perceived. The subjective element involves the feelings and reactions upon perceiving the paradox. In verbal irony someone is always the object of mockery; the observer’s human sympathies generally, at least in tragedy, go toward him, even if it is in a divided way. When Clytemnestre says to Iphigénie: "Venez, venez, ma fille, on n'attend plus que vous;/ Venez remercier un père qui vous aime" (IV, iv, 1168–1169), we feel a certain sympathy for Agamemnon’s plight, but also feel that the mockery is justified. With dramatic irony or irony of events the ignorance and apparent helplessness of the character or person involved make it seem as if there is a victim. It appears as if there is the intention to play a cruel joke by the gods, fate, or the author of the play. When Pyrrhus says to Andromaque, speaking of Astyanax: "Je défendrai sa vie aux dépens de mes jours" (I, iv, 288), the audience attributes to fate an intention to victimize. Thus the nature of an ironic paradox is such that it evokes in the observer a mixed reaction.
He is detached intellectually so that he perceives the mockery. At the same time he experiences a certain human sympathy for the victim or apparent victim and feels to some extent the sting or pain of his situation.

The reaction of an observer in the face of an ironic paradox also implies a kind of feeling that things ought not to be the way they are turning out to be. The situation somehow contradicts common notions of justice or fairness. The word incongruous is appropriate to describe ironic contradiction. Chevalier\textsuperscript{17} distinguishes between satire which stems from the juggling of proportions and dimensions so that there is exaggeration, distortion, caricature, and irony which results from basic pre-existing incongruities which would be irony of fate as discussed above. He also remarks that irony can be progressively more intense in the sense of showing sharper distinctions, more profound vision, but not progressively more bitter. Only its verbal expression may become more cruel and abrasive. One of the chief traits of ironic expression is that it attempts to conceal the subjective, emotional reaction to a situation. J. A. K. Thomson says it well: "The studied absence of emotion—is not that but another name for irony?\textsuperscript{18} The concealed emotion takes the form of a cruel joke or scoffing. A famous example of this in Racine is the irony which Hermione uses to reply to Pyrrhus after he has reversed his announcement that he would marry her. She contains, momentarily, violent emotions of hatred which will soon burst forth (see IV, v). In the last analysis, extensive use of irony is a kind of metaphysical protest against the contradictory nature of things and an affected
callousness is really a veiled cry of pain. One must laugh or mock in order to avoid weeping.

Irony in literature can appear in any genre, but the very existence of the term dramatic irony is indicative not only of the peculiar form that irony takes in drama, but of the fact that drama is a mode which lends itself particularly well to irony. Drama or that which is dramatic, like poetry or irony itself, is something that is more easily recognized than defined. Conflict, movement, passion, a certain intensity are some aspects of drama. It is essential to have the impression of action, of something happening, of an event or life in the process of being lived. Drama presents an illusion of life. The audience views scenes unfolding in the present moment in time and space. "Real" people are speaking and interacting. Incidents are enacted, not narrated. And yet the audience is aware that what they are viewing is not life but art. The action may seem to be real but in fact it is selected and contrived. However convincing a scene may be it is not spontaneous. It may represent life, give a glimpse into life or a fuller understanding of life, but it is art.

From earlier remarks about the role of the observer in the creation of irony, it follows that drama, because the play does not exist without the spectator, has high ironical potential. Sedgewick uses the term "general irony" to refer to the detached interest which characterizes the position of the spectator. He says that while general irony "precedes and underlies the spectacle of conflict, specific irony emerges sharply in the course of that spectacle and subsides into general irony
when the conflict is over." The conflict is an opposition of forces or wills—one character's will against that of another, against circumstances, natural law, political or social forces. It furnishes the basis for the organization of incidents, the forward-moving pattern or the interrelatedness of things in drama. Conflict generates action and is often considered a synonym for drama. Irony enters because there is always ignorance of one or more characters regarding some aspect of the conflict or its development, while the spectator sees the whole situation. He sees the cumulative sequence of events and incidents and their cause and effect relationships and can readily anticipate the reversal of fortune which the character does not anticipate. He understands the full meaning of acts or words whereas the character gleans only a partial or an erroneous meaning. The author's exploitation of this situation in any specific line of a play is the technique referred to as dramatic irony. In good drama irony may be much more than an occasional device used for a particular effect. It is potentially ready to be used by the playwright at every turn and is part of the fundamental nature of the dramatic situation.

Conflict in the drama is ironical in another sense. In the light of States' view of drama as a genre involving the juxtaposition of opposites, conflict as the way of ordering the play is what makes drama an inherently ironical mode. Or conversely, this ironical counterbalancing in a play is the conflict. States sees irony and dialectic as two terms which can be used to explain the way of perceiving and ordering materials which is peculiar to drama—ordering according to what he calls "ironic
necessity" or internal fatality"—that is, with a view to the patterns of anticipation of the author and audience. Drama is irony acted out. Dialectic is irony explained. According to States the opposition is apparent at every level of a play—not just in the elaboration of the plot, but in structure, imagery, symbols, the selection and arrangement of scenes, character traits, and so forth.

Susanne Langer's 21 concept of "virtual future" as the essence of the dramatic illusion isolates another aspect of the theatrical experience which makes it so ripe for irony. She underscores the continuity of action when she says that in drama any act (any illusion of physical or mental activity) is not an isolated event but occurs as part of a forward-moving sequence or pattern. An act is seen in terms of its future consequences, its destiny. Langer calls drama the "mode of Destiny." The same sense of destiny is experienced in real life only at moments of special emotional stress. Normally in life the circumstances which underlie an extraordinary occurrence are understood only gradually, after such an occurrence is witnessed or experienced. However, in drama circumstances are colored as ominous and point toward an event even before the situation is clearly understood. The anticipated consequences make the future always imminent. Thus, time is telescoped. The future destiny is superimposed on the present occurrence. The spectator, whether he fears or hopes for the future event, is always conscious of it. The ultimate separation which will occur at the end of Bérénice looms in the mind of the audience throughout the play and we see how each decision, hesitation or conversation leads up to the final moment.
A scene is dramatic only in proportion to the reaction it evokes in the audience, and irony offers a unique means of controlling that reaction. It can be used to focus attention on specific details, incidents or characters. It can evoke sympathies for certain characters who are made to appear victims of fate. Irony can ultimately make a play more dramatic by increasing dramatic tension and intensifying the emotional experience of the spectator. In pointing out that the dramatic qualities of a play survive translation much more than lyrical detail, A. R. Thompson asserts that dramatic values "depend upon the imaginative linking together of all details in sequence during a time approximating performance." Irony facilitates this linking together, the impression of continuity discussed by Langer, because it evokes prior and subsequent events. It causes the mind of the spectator to connect seemingly unrelated incidents, to sweep back and forth over the play at the moment of an ironic occurrence. Drama and irony support each other: drama has ironic possibilities because it is the "mode of Destiny." At the same time irony increases the impression of the interrelatedness of things.

In addition to those general qualities of drama which contribute to the development of irony, tragedy has certain special ironical features. Peter Nurse, in pursuing the notion of "le tragique racinien," states that Aristotle tends to see the events of tragedy as occurring in an "ironic perspective" and that Racine, generally agreeing with Aristotle both in theory and practice, has created plays which are "essentially ironic structures." The conflict in tragedy takes a
particular form: the hero finds himself struggling against some kind of
superior force—another character, the gods, "fate," political or social
circumstances, something within himself or some combination of these.
Such odds can result only in much suffering and ultimately destruction
or disaster—often, but not necessarily, death. At the end of the
tragedy there is a resolution—the restoration of some kind of tran-
scendent order—moral, religious, social or political.24

Man against superior forces—is this not in and of itself ironic?
From the beginning the hero is doomed. All his actions are as in a
void. The irony is intensified by the kind of person the protagonist
is; he represents a magnified or elevated image of man both by his
high birth and position and his superior qualities. Kings, princesses,
emperors, generals, nobles are the heroes of Corneille and Racine.
Their stature is further enhanced because they are drawn from histor-
ical or mythological tradition. A substantial body of legend furnished
the characters of Greek tragedy. Corneille and Racine drew their heroes
from Greek or Christian myth, Roman history and other such sources.
These heroes are in positions of authority and command respect and ad-
miration but, at the same time, as representatives of humanity they
have our sympathy. They are subject to human weakness. In Greek trag-
edies the downfall came about at least in part because of *hamartia* or
"error of judgment," the most well-known form of which is *hubris* or
"pride." Sophocles' Oedipus had this failing: although the oracle
foretold that he would kill his father and marry his mother, his own
vanity and temper helped to bring this about (he killed his father in
anger). We see that same blind self-confidence in Racine's Hippolyte who feels that the gods will protect him and therefore refuses to clarify his innocence to Thésée; thus Thésée invokes Neptune's vengeance.

The exact cause of the tragic disaster, then, is ambiguous. Although to the audience the conflict is weighted against the protagonist from the beginning, he wages a heroic struggle. But instead of serving in any way to delay or diminish the catastrophe, his efforts only move him closer to misfortune. While the character himself is ignorant of the progression of events, the spectator sees and links each step. The protagonist is seen simultaneously as a victim of external forces and as contributing to his own doom. Irony highlights the disparity between the character's assessment of the situation and the real state of affairs and underlines the cause and effect chain of events in which the character's actions play a part. States suggests that tragic heroes have flaws "not so much to show that man is guilty but that the gods, ideally--are not." He maintains that "truly dramatic flaws" do not detract from the high moral stature of the character, but rather render him "ambiguously fallible." They "mark for destruction the median man who simultaneously deserves it (but not quite), yet does not deserve it (but not quite)." 25 And so we have irony stemming from the way of the universe, the chaotic or at least ambiguous order of things. This is what makes tragedy fundamentally ironic—it rests on the conception of a divided universe where things are not absolute and yet man's yearnings and expectations are for absolutes. The duality is often reflected in individual characters who are divided against them—
selves. Euripides' Medea is torn between hatred of Jason who has deserted her and love for her children. Racine has made the internal strife of his characters, divided between their passion and the responsibilities of their moral and social roles, the essence of the conflict in his plays. The tragic universe, then, is not all of one piece. It is based on the dualism which William Barrett singles out as the most characteristic habit of Western Philosophy, at least since Plato. Man experiences conflicts of reason versus passion, spirit versus emotion, good versus evil, time versus eternity, the individual versus the community. In all of these options man takes an ambiguous position. He is on both sides and neither side. His experience is inevitably mixed. Calcaro states: "The ground of Being is itself contradictory, and human action and suffering both reflect and paradoxically resolve its contradictions." And more simply: "What is right and wrong about man is not peculiar to him, but rather inherent in the universal order of things." These words describe the stuff of tragedy.

Tragedy often involves ironic reversals of fortune. Phèdre, assuming Thésée is dead, feels less bound to keep her love for Hippolyte secret. She even dares to hope for fulfillment. But she has no sooner revealed her passion to Oenone and Hippolyte than she suddenly learns that Thésée is alive. Oedipus is a famous king who feels he has escaped his predicted misfortunes. Suddenly he finds out the truth about his marriage. Any stability or happiness is shown to be based on false assumptions. Reversals such as these are ironic in terms of the individuals involved. At the same time they have a meaning which extends
beyond the particular characters and the greater irony comes from their meaning in terms of the chaotic order discussed above. The tragedy does not lie in the events themselves but in the transcendent pattern which they signify. Thus tragedy has a foundation in time and the life of the individual but its meaning is in terms also of eternity and the collective experience of humanity. "Tragic man, a funambulist in thought and action, walks the dizzy path between the two meanings of his single passion."29

The ambiguity which underlies the hero, the conflict and the universe of tragedy naturally contributes to the spectator’s experience of catharsis, the mingling of the emotions of pity and fear as Aristotle said it, or the state of poetic knowledge which results from viewing tragedy. If tragedy is ironic by nature, catharsis has been called an "ironic psychological state,"30 because it results from the combination of detachment and sympathy on the part of the spectator. In fact irony can help to evoke the state of catharsis in the spectator by creating distance between the spectator and the character, working for the detachment which leads to a limited identification with the suffering of the protagonist but simultaneously a view of the whole order. Irony frees the spectator from identifying with the personalities of the characters, for tragedy is not about "sympathetic people." Rather, it is about "acts by which people are judged to be worthy or not worthy of our sympathy."31 Although suffering is always an individual experience, it has a common human basis. Paradoxically, the individual suffering in tragedy is seen as an enactment of the human situation. Another way
of stating the same thing is that irony prevents tragedy from being melodrama and works for the mind's equilibrium. It contributes to the equilibrium of catharsis. Racine said of catharsis: "C'est à dire qu'en émuvant ces passions [la pitié, la terreur], elle [la tragédie] leur ôte ce qu'elles ont d'excessif et de vicieux et les ramène à un état modéré et conforme à la raison." He saw catharsis, then, as a kind of equilibrium between reason and emotion.

Even though the word irony as it originated in ancient Greece did not have the meaning it does today, the phenomenon in the modern sense pervaded Greek tragedy. Since tragedy was based on legends with which the audiences were acquainted, the element of surprise was lacking in this theatre and intentionally so. When a playwright had doubts about the familiarity of a particular story he often recapitulated the significant events in the prologue of the play. Foreknowledge was an essential feature of this theatre. The question was not what the outcome would be but when or how it would happen. Therefore, dramatic irony is found in all three of the great Greek tragedians, but especially in Sophocles from whom Thirlwall derived the term Sophoclean irony. Sophocles often used legendary oracles in his plays, at times even inventing new ones, for dramatic foreshadowing. Perhaps his most famous play in this respect is Oedipus the King in which dramatic irony is exploited to the utmost because the oracle foretelling that Oedipus would kill his father and marry his mother is already fulfilled at the opening of the play. Thirlwall observes that Sophocles constructed the plot in terms of ironic potential so as "Always to evolve the
successive steps of the disclosure out of incidents which either exhibit the delusive security of Oedipus in the strongest light or tend to cherish his confidence and allay his fears.” Oedipus, confident that he has escaped the prediction, denounces the murderer of Laius and claims he will champion his cause as though Laius were his father. His blindness is underscored by the character of Tiresias, the blind man who sees the truth. Racine commented on this very thing in the margin of Sophocles’ play: "Oedipe, l’injure.—Oedipe, en querellant Tiresie, l’engage à lue dire des vérités qu’il prend pour des calom- nies.—Bel artifice d’instruire le spectateur, sans éclaircir l’acteur." Racine greatly admired Sophocles’ use of dramatic irony, as Georges May clearly demonstrates, and frequently used irony the same way in his own plays.

Euripides uses irony in a somewhat different way from Aeschylus and Sophocles. J. A. K. Thomson says that it is in the modern sense of a subjective irony based on a deep emotion for what is portrayed. A. R. Thompson sees Euripides' irony as the only true and profound irony, embodying the ambiguities of man's soul and the nature of the universe. He maintains that irony in Euripides is so fundamental that it may be overlooked or denied because it does not consist of using irony as a device. Thompson supports his assertions by citing the numerous and contradictory scholarly evaluations of Euripides. Some critics view him as a playwright concerned mainly with theatrical effect, others as a poet and seeker after moral truth. Some see him as a realist interested in human psychology, others as an idealistic
intellectual concerned with abstract ideas. Thompson feels these conflicting judgments reveal intentional and conscious ambiguity on the part of the dramatist.

In a discussion of Greek tragedy it is obviously essential to mention the idea of fate. One of the beliefs reflected in classical legend is the notion that the gods are jealous of men and will intervene in their lives. This concept of vengeful gods is conducive to an ironic view of things in a way which is absent from New Testament Christianity. However, the exact importance of fate in Greek thought is a difficult question. A. R. Thomson insists that the Greeks did believe in individual will, initiative and intelligence, and Philip Harsh remarks that fate was spoken of or thought of in the past tense—as someone’s destiny in terms of the way things had already happened. As for the future, there was always something of a question mark. The importance of hamartia or hubris in Greek tragedy has already been mentioned. This notion places some of the responsibility for destiny on the character, not just on the activity of the gods. At the same time emphasis on human weakness may be construed as contributing to a fatalistic outlook which suggests that man can never win. It is interesting that the use of gods, oracles, miracles and the like in Greek tragedy was accepted by believer and skeptic alike. Believers took them at face value and skeptics accepted them as poetic abstractions for basic forces of nature. In fact, Euripides who was a skeptic, used gods more extensively to open and close his plays than did Aeschylus and Sophocles, who did not share his skeptical views.
It is not within the scope of this study to pursue further the significance of fate in the Greek theatre. The question will arise later in terms of Racine's tragedies.

Racine, unlike the other secular writers of his time, had a first-hand knowledge of Greek letters. The Petites Ecoles of Port-Royal where he began his formal education was the only school of the day which emphasized Greek, and Racine was its only student to enter the field of literature. Racine read widely and repeatedly in Greek authors during his life, not in a systematic and scholarly fashion, but with the selective curiosity and interest of an artist. He often made marginal comments on things which caught his attention. R. C. Knight in his synthesis of Racine's Greek studies points out that what interested Racine in reading philosophy was finding moral observations having a certain epigrammatic beauty and some relevance to Christian doctrine, while in his reading of tragedy and poetics he was particularly interested in passages dealing with the emotions aroused by tragedy (In reading Aristotle, he chose to comment on the discussion of catharsis, rather than on passages concerning dramatic actions and events).

Knight considers the difficult question of the extent of the Greek influence on Racine the artist. He points out that Greek civilisation was not really understood in the seventeenth century. The century of Louis XIV did not have the benefit of the modern-day findings of such disciplines as archeology, art and anthropology and also, Knight suggests, Greece did not interest people then as a civilisation, for the seventeenth century was interested in itself.
French critics spoke of Greek authors as having written well and this was the goal of the French classical writers. Thus the qualities the French seventeenth century attributed to the Greeks were more projections of their own thinking than an understanding of Greece. Racine had the advantage over many of his contemporaries of reading the Greeks in their original language. His commentaries reveal that he read critically, sometimes admiring, sometimes rejecting what he found. He used Greek literature particularly as a source of names, legends, subjects—primarily as a décor. However, as will be pointed out from time to time, there are a number of parallels between Greek tragedy and Racinian tragedy. Both were concerned with "effets pathétiques" rather than with surprise as cultivated by Corneille, for example. Knight wonders whether this interest of Racine came primarily from Euripides and Sophocles or whether he was merely following his own artistic inclinations. He raises the same question about fatality or the concern with portraying human weakness in a tragic way not known by Racine's contemporaries. Did this come from the Greeks, his Jansenist training or his own temperament and experience? Obviously the answer is complex, but Knight seems to feel that Racine's readings in Greek were not the primary force behind his literary creation, but that they certainly contributed to or reinforced his development.

The question at hand is how irony relates to Racine. We have seen in the foregoing discussion of definitions that irony is ultimately as elusive as poetry, resisting definition, calling attention to itself, triggering a reaction, then disappearing from sight. J. A. K.
Thomson appropriately uses the term "flashes" of irony. He also points out that irony is finally an individual thing, taking a different meaning or a different form for each person or writer who uses it, and so, to be understood, must be considered not in the abstract, but in the specific case. Let us now turn to the case of Racine's tragedies, specifically, first, the irony of communication or verbal irony.
FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER I

1 Jean Racine, Andromaque, I, iv, 299. Subsequent references to the plays of Racine will be given in parentheses in the text.


3 The Grand Larousse reports under "Ironic" that there was even a proposal to Alcander de Brahms for a new punctuation mark: an irony point [¡] to be used to indicate for the reader the ironic passages and sentences of a work or article. Paris, 1960.

4 In fact, according to J. A. K. Thomson the exact etymology of the word has never been determined. Irony: An Historical Introduction (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press, 1927), p. 4.

5 II, vii and IV, xiii.


8 Shakespeare, Othello, I, iii, 293-294.

9 The Dry Mock: A Study of Irony in Drama (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1948), p. 142.

10 P. 9.

11 Dry Mock, pp. 131-132.


14 Pp. 127-137.


16 Dry Mock, pp. 30-35.
17 P. 37.

18 Irony, p. 139.

19 Pp. 54-55.

20 Chap. 2.


22 Dry Heat, pp. 159-160.

23 "Towards a Definition of 'le tragique racinien'," Symposium, XXI (Fall, 1967), 206, 208.

24 For further discussion of these tragic elements see Odette de Mourgues, Racine or the Triumph of Relevance (Cambridge, England: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 4-5.

25 States, pp. 53-54.


27 M. Joseph Calcaro, Tragic Being: Apollo and Dionysus in Western Drama (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1968), p. 177.


29 Calcaro, p. 183.


31 States, p. 49.


35 P. 17.
36 "Notes sur Oedipe Roî," in Oeuvres, VI, 235.


38 Irony, p. 76; Dry Mock, chap. 8.


40 Dry Mock, p. 141; Classical Drama, p. 118.

41 Harsh, pp. 28-29.


44 Irony, pp. 143, 171.
CHAPTER II
THE IRONY OF COMMUNICATION: VERBAL IRONY

According to the definition in the preceding chapter, verbal irony is a mode of speech in which the lexical meaning of the words uttered and the meaning which they are actually intended to communicate are different, often paradoxical, due either to the context of the language or the manner in which it is spoken. In other words, the speaker says something which is literally contrary to or conceals his true thought, emotion, or judgment. For some reason he is unable or unwilling to state the truth openly but he nevertheless communicates it. Thirlwall states that verbal irony is "a figure which enables the speaker to convey his meaning with greater force . . ."\(^1\) Although indirect, then, verbal irony is a powerful way of speaking. The result is a kind of raillerie which often indicates hostility; the speaker seeks either to defend himself or to attack an adversary. Although such irony is used frequently in comedy where it incites laughter, the same irony in tragedy contributes to pathetic effects. In fact, there is little difference between the techniques of comic and tragic irony. Raymond Picard\(^2\) maintains that in the last analysis whether an incident is viewed as comic or tragic depends on the disposition of the observer, that a scene by itself is neither comic nor tragic but that the context makes it one or the other. In comedy the spectator is prepared to laugh at man's shortcomings; in tragedy he expects to increase in a serious way his knowledge of human limits and failure. Racine and Molière both deal with passions as they affect human autonomy. In Molière the characters, becoming marionettes controlled by their obsessions,
are ridiculous. In Racine the characters' similar lack of liberty is perceived as tragic. The question is one of emphasis and preparation, of the framework of the play as a whole.

Voltaire remarks that as opposed to comic irony, irony in tragedy must be used more sparingly and must be called forth by the situation of the characters: "Dans la tragédie ... il faut que le personnage se trouve dans une situation où il ne puisse s'expliquer autrement, où il soit obligé de cacher sa douleur et de feindre d'applaudir à ce qu'il déteste." In Racine words mask emotions which are so strong that they cannot be dealt with openly. Because the characters must live within the bienséances of the seventeenth century, they must maintain outward decorum and contain those passions which, if given free rein, would violate the standards of conduct which constituted civilized behavior. Since the characters cannot suppress their emotions, words are the only outlet for them. In all of Racine's tragedies, characters use language both to protect themselves in situations where they are threatened by others, and to strike out at others as a means of asserting their own autonomy or warding off those who are potential threats. Naturally, defensive and offensive irony occur together, one countering the other. But often one kind of verbal irony will predominate, reflecting a fundamental difference in characterization or situation. In this chapter Andromaque will be examined mainly in terms of defensive irony and Britannicus in terms of offensive irony.

In Andromaque Orest, Hermione, Pyrrhus, and Andromaque are each obsessed with a deep passion which controls their whole existence, yet
to which there is an immovable obstacle. The love of Orestes, Hermione, and Pyrrhus is unreturned by the one each loves. Andromaque’s husband is dead and her son, Astyanax, the symbol of her love, is threatened by Pyrrhus. Each character, no matter how illogical it may seem, hopes that his passion can be fulfilled. (Andromaque is perhaps an exception, but even she hopes to be able to mourn Hector and raise her son in peace.) Orestes and Andromaque accept fate as the determining factor, but dare to hope for its favor. Hermione and Pyrrhus maintain the illusion that they still control their own destinies. For this reason the latter two characters, especially Hermione, turn to verbal irony more frequently than the others. Verbal irony is a means of gaining or maintaining the upper hand. The characters control their emotions, calculate their words so as to give an appearance of sang-froid, for if they surrender to their passions, they will go out of control. Ultimately, losing control is the destiny of many Racinean characters. Irony fails them.

Immense reserve is typical of all Racine’s characters. This is partly convention—they speak to each other out of the dignity of their roles as kings and princesses, addressing one another as Madame and Seigneur. The rhetorical form of tragedy, the alexandrine, also forces a kind of formalism. But in Racine, as in classical literature in general, the form is inevitably linked to the nature of the art. The distance of convention reflects the emotional distance between Racine’s characters. Only confidants have that intimacy with their masters which indicates their being called by their first names. The characters often avoid naming each other even in passing reference.
In *Andromaque* they frequently refer to one another as *la fille d'Achille*, *la fille d'Hélène*, or *la veuve d'Hector*, even when speaking directly to each other. Orestes and Pyrrhus do this in their first meeting. As will be discussed later, designations like those mentioned evoke the political and legendary roles of the characters, but as means of indirect speech they also mark the emotional barriers which separate them.

Another method of evading direct communication is the use of *on*. Andromache, speaking to Pyrrhus, avoids addressing him and says: "On craint qu'il n'essuyât les larmes de sa mère" (I, iv, 278). By using *on* to refer to Pyrrhus, Andromache subtly marks both her inferior position as a captive and her scorn for Pyrrhus.

Verbal irony, as such, is an extension of this kind of reserve. It conceals all sorts of pent-up emotions which the characters cannot acknowledge before one another because the pain would be too great. So, in confronting others they use verbal irony both as a defensive and as an offensive weapon. Orestes's entire mission to Pyrrhus is ironic because he does not really want it to succeed. Gaining custody of Astyanax would mean losing Hermione and, as Orestes admits to Pyrrhus, his real purpose is to win Hermione. It was only after he had recognized that his love for Hermione was not dead that Orestes sought to be elected ambassador to Epirus (I, 1, 58-94). Now he must face Pyrrhus with a demand he does not wish to be fulfilled. A certain kind of flattery is inevitably linked to a diplomatic encounter, but how much more difficult it must be for Orestes to proclaim his pleasure at seeing his rival and to praise him for those exploits of the Trojan War which
have caused him to be chosen as king of Epirus. Orestes’s manner of praising Pyrrhus may actually be construed as insulting in view of Pyrrhus’ behavior in the context of the play. As a king he no longer shows the famed audacity he once displayed in fighting the Trojans. Orestes’s "Oserai-je, Seigneur, dire ce que je pense?" (I, ii, 165) becomes meaningless rhetoric in view of Orestes’s true feelings. When Orestes warns Pyrrhus of the Greeks interest in Astyanax, Pyrrhus replies with the same kind of mockery which will later be used by Andromaque against him (see I, iv, 270-272). Ridiculing the Greeks for fearing a mere child, he then defends his rights as a conqueror (I, ii, 173-220). While the irony of Orestes’s words to Pyrrhus stems from the fact that Orestes’s true passion contradicts his political mission, the irony of Pyrrhus’ words arises from the use of political pretenses to defend his passion. The reasons Pyrrhus alleges are perfectly believable: his right to do with his own prisoners as he sees fit, his humanitarian considerations—once the war is over there is no justification for cruelty. Such reasons are called forth by the situation; however, the real motive they conceal and at the same time betray is Pyrrhus’ love for Andromaque. This scene is built around verbal irony used as a defense. Although both Orestes and Pyrrhus use language of calculated sang-froid and pride, the underlying emotions which determine the direction of the conversation are apparent.

Defensive irony is also the recourse of Orestes when Pyrrhus announces to him his decision to marry Hermione (II, iv). Pyrrhus naturally uses political arguments to justify his change of mind, the same argu-
ments which Orestes has furnished him in their preceding diplomatic encounter (I, ii). But from Pyrrhus' earlier confrontation with Andromaque (I, iv) we know that his real reason for marrying Hermione is spite at being refused by Andromaque. In the scene immediately preceding Pyrrhus' announcement to Orestes, Orestes was confident that Pyrrhus would choose Andromaque (II, iii). Thus, when he hears Pyrrhus' words, his reply is very brief, as though he can barely manage to keep his composure: "Seigneur, par ce conseil prudent et rigoureux, c'est acheter la paix du sang d'un malheureux" (II, iv, 615–616). This remark is not at all what he would wish to say. He can only speak of Astyanax and cannot even bear to mention Hermione. Then, with sadistic cruelty, Pyrrhus tells Orestes that it is he who will give Hermione's hand in marriage. Such an arrangement is again legitimate in an official sense since Orestes is Hermione's cousin, the ambassador from Greece, and the representative of Hermione's father. But Pyrrhus' true reason for choosing Orestes is his knowledge of Orestes' feelings for Hermione.

We have said that Hermione is the character in Andromaque most disposed to use verbal irony. Her first meeting with Orestes shows her in an ironic hypocritical pose toward him (II, ii). For its full effect the scene depends on the one immediately preceding in which Hermione discusses her sentiments with Cléone (II, i). We see that for Hermione, Orestes is someone to fall back on. When her resentment at Pyrrhus' faithlessness becomes intolerable, she turns her thoughts to the constancy of Orestes. It is this situation which makes her agree to see Orestes, although in her own words full of dramatic irony: "Mais, si je m'en
croyais, je ne le verrais pas" (II, i, 388). Finally, she calls for
Oreste, but when Cléone announces his immediate approach, we see Har-
mione's ambivalence reveal itself in the spontaneous exclamation: "Ah!
je ne croyais pas qu'il fût si près d'ici" (II, i, 476). His appeal is
much stronger in his absence. As Oreste arrives, Hermione speaks so as
to give the impression that there is still a place in her heart for
Oreste, that she would be pleased if his motive in seeking her is "un
reste de tendresse" (II, ii, 477). There is a parallelism between the
beginning of this scene and Pyrrhus' meeting with Andromaque (I, iv).
Both Pyrrhus and Hermione use a comparable tone--gallantry for Pyrrhus,
coquetry for Hermione--but Pyrrhus wants to see Andromaque whereas Hermione
only sees Oreste out of desperation and thus her coquetry is more insincere.
Oreste lays his heart bare before Hermione, declaring that it is his
destiny to continually adore her despite his intentions to the contrary.
This kind of frankness belies Hermione's hope of the preceding scene:
"Et peut-être il saura se faire aimer lui-même" (II, i 474). Such soul-
baring can only be disagreeable and embarrassing to Hermione who loves
another; consequently, she rejects this display, trying to change the
subject ("Quittes, Seigneur, quittes ce funeste langage." [II, ii, 505])
to political concerns--that is Oreste's mission. The irony of her response
derives from the two levels of action. Hermione, herself, has invited
Oreste to speak on the level of passion of her initial allusion to their
past association, but his response, although couched in précieux language,
is obviously much too frank for Hermione. Pyrrhus never speaks with such
complete candor, whether to Andromaque or to Hermione.
Oreste, who is all the more vulnerable because of his frankness, is very much hurt by Hermione's coldness. He retaliates with an allusion to Pyrrhus' feelings for Andromaque: "... et quelque autre puissance/ Lui fait du fils d'Hector embrasser la défense" (II, ii, 513-514). His remark hits home and for a moment Hermione's pout drops as the words "L'infidèle!" escape her lips. But when Oreste expresses his fears of her hatred, she regains control and begins to allege obedience to her father as an excuse for coming to Epirus in order to intimate that she does care for Oreste. Oreste, however, understands too well. Hermione would like to love Oreste—logically she should—but the heart is not governed by logic and Hermione loves Pyrrhus. Thus Oreste states the paradox that inversely, if Hermione only wanted to hate him, she would then love him, a statement which accurately characterizes her feeling for Pyrrhus. Still, with the blindness of one in love trying to convince the beloved, Oreste exclaims: "Que de raisons pour moi, si vous pouviez m'entendre!" (II, ii, 546). As so often occurs in Racine's plays, Oreste then unwittingly says the wrong thing, makes the exact remark which is guaranteed to provoke Hermione's wrath: "Car enfin il vous hait ..." (II, ii, 549). Once more Hermione's mask falls, the verbal irony is dropped. Hermione becomes haughty and insulting, then suddenly, as before, regains control and suggests that Oreste arm all Greece against Pyrrhus. Again there is the ironic interplay of the two levels of action—Hermione attempts to put the conversation on a political level but reveals her motive of passion by saying immediately: "Alléz. Après cela direz-vous que je l'aime?" (II, ii, 565). What she puts forward as evi-
idence against her love is actually evidence for it. Also, when Oreste carries her idea further and suggests that she come away with him to convince the Greeks herself, she hedges and betrays that her political argument is a front and her thoughts are on Pyrrhus: "Mais Seigneur, cependant, s'il épouse Andromaque?" (II, ii, 570). The pattern repeats itself once more. Oreste confronts her with her true feelings which she attempts to deny:

Seigneur, je le vois bien, votre âme prévenue
Répand sur mes discours le venin qui la tue,
Toujours dans mes raisons cherche quelque détour,
Et croit qu'en moi la haine est un effort d'amour.
(II, ii, 577-580)

These lines are ironic because they are both true and false at the same time. It is true that Oreste looks for Hermione's betrayal in her every word and sees it everywhere and would see it even if it were not there; yet he certainly has provocation to do so. Hermione's remark about hate growing out of love echoes Oreste's earlier line: "Vous m'aimez, Madame, en me voulant hair" (II, ii, 544). The scene ends with Hermione alleging that her duty to her father and Pyrrhus must determine her action. Whenever it serves her own purposes, Hermione gives specious reasons for refusing something to someone: gloire, devoir and the bien-éances of her sex. As Knight points out in a theory discussed below, this is a case of giving a traditionally acceptable rationalization for some action motivated by personal concerns, but what Hermione dignifies with the mask of convention is really her own self-interest.  

Defensive verbal irony is used again both by Oreste and Hermione
when they meet after Pyrrhus' announcement that he will marry Hermione (III, ii). Oreste feigns resignation at the decision because he plans to abduct her. Hermione pretends it is devoir and gloire which have led her to accept the marriage and claims to think that Pyrrhus is motivated by fear of Greece. However, in her subsequent conversation with Cléone (III, iii) she reveals that she really believes Pyrrhus must love her or at least that she wants to believe it, thus completely betraying the picture of him which she has just presented to Oreste. Of course, the notion that Pyrrhus loves her is false. Ironically, Hermione was closer to the truth when she was feigning to Oreste: "Qu'il suit son intérêt plutôt que sa tendresse" (III, ii, 814). This line is false but in a different way than Hermione implies. Pyrrhus pursues, not his political interest nor any love for Hermione, but rather his feelings for Andromaque, just as Hermione pursues her feelings for Pyrrhus, not Oreste. In using irony of manner toward Oreste, Hermione is being kind. At the same time, perhaps without realizing it, she is instinctively keeping open the channels of communication between her self and Oreste in the event of another reversal by Pyrrhus. On the other hand, when Andromaque comes to see her, requesting her intervention for Astyanax, Hermione replies with an irony which is far from benevolent. Deriding Andromaque for her seemingly bygone influence over Pyrrhus, she says: "S'il faut fléchir Pyrrhus, qui le peut mieux que vous?" (III, iv, 884). Although Oreste plagues and irritates Hermione, he is useful to her. Andromaque, however, is the source of her misery and Hermione conceals much bitter resentment and suffering behind her cruel reply to Andromaque.
If irony is often used to attack others, it may at the same time be self-directed. The irony Hermione uses in the scene just discussed strikes at Andromaque, but on a deeper level it is directed at Hermione herself. She is the one who is hurt by the fact that Andromaque had (and, in fact, still has) such power over Pyrrhus. The backhanded compliment to Andromaque brings into relief Hermione's own powerlessness before Pyrrhus; she, in a sense, mocks herself for having accepted the situation, for not having had the strength to leave Epirus when scorned by Pyrrhus. The powerful dramatic irony of the scene anticipating Pyrrhus' subsequent refusal is accentuated by Hermione's final line: "Faites-le prononcer; j'y souscrirai, Madame" (III, iv, 886). Voltaire spoke of this kind of verbal irony in tragedy which lashes out at the speaker himself: "Il y a une autre espèce d'ironie qui est un retour sur soi-même, et qui exprime parfaitement l'excès du malheur."

Oreste is a character who frequently turns irony against himself. In his initial encounter with Pylade he says: "Mais admire avec moi le sort, dont la poursuite/ Me fait courir alors au piège que j'évite" (I, i, 65-66). Oreste acknowledges with perfect lucidity and acceptance his self-destructive pattern of behavior. He is, to an extent, a spectator to his own actions and it is the resulting detachment from himself, in certain instances, which puts him in an ironic perspective toward himself. The follow-up to these lines comes in the closing scene of the play when Oreste faces his total despair. Having killed for Hermione only to be cursed by her, and then to learn of her death, Oreste exclaims: "Grâce aux Dieux! Mon malheur passe mon expérance./ Oui, je te loue, 8
ciel, de ta persévérance" (V, v, 1613-1614).

Another example of Oreste's self-mockery is found in the middle of the play. When Hermione pretends to believe that Pyrrhus has decided to marry her because he fears Greece, Oreste mockingly reproaches Hermione for not being truthful:

Non, Madame: il vous aime, et je n'en doute plus,
Vos yeux ne font-ils pas tout ce qu'ils veulent faire?
Et vous ne voulez pas, sans doute, lui déplaire."
(III, ii, 816-818)

Oreste, first of all, knows that Hermione wanted to please Pyrrhus. Secondly, he believes that Pyrrhus has chosen Hermione simply to spite him because he (Oreste) loves her. These lines, then, highlight his own position as loser since he is the one who suffers from the decision of Pyrrhus.

Verbal irony is instinctive and necessary to characters having deep, uncontrollable, and destructive emotions and Racine has exploited it to the fullest. We have seen how the customary reserve of characters in seventeenth century French theatre is used by Racine in terms of his own art. Another example of Racine's use of convention which is at the same time renewed through his own dramatic purposes is the use of précieux language and the love traditions of the period. The literary and social movement of préciosité in seventeenth century France had produced a special style of speech characterized by unusual and gallant expressions, extensive use of vague and superfluous words (ma chère, air, car enfin, je ne sais quoi), superlative adjectives and adverbs (furieux, terrible, ravis-
sant, effroyable), and ornamental metaphors such as exaggerations, hyperbole, periphrasis, and antithesis. Racine used such vocabulary and linguistic patterns in his plays, but as will be illustrated in the section on language, what in préciosité is overstatement becomes understatement in the context of Racine's art. In addition to the lexical conventions, Racine made use of the accompanying prescribed sentiments, attitudes, gestures and patterns of conduct for love which grew up, according to R. C. Knight, more precisely from the romanesque than the précieux tradition. In Racine, the use of this tradition contributes to effects of verbal irony since characters express themselves in conventional ways which are a kind of pose and do not correspond to their real sentiments or attitudes but rather to what is acceptable seventeenth century behavior. Knight develops the thesis that such "social hypocrisy" is a kind of extension of verbal irony which Racine learned from Corneille, and he shows how these two dramatists were, unlike other writers of the period, not subservient to conventions of language, but rather used them for their own ends and hence remained above them.

We see this use of convention in Andromaque in Pyrrhus' behavior toward his captive in their first meeting of the play (I, iv). From the beginning of the scene Pyrrhus affects a tone of gallantry. He knows very well that Andromaque is not looking for him but he pretends to think so when he meets her by chance. Andromaque expresses her grief and suffering in a proud, haughty and sarcastic manner. Pyrrhus, however, continues his tone when he asserts his desire to protect Astyanax at the expense of his own life, but requests the favor of a more cordial or
receptive attitude from Andromaque toward him. He expresses himself in a common figure in Racine, litotes: "Ne refuserez-vous un regard moins sévère?" (I, iv, 290), and "... me sera-t-il permis/ De ne vous point compter parmi mes ennemis?" (I, iv, 295-296). By using this inverse form he shows a reluctance to state outright what he really wants, that is, Andromaque's love. Here Racine uses the language of préciosité—the emphasis on the eyes (le regard) and the use of military conceptions (ennemi) for love relationships—in a kind of understatement which is characteristic of his plays. Even when Andromaque shows repugnance for the kind of emotional blackmail Pyrrhus is attempting he continues to speak in terms of courroux and yeux and transposes the language of the Trojan war into the précieux metaphor of love as a battlefield: "Vaincu, chargé de fers, de regrets consumé,/ Brûlé de plus de feux que je n'en allumai" (I, iv, 319-320). This kind of language in Racine carries a complex irony. De Mourgues singles out the oft-quoted second line as an example of the transformation Racine works in précieux vocabulary. Such words as feux, cruel, tendre, horrible, ingrat are overstatement in the language of préciosité. But with Racine the words must be restored to their original full meaning and even then they become understatement. The line "Brûlé de plus de feux ... " was originally a précieux conceit, but in the context of Andromaque, de Mourgues points out, Pyrrhus' love for Andromaque has destroyed his moral sense, leading him to become a blackmailer and perjurer. Thus the line is in no way an exaggeration.

Lapp explains the line as an expression of the captor-a-captive précieux conceit which he sees as the point of departure of Andromaque.
The tragedy is basically an elaboration of this initial paradox (Andromaque makes her captor a prisoner of love) into a play of complexity and depth of characterization. The line also embodies the paradoxical role of Troy in the play. Without the Trojan War, Pyrrhus would never have fallen in love with Andromaque, would never have won her as a prisoner. Yet this same war which earned him his reputation and brought him into contact with Andromaque stands in his way, for Hector was killed by Pyrrhus' father Achilles and Andromaque first saw Pyrrhus in battle against her people. She retains a visual image of his cruel acts of war. Thus she can never love Pyrrhus, only Hector and Troy (see III, viii, 997-1006).

Another interpretation of Racine's uses of conventional language is suggested by Knight's view of Pyrrhus' use of précieux speech here as a way of offering Andromaque an honorable way out. Although he knows that Andromaque's continued refusals have not been motivated by any kind of coquettishness, but by her language he chooses to interpret her coldness as the conduct dictated by the romanesque tradition of a lady playing hard-to-get. Thus Pyrrhus through the irony of social hypocrisy offers Andromaque an acceptable and dignified way of changing her mind. Andromaque, of course, does not take advantage of the opportunity. In addition to the pose of coquetry, Pyrrhus offers Andromaque a political pretext for relenting: "Votre Ilion encor peut sortir de sa cendre" (I, iv, 350). While politics often furnishes pretexts for action in Racine's plays— for example, Oreste's mission--Andromaque herself does not act from political motives. She is moved only by love for Hector and the desire
to save her son. It is, in fact, on this level that she phrases her refusal to Pyrrhus—he is no longer concerned with restoring Troy's former grandeur. The line in question, "Brûlé de plus de feux ... " reflects the inextricably intertwined themes of passion and politics in this play.

The ideas of de Mourgues and Knight on préciosité in this scene as an understated metaphor and as a pose (which implies exaggeration) may seem incompatible, but, in fact, when accepted as simultaneously valid interpretations, they indicate the complexity of Racine. The précieux lines do represent an affectation on the part of Pyrrhus—he does not bare his heart with the same embarrassing frankness as Oreste does, for example. At the same time, almost in spite of his intentions, the words are a true reflection of Pyrrhus' own emotional state. The language begins as a concealment of emotion or a stylized form of expression, but reality takes over. Knight sees the same sort of device used by Pyrrhus when he faces Hermione (IV, v) and makes the remarks which seem so cruel to her. He approaches her with a frank avowel of the wrong he has done her, yet he seems to feel that he should be forgiven for, after all, he did make an effort to comply with the pledge of his father. However, love won out, and so, recognizing the injustice he does to Hermione, he will nevertheless marry Andromaque who detests him.

Pyrrhus appears to want sincerely to make peace with Hermione—in this sense he is frank. But the speech is carefully calculated to be non-emotional. What cannot fail to inflame Hermione's wrath, however, is Pyrrhus' suggestion that somehow, perhaps by this frankness he pretends
and by his own self-condemnation, he has atoned for the wrong he is doing
er. He seems to feel that emotions are an investment to be bartered
and balanced. He has already shown this attitude in the scene just
discussed when he feels that the suffering he has experienced from
Andromaque's rejections somehow balances with Andromaque's suffering from
the loss of her husband and the effects of the war.

Hermione can scarcely control her rage in the speech which has
been known since the eighteenth century as the 'couplet d'ironie':
"J'aime à voir que du moins vous vous rendiez justice/ Et que .../ Vous
vous abandonniez au crime en criminel" (IV, v, 1310-1312). She pro-
ceeds to laud him as a conqueror, painting a portrait of a man given to
barbaric cruelty. Pyrrhus returns the irony:

Madame, je sais trop à quel excès de rage
La vengeance d'Helène emporta mon courage;
Je puis me plaindre à vous du sang que j'ai versé;
Mais enfin je consens d'oublier le passé,
Je rends grâce au ciel que votre indifférence
De mes heurts soupirs m'apprenne l'innocence.
Mon coeur, je le vois bien, trop prompt à se gêner,
Devait mieux vous connaître et mieux s'examiner.
Mes remords vous faisaient une injure mortelle;
Il faut se croire aimé pour se croire infidèle.
Vous ne prétendiez point m'arrêter dans vos fers;
Je craints de vous trahir, peut-être je vous sers.
Nos coeurs n'étaient point faits dépendants l'un de l'autre;
Je suivais mon devoir, et vous cédiez au votre.
Rien ne vous engageait à m'aimer, en effet. (IV, v, 1341-1355)

Pyrrhus knows full well that Hermione is far from indifferent. Ironically,
he here pretends to attribute Hermione's actions to the very duty which
she herself has tried to make Orestes accept as her source of motivation.
According to Knight, Pyrrhus deliberately makes this speech to offer Hermione a way to save face and thus his intentions are ultimately benevolent. Certainly Hermione does not take it in this way, but instead launches into the kind of invective which Pyrrhus had invited her to do at the beginning of the scene: "Donnez-moi tous les noms destinés aux parjures" (IV, v, 1345). In this scene Hermione uses irony to attack Pyrrhus and he does the same in return. They have both adopted poses of convention, socially accepted forms of expression. The building up of emotions behind the mask to the point where they break through the composition of the character, as when Hermione finally lets her rage penetrate her language, illustrates Racine's use of verbal irony to create a tension-filled atmosphere. The characters are pushed to the limits of their endurance by their passions.

Verbal irony in *Andromaque* is used most often as a defensive tactic. The characters in this play are particularly vulnerable because their strong emotions toward others make them dependent on the actions of another individual not only for their happiness, but for their very sanity. Since the interdependencies are so structured that no person responds to the one who is emotionally dependent upon him, the loved one subsequently becomes a threat to the one who loves. Likewise, a third individual who stands in the way also is an emotional threat. Verbal irony comes naturally to the characters as a means of self-defense. As is generally true in Racine, then, verbal irony is not external to the characters; rather it grows out of the situations in which they find themselves and is a reflection of their own internal unrest and complexity.
Britannicus is another play in which verbal irony is closely linked to the dramatic situation. It is used occasionally by Agrippine, Britannicus and Narcisse, but extensively and very significantly by Néron. In this play it serves primarily as a method for those involved in the desperate struggle for physical power to attack each other. The will to power is the chief motivation of both Agrippine and Néron, and to a certain extent, of Britannicus, although he is more immediately concerned with his love for Junie. Narcisse, too, is motivated by ambition. Agrippine fights almost obsessively to maintain her authority over Néron, her authority both as a mother and as a political figure; Néron seeks to free himself from the constraints of his mother and the influence of political advisers whose advice is contrary to his personal desires; he seeks to assert his own wishes. Britannicus hopes one day to regain the favor and position that were his by birth. Narcisse seeks his own advancement as the preferred counselor of the emperor; he is favored because he flatters the whims of Néron. The world of the imperial palace in Rome is a shadowy realm of intrigue, and suspicion, violence, cruelty and fear. This atmosphere is developed initially in the play through frequent allusions to Agrippine's past crimes (deception, bribery, murder) as well as to other incidents in the history of previous rulers. Human lives have been manipulated and used to fulfill the ambitions and desires of the most powerful. In such a context veiled and ambiguous language is the only safe course. Candor such as Junie uses in speaking to Néron about her feelings for Britannicus (II, iii) merely deepens her peril. Duplicity, on the other hand, shields the user and at the same
time serves to perpetuate and continually recreate the murky atmosphere
(The word faire and its various forms appear frequently in this play).

In the second Preface to Britannicus Racine says of Néron: "En
un mot c'est ici un monstre naissant, mais qui n'ose encore se déclarer
et qui cherche des couleurs à ses méchantes actions." Néron's use of
verbal irony is closely linked to his progressive development as a mon-
strous character. It serves the dramatic purpose of marking the flowering
of his cruel nature. He lashes out at anyone who is an obstacle to his
personal desires until ultimately he can brave even Agrippine. Brunsch-
vicg demonstrates that verbal irony represents two aspects of Néron's
character—the progressive fastidiousness of his speech marks both an
artistic refinement in cruelty and progressive self-assertion. The
irony Néron uses is in keeping with a fundamental duality in his conduct
which is underlined throughout Act I. Néron's past actions—the good
deeds of his early reign—are juxtaposed to a future which will negate
them: "l'avenir détruisant le passé" (I, i, 33). His positive beginning
has been contrary to his nature. Agrippine has foreseen and feared a
reversal. Burthus has unsuccessfully attempted to keep Néron's harmful
tendencies under control: "Cette féroce que tu croyais fléchir/ De tes
faibles liens est prête à s'affranchir" (III, ii, 801-802). Now, by
having Junie arrested, Néron takes the first step toward negating his
past and letting his true nature develop. Numerous expressions indicate
this opposition—"L'impatient Néron cesse de se contraindre" (I, i, 11).
Néron has already foreshadowed the pattern he will follow in asserting his
power and respectability will conceal the most heinous acts. Agrippine
remembers the first indication of his "faux respect" when Néron prevented her from taking her seat on the throne with a physical embrace. She has seen her honors increasing in inverse proportion to her worth to Néron and would prefer "Un peu moins de respect, et plus de confiance" (I, i, 88). This first incident is indicative of the way in which Néron will maintain appearances but be ruthless beneath. 14

In II, iii, Néron's first interview with Junie in which he states his desire to marry her, Néron begins with a pose of gallantry accusing Junie of hiding herself from him. Junie is not really a threat to Néron--she is his captive and it is within his power to decide her fate. However, he is annoyed that she does not seem even to be awed by his offer of marriage or his power. Her resistance and particularly her love for Britannicus are obstacles to his desires. So, he uses verbal irony: "L'heureux Britannicus verra-t-il sans alarmes/ Croître, loin de nos yeux, son amour et vos charmes?" (II, iii, 543-544). His irony is, in fact, directed toward Britannicus rather than toward Junie. Although initially Britannicus was a political rival and the arrest of Junie was actually a means of striking at Agrippine, once Néron has fallen in love with Junie, Britannicus becomes the object of Néron's sadistic pleasure. Néron had even announced to Narcisse: "Néron impunément ne sera pas jaloux" (II, ii, 445). His cruelty does extend to Junie, however, when he lets her rejoice at the prospect of seeing Britannicus: "Mais je garde à ce prince un traitement plus doux:/ Madame, il va bientôt paraître devant vous" (II, iii, 661-662). He dupes her into thinking the meeting is an act of generosity on his part, then reveals the terms of the meeting. Junie has unwittingly goaded Néron with that faculty for saying the wrong thing so common in
Racine's plays. She has irritated him first by mentioning that his wishes are always so much in conformity with his mother's (II, iii, 560-561), second, not only by arguing against Néron's notion of divorcing Octavia, but by boldly declaring her love for Britannicus. Junie eloquently contrasts her view of Néron's destiny and her view of Britannicus' fate:

Tout ce que vous voyez conspire à vos désirs;  
Vos jours toujours serains coulent dans les plaisirs,  
L'Empire en est pour vous l'inépuisable source;  
Ou, si quelque chagrin en interrompt la course,  
Tout l'univers, soigneux de les entretenir,  
S'empresse à l'effacer de votre souvenir.  
Britannicus est seul. Quelque ennui qui le presse,  
Il ne voit dans son sort que moi qui s'intéresse,  
Et n'a pour tous plaisirs, Seigneur, que quelques pleurs  
Qui lui font quelquefois oublier ses malheurs. (II, iii, 649-658)

The portrait she paints of Néron is very naive and it strikes a nerve because such an existence is one to which Néron aspires. But, by her very resistance, Junie shows that all does not work to satisfy Néron's desires. He wants the entire universe, including, and in particular, her. He replies by speaking deceptively of her meeting with Britannicus, leading her into the supremely ironic situation in which he will be the unseen watcher of the interview and Junie will be forced to belie her heart.

Another obstacle to Néron's free pursuit of his desires is Burrhus who counsels him in view of the best interests of the Roman Empire. In this respect, Burrhus advises Néron to give up Junie, saying that one loves only if one wants to love. Néron responds by mocking Burrhus on a personal level, saying that in matters of state he has confidence in
Burrhus' experience, but love is something else again (III, i, 791-799). The irony shows how little Néron is concerned with the empire and how much he is preoccupied with his own wishes. His scorn for Burrhus emphasizes his assertion of his own will in defiance of his advisors.

One of the most powerfully ironic scenes in the play occurs when the emperor surprises Britannicus at Junie's feet. Néron hones his words into razor-edged barbs. His irony is stronger in this scene because he is vulnerable on a most intimate and personal level—he is confronting his rival in love before the one he loves. Both Weinberg and Barth underscore the significance of Néron's act of falling in love both in his personal life and as a factor which reinforces him in his swing toward self-assertion. Néron did not seriously fear Britannicus in a political sense. He banished Pallas not so much because he feared the success of any plot against himself which might have been conceived at Pallas' instigation, but because this man encouraged Agrippine's "caprices" and made her and Britannicus more difficult to deal with. But when Néron sees Britannicus as the obstacle to his love, she feels deep resentment and jealousy toward him. He had said to Junie: "Et ce sont ces plaisirs et ces pleurs que j'envie" (II, iii, 659). So, when Néron comes upon the two lovers he ridicules Britannicus' devotion:

Prince, continues des transports si charmants,
Je conçois vos bontés par ses remerciements,
Madame: à vos genoux je viens de le surprendre.
Mais il aurait aussi quelque grâce à me rendre:
Ce lieu le favorise, et je vous y retiens
Pour lui faciliter de si doux entretiens.

(III, viii, 1025-1030)
But Britannicus is not in the least intimidated. Since Junie has just reassured him of the constancy of her love, he is now self-confident and fearless. Instead of flinching under Néron’s mockery, he retaliates by bringing up his own rightful claim to the throne and Néron’s position of usurper: “Et l’aspect de ces lieux où vous la retenez/ N’a rien dont mes regards doivent êtres étonnés” (III, viii, 1033-1034). He further underscores his equality with Néron by addressing him as Domitius, his name before he was adopted by Claudius. Néron retorts by emphasizing his current superiority and his power over Britannicus: “Si vous n’avez appris à vous laisser conduire/ Vous êtes jeune encore, et l’on peut vous instruire” (III, viii, 1043-1044).

Britannicus’ youth is one of his weak points—he has said to Narcisse earlier in the play that he feels he can get no support in Rome because of his youth: “Et ma jeunesse même écarte loin de moi/ Tous ceux qui dans le coeur ma réservent leur foi” (I, iv, 325-326). But before Néron, Britannicus refuses to be subdued. He throws back into Néron’s face the violent methods which have put him on the throne (“les empoisonnements, le rapt et le divorce” [III, viii, 1048]). The verbal battle continues until Britannicus brings the subject back to Junie and attacks Néron at the exact point where he is most vulnerable in this scene: “Je connais mal Junie, ou de tels sentiments/ Ne mériteront pas ses applaudissements” (III, viii, 1057-1058). Néron’s anger is bringing him dangerously close to action: “Du moins, si je ne sais le secret de lui plaire,/ Je sais l’art de punir un rival téméraire” (III, viii, 1059-1060). But Britannicus does not heed the warning. He is winning the
verbal battle and gives one more thrust, criticizing Néron's cruel deception of forcing Junie to feign indifference to Britannicus. Britannicus has gone too far; Néron abruptly calls the guards to arrest him.

We saw in examining Andromaque how the emotions veiled by irony build to a point where the composure of the character finally snaps and the emotions break through. In this scene with Néron the same phenomenon occurs. Néron's irony contains his emotions, but the very containment increases their fury and thus the force of the ultimate explosion. Since Britannicus proves himself the equal of Néron in verbal games and does not allow himself to be shaken, Néron receives no satisfaction, no triumph, no release as he has, for example, in the scene with Burrhus, because Britannicus not only parries each thrust, but gives a counter-thrust which hits home. Britannicus will not be mocked, or will mock equally well, if not better, and since he plays the game as well as Néron, the emperor is forced to use a more effective weapon—his power to control lives. The verbal irony of this scene serves the dramatic function of carrying forward the action of the play by inducing Néron to act. Now he is serious. The arrest of Junie, the banishment of Pallas are nothing compared to what is to follow. If Britannicus had proved himself weak and verbally ineffectual, his fate might have been different, or at least delayed.

This scene illustrates well the fact that there are three elements in verbal irony: 1) the literal statement, 2) the communicated message and 3) the concealed emotion or attitude which causes the speaker to use irony. The third may often be the most important element. A. R. Thomson,
in his digest of Thirlwall, says verbal irony often conceals a conviction so deep that it cannot be challenged directly. It is this hidden emotion that is most important in the case of Néron. These three elements may be clarified by a closer look at the beginning of the scene. Néron speaks of Britannicus' "transports si charmants" and the "si doux entretiens." His message is really something like: "How ludicrous you look at Junie's feet like that. I find such puerile demonstrations of affection odious." The hidden emotion is, of course, his own jealousy based on his love for Junie and resentment of Britannicus' favored position. Another aspect of Néron's emotion is his resentment toward Agrippine. This is indicated clearly in the short scene which follows Britannicus' arrest when Néron says to Burrhus: "Je reconnais la main qui les a rassemblés./ Agrippine ... " (III, ix, 1086-1087). Correctly deducing the action of his mother behind the meeting of Junie and Britannicus, he decides to put her under arrest also. When Britannicus speaks to Néron, it is the emotion behind his words which is significant, also. He says that the palace is not strange to him and communicates the belief that he rightfully belongs there and Néron does not. The emotion is scorn for Néron. It is perhaps Britannicus' lack of awe and fear that most infuriates the emperor.

Néron uses irony to Britannicus once more, in the form of the kiss of death. This time, of course, Néron is triumphant. Britannicus cannot return the irony because he does not recognize Néron's, except perhaps in the instant of his death. The importance of Néron's final irony is brought out by the fact that although Britannicus' death is related
second-hand by Burrhus, Néron's words to his rival are quoted verbatim:

Pour achever ce jour sous de meilleurs auspices,
Ma main de cette coupe espance les prémices,
Dit-il; Dieux, que j'appelle à cette effusion,
Venez favoriser notre réunion. (V, v, 1623-1626)

We are also told of his cold haughty words to the court: "Ce mal dont vous craignez, dit-il, la violence,/ A souvent sans péril attaqué son enfance" (V, v, 1639-1640). This is the full flowering of Néron's cruelty revealed. He is serene in his irony which is the outward manifestation of a now irreversible development in his character. Burrhus twice expresses his horror at Néron's perfect control: "D'aucun étonnement il ne paraît touché" (V, v, 1638), and:

Néron l'a vu mourir sans changer de couleur.
 Ses yeux indifférents ont déjà la constance
D'un tyran dans le crime endurci dès l'enfance.
(V, vii, 1710-1712)

while Britannicus is the most unfortunate victim of the crystallization of Néron's evil tendencies, the whole evolution in Néron's character is initiated by his rebellion against Agrippine. Early in the play he expressed to Narcisse his fear of his mother, his inability, in her presence, to hold fast to any prior resolve to resist her will:

Eloigné de ses yeux, j'ordonne, je menace,
J'écoute vos conseils, j'ose les approuver;
Je m'excite contre elle, et tâche à la braver.
Mais (je t'expose ici mon âme toute nue),
Sîtôt que mon malheur me ramène à sa vue,

Mon Génie étonné tremble devant le sien.(II, ii, 496-500, 506)

He then explained how he was attempting to deal with the situation:
Et c'est pour m'affranchir de cette dépendance,
que je la fis partout, que même je l'offense,
Et que de temps en temps j'irrite ses ennus,
Afin qu'elle m'évite autant que je la fis. (II, ii, 507-510)

Néron first confronts Agrippine on the stage in Act IV. She has seen him one other time during the action of the play—we know this from Junie's statement when she comes to meet Britannicus that Agrippine is with Néron, but this conversation is not significant enough to be reported in the play. By Act IV, however, Néron is in sufficient control of himself to be able to respond to Agrippine's long tirade against him with the irony which Brunschvicg describes as "désinvolture, mollesse, négligence affectée"\(^\text{17}\):

> Je me souviens toujours que je vous dois l'Empire;
Et sans vous fatiguer du soin de le redire,
Votre bonté, Madame, avec tranquillité
Pouvait se reposer sur ma fidélité. (IV, ii, 1223-1226)

He then proceeds to accuse her directly of advancing his cause for her own selfish purposes. He speaks with indifference, not invoking his personal feelings. Néron ends by deceiving Agrippine absolutely, pretending to concede to her wishes but intending, as he explains to Burrhus in the following scene, (IV, iii) to do the opposite.

In the final confrontation of Agrippine and Néron after the murder of Britannicus, Néron first seems taken with his old fear at the sight of his mother. His exclamation upon seeing her is "Dieux!"; then he takes hold of himself and, with complete sang-froid, replies to her accusations:
Moi! Voilà les soupçons dont vous êtes capable.
Il n'est point de malheurs dont je ne sois coupable;
St, si l'on veut, Madame, écouter vos discours,
Ma main de Claude même aura tranché les jours.
Son fils vous était cher: sa mort peut vous confondre;
Mais des coups du destin je ne puis pas répondre.
(V, vi, 1651-1656)

Reminding her of her own past crimes, he still maintains his innocence.
However, when she pursues her accusations, he seems to falter: "Madame,
mais qui peut vous tenir ce langage?" (V, vi, 1659), and Narcisse inter-
cedes, attempting to justify Britannicus' death. This gives Agrippine
the occasion to reply with her own irony: "--Poursuis, Néron, avec de
tels ministres,/ Par des faits glorieux tu te vas signaler" (V, vi,
1672-1673). She subsequently launches into a prophecy of his future
crimes and the remorse which will haunt him and force him further along
the path he has chosen. She expresses a wish that his ignominy will
finally be sealed by his causing his own death. History was, of course,
to bear out Agrippine's prophecies. The interview ends when, in some
semblance of her former authority, Agrippine says to Néron: "Adieu: tu
peux sortir" (V, vi, 1694). Néron does not even reply to her, but in-
stead speaks to Narcisse. In this scene Agrippine has, in a sense, had
the last word. Like Britannicus, she is not humbled or awed before
Néron's power but her verbal triumph is a hollow one for she herself now
has only the illusion of power. As he leaves, Néron has for Agrippine
only regards furieux which she speaks of to Burrhus in the next scene
(V, vii, 1697).

Néron's irony is an expression of his nature, of his struggle to
take control, of the fundamental ambiguity of his own attitude toward
his actions. It marks, on the one hand an assertion of his will, on the other hand a refusal to admit or accept responsibility for his deeds—hence, his vulnerability. Ultimately, his irony is a failure, as is his struggle for freedom. When Junia escapes Néron, seeking refuge in the temple, Néron is beset immediately with that fureur which Agrippine predicted would pursue him. Néron has the power, but not the mastery of himself.

In the second Preface to the play Racine speaks of Agrippine:

"C'est elle que je me suis surtout efforcé de bien exprimer, et ma tragédie n'est pas moins la disgrâce d'Agrippine que la mort de Britannicus."

Agrippine, too, uses verbal irony on several occasions, but while that of Néron progressively indicates the ascendency of his power, Agrippine's is rather called forth by an effort to hold on to an authority which she sees ebbing away from her. Her irony is a protestation, a defensive tactic, while Néron's is more an offensive weapon. It is significant that Agrippine, prevented from seeing Néron by his ministers, is forced to use her irony against Burrhus, whom she accuses of turning Néron away from her (see I, ii, and III, iii). Her mistrust of Burrhus is in itself ironic in view of the fact that he alone is fighting to make Néron a good ruler. When Agrippine does finally see Néron she harangues him in a frank exposure of her grievances against him (IV, ii). The irony she uses to him after Britannicus' murder is futile because it is a hollow protest after the fact and the course of Néron's future actions is already set. For Agrippine, irony marks defeat.

Verbal irony in Britannicus reflects not only the opposition of
Néron's apparent and real character as well as Agrippine's futile attempts to clasp on to power which is escaping her. It also connotes the atmosphere of the Roman court in which everything potentially has two faces, in which semblance and reality are often mistaken one for the other. Beneath the surface calm there is chaos. Lapp remarks that Britannicus is Racine's first play with constant interplay between appearance and reality. Many profound ironies arise from this situation. One of the most pervasive is that of misplaced trust. Agrippine tragically believes that Burrhus is against her and recognizes only too late that she should have suspected Narcisse. Britannicus makes the mistake of relying on the past—his father's assurance of Narcisse's loyalty. Fatally, he thinks Narcisse is the only one to be trusted. Néron, too, trusts Narcisse without ever questioning his motives for the advice which is so much in keeping with his own desires.

Perhaps the ultimate irony arises from the fact that Néron is Agrippine's ouvrage. As his mother, Agrippine has set the example for her son. Odette de Mourgues points out that this bond of blood of which Néron and Agrippine constantly speak is ambiguously both a unifying and a divisive factor in their relationship. By following in Agrippine's footsteps Néron must eventually turn against her. In her formidable planning and foresight, she overlooked this one crucial fact. And so Néron imitates and finally surpasses her in irony and crime. Jules Brody says very appropriately that Agrippine succeeds in her intention to discover the secrets of Néron's soul (she expresses this design in I, i, 127)—she finds out that they are the same as her own. And yet
throughout the play Agrippine seems blind to the fact that she is the example. She looks upon her son as turning against her and never indicates any sense that she is the cause. Even at the end of the play she still hopes to regain control over him: "Voyons quel changement produiront ses remords, S'il voudra désormais suivre d'autres maximes" (V, viii, 1766-1767). The irony of history will, of course, prove her hope vain.

We have seen that verbal irony is used frequently by Racinian characters in their dealings with one another, not by chance, but as a consequence of the basic ambiguity of their natures and of their situations. We may compare Narcisse with Néron in terms of their ways of speaking. Narcisse speaks falsely, but his communication is generally not irony, but pure hypocrisy, deception, artifice. He is single-minded in his self-seeking ambition and never falters. In this sense he is not a Racinian character. Néron, on the other hand, conceals his real nature, in a sense, because he cannot face it. He uses equivocal language to strike at and injure others on a personal level because he is not strong enough to act head on. Narcisse is treacherous purely for pragmatic reasons. Néron is deceptive because he is personally vulnerable and complex. Some of Starobinski's remarks about le regard in Racine are pertinent here. He says that in Racine a character senses that to be seen completely would be to be condemned. Therefore, in Racine there is always something hidden, glimpsed behind what is seen. Verbal irony is a reflection of this profundity and complexity.

We have seen in this chapter how verbal irony is part of the dramatic mechanism of Racine. It emphasizes for the audience the tense
relationships between characters. At the same time the attempts to restrain and deny violent emotions actually increase their intensity and precipitate their ultimate unleashing in verbal confrontation and violent action. Let us now turn to another kind of irony which also serves a dramatic function; that irony which is properly called dramatic irony.
FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER II


4 See Chapter I, p. 2.

5 For a discussion of the way in which Racine juxtaposes scenes to contrast the public mask and the inner passion of the characters, see: Robert W. Hartle, "Symmetry and Irony in Racine's Andromaque," L'Esprit créateur, XI (Summer, 1971).

6 Mélanges, X, 192.


14 For a discussion of how the play turns structurally on the opposition of Néron's apparent and real character see: Bernard Weinger, The Art of Jean Racine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), Chap. IV.

16 Dry Mock, p. 143.


19 Racine, p. 50.


CHAPTER III
DRAMATIC IRONY THROUGH STYLE

Dramatic irony is the broad term for the characteristic irony of the theatre which derives from the knowledge of the spectator as juxtaposed to the ignorance of the characters. By definition any observer is detached from an event and thus has a more objective view than those involved. If the spectator is perceptive, he is able to see various sides of an issue and the converging of circumstances, and therefore to anticipate the contrast between the outcome and the expectations of the characters. Thus, dramatic irony may occur without the specific intention of the playwright. The dramatist who so chooses however may deliberately cultivate and prepare this sort of irony if it serves his dramatic purposes. We have already seen that Racine was particularly interested in Aristotle’s comments on the emotions aroused by tragedy (see Chapter I, p. 21). In his own plays, as numerous critics have pointed out, he wanted to concentrate attention on the tragic experience, the internal destruction of a hero who, although he cherishes an ideal of autonomous action, finds that ultimately he is not in control of his destiny. His values clash with his nature and the nature of the universe. Dramatic irony is eminently suited to concentrating the spectator’s attention on this duality of experience. Moving on from verbal irony which Racine used extensively, this and subsequent chapters demonstrate that Racine also chose to cultivate dramatic irony in his plays and will examine the various ways in which he has done so.
As discussed in Chapter I, for the Greek playwright’s audience foreknowledge was essential to the effects of tragedy. Contrary to Corneille and other dramatists of the time who cultivated effects of surprise in their plays, Racine, like the Greeks, made audience awareness fundamental to his theatre. This is apparent first in his choice of subjects. Greek tragedy was based on legends familiar to the audiences of the day; Racine, too, chose subjects which would be familiar to his public. It must be understood that when Racine wrote his plays he had in mind an ideal spectator or reader (for plays were written for both) who was cultivated and had good taste—something Racine believed spanned the bounds of time and nations. The subjects and characters of Racine’s plays were taken from Greek legend and mythology or from ancient or recent history or the Bible. Many of these same subjects had been used by other French playwrights before him. Of course, Racine often made changes in legends as was the custom. There existed many versions of ancient tales and even in Greek times the use of legend implied adapting certain basic occurrences to suit one’s own purposes. Georges May examines Racine’s choice of subjects and shows how Racine carefully prepared the audience for any changes he made, often mentioning them in the Prefaces. We have already seen how Racine admired Sophocles’ use of Tiresias to inform the spectator but not the actor (see Chapter I, p. 19). May states that Racine exploits to the fullest the principle of preparation of events stated by D’Aubignac, who maintained that circumstances must be such that they seem naturally or logically to give rise to the events which follow. May’s
point is that Racine did not want to distract the audience's attention to novel details of plot or circumstance, but wanted to focus it on the tragic experience of the characters. The familiarity of the audience with the external action of the play creates a climate ripe for exploiting dramatic irony.

It was standard practice in the seventeenth century to view plays several times in succession. This custom is alluded to by Racine. In defending Alexandre from negative critics, Racine remarked in the original Preface: "On ne fait point tant de brigues contre un ouvrage qu'on n'estime pas; on se contente de ne plus le voir quand on l'a vu une fois ... Cependant j'ai eu le plaisir de voir plus de six fois de suite à ma pièce le visage de ces censeurs ..." In the second Preface to Britannicus he says "C'est maintenant celle [la tragédie] des miennes que la cour et le public revolent le plus volontiers." The plays were also written to be read as well as viewed. In his Prefaces Racine constantly refers to le lecteur and the very fact of writing a preface indicates a reading public.

The full comprehension of irony in the tragedies can come only as the plays are seen or read for the second or third or fourth time because much of the irony builds up gradually through correspondences and associations of lines, allusions, scenes and events at various points in a play. As the knowledge of the audience grows, its capacity to perceive irony is heightened. Racine exploits the clairvoyance of the audience, causing the reader or viewer to participate in the theatrical experience.
The most common form of dramatic irony is the line spoken by a character which means one thing to the speaker and perhaps to other characters hearing the statement, and something quite different to the audience. When Hermione exclaims to Orestes: "Ah! ne souhaitez pas le destin de Pyrrhus" (II, 11, 539), she is referring to her mixed feelings of anger and love for him, but the audience knows that Pyrrhus' destiny will be to die because of the extremes to which these feelings lead Hermione. However, dramatic irony can become much more complex than the pattern of a single speech with special undertones for the audience if dramatic irony is viewed in terms of the omniscience or cumulative knowledge of the public as opposed to the blindness or continuing ignorance of the character or characters. It will be useful, for purposes of organization, to discuss two classes of dramatic irony based on the source of ironic contrast: irony derives first from certain characteristics of style, second, from certain aspects of structure. Stated another way, irony comes from effects of language, and also from the elements which constitute and develop the action. In fact, these two aspects of plays are intertwined, and it is often the interplay of word and event or situation which creates irony. However, for the discussion of dramatic technique it is useful to attempt to separate the two, however arbitrary the distinctions may finally be. This chapter will deal with dramatic irony from the point of view of stylistic traits.

In her book Racine or the Triumph of Relevance Odette de Mourgues makes the following statement:

A study of Racinian tragedy necessarily begins and ends with the
the language of the plays. It is through our first immediate reaction to a single line taken at random that we discover how much Racine can move us. It is when any line of Racine can reveal to us its complete significance, that is, all its connections with all the other elements of the tragedy, that we appreciate Racine fully.

Language was the principal tool of the tragic dramatist in the seventeenth century while staging, gestures and decor were secondary concerns. The preoccupation with language, however, was not for its own sake. The aim of classical writers was complete integration of style and content. So, although we may be struck by certain lines of Racine, certain qualities of style, these always draw us into the substance of his tragedies themselves for full comprehension. Irony is a phenomenon which comes into existence through the intellectual apprehension of incongruities. Let us see how certain stylistic traits facilitate this kind of awareness. We must, at the same time, keep in mind Racine's concern with arousing tragic emotion in the public.

The conflict in Racine's tragedies is in the inner life of his characters, although such an internal conflict results from their relationships with other characters. A number of stylistic patterns reflect the contradictions within the souls of Racinian man. One trait is the frequent use of two types of short expressions: 1) exclamations such as "c'en est fait" or "la dernière fois" which indicate a character's desire to see his life in terms of irrevocable turning points, finalities; and 2) utterances which reflect the notion that destinies are precarious and constantly turning upon small details such as "un mot" or "un regard."

Racinian characters like Hermione, Bajazet, Roxane, Agamemnon, and Phèdre
are always on the verge of making a final decision which will sum up their destiny, ending conclusively the disorder within themselves. Hermione will leave Epirus, Bajazet will reveal his feelings to Roxane, Roxane will have Bajazet killed, Agamemnon will once and for all save or sacrifice Iphigénie, Phèdre will die. Conversely, these characters, although always on the threshold of eternity, are incapable of taking the irrevocable step until circumstances carry them into such a move. So they are perpetually looking for the small detail which may give foundation to their desperate hope that somehow the obstacles to the realization of their passion can be resolved. One glance, one word of encouragement will feed the illusion that they can escape from their problem, their nature, and will cause them to falter in whatever resolution they have made to master their fate. Oreste's illusion at the beginning of Andromaque: "Ma fortune va prendre une face nouvelle" (I, i, 2) is the illusion which perpetuates the stultifying indecision of many Racinian characters.

Andromaque contains a number of examples of these two types of expressions. Hermione, Pyrrhus and Oreste are all victims of the notion that they are about to become masters of their fate. In Act II, Hermione, after recalling Pyrrhus in his post-war glory, her initial belief that he loved her, and the circumstances which seemed to favor their union, speaks of his betrayal with "Mais c'en est trop, Cléone ..." She resolves to turn to Oreste, but when Cléone immediately announces Oreste's approach we see Hermione's resoluteness belied when the words: "Ah! je ne croyais pas qu'il fût si près d'ici" (II, i, 471,476) escape her lips. After his interview with Hermione, Oreste lets his hopes soar: "Nous
n'avons qu'à parler: c'en est fait ... " (II, iii, 597). He is convinced that all he has to do is insist that Pyrrhus hand over Astyanax and Pyrrhus will declare himself for Andromaque; he believes what Hermione has asserted (II, ii): if she is scorned by Pyrrhus, she will follow Oreste. This certainly heightens the despair he feels when Pyrrhus announces his decision to marry Hermione:

Ah Dieux! c'en était fait: Hermione gagnée

Pour se donner à moi n'attendait qu'un refus;
Ses yeux s'ouvraient, Pylade, elle écoutait Oreste,
Lui parlait, le plaignait. Un mot eût fait le reste.

(III, i, 741, 744-746)

Here paradoxically the absolute and the contingent come together in one breath. If the word of refusal had been spoken, thinks Oreste, fate would have definitively swung to his side. Oreste blindly simplifies the situation. The audience's knowledge of how Hermione will turn to Oreste, then turn on him when Pyrrhus' refusal finally does come heightens the dramatic irony.

Pyrrhus, too, deludes himself: "D'un amour qui s'éteint c'est le dernier éclat" (II, v, 704). In this scene he has asserted to Phoenix that he is now taking up his role as king of Epirus and acting as duty dictates. He looks back in astonishment on how close he came to throwing away everything: "... Un regard m'eût tout fait oublier!" (II, v, 640). Pyrrhus had even stated this inclination earlier to Andromaque when he declared his intention to protect Astyanax against Greece: "Animé d'un regard, je puis tout entreprendre" (II, iv, 329). The irony lies in
Pyrrhus' now looking upon his vulnerability as a thing of the past. Céphise knows differently and tells Andromaque: "un regard confondrait Hermione et la Grèce..." (III, v, 889). In the subsequent scene Andromaque runs across Pyrrhus who is looking for Hermione and feigns not to see Andromaque. She comments bitterly to Céphise: "Tu vois le pouvoir de mes yeux!" (III, vi, 892). But Céphise is right; Pyrrhus is only pretending. Upon hearing Andromaque speak he immediately says: "Que dit-elle, Phoenix?" (893). After delaying and feigning hardness of heart, Pyrrhus finally reiterates his offer to Andromaque. When Andromaque has at last accepted Pyrrhus' restated offer, Céphise confirms her previous intuition: "Madame: il n'attendait qu'un mot pour vous le rendre" (IV, i, 1054).

Andromaque herself looks at her destiny in terms of absolutes. Upon accepting Pyrrhus' offer of marriage she says of her son: "Céphise, allons le voir pour la dernière fois" (IV, i, 1072). Contrary to the others, Andromaque seems to have the strength to carry through her resolve. It is circumstance which will prove her wrong and let her live to see her son again. These recurring bits of phraseology which reveal conflicting mental processes of characters who try both to pinpoint and to let hang in the balance their destinies are ironic in that they are simultaneously true and false; their truth and falsehood, however, are always different from that understood by those who utter them. These speech habits represent psychological truths about characters who are victims of their own internal dissension. They want desperately to settle their destinies and yet they cannot because they do not have the
will to do so. They see themselves always on the threshold of finality, only to fall back and begin again. After Pyrrhus has already proclaimed once that his love for Andromaque has seen its last manifestation, he later repeats the phrase in the plea: "Pour la dernière fois, sauvez-le (Astyanax), sauvez-nous" (III, vii, 960). The characters suffer the psychological anguish of finality over and over again, yet do not find the release and relief real finality would bring them.

The ironic coexistence of opposite tendencies within the souls of Racine's characters is echoed in another stylistic device—antithesis, and its sub-category, oxymoron, antithesis being the juxtaposition of opposites, and oxymoron, a figure of speech which combines two terms which are ordinarily contrary and incompatible. At first the two elements seem logically to contradict each other, but upon closer examination a valid meaning is revealed. Although the use of antithesis was cultivated in précieux language, Racine uses this device in a much more authentic way than it was used in the gallant tradition. Odette de Mourgues' pinpoints the difference: precisioy uses antithesis in such a manner that it seems to be an automatic association of ideas. It has no shock value, but serves a mechanical function of putting our mind in a familiar groove which takes us away from the implications of content. De Mourgues states that, on the other hand, the successful antithesis is much more complex, that it does not rely on our automatic response but confronts us with the unexpected, shocks us into thinking about the implications. Successful antitheses take the form of metaphysical conceits or dramatic irony.

Many of Racine's antitheses, particularly in a play like Andromaque,
which deals primarily with love, use familiar juxtapositions associated with this theme such as love and hate, fire and ashes, which have a long literary and social tradition and which were most certainly précieux antitheses. But Racine uses these oppositions in such a way as to bring new life to old clichés. Like everything in Racine, his antitheses serve to concentrate the attention of the audience on the tragic action. This is done through dramatic irony.

One of the most famous oxymorons in the work of this playwright is from the first play, *La Thébaïde*. Créon confesses to his confidant his ambition to rule which he hopes to accomplish by using the warring brothers and encouraging them in that paradox against nature embodied by the play's subtitle, *Les Frères ennemis*. He expresses his wish that: "Ils s'étouffent, Attale, en voulant s'embrasser" (III, vi, 890). The reality of his wish is later confirmed by Créon himself to Antigone: "Par l'excès de leur haine ils semblaient réunis; / Et prêts à s'égorger, ils paraissaient amis" (V, iii, 1315-1316). Here in Racine's first play we see a technique which he will use frequently and with increasing mastery. In this case the antithetical statement is not linked closely to the tragic action as it will later be. There is no serious move toward reconciliation on the part of the brothers in *La Thébaïde*.

Antithesis is used much more extensively in *Andromaque*. In the initial scene Ureste explains his feelings upon his return to Greece: "Je sentis que ma haine allait finir son cours;/ Ou plutôt je sentis que l'aimais toujours" (I, i, 87-88). This inversion of love and hate and the self-deception surrounding it is the substance of the tragedy,
and the contradiction is stated time and again—for Orestes, for Hermione, and for Pyrrhus. Pyrrhus, in his attempt to blackmail Andromaque into loving him, exclaims that of necessity his heart: "S'il n'aime avec transport, laisse avec fureur" (I, iv, 368). Hermione, in her first appearance on stage is speaking to Cléone of Pyrrhus and cries out: "Ah! je l'ai trop aimé pour ne le point hâter" (II, i, 416). Yet in that blindness common in Racine no character ever considers that his own dilemma may be that of anyone else. The two faces of passion of these characters cause all manner of aberrations. They make about-face moves upon the slightest provocation (in this sense, the tendency to see destiny as turning upon a word or look is realistic). Line after line in Andromaque highlights this kind of paradox. Pylade tells Orestes that Pyrrhus is completely unpredictable because of the disorder caused by his love for Andromaque. He may: "S'ouvrir ce qu'il hait, et punir ce qu'il aime" (I, i, 122). At the same time, it is this situation that causes Pylade to advise Orestes that going ahead with his mission to obtain Astyanax should increase his chances with Hermione: "Plus on les veut brouiller, plus on va les unir./ Pressez, demandez tout, pour ne rien obtenir" (I, i, 139-140). Hermione's declared intentions are continually at variance with her actions. Pylade describes her as "Toujours prête à partir, et demeurent toujours" (I, i, 131). Orestes even admits his lack of self-control to Hermione. In two lines which might be seen as a précieux pose, but which, in the context of Racine's play express a tragic reality, Orestes says to her that his destiny: "Est de venir sans cesse adorer vos attraits,/ Et de jurer toujours qu'il n'y viendra jamais" (II, ii, 483-484).
In this same scene Hermione is playing a difficult game, trying to keep Oreste favorably disposed toward her and to avail herself of the opportunity he offers to punish Pyrrhus. At the same time she cannot, in spite of herself, hide her feelings for Pyrrhus. Oreste sees the contradictions in what she says to him and confronts her with them: "Le coeur est pour Pyrrhus, et les vœux pour Oreste" (II, ii, 538). Hermione exclaims that Oreste must not wish for Pyrrhus' destiny: "Je vous hais trop." Oreste replies: "Vous m'en aimerez plus" (II, ii, 540). Oreste pursues:

Vous me voulez aimer, et je ne puis vous plaire;
Et l'amour seul alors se faisant obéir,
Vous m'aimerez, Madame, en me voulant hâir." (II, ii 542-544).

Shortly Hermione says that Oreste twists her words: "Et croit qu'en moi la haine est un effort d'amour" (II, ii, 580). Although here Hermione would deny the blurring of categories within her, we have only to think of her monologue at the beginning of Act V. Its first four lines reveal her own awareness of the conflict and the resulting frenzy which culminates in the anguished cry: "Ah! me puis-je savoir si j'aime, ou si je hais?" (V, i, 1396). She then turns over and over in her mind the humiliation of her rejection by Pyrrhus and her need for vengeance. She is insensate at her own hesitation (V, i, 1406). This contradictory resolve seems to confirm the image that her actions thus far have given to Pyrrhus:

"Il croit que toujours faible et d'un coeur incertain,/ Je parerai d'un bras les coups de l'autre main" (V, i, 1411-1412). No matter how she tries, Hermione cannot escape the internal contradiction, for at the very
end of her monologue when she has convinced herself to let Pyrrhus die, she is betrayed by her own language. When she utters her rationalization: "Et puisqu'il m'a forcé enfin à le vouloir" (V, i, 1420), she is suddenly struck with all the implications of her words and she pulls back: "A le vouloir? Hé quoi? c'est donc moi qui l'ordonne?" (V, i, 1421). Her love for Pyrrhus overpowers her and she is filled with self-horror. In this monologue her feelings have made the full circle and she is left at the end in the same indecision as at the beginning. The antitheses in her language emphasize for the audience her inability to extricate herself from the contradictions of her passion. Her language also jolts Hermione into self-awareness as we saw above with line 1420. The spectator sees the whole monologue in terms of the ultimate "Qui te l'a dit?" (V, iii, 1543) which Hermione flings at Orestes when he confronts her with the fait accompli of Pyrrhus' murder.

One of the most striking oxymorons of the play is the one Pyrrhus uses to try to justify to Hermione his approaching marriage to Andromaque: "L'un par l'autre entraînés, nous courons à l'autel" (IV, v, 1299). This is a remarkably appropriate capsule statement of the destinies of Orestes, Hermione, and Pyrrhus. It reflects the complex and ironic mingling of passion, of the temperament of the characters, and of the situation of which they are simultaneously originators and victims. They paradoxically resist and in so doing rush headlong to their fate and are concomitantly pulled along by the inextricably intertwined passions in which they are caught.

A contributing factor to the effectiveness of paradox in the
linguistic patterns like those just discussed is their repetition. Just as one line may echo another poetically, in terms of sonority and rhythm, the same linking may occur through the juxtaposition of words or expressions which repeat themselves. One stylistic contradiction recalls a previous one or anticipates a subsequent one. The ironic correlation develops and expands with each recurrent or similar expression and the full ironic significance of any one line may become apparent only upon the final echo. The more familiar one is with a particular tragedy, the more powerful such lines become. Irony, then, can be said to be cumulative. Echoing also causes a recapitulation and/or projection of the tragic action in the mind of the audience. By using irony to do this, Racine creates a climate of irony which works toward his ultimate concern of building the tragic emotion of the reader.

Racine also creates irony through his choice and ordering of individual words. In his detailed study of Racine's vocabulary, Jacques Cahen remarks that the vocabulary of an individual author is formed from the general vocabulary of the language, narrowed by such factors as literary convention and the tragic universe or private esthetic of the poet himself. Racine used the literary vocabulary of his time, a vocabulary which had been refined and rarefied through various social and literary developments. At the beginning of the century Malherbe's literary doctrine had called for a purification of poetic language for the purpose of clear, direct, forceful communication. The role of salons, the Court as a center of social life, the précieux and romanesque traditions worked for a certain selection in vocabulary. The language used by a
particular author was determined largely by the genre in which he chose to write; the language of tragedy differs from that of other forms of poetry (comedy, satire, burlesque, etc.) and these are all different from prose (letters, memoirs, etc.). The vocabulary appropriate for the tragic poet was that of a society turned inward in self-observation and analysis. It lacked resources for describing social life, nature, the material world. Its descriptive vocabulary seems cold, barren, sterile—it appeals to reason rather than the imagination. Brunot sees Racine's achievement in tragedy as astonishing in view of the limited resources of language with which his era provided him.

Racine's originality lies partly in the new and unexpected ways in which he used the conventional vocabulary of tragedy. He did not seek out elaborate or unusual expressions. His language is simple and concrete, but it bears his own stamp. Although he drew upon the précieux and romanesque traditions, he transformed them for his own purposes. Words coming from his pen often seem to take on new qualities, to have a depth that they lack in normal usage. The device of repetition which we have seen in relationship to stylistic patterns applies also to vocabulary. Ironic effects are produced through repetition of related words which, by their relation to the tragic theme, create and heighten the tragic mood. In Andromaque, for example, words such as destin, sort, fortune, and cie occur again and again. There is a concentration of these words in the first scene of the play. Upon encountering Pylade after such a long absence, Oreste exclaims: "Ma fortune va prendre une face nouvelle" (I, i, 2). Fate has given him a favorable omen and brought him to these
shores to see Pylade. Pylade, too, rejoices in their meeting: "J'en
rends grâces au ciel, qui m'arrêtant sans cesse/ Semblait m'avoir fermé
le chemin de la Grâce" (9-10). He attributes to heaven an active role.
Later he expresses the feeling that fate is hard to interpret: "Je
craignais que le ciel, par un cruel secouss./ Ne vous offrit la mort que
vous cherchiez toujours" (19-20). But he sees that the opposite is true:
"Un destin plus heureux vous conduit en Épire" (22). Oreste, however,
immediately evokes the uncertainty:

Hélas! qui peut savoir le destin qui m'amène?
L'amour me fait ici chercher une inhumaine
Mais qui sait ce qu'il doit ordonner de mon sort,
Et si je viens chercher ou la vie ou la mort? (25-28)

And in his next speech Pylade asks: "Pensez-vous qu'Hermione, à Sparte
inexorable,/ Vous prépare en Épire un sort plus favorable?" (33-34).
In this sequence of allusions to fate there has been a gradual shift in
the sense of the words used. Initially fortune and destin are used in a
more abstract and absolute sense, implying the whole outcome of one's
life, the issues of life and death. Then, as the discussion turns to
the specific cause of Oreste's unhappiness, the words are used in a
fashion much more akin to preciosity, sort being one's status in regard
to the beloved. Ultimately, however, these lines go beyond preciosity for
several reasons. They involve powerful dramatic irony. The audience
knows that all notions of a happier destiny in love are false. We know,
too, that to describe Hermione with the précieux term inhumaine conveys
also the literal meaning of the word in view of her later conduct toward
Oreste. Her actions will lead to issues of life and death for those related to her in love. In fact, the destinies of nations are involved because of the intertwining of love and politics. What would seem to have its origins in preciosity, then, becomes much more complex in Racine and works toward ironic effects. This is the kind of technique we saw in Chapter II: what may begin as the striking of a précieux attitude by a character has a terrible validity which turns preciosity into fate mocking an unwitting character through his own words. Subsequently, in the scene just discussed the meanings of the words lose the tinge of preciosity and shade back to the way they were used initially. Oreste exclaims to Pylade: "Mais admire avec moi le sort, dont la poursuite/Me fait courir alors au piège que j'évite" (65-66). Finally he says: "Je me livre en aveugle au destin qui m'entraîne" (98). There is a kind of orchestration of words here. In the space of the first 100 lines of Andromaque the word destin or some echo of it occurs nine times. The theme is played in different keys—some lighter, some more serious, but it sets the mood of the tragedy.

Another series of related words occurring in Andromaque includes such terms as courroux, rage, fureur, furie, colère, emportement, transport and violence which reflect the inner disorder in which the passions of the characters cause them to live. Although lexically related to each other, certain of these words also lend themselves to the expression of opposites. Some are associated with the violence of love, others with the violence of hatred. We have already seen Pyrrhus saying that if he does not love avec transport, he must hate avec fureur (I, iv, 368).
Some of the words are ambiguous in themselves: *emportement*, *transport*, and *violence* are used to represent either the positive or the negative emotions of a particular passion. They sometimes refer to emotions of love, sometimes hate. Oreste, recounting to Pylade his emotional life during the time he has not seen his friend, says: "Je pris tous mes transports pour des transports de haine" (I, i, 54). He had been deceived himself—what he thought was hate was love. Once Pyrrhus has announced his decision to marry Hermione, we find her confiding to Cléone: "Conçois-tu les transports de l'heureuse Hermione?" (III, iii, 850). But in Act V, not knowing whether she loves or hates in the sequence of tortured questions she utters, she again uses the word: "Quel transport me saisit?" ..." (V, i, 1595). A single character, then, uses the same word in opposite contexts.

Another way in which contradictions are emphasized is through the repetition of opposing terms. In contrast to the terms of agitation just discussed, there are terms such as *calme* and *silence*, which are generally used to describe a psychological state which precedes or conceals fury: Oreste, in speaking of his seeming internal equilibrium before returning to Greece, speaks of a *calme trompeur* (I, i, 58). He tells Hermione that everything she does betrays the fire of her passion for Pyrrhus, including silence: "Tout nous trahit, la voix, le silence, les yeux;/ Et les feux mal convertis n'en éclatent que mieux" (II, iii, 575-576). The opposition here between *éclatant* and *feux couverts* will be discussed later. Cléone can only fear the terrible silence into which Hermione retreats upon the news that Pyrrhus has scorned her once more and has now
announced his forthcoming marriage to Andromaque: "Non, je ne puis ad-
mirer ce silence." And: "Ah! que je crains, Madame, un calme si funeste!" (IV, ii, 1130, 1141). Pyrrhus also feels Hermione's silence is dangerous: "Je crains votre silence, et non pas vos injures" (IV, v, 1306). This use of contradictory terms is common in Racine.

In both Andromaque and Iphigénie there are groups of designations for happiness and unhappiness: bonheur, joie, félicité are opposed to dou-
leur, misère, malheur, déplaisir (the latter group being statistically more frequent in the plays). Many other vocabulary oppositions can be found in relation to such themes as silence/speech, purity/guilt, and knowledge/ignorance. A number of critics deal with this phenomenon in specific plays. This stylistic trait may occur on both a large and a small scale. Sometimes words appear in paradoxical juxtaposition over and over again. Sometimes, it may be a matter of only one or two words. Weinberg points out, for example, that in Iphigénie, whereas other characters describe Agamemnon as injuste and barbare, he himself speaks of "mes justes désirs" (IV, iii, 1159). The pattern of ironic oppo-
tion in language is established firmly in Racine's stylistic technique.

We have already briefly mentioned the use of a range of meanings for various words. This phenomenon of shades of meaning is singled out by Cahen as the factor which distinguishes the language of one Racinian play from another. The vocabulary does not vary significantly with the subject, but remains consistent in all of Racine's theatre. Yet in spite of apparent similarity, the words in each play form a certain nuance. This has partly to do with varying frequencies of usage, but
more specifically with the level of meaning intended. Sometimes the most basic literal meaning of a word is the one conveyed. At other times, words are used figuratively, for their symbolic value. Lapp sees words in Racine as existing in stages: 1) Words, because of preciosity, have lost any figurative meaning they once had and become euphemisms. Brunot speaks of that phenomenon which consists of the passage of words from a figurative stage to a more ordinary stage. As a figure of speech is more and more widely used it gradually becomes accepted as an equivalent term for the thing it originally evoked symbolically. Flamm became a mere synonym for amour, sang for race or famille. Words became trite because of preciosity. 2) From the stage of euphemism, "demetaphorized words" may regain a concrete meaning and return to their original sense. 3) Finally, words may be "remetaphorized," somehow win back again at least part of an earlier figurative association. This explanation of the transitions in word meanings is very useful as an understanding of Racine's transformation of preciosity. Words which, in general usage, have become précieux euphemisms, in Racine often recapture their symbolic sense.

The same word may occur at various points in one play or in several plays with differing meanings. In the later plays there seems to be much more extensive use of symbolic meanings than in the earlier works. Symbolic use, of course, increases the ironic potential of words. Irony also may develop from simultaneous exploitation of different stages of meaning. One of the later plays, Iphigénie, illustrates well the range from literal to figurative meanings. Autel is a particularly meaningful
word in this tragedy. It is, first of all, the place of routine sacrifices, made to propitiate the gods. Weinberg points out that in Iphigénie the word most often appears in the plural, autels, when used in this general sense. But in this play the specific sense is much more important; l'autel becomes Diana's altar where the Greeks must sacrifice a girl who is directly descended from Helen of Troy in order that the gods will cause the winds to rise. Since Agamemnon, Ulysse, and Calchas have interpreted the oracle to mean Agamemnon's daughter, the word comes to represent the sacrifice of Iphigénie. It is the specific sacrifice which Agamemnon rejects, then accepts, but plots to conceal by an alleged marriage ceremony; he swerves between carrying through the plan and rejecting the sacrifice. The word autel, then, comes to have the meaning of the marriage of Iphigénie and Achille, as well as the sacrifice. It is frequently used ironically, evoking marriage for some characters while meaning sacrifice for others. When Iphigénie says to her father: "Verra-t-on à l'autel votre heureuse famille?" (II, ii, 577), she is completely ignorant of that double meaning which causes Agamemnon to exclaim: "Hélas!" and causes the terrible irony of the reply: "Vous y serez, ma fille!" (II, ii, 578).

The word is used repeatedly in its double sense so that, each time, the ironic connotation is reinforced to the audience, and attention is concentrated upon the moment when the double significance will be revealed. Agamemnon tells Clytemnestre: "Vous pouvez à l'autel envoyer votre fille" (III, i, 782), but in trying to dissuade Clytemnestre herself from coming and finally ordering her to stay away, the word is
used several times. When he leaves, she ponders: "L'injuste Agamemnon m'écarte de l'autel?" (III, ii, 820). Achille, too, is completely ignorant of the way Agamemnon is using him and says to Iphigénie: "Votre père à l'autel vous destine un époux; venez y recevoir un cœur qui vous adore" (III, iv, 852-853). Finally when Arcas is sent by Agamemnon to fetch Iphigénie from Clytemnestre, he says: "Madame, tout est prêt pour la cérémonie. Le Roi près de l'autel attend Iphigénie" (III, v, 897-898). Just before revealing the double significance of the altar, Arcas highlights the exact coincidence of the two ceremonies localized there. Then he explains to those assembled the terrible significance of the phrase "tout est prêt" which the audience has already anticipated: "Mais le fer, le bandeau, la flamme est toute prête" (III, v, 905). Now the characters, too, are beginning to anticipate the truth which Arcas must finally utter: "Il l'attend à l'autel pour la sacrifier" (III, v, 912). Racine has created the same tension in the audience and the characters. The audience waits upon the words it knows the characters must say. Clytemnestre, Achille, Iphigénie, Eriphile, and their attendants who all know only the marriage implications of the altar are lead to suspect and wait in dread for Arcas to give the more gruesome meaning. Now all those previous double meanings of autel are recalled and new lines recapitulate previous ones. Clytemnestre says "Je ne m'étonne plus de cet ordre cruel/ Qui m'avait interdit l'approche de l'autel" (III, v, 923-924). Achille, who, a few moments earlier, bid Iphigénie come to the altar, now rages:

C'est peu que de vouloir, sous un couteau mortel,
Me montrer votre cœur fumant sur un autel;
D'un appareil d'hymen couvrant ce sacrifice,
Il veut que ce soit moi qui vous mène au supplice?
... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ...
Quoi donc? à leur fureur livrée en ce moment
Vous iriez à l'autel me chercher vainement.

(III, vi, 975-978, 985-984)

Achille will later repeat to Agamemnon himself: "On dit que sous mon nom à l'autel appelée, je ne l'y conduisais que pour être immolée" (IV, vi, 1329-1330). For those characters who originally interpreted the altar as symbolic of marriage, the word now is used with full awareness of the deception it involved. The revelation of the double sense has opened up new ironic possibilities for autel since Agamemnon is still unaware that the others now know both meanings.

Clytemnestre laments her doughter's devotion to her father.

While Iphigénie is excusing him, Agamemnon is complaining of her slowness in coming to the altar--Clytemnestre points out the irony: "Le babare à l'autel se plaint de sa paresse" (IV, ii, 1150). Finally, Agamemnon comes himself to get his daughter and says innocently to Clytemnestre: "Ne peut-elle à l'autel marcher que sur vos pas?" (IV, iii, 1160). And, not realizing that Clytemnestre understands fully he says: "Calchas est prêt, Madame, et l'autel est paré" (IV, iii, 1164), recalling Arcas' previous speech. This time there is no need for an explicit statement.

"Vous ne me parlez point, Seigneur, de la victime" (IV, iii, 1166), and:

Venez, venez, ma fille, on n'attend plus que vous;
Venez remercier un père qui vous aime,
Et qui veut à l'autel vous conduire lui-même.

(IV, iv, 1168-1170)
From this verbal irony and from the tears of Iphigénie, Agamemnon realizes that he has been found out: "Ah! malheureux Arcas, tu m'as trahi" (IV, iv, 1174). From this point on in the play the word autel evokes another double significance which is organized around the word sang.

Using the word autel to develop ironic associations in the mind of the reader is of Racine's invention. Lapp points out that for the Greeks the temple and altar were not connected with ideas of marriage. This is a clear indication of a deliberate effort on Racine's part to develop irony. By way of comparison, we may note that in Andromaque, too, the word autel could have had a double significance since it is the site of Pyrrhus' marriage and his death. But in this play the word appears no more than ten times and is not used extensively in the symbolic, ironical way it is in Iphigénie, the later play.

The same comparison between Andromaque and Iphigénie holds true for the word sang. It appears often in both plays, although more in the latter. In Andromaque, sang is used most of the time in its concrete meaning of blood, particularly in association with the blood shed in battle. By extension, it often means death. In fact, the prime use of the word in the earlier play seems to be to call forth visual images of death in battle and war, particularly the Trojan war. On occasion, sang also means family or country, or life. Sometimes its use creates dramatic irony; Orestes cries out to Pylade when he believes Pyrrhus is about to marry Hermione: "Ah! plutôt cette main dans le sang du barbare... " (III, i, 733), little realizing it will actually come to that. There is occasional irony revolving around the fact that Pyrrhus is now protecting,
in Astyanax, that blood which he shed so cruelly on the battlefields of Troy. But the word lacks the symbolic-ironic dimension which it attains in Iphigénie. In Iphigénie there is a double-meaning to the word sang which is closely bound to the action of the tragedy. It evokes continually the ambiguity of the oracle around which the play is organized:

Vous armez contre Troie une puissance vaine,
Si dans un sacrifice auguste et solennel
Une fille du sang d'Hélène
De Diane en ces lieux n'ensanglante l'autel,
Pour obtenir les vents que le ciel vous dénie,
Sacrifier Iphigénie. (I, i, 57-62)

This larger ambiguity in the language of the gods results in Agamemnon's use of ambiguity in regard to the ceremony at the altar. When the lesser mystery of the double ceremony becomes clear, the larger deception still remains and is not unraveled for the characters until the very end, although the audience has privileged knowledge. The word sang in this play, then, generally connotes the sacrifice which will bring favorable winds to the Greeks so they may sail to Troy. All the characters in the play know of only one Iphigénie, but we know that Erichthon is also "Iphigénie." Other meanings for sang are also used in Iphigénie. Sometimes the word is used in its concrete meaning of blood, generally that spilled in battle; sometimes it means lineage, either descendants or ancestors; sometimes, specifically one's children or family, sometimes nation. It also means death, war, and life. But the most frequent meaning, one which may occur concomitantly with others, is sacrifice. When Achille declares to Agamemnon and Ulysse: "Remplissez les autels d'offrandes et de sang" (I, ii, 199), sang for him means routine sacrifice to the gods,
but to the audience it means the sacrifice of Iphigénie. Later he proclaims to Clytemnestre Calchas’ prediction: "Que Neptune et les vents, prêts à nous exaucer, / N’attendent que le sang que sa main va verser" (III, iii, 839-840). Achille is eager for the sacrifice because, although the gods have predicted he will achieve glory at the price of his life, he is anxious to be off to battle at Troy: "Puis-je ne point chérir l’heureuse occasion/ D’aller du sang troyen sceller notre union" (847-848). This last line ironically echoes a previous line of Eriphile who is launched upon the quest for her origins, an enterprise which can only be fatal to her:

Un oracle effrayant m’attache à mon erreur,
Et quand je veux chercher le sang qui m’a fait naître,
Me dit que sans périr je ne puis me connaître. (II, i, 428-430)

The lines Eriphile speaks to Iphigénie when the latter has accused the former of loving Achille typify the tightly woven ambiguities of plot and language in Iphigénie:

Avez-vous pu penser qu’an sang d’Agamemnon
Achille préférerait une fille sans nom,
Oui de tout son destin ce qu’elle a pu comprendre,
C’est qu’elle sort d’un sang qu’il brûle de répandre?

(II, v, 707-710)

She believes she is Trojan because Doris’ father had told her she was awaited in Troy (II, i, 438-442). In fact, she is the daughter of Helen, whose kidnapping, as we have just seen, Achille is eager to avenge. We have also seen his eagerness for the sacrifice which will bring favorable winds, although at this point he has no idea that Eriphile is the one
designated by the term "fille du sang d'Hélène," nor has he even yet heard of the oracle. The intricacies of blood relationships, then, are ironically intertwined with the action. Iphigénie will ask Achille to free Brîphile, his captive, but she will be freed to be designated by Calchas as the victim, finding she is Trojan only by virtue of her mother's kidnaping. Her death will consecrate the marriage of Iphigénie and Achille and will send the Greeks off to battle.

The word sang, then, embodies a number of oppositions; the ties which Agamemnon, as a father, feels for his daughter versus the obligations which he has because of his own heritage as a Greek king descended from the gods; his blood relationship—brother of Mênélas, the husband of Helen—which led him, initially, to spearhead the move to avenge Helen's kidnaping is the same relationship which causes him now to believe he must sacrifice his own daughter; and, the confusion between Brîphile's supposed Trojan lineage and her real origins. Racine has brought together all these oppositions in a single word, making it highly charged with meaning, and thus granting it a symbolic power of its own. We can view this symbolic use of words as one of Racine's points of departure from preciosity. Lapp refers to Lanson's explanation of précieux language. Lanson says words were used only as signs and lacked independent significance and properties of their own. Lapp interprets this as a denial of the possibility of symbol in précieux writing. By endowing words with new evocative power, Racine guides his audience toward the desired emotional response. He suggests, but in true classical fashion, makes the audience participate.
It is significant that *Iphigénie*, which uses words in a kind of symbolic-ironic way, is also said to be one of the most poetic plays. There seems to be a close relationship in this playwright between poetic and ironic effects. The same linguistic patterns often contribute to the poetry and the irony of his tragedies. Cleanth Brooks in his book *The Well-Wrought Urn* sees poetry as a domain in which much of the language is necessarily grounded in paradox. The poet's vision is a dual vision. Poetic perceptions necessarily reveal or imply contradictions. The language of even the most direct poet involves certain contradictory aspects. A poem which compares the calm of evening to the breathless adoration of a Nun involves a paradox between stillness and excitement which does, however, make sense. Brooks also finds paradoxical language common to the provinces of religion and love—life springing from death, for example. The concomitants of paradox which often commingle in varying degrees are irony and wonder. Brooks' remarks are extremely interesting when applied to Racine, the great poet whose poetry cannot be pinpointed, who writes primarily of love in tragedies which have similarities with liturgy. (In his book on Racine's language, Thierry Maulnier discusses the incantatory nature of the tragedies.) Our understanding of irony in Racine may bring us closer to understanding the poetry.

The final aspect of irony of language which remains to be discussed is also a poetic aspect—that is, imagery. In the realm of imagery we once more see both Racine's indebtedness to the précieux tradition and his originality in the way he uses this heritage. Fire
and flame imagery is a prime example. This imagery occurs in all the tragedies and as a metaphor of love it is one of the most typical précieux figures of speech. It is impossible, of course, to pinpoint the specific source of Racine's inspiration. Georges May makes a case for a strong influence of Ovid on Racine, particularly in terms of the conceptions of love. He points out that Ovid used extensively images of flame and melting, depicting the theme that love burns its victim but does not make him happy. May states: "Les deux poètes conçoivent l'amour comme une passion subite, capricieuse et irrationnelle qui frappe au hasard, comme la foudre, et enflamme immédiatement sa proie." It is very likely, then, that Ovid contributed to Racine's use of this figure along with the précieux tradition.

Andromaque is outstanding in terms of fire imagery. In this play the conventional image of fire is wedded to the legendary background of the action and it is the dimension of the past which gives special power to many of the lines. The integration of the image and background is done in such a way as to involve ironic contrast. Racine's play takes place in the shadow of the Trojan War in which Pyrrhus made his reputation as a warrior, in which the honor of Hermione's mother was avenged, in which Andromaque saw Pyrrhus' father kill her husband. The city was burned to ashes. Hector, too, became ashes. The war is over and won—a thing of the past. But the importance of the past is a well-known theme of Andromaque. Images of the war linger in the minds of the characters. These images almost always involve fire. Racine cites in the prefaces a passage from Virgil which quotes Andromaque as saying: "Et
moi, j'ai vu ma patrie dévorée par les flammes." In the play itself
Andromaque says to Céphise: "J'ai vu mon père mort et nos murs embrasés"
(III, vi, 928). A little later she gives her a vivid description of the
horrors of the war, in which fire plays a prominent part:

Songe, songe, Céphise, à cette nuit cruelle
Qui fut pour tout un peuple une nuit éternelle.
Figure-toi Pyrrhus, les yeux étincelants,
Entrant à la lueur de nos palais brûlants,
Sur tous mes frères morts se faisant un passage,
Et de sang tout couvert échauffant le carnage.
Songe aux cris des vainqueurs, songe aux cris des mourants,
Dans la flamme étouffés, sous le fer expirants.
Peins-toi dans ces horreurs Andromaque éperdue:
Voilà comme Pyrrhus vint s'offrir à ma vue. (III, viii, 997-1006)

Pyrrhus himself associates fire with Troy; he recalls the victors dividing
the spoils "... au pieds des murs fumants de Troie" (I, ii, 185). Fire
is associated with the destruction of the city and with the war in general.
Oreste projects what Astyanax might be capable of in terms of Hector's
exploits; he may: "Tel qu'on a vu son père embraser nos vaisseaux,/ Et,
la flamme à la main, les suivre sur les eaux" (I, ii, 163-164). The
ultimate fate of Troy involves a contradiction central to the play. On
the one hand there is the notion that Troy has been snuffed out, buried
in ashes. Oreste speaks to Pylade of Astyanax as the "Reste de tant de
rois sous Troie ensevelis" (I, i, 72). Oreste speaks to Pyrrhus of
Achilles: "Hector tomba sous lui, Troie expire sous vous."
(I, ii, 148). In a beautifully poetic evocation of the ruin of a city and of a civili-
ization, Pyrrhus looks at the fate of Troy:

Je ne vois que des tours que la cendre a couvertes,
Un fleuve teint de sang, des campagnes désertes,
Un enfant dans les fers; et je ne puis songer
Que Troie en cet état aspire à se venger. (I, ii, 201-204)

The image of ash is crucial to the play. Suggested in a negative fashion in this speech of Pyrrhus is the paradox that Troy may not really be dead, but may be resurrected, born again. We will not admit the possibility to Oreste because Oreste, as a spokesman for Greece, is demanding Astyanax and thus threatening Pyrrhus' authority. But two scenes later Pyrrhus, with the motives of a lover, says to Andromaque: "Votre Ilion encor peut sortir de sa cendre" (I, iv, 330). Troy, then, fills the minds of the characters in this play—Troy the site of a bitter war, Troy the ruined city, Troy which might be revived as a city or as a war. Troy becomes superimposed on Epirus, the past on the present, as attested by numerous lines. 23 Marcel Gutwirth emphasizes in a vivid way the importance of Troy in the play: "La hantise d'une ville morte paralyse les vivants."24 This obsession with the past and Troy is in terms of flame, ashes and images of rekindling, as we have seen in passages cited thus far.

We must next observe how these same images are associated with love in Andromaque. In studying fire imagery in this play we find a whole complex of interrelated terms which recur: feu, flamme, brûler, éclat, éclater, allumer, rallumer, embraser, consumer, éteindre, ardeur, ardent. All of these are terms associated with love in the précieux tradition, flamme being one of the most conventional designations for love. Racine uses flamme in just this way. Oreste reminds Pylade: "Tu vis naître ma flamme et mes premiers soupirs" (I, i, 40). Phoenix, praising his master
who, he thinks, has finally brought his passion for Andromaque under control says: "Ce n'est plus le jouet d'une flamme servile" (II, v, 629). Andromaque speaks of her love for Hector: "Ma flamme par Hector fut jadis allumée; Avec lui dans la tombe elle s'est enfermée" (III, iv, 865-866). The word flamme designates sometimes a specific passion for a specific object, but often, as in this passage, also implies the capacity to love which Andromaque claims to have lost. These two lines present the image of a flame being extinguished, buried, expressing the idea of love being snuffed out and forming a parallel with the imagery used to represent the fate of Troy. Time and again there is a similar portrayal of love in Andromaque. As with the depiction of Troy, there is also the possibility and the reality of the fire not really being dead, of rekindling. Orestes experiences the resurrection of his passion for Hermione: "De mes feux mal éteints je reconnus la trace" (I, i, 86). A few lines later he speaks of mes feux redoublés (95). Phoenix questions Pyrrhus on the wisdom of his allowing Orestes to see Hermione: "Mais si ce feu, Seigneur, vient à se rallumer?" (I, iii, 251). Orestes ultimately accuses Hermione of unsuccessfully trying to hide her love for Pyrrhus:

L'amour n'est pas un feu qu'on renferme en une âme;
Tout nous trahit, la voix, le silence, les yeux;
Et les feux mal couverts n'en éclatent que mieux
(II, ii, 574-576)

The parallel imagery for Troy and for love is one of the ways Racine superimposes the past on the present, for similar lines naturally recall each other and cause an association of themes in the mind of the reader. This
depth of meaning is part of what causes the metaphors Racine uses to transcend their précieux stereotypes.

At some points in the play Racine goes beyond mere parallelism and actually fuses the themes in a common image. Andromaque, in rejecting Pyrrhus' attentions, tries to persuade him to return to Hermione in a way which is at the same time a reproach and a reminder that he is associated in her mind with the death of Hector because he is Achilles' son. She says: "Aux cendres d'un époux doit-elle enfin sa flamme?" (I, iv, 358). Andromaque's only love is for her dead husband who, like Troy, is ashes. There is the obvious paradox of flame being generated by ash--Andromaque's passion may in fact burn more brightly now because Hector is dead and all that remains of her love, Astyanax, is being threatened. But the line is worded carefully so that there are several ironic ramifications. Literally, of course, Andromaque is saying that Hermione has no dead husband. But Hermione's love for Pyrrhus is inextricably bound up with his reputation built on the Trojan war. A passage we have already seen in another context shows how her memories of the early days of her passion are associated with Pyrrhus, the returning warrior:

Ma famille vengée, et les Grecs dans la joie,  
Nos vaisseaux tout chargés des dépouilles de Troie,  
Les exploits de son père effacés par les siens,  
Ses feux que je croyais plus ardents que les miens,  
Mon coeur, toi-même enfin de sa gloire éblouie. (II, i, 465-469)

Pyrrhus' gloire is based on the avenging of Helen which includes Hector's
death. In a sense Hermione does owe her passion to his ashes. Andromaque herself states this a few lines later, speaking of Pyrrhus' father Achilles, who killed Hector, and of Pyrrhus: Et vous n'êtes que tous deux connus que par mes larmes" (I, iv, 362). Another aspect of the line about the ashes of a husband is the fact that Pyrrhus himself owes his love for Andromaque to Hector's ashes, for with him dead and Troy conquered Andromaque came into his world. Passion in this play is inseparable from Troy and from a war which was, of course, fought for a woman. The line embodies the paradox of the play, a paradox which lies in the meaning of the Trojan War as expressed by Goethe: "Mais la guerre de Troie n'est pas seulement l'événement décisif par lequel l'Occident se connait à la fois source de valeurs et foyer de dévastation. Elle est encore, Racine ne peut l'oublier, source du Poème."25 His choice of the word foyer is quite appropriate to the images we have been discussing. The intertwining of the past and present is also accomplished by applying the same metaphors to love and to the hatred of the Greeks for the Trojans. Andromaque says to Pyrrhus: "Votre amour contre nous allume trop de haine: Retournez, retournez à la fille d'Hélène" (I, iv, 341-342). The reference here to Hermione as Helen's daughter underscores the presence of Troy. The fusion of themes in fire imagery is also well illustrated by the oft-quoted line which we have already seen in Chapter II: "Vaincu, chargé de feux, de regrets consumé,/ Brûlé de plus de feux que je n'en allumai" (I, iv, 319-320). Here Pyrrhus equates the burning he is experiencing for Andromaque with the fires he set at Troy. It is perhaps only the total context of the play, integrating Troy and love, which redeems from
conventionality this précieux mixture of military language with love.

Images of rekindling point to the role of Astyanax in the play. He is consistently described as the remnant of the Trojan race (reste), all that is left to Andromaque of her love for Hector. Andromaque speaks of him as "Le seul bien qui me reste d'Hector et de Troie" (I, iv, 262) and "Il est du sang d'Hector, mais il en est le reste" (IV, i, 1122). She speaks of him also as "Ce fils, ma seule joie, et l'image d'Hector:/ Ce fils, que de sa flamme il me laissa pour gage!" (III, viii, 1016-1017).

As ashes may burst into flame, Troy may rise again through Astyanax. The Greeks fear this: "On craint qu'avec Hector Troie un jour ne renaisse" (I, ii, 193). Céphise, who thinks that by marrying Pyrrhus, Andromaque will be able to bring up Astyanax in peace, exclaims: "Mais pour voir avec lui renaitre tant de rois!" (IV, i, 1071). Astyanax's role is ironic as he becomes the stake in Pyrrhus' pursuit of Andromaque. Pyrrhus, whose glory rests on his victory over Troy, is now offering to revive it by protecting Astyanax. In so doing he is preserving the very thing which is the obstacle to Andromaque's loving him—Astyanax as the extension of Hector. Only blindness makes him believe that when Andromaque agrees to marry him he can be happy with her. In the last analysis, of course, all the lines alluding to Spiritus becoming a second Troy come true, but not in the way that had been anticipated. By placing his guards around Astyanax, Pyrrhus becomes vulnerable to the Greeks. The Greeks attack him for protecting Astyanax and scorning Hermione, who finds herself in the inverse situation of her mother: the Greeks avenged the kidnapping of Helen by a foreigner; they now avenge the spurning of Hermione
by a Greek. Andromaque is cast in the ironic role of Pyrrhus' widow, avenging the death of a man she detested. In the end it is Hector who triumphs symbolically, by causing the downfall of Pyrrhus. Judd Hubert states that Hector represents an ideal moral value whom Pyrrhus can never equal because of his nature but whom he would have to equal in order to gain Andromaque's love or even respect. Hector and Troy must necessarily win out in the play because they have already gained a spiritual victory, causing Pyrrhus to renounce his past and his identity in order to marry a Trojan woman. Thus Pyrrhus' physical death only confirms his spiritual death.

We have seen that metaphors of burning have special power in Andromaque because they convey the particular irony of the way the story of Troy and the destinies of lovers are integrated. Yet the actual vocabulary and even the way it is put together is not at all original. The line "Brûlé de plus de feux . . . ," for example, has its origin in the novel Théagène et Chariclée of Héliodore which Racine knew by heart and a version of it had previously appeared in a play in 1642 (La Troade, Sallebray). Odette de Mourgues makes the statement: "Racine's images are traditional, unobtrusive, public property." Their purpose, she says, is intellectual. They are appropriate to the extent that they incarnate some aspects of the experience they represent and their force comes from the interrelated elements of the plays. In addition to the convergence of the past and the present, fire imagery certainly conveys the violence of the passions depicted in Andromaque. Passions are strong enough to cause a king to negate his past military career and in effect
betray his country, to cause a princess to demand the immediate murder of the man who has publicly scorned her, then to castigate his murderer and renounce Greece, to cause a man who has been confronted at every turn with the evidence that his love is unreturned to murder his rival, and to cause a woman to plan suicide to avoid betraying her dead husband. Fire is no exaggeration for the intensity of such passions and its flickering embodies the oscillation between love and hatred. What is often a hollow précieux affectation which attempts to exaggerate ordinary experience to the extraordinary is, in Racine, a vital representation of experiences which are devastating to the characters individually and to those around them. Fire and flame images, then are vehicles for developing the ironic themes of the play: the tension between appearance and reality, the extent to which Troy is superimposed on Epirus, the way the past is superimposed on the present and at the same time the way the present negates the past. Particularly, there is the paradox of the fire thought to be extinguished but which the audience knows is still smouldering. Hector in the tomb still threatens the Greeks through Andromaque. Passions which the characters thought were dead or under control surge forth with new destructive power.

In the chapter as a whole, then, we have seen how the repetition of certain stylistic and vocabulary patterns contributes to the cumulative knowledge of the audience, constantly showing up the events of the play in the light of their ultimate tragic significance which the characters cannot yet know. Chapter Four will continue the study of dramatic irony, showing how it arises from the way the action is structured in
terms of the legendary background, the political and social relationships of the characters in conjunction with the timing and arrangement of incidents, and the exigencies of passion.
FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER III


8 The study of vocabulary frequencies and correlations is facilitated by the extremely useful work of Bryant C. Freeman, Concordance du théâtre et des poésies de Jean Racine (2 vols.; Ithaca, New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1968).


11 P. 16.

12 P. 124.


14 P. 249.
15  P. 130.


17 P. 124.

18 See Weinberg, pp. 248-254.


20 William Wordsworth, "It is a beauteous evening, calm and free."


23 "On craint qu'avec Hector Troie un jour ne renaisse."

(I, ii, 193)

"Qu'ils cherchent dans l'Epire une seconde Troie."

(I, ii, 250)

"Qu'on fasse de l'Epire un second Ilion." (II, ii, 564)

"Qui triomphe de Troie une seconde fois." (II, v, 632)

"Mais pour voir avec lui [Astyanax] renaître tant de rois!"

(IV, i, 1071)

"Nattons encore un coup toute la Grèce en flamme; Prenons, en signalant mon bras et votre nom, Vous, la place d'Hélène, et moi, d'Agamemnon. De Troie en ce pays réveillons les misères; Et qu'on parle de nous, ainsi que de nos pères."

(IV, iii, 1158-1162)

"Andromaque elle-même, à Pyrrhus si rebelle, Lui rend tous les devoirs d'une veuve fidèle, Commande qu'on le venge, et peut-être sur nous Veut venger Troie encore et son premier époux."

(V, v, 1589-1592)


25 Ibid., p. 71.

CHAPTER IV
DRAMATIC IRONY THROUGH STRUCTURE
PART I--LEGEND

Legend in Racine's theatre has been frequently discussed by critics, particularly its poetic and symbolic significance. It is also important in creating ironic effects. Legend will be defined as the mythological, historical or Biblical background of the tragedies. In choosing subjects from these materials, Racine followed the conventions of the day.\(^1\) R. C. Knight\(^2\) points out that seventeenth century playwrights made little distinction between legend and history; both were used to remove the events of tragedy from the viewer. Racine says in the second Preface (1676) to Bajazet: "Les personnages tragiques doivent être regardés d'un autre oeil que nous ne regardons d'ordinaire les personnages que nous avons vus de si près. On peut dire que le respect que l'on a pour les héros augmente à mesure qu'ils s'éloignent de nous."

Another use of myth indicated by Maurice Delcroix\(^3\) is for its value as a poetic ornament, not for moral or religious meaning. Because of Racine's concern with concentrating attention on the tragic emotion, he did not use gratuitous ornaments which would serve as a distraction from his central purpose. The background in his plays is integrated to a greater or lesser extent into the action itself.

One of the most striking effects of legend in terms of irony is the creation of dramatic irony in a manner similar to the practice of Sophocles. Racine puts into the mouths of characters allusions to future
events which are beyond the scope of the play, but which, as part of the history or the body of legend from which the subject of the tragedy is taken, have some bearing on the characters and their destiny. Dramatic irony through legend occurs in a number of plays; although not used extensively, it is one of several means used to emphasize the privileged knowledge of the audience. The comprehension of these allusions is not necessarily crucial to the central action, but it certainly enhances the dramatic qualities of the plays. For example, in Bérénice there are several lines which take on a particular connotation when we know that historically Titus reigned only twenty-seven months and died at the age of forty-one. During the scene in which Titus informs Antiochus that he has decided to give up Bérénice he says: "Si le ciel, non content de me l’avoir ravie, / Veu kr encour m’affliger par une longue vie" (III, i, 755-756). Later, after Bérénice has evoked the unbearableness of endless time for herself and Titus without the possibility of their seeing each other, Titus replies:

J’espère que bientôt la triste renommée
Vous fera confesser que vous étiez aimée,
Vous verrez que Titus n’a pu sans expirer... (IV, v, 1123-1125)

Finally, Bérénice, in her parting words to Titus says that he must not deny the expectations of the Roman Empire:

Dans le temps que Titus attire tous ses voeux
Et que de vos vertus il goûte les prémices,
Se voie en un moment enlever ses délices. (V, vii, 1486-1488)

Taken alone, these lines create an incidental effect—for a fleeting moment
we see man's precarious hold on reality—but taken as a whole, along with other kinds of irony, they contribute to the total tragic emotion which is intense and enduring.

The same phenomenon occurs in Iphigénie, through veiled references to the future crimes of Clytemnestre and Oreste. Clytemnestre will eventually kill Agamemnon as vengeance for his sacrificing Iphigénie and Oreste will one day seek retribution by murdering Clytemnestre. These future crimes are called forth by a line near the beginning of the play, Arcas, trying to guess at the cause of Agamemnon's unrest, says: "Votre Oreste au berceau va-t-il finir sa vie?" (I, i, 37). This initial note of foreboding is followed up some time later by Iphigénie's remarks to her mother: "Ne reprochez jamais mon trépas à mon père!" and "Vos yeux me reverront dans Oreste mon frère./ Puisse-t-il être, hélas! moins funeste à sa mère!" (V, iii, 1654, 1661-1662). It is interesting that Racine uses this allusion when Iphigénie is not actually sacrificed in his play. The fact remains that these crimes are a part of the tradition surrounding Clytemnestre and Oreste. The importance of the legends is not in the events themselves, or their immediate causes, but in the tragic nature of the occurrences and the connotations of inevitability which they have. A particular writer chose what suited his purposes and left out or changed other events. Evoking future crimes as unavoidable, as lurking in the background ultimately to occur no matter what the present actions of the characters, suited Racine's perception of man's condition as presented in his tragedies. The fact that he mentions these events even though causally they are at variance with the outcome
of his tragedy is evidence that he selected them precisely for their ironic value. Racine foresaw a similar effect from the use of this same legend in the plan he made for the first act of Iphigénie en Tauride. In the first scene he has Iphigénie describing a dream in which she envisions, among other things, Oreste and the murder of her parents. The showing of a sinister relationship between the present and the future is no chance occurrence.

This kind of allusion is much more developed in Athalie, in which Joas' eventual falling away from God is a source of intense dramatic irony. Brought up under the tutelage of the high priest Joas and his wife Josabet, Joas, the child, is a model of piety and remains so throughout the play. This characteristic is most astonishing in his confrontation with Athalie (II, vii). Insisting that Joas reply to her questions himself, she hears answers that she might have expected from the mouth of Joas.

In striking contrast to this image of the boy is what Racine refers to in the Preface as "le funeste changement de Joas." Racine's description of the nature of the change highlights the details which are brought out in the play:

... après trente années d'un règne fort pieux, il s'abandonna aux mauvais conseils des flatteurs et se souilla du meurtre de Zacharie, fils et successeur de ce grand prêtre. Ce meurtre, commis dans le temple, fut une des principales causes de la colère de Dieu contre les Juifs, et de tous les malheurs qui leur arrivèrent dans la suite. (Préface)

It is significant that Racine is careful to describe certain events subsequent to the action of the play so that any doubt about allusions to them within the tragedy is clarified. There are references to Joas' future in
all five acts. The first allusion is made by Josabet who tells Joad of her fears that Joas is condemned because of the past crimes of his ancestors. Joad has been speaking of God's vengeance being visited upon the descendants of Ahab, and Josabet says: "Qui sait si cet enfant, par leur crime entraîné, / Avec eux en naissant ne fut pas condamné?" (I, ii, 237-238). Shortly, Joad says:

If faut que sur le trône un roi soit élevé,
Qui se souvienne un jour ou l'autre de ses ancêtres
Dieu l'a fait remonter par la main de ses prêtres.
(I, ii, 278-280)

The use of se souvenir here must be compared to that in a later speech of Joad in which he is admonishing Joas regarding his future role:

Entre le pauvre et vous, vous prendrez Dieu pour juge,
Vous souvenant, mon fils, que caché sous ce lin,
Comme eux vous fûtes pauvre, et comme eux orphelin.
(IV, iii, 1406-1409)

These lines create ironic effects both in idea and in language in terms of the Biblical verse which inspired them: "Le roi Joas, oubliant la générosité que lui avait témoignée Yehoyada, père de Zacharie, tua Zacharie, son fils ... " When Joad talks about the kind of king Israel must have and that he hopes that Joad will be, he asks the Lord to snuff him out if he should prove unworthy:

Grand Dieu, si tu prévois qu'indigne de sa race,
Il doive de David abandonner la trace,
Qu'il soit comme le fruit en naissant arraché,
Ou qu'un souffle ennemi dans sa fleur a séché.
(I, ii, 283-286)
Racine uses the verb *abandonner* which he also used in the Preface to describe Joas' yielding to flatterers. By the end of Act I the spectator has a definite picture of the eventual transformation which will take place in Joas long after the events depicted in the play. The audience sees both the present and future image each time either one or the other is mentioned.

In Act II Joas, himself, denies the possibility that he could ever turn away from God. When Athalie issues him an invitation to leave the temple and come to live in her palace, he exclaims in horror: "Moi, des bienfaits de Dieu je perdrais la mémoire?" (II, vii, 680). History will prove him right to shy away from the temptations of the royal palace. The wording of Athalie's response to him once more suggests his future: "Non, je ne vous veux pas contraindre à l'oublier" (II, vii, 681). At the end of this act the chorus both celebrates the piety of Joas and ponders the rising up of wicked men against God. They cannot know that Joas himself will one day answer to the description of their very words. His innocence will be "altered" to the point of having Zacharie murdered in the temple. The reversal is most vividly described by Joad in his Prophecy: "Comment en un plomb vil l'or pur s'est-il changé?/ Quel est dans le lieu saint ce pontife égorgé?" (III, vii, 1142-1143). The contradiction is expressed in imagery consistent with other imagery in the play. Joas is continually referred to as a treasure having the qualities of a precious metal. His falling away from God would reverse these qualities; gold would turn to lead. These two lines are only the beginning of Joad's prophecy of the destruction and rebirth of Jerusalem. Neither Joad nor
those present seem to associate his words with Josias. Some interpretations of the prophecy scene argue against audience comprehension of Josia's prophecy in terms of Josias. This view is completely out of keeping with the importance given to Josias' future in both the Preface and the play itself.

The irony of Josias' future is heightened by his own unwitting self-condemnation in the scenes preparatory to his coronation. When Josias asks him for reassurance that he will not follow the wicked example of Joram and Ahaz, Josias replies: "Puissé périr comme eux quiconque leur ressemble!" (IV, ii, 1290). One of Josias' sentiments which contrasts strikingly with what we know he will do later is the gratitude he wishes to express upon learning how he has been rescued from extinction. He asks how he can ever repay the debt and Josias answers: "Gardez pour d'autres temps cette reconnaissance" (IV, iii, 1325). Later, Josias warns Josias of the dangers of power, hitting upon the very fact which will lead to Josias' betrayal--his heading of bad advice:

De l'absolu pouvoir vous ignorez l'ivresse,
Et des liches flatteurs la voix enchanteresse.
Bientôt ils vous diront que les plus saintes lois,
Maîtresses du vil peuple, obéissent aux rois.8
(IV, iii, 1389-1392)

Josias promises to observe God's law: "Mon Dieu, punissez-moi si je vous abandonne" (IV, iii, 1410). Perhaps the most poignant irony surrounding future years comes from the portrayal of tenderness between Josias and Zacharias. When the true identity of Josias has been proclaimed, Zacharias and Josias embrace and Josias exclaims: "Enfants, ainsi toujours puissiez-vous être unis!" (IV, iv, 1416). Thus, not only Josias' falling away, but
the process by which he will do so and the very crime he will commit is emphasized.

A final sequence of events at the end of the play constitutes a closing evocation of the twists of fate ahead. Athalie, at the moment of her own downfall, wishes for Joas to avenge her race:

Voici ce qu'en Mourant lui souhaite sa mère:
Que dis-je, souhaiter? je ne flatté, j'espère
Qu'indocile à ton joug, fatigué de ta loi,
Fidèle au sang d'Achab qu'il a reçu de moi,
Conforme à son aïeul, à son père semblable,
On verra de David l'héritier détestable
Abolir tes honneurs, profaner ton autel,
Et venger Athalie, Achab et Jésabel. (V, vi, 1785-1790)

Her parting words link Joas' name to those to whom his crimes will one day also link him. After Athalie has been taken away, Joas prays: "Faîtes que Joas meure avant qu'il vous oubliez" (V, vii, 1800); once more Racine has chosen to use the Biblical word, *oublier* (see above, page 107). Ironically, it is the prayer of Athalie which will be answered. Joas will not heed Joas' final admonition to him to take Athalie as an example of what happens to those who go against God. Throughout the entire play an image of the ungodly king hovers over that of the godly child and this same image is left in the mind of the audience with the last words of the play.

In his article "Athalie: The Tragic Cycle and the Tragedy of Joas," Edwin B. Williams builds a case for seeing the play as a part of a tragic cycle, that is, a "series of related tragic catastrophes" going from the death of Achab to the murder of Ahasias, the grandson of Joas.
Lancaster disagrees, saying in regard to Zacharie’s future crimes:

He could not have believed that his audience understood, for otherwise he would not have gone to such lengths in his preface to reproduce the history of Ahab’s descendants. . . . Now certainly Racine would not have made the central point of his play one that could easily be missed by his audience. 11

But Williams makes no claim that this is the central point of the tragedy. He specifically states that he sees the linking of Athalie to the tragic cycle not as a major aim of Racine, but as a way in which he set forth the divine plan in the play. 12 Williams also suggests that Racine’s intentional evocation of the tragic cycle provides the justification for Zacharie’s existence in the play, for he plays no part in the Biblical account of Athalie’s overthrow and has no specific role in the action of establishing Joas on the throne. Zacharie’s presence must continually remind the spectator that he will one day be a victim of Joas. Even Lancaster 13 points out that Racine invented Joas’ friendship with Zacharie and their act of embracing. My own opinion is that Racine fully intended to call attention to the shadow hanging over Joas’ future. The references are too numerous and too carefully prepared to be coincidental, and the dramatic irony arising from them participates in a larger irony, tragic irony.

Tragic irony, as discussed in Chapter I, is related to some of the special features of tragedy: the portrayal of man pitted against superior forces, man who seems a victim, but yet has flaws which make him at least partly responsible for what befalls him. The ultimate destruction
involves the kind of paradoxical relationship between man and his fate expressed by Pyrrhus when he speaks of his marriage to Andromaque: "L'un par l'autre entraînés, nous courons à l'autel" (IV, v, 1299). Man is dragged and yet runs toward his doom. Racine often uses legend to represent the part fatality plays. Already in La Thébaïde the characters are haunted by a criminal heritage. Jocaste addresses the Sun:

Tu peux voir sans frayeur les crimes de mes fils,
Après ceux que le père et la mère ont commis
Et tu t'étonnerais s'ils étaient vertueux. (I, i, 29-30, 34)

Néron cannot shake the double heritage Agrippina sees in his actions:

"Des fiers Domitius l'humeur triste et sauvage" and "La fierté des Nérons qu'il puisa dans mon flanc" (Brut., I, i, 36, 38). He has, in addition, the example of his mother. We will examine Phèdre's lineage in the last chapter. In the plays based on Greek mythology, the gods are also used to express the element of fate. Jocaste laments the duplicity of the heavens:

Connais ses mieux du ciel la vengeance fatale;
Toujours à ma douleur il met quelque intervalle;
Mais, hélas! quand sa main semble me secourir,
C'est alors qu'il s'appare à me faire périr.

(Thés., III, iii, 675-678)

Particularly in Iphigénie and Phèdre the action is closely tied to the gods. Thierry Maulnier says of the way Racine uses legend in the ending of Iphigénie:

Il va chercher dans les légendes grecques des dieux qui accomplissent la fatalité, non des dieux qui l'abolissent. Par le sacrifice d'Eriphile, la destinée funeste reçoit satisfaction, tandis que
The action in *Iphigénie* reflects the accomplishment of oracles. Although the hesitation and vacillations of Agamemnon are a result of his own character, he is acting in response to an oracle. Eriphile is sacrificed in fulfillment of the oracle. The winds will lift and the Greeks set sail for Troy so that another prediction can be accomplished; Achilles will win fame and die, for the Fates had spoken to his mother: "Ils ont aux champs troyens marqué votre tombeau" (I, ii, 224). At the end, both Agamemnon and Eriphile have been tricked by the gods. Deities are present throughout the play. The characters fight to control their own destinies; they, nevertheless, accept the gods as arbiters. Achilles says: "Les Dieux sont de nos jours les maîtres souverains" (I, ii, 259). Eriphile speaks bitterly, even before she knows the extent of her misfortune: "Le ciel s'est fait, sans doute, une joie inhumaine/ A rasssembler sur moi tous les traits de sa haine" (II, i, 485-486). Doris underscores the trickery of the gods: "Un oracle toujours se plaît à se cacher" (II, i, 432).

Although many effects of tragic irony are drawn from the use of legend to represent fatality, several critics have pointed out that the gods are ultimately a sort of incarnation of human psychology. Or, if the gods have been the provocation of the tragedy, the drama has still been human action. Maurice Delcroix states that although all the characters have a common belief in the mythological deities, the gods remain only a décor—their significance comes from the human factor.
In Athalie the situation is different. The psychology of the characters is much less developed. Even in this play it is possible to see the end coming about from the interaction of Joad and Athalie and certain characteristics of both, but these factors are less important than in the earlier plays. God is seen working through or acting upon the characters and is much more prevalent than were the mythological deities. And what is more important, the characters are submissive to God in a different sense. At the end when Athalie is surrounded she protests that she has been led into a trap by God. She sees him as totally responsible for her downfall. Maunier says: "Athalie, c'est le moyen pour Racine de mener à bien, et de réussir, dans sa perfection, l'entreprise qui l'a toujours tenté, c'est l'idéal qu'il a cherché dans la tragédie grecque enfin réalisé."¹⁸ Fatality as a superior force outside the human realm is strongest in this last play.

The God of Athalie is the jealous God of the Old Testament, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generations of them that hate him (Deut. 5:9), not the forgiving God of New Testament Christianity. In the Preface to the play Racine describes at length the Old Testament foundations for the action so that, as discussed above, events of the legend which precede the play, as well as those which come after it, are set forth clearly to the reader before he approaches the text itself. Racine pinpoints the subject as "Joas reconnu et mis sur le trône." As the only living heir of David, Joas is a vital link in the chain leading to the Messiah. His coronation is necessary to enable God to work out his promises to men. The larger
subject of the tragedy, then, might be stated as the portrayal of a process: God working to fulfill his will for man. Or it might be stated as God punishing those he calls wicked and rewarding those he calls righteous. The exact significance of God in the play has been much debated. An examination of the use of legend to create tragic irony will lead to certain conclusions about the role of God.

The characters in Athalie are presented in terms of events which are treated as part of the Jewish history which precedes the action of the play. There are, first, numerous allusions to Athalie's supposed origins. She is referred to several times as the daughter of Jezebel, as another Jezebel, and as the daughter of Ahab. There is an important parallel between the fate of Jezebel and Athalie's fortune at the end of the play. Jezebel's cruel death is described first by Joad (I, i, 115-118) to Abner as an example of God crushing out those who stand in his way. Subsequently, Athalie relates to Abner and Mathan her dream in which Jezebel appeared to her saying: "Le cruel Dieu des Juifs l'emporte aussi sur toi" (II, v, 498). Athalie then saw a vision of Jezebel's mutilated body being devoured by dogs. Joad later speaks of Jezebel's fate to Mathan. As he chases him from the temple he warns him that the dogs which devoured Jezebel are at his door. Athalie is seen as part of the race imple of Jezebel and Ahab. Jezebel is a symbol of evil in the play. Seeing Athalie as another Jezebel in a sense anhilates her personality. She, too, becomes simply a representative of evil. In the same way Joad is referred to as another Moise or another Elie, thus representing a figure of righteousness. Joad even says at one point: "Autant que
de David la race est respectée;/ Autant de Jézébel la fille est détestée"
(I, ii, 271-272). The effect of such characterization is to emphasize
the Old Testament tradition, the movement of people in the world in rela-
tion to God's decrees. Raymond Picard\textsuperscript{20} says that the action and setting
in Athalie take on an importance formerly accorded to the study of emotions.
The characters in this play are defined by their setting, rather than their
psychology. The rudimentary psychology is itself determined by the
setting. That is, the significance of the characters arises from the way
they fit into God's scheme of things regardless of their personal motives.
Joad is primarily the believer.\textsuperscript{21} Athalie is one who has abandoned the
faith. The treatment of Athalie's past crimes conveys the contrast
between the political motives for her actions which seem justifiable and
the interpretation of her deeds in the light of the Old Testament tradition
as represented by Joad.

The Biblical account (II Chron. 22: 9-12) states simply that
Athalie, having learned of the murder of her son Okosias by Jehu, under-
took to exterminate the descendants of the house of David. She is re-
ferred to in II Chron. as a wicked woman. The account also relates that
Joas, one of the sons of the group being massacred, was hidden with his
nurse by Josabet. In the play Athalie is described by the faithful Jews
as a wicked woman. Her deeds are initially presented in terms of their
effect on the Jewish religion, specifically the celebration of Pentecost
(I, i). Her crime of killing the descendants of the house of David is
described first by Abner who questions heaven's ability to produce a
son of David as king. Dramatic irony is created by his wish that things
had been different (I, i, 143-144). The assumption of Abner and the Jewish people, as well of Athalie and Mathan, that Athalie was successful in killing off all the descendants of David makes it possible for Racine to exploit this kind of irony frequently. The crime is also related by Josabet, who, having saved Joas, recollects it in all its horror, painting Athalie as an implacable murdereress (I, ii, 241-246).

Against this Old Testament view of Athalie's wickedness, Racine portrays also her own assessment of her actions which the dramatist himself has created. In speaking to Abner, she expresses the view that her actions have been justified and moved by the logic of a ruler. She reacted to the persecution of her family, and seems to have acted well because her country is at peace, her authority accepted; Jéhu, who had killed her mother and son, has left her alone. She feels heaven has approved her actions (II, v, 467-480). Prior to the events of the play, then, Athalie's actions have been politically motivated. She has conducted herself as a firm, strong and effective queen. Mathan, wondering at the change in Athalie, refers to her previous career with admiration:

Oh n'est plus cette reine éclairée, intrépide,
Élevée au-dessus de son sexe timide,
Qui d'abord accablait ses ennemis surpris,
Et d'un instant perdu connaissait tout le prix. (III, iii, 871-874)

Politically, Athalie's vengeance is normal and logical for that era, as well as a question of honor. Athalie also defends herself to Josabet:

"Oui, ma juste fureur, et j'en fais vanité,/ A vengé mes parents sur ma postérité" (II, vii, 709-710). Athalie goes on to describe the horrors done to her parents and their children. In spite of such suffering,
however much Athalie's actions may have been justified in her eyes, she has offended God by turning from him to Baal. Yet she blames God for breaking the alliance between her house and that of David by his vengeance carried out by Jāhu (II, vii, 727-730). In fact, Athalie, as a ruler, has been rather magnanimous toward the Jewish faith, allowing the Temple to exist and the practice of the religion that she has abandoned to continue. In "worldly" logic, then, Athalie's actions seem quite valid. But the evaluation of her by the representatives of the Jewish faith is the one which stands out in the play. Abner, who supports her politically, first speaks of her in negative terms when he laments the deterioration of the faith and thinks back to religious fervor which is no more: "L'audace d'une femme, arrêtant ce concours, / En des jours ténébreux a changé ces beaux jours" (I, i, 13-14). The transcendant order, the superior force in the play is the Jewish faith in God.

References to God's working in the world abound in the play. Joad extols his wonders and chides Abner and Josabet for doubting. The chanting of the chorus serves to emphasize the view of God held by the faithful. In Act I he is lauded as the benefactor whose acts are seen throughout the universe. In Act II the chorus marvels that a mere child has scorned earthly pleasures and proclaimed the one true God. It meditates on temptations, the continuing existence of sinners, the fleeting nature of the pleasures of the wicked, and the horror of sins which are recognized by the sinner. At the end of Act III the chorus sings about the great mystery and contradiction reflected in Joad's prophecy, God's great anger and great love. Finally, in Act IV the chorus, hearing the sounds of the
Tyrannical army, longs for the antiques bontés of God. Joad does not fear Athalie, he fears only this God (see I, i, 61-64) described by the chorus. As continuing evidence of God's miracles, Joad cites the stamping out of Israel's oppressors, Achab and Jezabel. He describes the Old Testament God who protects orphans and exterminates tyrants: "Dieu, dont le bras vengeur, pour un temps suspendu, / Sur cette race impie est toujours étendu" (I, ii, 233-234). This vengeful God is seen throughout the play as acting upon Athalie.

Joad prays for God to intervene in the life of Athalie early in the play:

Confonds dans ses conseils une reine cruelle.
Daigne, daigne, mon Dieu, sur Mathan et sur elle
Répandre cet esprit d'imprudence et d'erreur
De la chute des rois funeste avant-coureur. (I, ii, 291-294)

The change which has come over Athalie—her irresoluteness, her confusion—first mentioned by Abner (I, i, 51-52), her recurring dream, her agitation at seeing Eliacin, her pity for him, the "instinct" which impels her to come to the Temple to appease the Jewish God, all are depicted as evidences of God confounding the unjust. The action of God in this sense extends also to Athalie's high priest. One of the young girls of the chorus prays that God confound Mathan (III, i, 847). Shortly after, Mathan tells Nabal that the memory of the God he has deserted still makes him uneasy. And, in effect, during his subsequent confrontation with Joad he is suddenly overcome with a feeling of fear and astonishment, disorientation. Thus, although the events resulting in Athalie's capture and death occur through the interaction of Joad and Athalie and certain
strengths in Joas and weaknesses in Athalie, as well as the converging of circumstances, God is portrayed as the inspirational force leading Joas and misleading Athalie. In her final protestation Athalie cries out:

Dieu des Juifs, tu l'emportes!

... Impitoyable Dieu, toi seul as tout conduit.
C'est toi qui me flattant d'une vengeance aisée,
M'as vingt fois en un jour à moi-même opposée,
Tantôt pour un enfant excitant mes remords,
Tantôt m'éblouissant de tes riches trésors,
Que j'ai craint de livrer aux flammes, au pillage.

(V, vi, 1768, 1774-1779)

She sees herself and is seen by the others as a victim of God's vengeance. Tragic irony, then, results because Athalie is seen as a pawn being used by God for his purposes. All Athalie's striving is vanity. God's role is greater than Weinberg assesses it. He sees God as a rhetorical force in the play, "a kind of 'coloring' of the central problem and of the characters of the main personnages."22 But all of the characters in the play, both the faithful and the unfaithful, accept God as the prime mover. Maulnier states that in Athalie man has ceased to be the subject of the tragedy.23 Picard says that in this play "il n'y a pas de destinée individuelle; les personnages ne prennent de valeur que par ce qui les dépasse et dont ils sont le signe."24 The simple dramatic irony created by the evocation of Joas' future crimes becomes finally tragic irony, because Joas, like Athalie, is seen as an actor in God's drama.
FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER IV, PART I

1 There was less of a tradition of Biblical subjects than of mytho-
logical and historical plays in Racine's generation. The success of 
Racine's religious tragedies seems to have caused a new interest in 
them among other writers and at the Comédie Française. See Henry 
Carrington Lancaster, A History of French Dramatic Literature in the 
Seventeenth Century, Pt. IV: The Period of Racine: 1673-1700 (2 vols.; 


3 Le Sacré dans les tragédies profanes de Racine: Essai sur la 

4 Bible de Jérusalem, Chroniques, Livre II, XXIV, 22.

5 "Lois du monde élevée de tous les dons des cieux 
   Il est érigé dès sa naissance;
   Et du méchant l'abord contagieux
   N'altère point son innocence." (II, ix, 782-785)

   "Combien de temps, Seigneur, combien de temps encore 
   Verrons-nous conti toi les méchants s'élever? 
   Jusque dans ton saint temple ils viennent te braver."
   (II, ix, 810-812)

6 But Josabet laments after the prophesy: "Hélas! d'où nous 
viendra cette insigne faveur,/ Si les rois de qui doit descendre ce 
Souverain..." (III, vii, 1175-1176). See Robert Kemp, "Athalie," in 
his Lectures dramatiques: chronique théâtrale (d'Eschyle à Giraudoux) 

7 For discussion see Edwin E. Williams, "Athalie: The Tragic Cycle 

8 Cf. Racine's description of this event in the Preface.

9 " Par cette fin terrible, et due à ses forfaits, 
   Apprenez, roi des Juifs, et n'oubliez jamais 
   Que les rois dans le ciel ont un jugé sévère, 
   L'innocence un vengeur, et l'orphelin un père."
   (V, viii, 1813-1816)

10 Pp. 36-37.
Historically, Athalie seems to have been a sister of Ahab and sister-in-law of Jezebel, but because of Racine's play she is remembered as the daughter of Jezebel. Her actual parentage is unimportant in terms of the play. Here Racine uses Biblical legend in the same way as mythology. He links Athalie with people and events which are part of Jewish history. Although the precise facts may be changed slightly, he is faithful to the spirit of the tradition in connecting Athalie with a succession of evil doers as she is depicted in the Bible. We might compare this with his treatment of the legend of Iphigénie and his substitution of Eriphile.

CHAPTER IV

PART II--SITUATION AND EVENT

We have just seen various ways in which Racine uses the background of his subject matter to create ironic effects as well as to root the tragic action in a situation which is fundamentally ironic. M. M. Olga states that Racinian tragedy, like Greek tragedy, is essentially one of situation. Situation may be defined as a complex of circumstances as they affect a character or characters at any given moment. It represents the convergence of influences and the radiating of alternatives. Stated another way, situation is the position of a character in terms of all factors which potentially affect his actions. Racine places his protagonists in situations which are basically ironic and he constantly calls to the attention of the audience the paradoxical elements of the situation. Much of this kind of irony arises from the way political circumstances and emotional involvements are intertwined. This is true in Bérénice where irony of situation is one of the features Racine uses to "faire quelque chose de rien" (Préface, 1671).

The situation involves three people all of whom have met and fallen in love through political circumstances, and who are ultimately forced to part because of the consequences of these circumstances. Prior to the action of the play, Titus, the future emperor of Rome, and Bérénice, queen of Palestine, under Roman domination, have been in love for a period of five years. In spite of a Roman law forbidding marriage between an emperor and a foreign queen, they have been planning to marry, assuming that ultimately the emperor is above the law. When the play opens, Titus has just become emperor following the death of his father.
It is the general assumption that the marriage will now take place. But unknown to all, upon actually becoming responsible to Rome, Titus finds that in spite of his love it is unthinkable that he base his personal happiness on disrespect for Roman law (II, ii, 468-470). Yet he lacks the courage to tell Bérénice. Racine exploits several ironic aspects of this situation.

Throughout Act I language points up the precariousness of the general assumption that Titus will marry. In the first speech of the play Antiochus refers to the antechamber separating the apartments of Titus and Bérénice: "Souvent ce cabinet superbe et solitaire/ Des secrets de Titus est le dépositaire" (i, 3-4). His vision of Titus wooing Bérénice contrasts sharply with the scenes which will take place subsequently in the antechamber--Titus will explain to Paulin, then Antiochus, and finally Bérénice another kind of secret, the fact that he cannot pursue his love. Arsace refers to Bérénice as the épouse en espérance (i, 15) and speaks of her prochaine grandeur (iii, 54). Bérénice refers to the fact that Titus is enlarging her kingdom "sans qu'il m'en ait parlé" (iv, 169), and speaks of the day as one "qui doit avec César unir ma destinée" (iv, 260). All these subtle allusions to the uncertainty of the marriage, uncomprehended by the characters uttering them, are summed up finally in the words of Phénice who does have doubts: "Titus n'a point encore expliqué sa pensée" (v, 292), but Bérénice, buoyed up by the splendor of Titus and his enthusiastic reception by the people of Rome on the preceding night, is entirely confident. Dramatic irony of this type builds to Act II when Titus reveals to Paulin his decision not to marry.
At the same time that the shakiness of the assumption of marriage is highlighted, circumstances seem to show it to be logical. Titus has said nothing to the contrary. The court seems to approve the marriage, for Bérénice is pursued by new admirers (I, iii). Titus' expansion of Bérénice's kingdom is interpreted by all as a prelude to the wedding. Above all, Titus now has absolute power. Another contradiction emphasized is the fact that only when Titus actually holds the highest office in the land, which would make it possible for him to marry Bérenice,² does he choose not to do so. The verb pouvoir is used repeatedly to bring out the absoluteness of Titus' power. Antiochus thinks of Titus as he debates with himself over whether or not to confess his own love to Bérénice: "Aujourd'hui qu'il peut tout ... " (I, ii, 43). Bérénice brushes aside the obstacles to her marriage pointed out by Phénice: "Titus m'aime; il peut tout; il n'a plus qu'à parler" (I, v, 298). When Titus questions Paulin on the public reaction to his love for Bérénice, Paulin replies: "Vous pouvez tout ... " (II, ii, 349). But Titus already knows this and explains his decision in terms of the paradox:

Maintenant que je puis couronner tant d'attraits,
Maintenant que je t'aime encore plus que jamais,
Lorsqu'un heureux hymen, joignant nos destinées,
Peut payer en un jour les vœux de cinq années,

Pour jamais je vais m'en séparer. (II, ii, 441-444,446)

Titus sees himself as finally powerless in terms of his personal happiness: "Maître de l'univers, je règle sa fortune;/ .../ Cependant de mon coeur je ne puis disposer" (III, i, 720, 722). Even after Bérénice
knows of Titus' decision, he dreads confronting her because of the paradoxical timing of his decision. If he had abandoned her before, she might have blamed Vespasien, Rome, the people, the Senate, whose objections she was aware of. Now she can blame only him and will do so (IV, v, 1062-1086). Titus anticipates this:

Je viens percer un coeur que j'adore, qui m'aime.
Et pourquoi le percer? Qui l'ordonne? Moi-même;

J'avance des malheurs que je puis reculer. (IV, iv, 999-1000, 1006)

The fact that the highest authority in the land is powerless to conciliate the conflicting tendencies in himself—his concern for gloire and his love for Bérénice—is contrary to all notions of the way things ought to be. Bérénice is astonished at the reality: "Vous êtes empereur, Seigneur, et vous pleurez!" (IV, v, 1154).

In addition to emphasizing the unexpectedness with which Titus' obligation to Rome becomes important to him, Racine underlines the paradox that Titus owes this concern for gloire to Bérénice: "Que dis-je? Cette ardeur que j'ai pour ses appas [the appas of his gloire],/ Bérénice en mon sein l'a jadis allumée" (II, ii, 503-504). He goes on to evoke his youthful debauchery in the court of Néron which he renounced in order to be worthy of Bérénice. He sought to merit her in battle, and then in championing the cause of the downtrodden. Now this value which she has inspired in him is turning against her own happiness:

Je lui dois tout, Paulin, Récompense cruelle!
Tout ce que je lui dois va retomber sur elle,
Pour prix de tant de gloire et de tant de vertus,
Je lui dirai: "Partez, et ne me voyez plus. (II, ii, 519-522)
Dramatic irony arises from the fact that Bérénice is still unaware of Titus' sudden preoccupation with gloire. She chides him for what she misinterprets as excessive grief for Vespasien, saying: "Vous devez d'autres soins à Rome, à votre gloire" (II, iv, 604). We can imagine that this is the kind of remark she may have made previously to Titus in trying to arouse in him a sense of duty to Rome. This time Bérénice has not pushed the logic of her remark to its ultimate conclusion. Little does she know that the grief she is witnessing is not due to Vespasien's death but to the very fact that Titus has obligations to Rome which require that he renounce her. Because the concern for honor is an inherent feature of the relationship between Titus and Bérénice, their love would ultimately be marred by slighting it. Titus depends on Bérénice for encouragement in its pursuit. This situation finally puts her in a position where Titus asks her to speak against her own happiness: "Vous-même contre vous fortifiez mon coeur" (IV, v, 1054). The triumph of love has caused the triumph of gloire which poses the obstacle to the fulfillment of that love because of political circumstances.

Further ironies exist in the basic situation because of the relationship of the third protagonist, Antiochus, to Titus and Bérénice. At the opening of the play Antiochus has been kept in Rome for three years by the friendship of Titus and especially Bérénice. Bérénice seems to have forgotten that Antiochus was her suitor before she met Titus, and Titus has never known this. But Antiochus has always retained a slight hope that his love might someday be possible because of the Roman proclamation affecting Bérénice. We must, for a moment, examine
the implications of Antiochus' position as a rival. In effect he has been a kind of double or shadow figure for Titus. Ever since Bérénice fell in love with Titus, Antiochus has seemed to exist only by virtue of Titus. His military feats have value only insomuch as he is a soldier in the service of his superior (I, iii, 101-104). Although he eventually survived what had been certain death in battle (the whole camp wept for him [I, iii, 105-114]), it was only to be overshadowed by Titus: "La valeur de Titus surpassait ma fureur. ... Son malheureux rival ne semblait que le suivre" (I, iv, 218, 224). Antiochus is acutely conscious of not warranting Bérénice's attention in his own right:

Je vois que votre coeur m'applaudit en secret;
Je vois que l'on m'écoute avec moins de regret,
Et que trop attentive à ce récit funeste,
En faveur de Titus vous pardonnez le reste. (I, iv, 225-228)

In spite of this statement, Bérénice unwittingly sums up her feelings of friendship and respect for Antiochus in a way most cruel to him:
"Cent fois je me suis fait une douceur extrême/ D'entretenir Titus dans un autre lui-même" (I, iv, 271-272). Antiochus cannot contain himself:

Et c'est ce que je fuis. J'évite, mais trop tard,
Ces cruels entretiens où je n'ai point de part.
Je fuis Titus; je fuis ce nom qui m'inquiète,
Ce nom qu'à tous moments votre bouche répète.
Que vous dirais-je enfin? Je fuis des yeux distraits,
Qui me voyant toujours, ne me voyaient jamais. (I, iv, 273-278)

The speech expresses the day-to-day torment in which Antiochus has lived for the past three years. The last antithetical line characterizes precisely his situation of existence/non-existence. He flees the name of
Titus which has become superimposed on his own. At the opening of the play Antiochus, like Titus, has made a decision. Since it appears certain that Titus is about to marry Bérénice, Antiochus has no more hope. He will therefore confess his love to Bérénice and depart for the Orient, leaving the nightmare situation in which he has been living.

Beginning with a situation which offers little hope for the characters to achieve their goals, Racine so arranges the action that there is an ironic progression. Unhappy circumstances seem to multiply; one ironic situation gives way to another. All this has to do with the interplay between situation and event. Henri Gouhier speaks of the necessary relationship between these two factors which is particularly apparent in drama because of the situation of the spectator:

... l'événement crée une situation telle que désormais d'autres événements sont possibles ou même nécessaires.... Événement et situation sont les deux moments d'un rythme. Cela signifie que tout se tient dans le temps, que chaque instant pèse sur le suivant ... que chaque mouvement modifie le monde.

We know that for Racine every incident in a play had to fulfill the dramatic function of moving the tragic action toward its conclusion. Weinberg's book makes very explicit the complicated groundwork which must have gone into the organization of each tragedy. In the Preface to Mithridate Racine says: "Et les plus belles scènes sont en danger d'ennuyer, du moment qu'on les peut séparer de l'action, et qu'elles l'interrompent au lieu de la conduire vers sa fin." R. C. Knight mentions this passage when he suggests that for Racine the progression of the action was the unique source of tragic emotion. Knight also points out that, although
Racine admired the way Sophocles unfolded the action in his tragedies, the mechanism of tragic action in his own plays is even more complex than in Greek theatre. For Racine, "c'est la mécanique qui, en renouvelant les situations, fait naître et renouvelle le pathétique." Event in Racine is not necessarily external action. Rather, it frequently consists of the revelation of certain feelings, a process which appropriately constitutes action in plays dealing with internal conflict.

The first action of Bérénice is Antiochus' confession to Bérénice. This action is made possible because Titus has delayed the announcement of his own decision. Antiochus' confession provides Bérénice with a plausible explanation for Titus' uncommunicativeness; instead of raising questions about her marriage, she attributes his behavior to jealousy (she assumes he knows about Antiochus) which she interprets as reassurance of Titus' love (II, v, 666). The overall effect of these events is to reinforce Bérénice's confidence that her future is settled. This way of complicating a simple situation is pointed out by Weinberg who also shows that the confession, in addition, gives Bérénice some reason to discredit Antiochus' subsequent message that Titus cannot marry her. If it had been Antiochus rather than Titus who had lacked the courage to speak his mind, the whole course of the action might have been different. One might conjecture that in the end Antiochus would have had more of a chance with Bérénice if she had not learned of his love prior to being rejected by Titus. Certainly Antiochus must have wondered about this later.

After the confession, Antiochus prepares to leave, but Titus
retains him. Expressing his gratitude for Antiochus' military support, Titus now asks his help as a friend:

Prince, plus que jamais vous m'êtes nécessaire.
St je veux seulement emprunter votre voix.

Prince, il faut que pour moi vous lui parliez encore.

(III, i, 684, 694, 705)

We can see the irony of these words in terms of Antiochus' role as a double discussed above. The vague nature of the request causes Antiochus to think first that Titus wants him to transmit a proposal of marriage, a natural assumption in view of Antiochus' own feelings and the events of the play thus far. This intensifies the irony when Titus reveals the nature of the message he wants Antiochus to communicate: not only must Bérénice leave; she is to leave with Antiochus. Completely oblivious to the reaction of Antiochus, Titus launches into a long explanation of his ironic position, while Antiochus can only silently contemplate his own. The reader may sense what is going on in Antiochus' mind. If silence in Racine is eloquent, this is one of the most eloquent, a silence powerful with dramatic irony. The scene is a poignant example of man's preoccupation with his own fate which blinds him to the fortunes of his fellowman. Titus closes his long discourse by making a request which, if followed, would keep Antiochus permanently in his role as a shadow-figure to Titus: "Que mon nom soit toujours dans tous vos entretiens"

(III, i, 762).

In the following scene Antiochus vacillates between hope and
despair, now listening to Arsace urge him: "Suivez les doux transports où l'amour vous invite" (III, ii, 787), now foreseeing the torment of having to see Bérénice weep for his rival. As he imagines her despair the full irony of his position comes home to him. He decides not to speak for Titus, but to leave Bérénice, "Sans lui donner encor le déplaisir fatal/ D'apprendre ce mépris war son propre rival" (III, ii, 845-846).

A chance event is timed precisely so as to negate his decision. Just as he is about to leave, Bérénice arrives and persuades him against his better judgement to talk. Antiochus had been right to fear her haine immortelle (III, ii, 848)—she banishes him from her sight.

Bérénice's decree frees Antiochus from a situation which can only cause him grief. Once more he resolves to leave; his reasons form a protest against the irony of his situation: "Je me verrai puni parce qu'il est coupable?" (III, iv, 932). He blames Bérénice for accusing him at the very moment when (que):

\[
\text{Que j'étale à ses yeux les pleurs de mon rival;}
\text{que, pour la consoler, je le faisais paraître}
\text{Amoureux et constant, plus qu'il ne l'est peut-être.}
\]

(III, iv, 938-940)

In spite of his resentment, Antiochus' tenderness for Bérénice causes one moment of hesitation which will prove fateful in involving him further in the action. He wants to see her again and, as a pretext, says that he will assure himself of Bérénice's welfare before going away. Therefore, in Act IV we find that Antiochus is so appalled when he sees Bérénice's utter grief that he can do nothing, paradoxically, but urge Titus to go to her. Act V holds one last false hope and reversal for
Antiochus. He learns that Bérénice is leaving Rome in anger at Titus, but immediately Titus arrives to urge her to stay.

We have focused on the situation of Antiochus because his position becomes increasingly ironic through the timing and ordering of events and through the actions of Titus and Bérénice. The irony in the situation of the latter two characters is constant from the beginning of the play. It is summed up by Titus' exclamation: "Ah, Rome! Oh, Bérénice! Oh, prince malheureux! Pourquoi suis-je empereur? Pourquoi suis-je amoureux?" (IV, vi, 1225-1226). For Titus love is an obstacle to his gloire and vice versa. He is typical of Racinian man as Lucien Goldmann describes him: man approaches the world with impossible demands—he seeks the simultaneous realization of mutually exclusive phenomena. Death is often the only release from this kind of conflict in Racine. In Bérénice, however, death will not be the resolution; rather, the conflict will be frozen into a kind of permanent tension.

In the last act of the play Titus is, ironically, pleading with Bérénice not to leave when he discovers that her departure is a concealment for intended suicide. In desperation, he, too, threatens to end his life. At this moment Antiochus enters to reveal both his rivalry and his intention to die. Thus, all three characters have come to the point of seeing death as the only solution to their respective dilemmas, although their decisions arise, in part, as a way of exerting moral pressure on each other. It is this state of affairs that makes Bérénice recognize that the only course of action other than death open to any of them is separation. Their situation will remain an example to the
world "De l’amour la plus tendre et la plus malheureuse" (V, vii, 1503).
In effect, nothing has changed from Act I to Act V, except in terms of
awareness on the part of the characters and their ultimate facing of
the consequences of their plight. An unbearable situation has been
clarified for all three characters, in all of its irony. They are
now resigned to live out their lives enduring its unbearableness. Ironi-
cally, it is Bérénice who, in the end, gives Titus the courage to pur-
sue his gloire. Titus and Bérénice at least have the consolation (and
the torment) of knowing that they love one another: "Je t’aime, je le
fuis: Titus m’aime, il me quitte" (V, vii, 1500). Antiochus is destined
to remain the shadow figure: "Sur Titus et sur moi règles votre conduite"
(V, vii, 1499). He will be eternally the unrequited lover.

In Bérénice the initial situation is modified progressively by
Antiochus’ confession to Bérénice, by Titus’ request to Antiochus,
by Antiochus’ transmission of Titus’ message to Bérénice, and so forth.
While the characters are trying to extricate themselves from their
dilemma, each action seems calculated to make their situation more
unbearable, to move the characters deeper into their own misfortune.
Henri Gouhier discusses the phenomenon of reversibility in human affairs
which is perhaps the harshest law of the human condition:

J’agis selon le bien et pourtant du mal s’ensuit. Je ne suis pas
seulement cause de ce que je fais, mais, indirectement, de ce qui
arrive à cause de ce que je fais. C’est pourquoi il est si difficil-
cile de dire jusqu’où va la responsabilité et à quel moment la
causalité continue toute seule. 12

Racine uses timing to underline the relationship of responsibility/
non-responsibility, causing a meeting, an announcement, a hesitation at precisely the single moment in which it will precipitate a new development. The spectator sees that if only Dérênice had arrived on the stage a moment later, Antiochus would have departed without transmitting Titus' message. On the other hand, the viewer senses a kind of ineluctable movement toward destruction behind the action. We have the impression that even if the particular fateful meeting had not occurred at that moment, something else would have happened to cause the same outcome. This factor is what Bert States identifies as "ironic necessity" operating within tragedy. It also resembles what Judd Hubert speaks of as a fourth unity in classical tragedy and especially in Racine, a kind of internal cohesion. Events in the plays are called forth by the logic of the action. Audience awareness of the exact relationship between event and situation contrasts sharply with the mistakes of the characters in estimating their situation or with their unwitting contribution to the events which occur. The characters seem to be simultaneously victims and architects of their fate.

Mithridate is also a tragedy which is based upon a particularly ironic relationship between event and situation in terms of the disparity between a character's hopes and efforts and the ultimate outcome. It will be discussed in less detail to avoid repetition. Although the spectator probably has more sympathy for Menime and Xipharès in the course of the play, the tragic effect at the end is directed toward Mithridate, who, because he is dying, becomes sympathetic. The basic theme of the play may be stated as glory in decline; it involves the paradox that these forces
which initially work to build something up eventually work to destroy it. In forty years as a king and general, Mithridate has made such a reputation for himself that his glory seems to increase even in defeat. In the Preface Racine says of him: "... ses seules défaites ont fait presque toute la gloire de trois des plus grandes capitaines de la république." He grows stronger even as he loses face; his ambitions increase in proportion to his adversity. Upon returning from being defeated by the Romans near the Euphrates River, Mithridate tells his sons: "Tout vaincu que je suis, et voisin du naufrage,/ Je médite un dessein digne de mon courage" (II, ii, 431-432). He is filled with his own name. Speaking to Menime, he projects a future when he might be even more dispossessed than he is:

Conservant pour tous biens la mom de Mithridate,  
Apprenez que suivi d'un nom si glorieux,  
Partout de l'univers j'attacherais les yeux;  
Et qu'il n'est point de rois, s'ils sont dignes de l'être,  
Qui, sur le trône assis, n'envisagent peut-être  
Au-dessus de leur gloire un naufrage élevé,  
Que Rome et quarante ans ont à peine achevé.  

The image in the second to last line embodies the paradox of the entire play: A ruined man has greater stature than those on whom fortune still smiles. Although we have difficulty accepting the sincerity of Pharmace's feelings, he appropriately describes Mithridate's situation: "Surtout j'admire en vous ce coeur infatigable/ Qui semble s'affermir sous le faix qui l'accable" (III, i, 367-368). At one point Mithridate presents an opposite image of himself to Menime: "Mes ans se sont accru; mes honneurs sont détruits" (III, v, 1042). This is a plausible and perhaps normal
description of a man who has outlived his glory. But here Mithridate is dissembling, giving Monime reasons she should marry Xipharès so he can find out her true feelings. This is not the image of himself which Mithridate accepts; it is perhaps one he fears and is fighting against. There is a kind of superimposing of the two images—one of a successful conqueror, the other of a man trying to grasp onto his past reputation. The king later tells Monime: "Ne me regardez point vaincu, persécuté;/ Revoyes-moi vainquer, et partout redouté" (IV, iv, 1293-1294).

In fact, when Mithridate does die, he does so valorously. Arbate relates his last deeds:

Qui pourrait exprimer par quels faits incroyables,
Quels coups, accompagnés de regards effroyables,
Son bras, se signalant pour la dernière fois,
A de ce grand héros terminé les exploits? (V, iv, 1591-1594)

Mithridate, himself, seems satisfied with his dying image: "J'expire environné d'ennemis que j'assole" (V, v, 1664). He feels that all the Romans he has killed in his life provide sufficient tribute to him (V, v, 1685-1686), and he dispenses Xipharès from the usual hommage paid to the dead. Paradoxically, Xipharès has already given Mithridate a sort of funeral oration in the very first scene of the play when he believed him dead. He might have repeated it at the end, for the apparent situation at the beginning of the play and the real state of affairs at the end are identical:

Ainsi ce roi, qui seul a, durant quarante ans
Lassé tout ce que Rome eut de chefs importants,
At the end the two brothers are still rivals, both in love and in war. There is one aspect of Mithridate's fortune which is not mentioned in this description, however—his defeat in love. Mithridate surmounts it, in a sense, by becoming magnanimous and blessing the union of Menime and Xipharès. But he cannot erase from the mind of the reader the lengths to which his jealousy pushed him. His death at this point is partially, at least, an outcome of those actions. This adds an ironic dimension to Mithridate's final image.

The initial link between the political and emotional aspects of the play, however, goes back to the reaction of Mithridate to his military defeat prior to the first scene. Mithridate's spreading of a false report of his death in order to escape the Romans begins a series of developments which lead to his losing Menime, or losing the possibility of marrying her. A military ruse provokes a situation which leads Mithridate to use ruse in his personal life. The action stems from a particular facet of Mithridate's character, his craftiness. Feigning has been a successful device of Mithridate in the past; it has contributed to his fame. At this point in his career, his ruses begin to backfire.

Racine uses the false report as an ironic device in several plays to elicit a particular action from a character or characters that works
to the disadvantage of that character. The false assumption we saw in *Bérénice* is one variation. The use of *guiprouxe* (action based on misinformation or misinterpretation) was not unusual as a device in Racine's era. But, as John Lapp points out, this kind of device seems to be a much more integral part of the action in Racine, than when used by Corneille, who seems to use it for its own sake. In *Mithridate* we are first struck with the consequences of the false report on the well-being of Monime and Xipharès. The rumor of Mithridate's death has brought his two sons, Pharnace and Xipharès to Nymphée where Monime, his prospective bride is residing while he campaigns against the Romans. The rumor throws into relief two rivalries between the half-brothers. 1) Political: Pharnace has been a secret admirer of the Romans; he will now collaborate with them freely. Xipharès, like his father, hates the Romans. Shamed when his mother had betrayed Mithridate to them, he had tried to atone by leading attacks on them. 2) Amorous: Xipharès fell in love with Monime before Mithridate ever saw her. But, always respectful to his father, he had given up hope when Mithridate fell in love with Monime. At the news of Mithridate's death, Xipharès hopes for a future with Monime is rekindled and he comes to Nymphée only to find that Pharnace has preceded him there and has proposed marriage to Monime. Xipharès confesses his love to Monime, who abhors the prospect of marrying Pharnace, and she seems more favorably disposed toward him. Pharnace is able to surmise that Xipharès is his rival, received more graciously than he. At this point the news arrives that Mithridate is not dead, but is arriving in the port. This turn of events puts both brothers and Monime in danger.
because of Mithridate's jealous and suspicious nature.

A number of ironies are associated with this first use of a false report. First, since craftiness is part of Mithridate's personal legend, the brothers should have been wary of the news. They both knew what Mithridate was likely to do, that he had previously used this kind of device in battle. He later reminds them himself: "Déjà plus d'une fois, retournant sur ses traces, / Tandis que l'ennemi, par ma fuite trompé ... " (III, i, 764-765). In other contexts, both brothers speak of his nature. Pharnace describes him as "Le Roi, toujours fertile en dangereux détours" (I, v, 369), and Xipharès tells Monime: "Mais moi, qui dès l'enfance élevé dans son sein, / De tous ses mouvements ai trop d'intelligence" (IV, ii, 119u-1191). In fact, Xipharès did at first doubt the report but received seeming confirmation when he found out a soldier had turned over Mithridate's crown and sword to Pompey (I, i, 1-8). It is ironic, also, that Monime, without believing her own statements, has used the uncertainty of the news as a way of putting off Pharnace.

An ironic parallelism exists between the false report of Act I and that of Act V regarding Xipharès. Both Monime and Mithridate accept the rumor of Xipharès' death spread by the Romans. Monime does not follow the advice she has given Xipharès: "Et du moins attendez quel sera mon destin" (IV, ii, 1266). She has also told Phaedime concerning Xipharès: "Va, ne le quitte point; et qu'il se garde bien/ D'ordonner de son sort, sans être instruit du mien" (IV, iii, 1269-1270). Fortunately, her attempt at suicide fails, but acceptance of the erroneous news by Mithridate is fatal to him. Believing Xipharès dead, he has no hope of
receiving reinforcements in his last stand against the Romans. Rather than be taken by them, he plunges his sword into his own breast moments before Xipharès routs the attackers. In a sense there is poetic justice in the fact that Mithridate, who lived by ruse, died a victim of it. It is this fact which ultimately gains for him the sympathy of Monime and the spectators. In his introduction to the play, Raymond Picard has suggested that Mithridate is the least tragic of the plays. He says:

... les hésitations ne sont pas la manifestation psychologique d'un destin qui joue avec sa victime et dont l'ironie se plaît aux détours; elles résultent de la complexité même des problèmes posés.... Ce serait bien plutôt un tragique de situation que l'on trouverait dans Mithridate.

Though destiny does not take the form of psychological necessity in this play, the external event is still a form of destiny which pursues its victims just as relentlessly. Mithridate feels himself tracked by fate. In speaking to his sons he uses the expression: "Malgré la faix des ans et du sort qui m'opprime" (II, iii, 459). He says to Monime: "Quand le sort ennemi m'aurait jeté plus bas" (II, iv, 561), and later, when she refuses to marry him: "Attendiez-vous, pour faire un aveu si funeste, / Que le sort ennemi m'eût ravi tout le reste?" (IV, iv, 1303-1304).

Throughout the play he fights off a feeling of despair and old age.

It is extremely ironic that Mithridate, who generally is suspicious of everyone around him, is not skeptical at the precise moment he should be. A man given to feigning will naturally suspect others of the same thing; he applies the epithet perfide at different times to both sons and to Monime, and also uses the word traître. His jealousy
makes him immediately distrustful when he finds his two sons in Nymphée. As soon as he is alone with Arbate, he begins to question him on the reasons for their presence (II, iii). His suspicions are justified concerning Pharmace, but would better have been silenced concerning Xipharès. Although Xipharès and Monime do love each other, both would have been obedient to his wishes and he would never have known the truth which so enrages him. But it is partly the feeling of being pursued by fate and surrounded by enemies which animates his suspicions:

Quoi? de quelque côté que je tourne la vue,  
La foi de tous les coeurs est pour moi disparue?  
Tout m'abandonne ailleurs? tout me trahit ici?  
(III, iv, 1011-1013)

The several levels of reality in this play give rise to irony. Mithridate proposes to himself specious reasons why he should discount Pharmace's accusation of Xipharès (III, iv). These reasons are a completely accurate description of Pharmace's self-seeking character. But in fact, Pharmace's accusations were not false, although, as has been stated, they would not have interfered with Mithridate's plans. Mithridate's suspicious nature and jealousy win out and he conceives the artifice he will use to find out the truth. It is the success of this ruse which leads to the king's defeat in love.

When Mithridate proposes to Monime that she marry Xipharès, she first suspects him of trickery. Because he is so insistent, she finally believes him and confesses the truth. Since Mithridate forced her by treachery to betray the one she loves, when he later wants to marry her anyway, she has only scorn for him:
He alone is responsible for bringing her love for Xipharès into the open and making it an obstacle to his own happiness. His first reaction is, surprisingly, self-condemnation, then anger, and finally a conflict between love and gloire. He ponders the political consequences of punishing Xipharès, whom he now needs to avenge his defeat by the Romans: "J'ai besoin d'un vengeur, et non d'une maîtresse" (IV, v, 1400). But he cannot stifle his feelings of jealousy: "Je brûle, je l'adore; et loin de la bannir... / Ah! c'est un crime encore dont je veux punir" (IV, v, 1405-1406). He is then overwhelmed with shame at his military and amorous defeats and turns against himself in verbal irony. Ultimately he regrets falling in love as a kind of foolishness unbecoming a man of his years and responsibilities. This internal debate is significant in that it shows a certain human quality in Mithridate and prepares for our transfer of sympathies to him at the end of the play. His wavering is dispelled suddenly by impinging events and the necessity to act. He receives a report that Pharnace has seduced his guards and turned Mithridate's soldiers against the proposed expedition to Rome, then a false report that Xipharès has gone over to the side of the rebels. Finally, there is the news that the Roman armies have arrived. In a surge of anger, Mithridate will punish his sons and send poison to Monime to prevent her from marrying either son should events make that possible.

It was stated earlier that the reader's sympathies during much of
the play are with Monime and Xipharès. The false report and its subsequent reversal bring into play a number of ironies in terms of the situation of these two characters. They have been in love with each other but unaware that their love was mutual since Monime was already accorded to Mithridate by her father. Racine points up the situation with dramatic irony. When Xipharès expresses his love he completely misinterprets her exclamation: "Vous!" (I, ii, 171), and shortly imagines that he alone recalls how painful it was when his duty forced him to leave her presence: "Je m'en souviens tout seul. Avouez-le, Madame,/ Je vous rappelle un souvenir effacé de votre âme" (I, ii, 203-204). The hope aroused in Monime in Act I, unknown to Xipharès, ends with the announcement of Mithridate's return, although she does, in spite of herself, make her love known to Xipharès. She and Xipharès are both prisoners of duty. Monime describes herself as an esclave couronnée (I, iii, 255) and "Reine longtemps de mon cœur, mais en effet captive;/ Ét véuue maintenant sans avoir eu d'époux" (I, ii, 136-137). Later she says to Xipharès: "Et que, de mon devoir esclave infortunée" (II, vi, 643). When Mithridate succeeds in convincing her that he wants her to marry Xipharès, her hopes are raised that the conflict may be resolved. Addressing Xipharès in her imagination she exclaims: "Tu verrais ton devoir, je verrais ma vertu/ Approuver un amour si longtemps combattu?" (IV, i, 1177-1178). But immediately Xipharès arrives to inform her of Mithridate's treachery. Subsequently, there is the drama of Monime's narrow escapes with death—the failure at suicide and the poison snatched from her by Arbade in the nick of time. Because she does not die and is united with Xipharès in the end,
there is no deep irony associated with the fate of these two characters, only with the vicissitudes of their expectations. We may wonder why Racine did not allow Menime to die, for this would have added a greater ironic depth to the scenes involving her with Xipharès. However, Menime's death would have eliminated the irony of Mithridate's end, for he would then have been odious to the audience. By allowing her to live, Racine makes it possible for the reader to view Mithridate as both a contributor to and victim of his fate.

In fact, everyone is duped to a certain extent in this play and it is finally the shifting levels of reality which make for pervasive irony. There are many kinds of dissembling by the characters—some perfidious, some laudable, some due merely to common sense or a concern for decorum. All the characters dissemble at some moment or another. There is also the kind of deception which arises from the contrast between proffered reasons which are specious but represent only partial truths, and not the whole truth. Menime, for example, rejects Pharmace, alleging her hatred of the Romans who killed her father. She neglects to mention her real feelings for Pharmace and Xipharès. Pharmace gives cogent military reasons to Mithridate for not marrying a Parthan girl, which are not his real motives. Xipharès hedges to Mithridate after Pharmace accuses him of loving Menime. Even Arbaste deceives Mithridate, without really betraying, him by the wording of his language, in order to protect Xipharès: "Son frère, au moins jusqu'à ce jour,/ Seigneur, dans ses desseins n'a point marqué d'amour" (II, iii, 497-498). All of this deception, of whatever nature, is in the last analysis called forth
by the character of Mithridate, whether it be a shield against him or
a weapon to attack him. The disorientation which comes from misunder-
standing, misinterpretation, and the inability to distinguish the truth
is basic to the image of man presented by Racine's theatre. Situation
and event are two elements which weave this portrayal into the structure
of the plays.
FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER IV, PART II

1 "Le Confident dans la tragédie de Racine," Revue de l'Université de Laval, VIII (1953-1954), 76.

2 There is a certain precedent for Titus—Caligula and Néron disregarded the Roman law on marriage, although he hardly wishes to emulate these men.

3 The following lines reflect Antiochus' desire to establish his own name:

"J'espère de verser mon sang après mes larmes,
Ou qu'au moins, jusqu'à vous porté par mille exploits,
Mon nom pourrait parler, au défaut de ma voix."
(I, iv, 212-214)


7 Pp. 133-134.

8 "Je n'ai pas oublié, Prince, que ma victoire
Devait à vos exploits la moitié de sa gloire."
(III, i, 687-688)

9 "Hélas! de ce grand changement
Il ne me reviendra que le nouveau tourment
D'apprendre par ses pleurs à quel point elle l'aime.
Je la verrai gémir; je la plaindrai moi-même.
Pour fruit de tant d'amour, j'aurai le triste emploi
De recueillir des pleurs qui ne sont pas pour moi."
(III, ii, 809-814)

10 At the end of Act IV is a scene which existed only in the edition of 1671, in which Antiochus sums up for Arsace the ironies of his situation:

"Je partais pour jamais. Voilà comme je pars.
. . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Je m'attendris aux pleurs qu'un rival fait couler;
Moi-même à son secours je le viens appeler.
. . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Malheureux que je suis! avec quelle chaleur
J'ai travaillé sans cesse à mon propre malheur!" (IV, ix)
Perhaps Racine decided the scene was not necessary because all these contradictions are quite apparent to the reader already.


12 Pp. 161-162.


15 Aspects of Racinian Tragedy (Canada: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1955), pp. 120-123.

CHAPTER IV
PART III—EMOTIONS

In the preceding sections we have seen how various elements in the structure of Racine's tragedies are organized to create irony: references to events outside the scope of the play itself highlight the contradiction between the expectations of the characters and their destiny; the demands of passion and the demands of the social or political situation are at variance; circumstances foster the birth of passion, these same circumstances render its fulfillment impossible. The structural (social and political) relationships of characters bind them together while passion divides them, and conversely, passion unites, situation separates. Chance events conspire for the disclosure of passion—the resulting knowledge not only causes suffering but works against the realization of that passion. Irony is the condition of the existence of Racinian characters. While events and circumstances seem to preclude personal happiness in Racine the main theme of his tragedies is often stated as the destructive action of passion. The concern with the inner foundations of man's existence and actions was a preoccupation of Racine's era.¹ In this section we will examine the way in which irony springs from the psychological reality of Racinian characters as seen specifically in _Bajazet._

In the last chapter of his book _Four Stages of Renaissance Style,_ Wylie Sypher makes the statement: "A tragedy by Racine is stylized until it becomes almost a disembodied painting of an emotion."² He might have said a painting of emotions or of the interaction of various emotions.
Passion is the reason for being of Racinian characters and, consequently, the mainspring of tragedy. Because passion is tied to the fondest hopes and expectations of man, its frustration points up the enormous disparity between expectation and reality. The passion of a Racinian protagonist is always frustrated, generally from the beginning of the play. But because of its imperious nature, until some combination of circumstances definitively kills all chance for fulfillment, passion causes the character to cling to unreasonable hopes.

The tragedy of Bajazet involves the passions of several characters—ambition for Acomat, and love for Bajazet and Athalide, love mingled with ambition for Roxane. We will be concerned in this discussion primarily with Roxane since it is on her passion and the actions it provokes that the lives and fortunes of the other characters depend. Because of the complexity of the plot of Bajazet, it will be necessary from time to time to give brief summaries of the action, although in this section we are interested in the intricacies of plot only insofar as they relate to the nature of passion. Roxane, the favorite of the Sultan Amurat has been left in power in Constantinople (Byzance) while the Sultan is away at war. Due to the grand vizier Acomat's maneuvering, she has fallen in love with Bajazet, the Sultan's brother and prisoner. In accordance with Acomat's plan, Roxane has agreed to proclaim Bajazet emperor, ignoring the Sultan's order that he be killed. As the play opens the moment for this proclamation to be made has come, since the return of Amurat is imminent. It is at this moment that the nature of Roxane's passion becomes apparent to the other characters.
One of the most notable effects of violent passion in Racine is the inability to make a decision or, if a decision is reached, a fateful hesitation or wavering which prevents the decision from being carried out. Yet the characters are placed in situations in which they not only have the authority to act, but in which they must make a decision and take some definitive action. Thus Andromaque must marry Pyrrhus or refuse and sacrifice Astyanax; Titus must accept the responsibilities of emperor and send Bérénice away or leave with her and give up Rome; Roxane must declare Bajazet Sultan or have him killed. Either way passion is frustrated. But in Racine passion refuses to give in—it seeks its own ends in spite of circumstances. The result is a vacillation between conflicting states of mind. Wylie Sypher makes the statement: "Every Racinian action is organized into a late-baroque play of forces that a painter would call double contrapposto (counterposition) since the impulses of the characters 'oscillate' between poles. This oscillation is a logic of dilemma."³ Roxane swings back and forth between credulity and doubt, truth and illusion.

At the beginning of the play Roxane has for some time suspected that Bajazet does not return her love. Since, for political reasons, Bajazet and Roxane cannot meet openly, the princess Atalide has been the secret go-between, under the apparent guise of being, herself, wooed by Bajazet. But Roxane has not been satisfied with second-hand declarations of love. She tells Atalide:

\[\text{Vingt fois, sur vos discours pleine de confiance, Du trouble de son coeur jouissant par avance,}\]
Moi-même j'ai voulu m'assurer de sa foi,
Et l'ai fait en secret amener devant moi.

... ...
Je ne retrouvais point ce trouble, cette ardeur
Que m'avait tant promis un discours trop flatteur.

(I, iii, 277-280, 283-284)

Bajazet's own words never fulfilled the promise of Atalide's messages. Therefore, when finally called upon to act, Roxane declares her doubts and states that she will do nothing until they are resolved: "Enfin si je lui donne et la vie et l'Empire,/ Ces gages incertains ne me peuvent suffire" (I, iii, 285-286). She decides to determine Bajazet's good faith by demanding that he marry her. Roxane had the ambition to marry before she ever fell in love with Bajazet. Marriage within the seraglio would represent a considerable triumph for her because it is contrary to Turkish custom for a Sultan to marry, although there have been Sultans who have set a precedent. Roxane sees this as a way to break out of her condition as a slave. She can expect love to be demonstrated by the breaking of tradition because Amurat has already declared her Sultana without waiting for her to bear a son, as custom required. Her conception of love naturally grows out of the life she has known. Since, as a number of critics have pointed out, relationships in the seraglio are essentially that of master-slave, she conceives of love as a kind of exchange. Placing love and power on the same level, she feels that one can be traded for the other. Ironically, her very attempt to break away from the condition of slave is through a plan which reveals how much she is tied to the psychology of the seraglio.

Roxane has also decided that if Bajazet refuses her, he will die,
in spite of her love. She tells Atalide she will act: "Malgré tout mon amour," and "dès le même moment, sans songer si je l'aime" (I, iii, 317, 321). Bajazet, who has been secretly in love with Atalide and she with him since a very young age, refuses Roxane's offer; he is unmoved by her power to kill him. Upon this refusal we see the strength of Roxane's passion and the resulting incapacity to act. She cannot avoid consulting her passion, when her anger has subsided, she is horrified at the thought of carrying out her threat, and pleads with her prisoner: "Bajazet, écoutez: je sens que je vous aime" (II, i, 538). When he proposes that she go back to Amurat, subtly reminding her of the untenability of her position, she exclaims:

Dans son cœur? Ah! crois-tu, quand il le voudrait bien,
Que si je perds l'espoir de régner dans le tien,
D'une si douce erreur si longtemps possédée,
Je puisse désormais souffrir une autre idée,
Ni que je vive enfin, si je ne vis pour toi? (II, i, 547-551)

Since Roxane's happiness depends totally on Bajazet's loving her, throughout the play she will seek to believe in his love even when she has evidence against it, even when she knows she is deluding herself.

In fact, from the beginning Roxane has been extremely credulous. Her passion has caused her to build up an illusion surrounding Bajazet. This fact made it relatively easy for Bajazet and Atalide to deceive her. Atalide says:

Mais qu'ais-je fait l'amour croit tout ce qu'il souhaite!
De ses moindres respects Roxane satisfaite
Nous engagea tous deux, par sa facilité,
A la laisser jouir de sa crédulité. (I, iv, 375-376)
However, it is with reluctance and only at the continual urging of Acomat and especially Atalide that Bajazet has agreed to the subterfuge. Originally, seeing that his life was in Roxane's hands, he had tried to impress her favorably, but he had never intended to feign love, for two reasons: his longstanding love for Atalide, and his basic honesty. When Roxane fell in love with him and seemed so willing to believe in his love, Bajazet was drawn into the deception by Atalide and Acomat almost without realizing it. When Roxane began to demand to see Bajazet himself, he could no longer reveal his true feelings without endangering the others. Still, Bajazet has refused to lie outright. He has limited himself to expressing respect and gratitude; thus his words have always been far from the passionate declarations Roxane conjures up in her mind. Furthermore, Bajazet is a rather laconic man given to frankness and uncomplicated emotions; in deceiving Roxane he feels uncomfortable to the point of fearing failure in misrepresenting his feelings. Atalide has continually found it necessary to coach Bajazet in the art of feigning and to try to make him appear to say more than he does:

Car enfin Bajazet ne sait point se cacher:  
Je connais sa vertu prompte à s'effaroucher.  
Il faut qu'à tous moments, tremblante et secourable,  
Je donne à ses discours un sens plus favorable. (I, iv, 391-394)

Roxane, then, certainly has grounds for her doubts. But because she wants so much to believe in Bajazet's love, her illusion keeps coming back, causing her to hesitate and to make unrealistic proposals until time runs out. Therefore, after Bajazet's initial refusal to marry
her, although she declares a return to the old order—that is, fidelity to Amurat which requires Bajazet's death—she delays in instituting this, giving Atalide time to persuade Bajazet to make amends.

Roxane's credulity is just one example of the tendency of passion to seek its own ends, to perceive and interpret everything in terms of itself. Atalide provides another example and forms an interesting parallel to Roxane. The nature of Atalide's love is quite different from Roxane's. Raised with Amurat and Bajazet, she had been assured of Bajazet's love since childhood, with his mother's blessing. Then separation and silence were imposed by the imprisonment of Bajazet (see I, iv, 357-366). Finally, the need for Atalide to serve as the messenger between Bajazet and Roxane has permitted Bajazet to reaffirm his love for Atalide. Atalide's role requires that she seem to promote a state of affairs which, if realised, would ruin the chances for fulfillment of her passion, yet by so doing she actually, if all goes according to plan, is making it possible to accomplish her love. But paradoxically, Atalide has become a victim of her own deception. In spite of Bajazet's declarations of love to her, she has, from the beginning of the deception, been plagued by feelings of jealousy which have led her to fear that Bajazet may fall in love with Roxane. She forgets that the deception is a deception. Struggling to control her feelings, Atalide, like Roxane, vacillates between doubt and belief. But, whereas for Roxane credulity marks the triumph of illusion and doubt shows progress toward lucidity, for Atalide the contrary is true: doubt stems from illusion and belief is tied to reality. When Bajazet refuses Roxane's offer, Atalide is put
in the ironic position of either urging Bajazet to agree to marriage in order to save his life, or allowing him to discontinue the deception and be killed. She chooses the former, but her jealousy causes her to be irresolute just as Roxane's passion causes her to waver.

In Bajazet, then, each character is obsessed with his own particular passion to the point where his vision of everything is filtered through his own emotional prejudices. From this situation arises a form of dramatic irony which is perhaps more intense than all other kinds because it points up the precariousness of human judgment. The spectator sees each character's blindness as well as the conflicting interpretations placed upon a single event by different characters. The undermining of human judgment by emotion is portrayed strikingly in Act III of Bajazet. Almost every scene of this central act revolves around one of four versions of an event which has occurred offstage between Act II and Act III, an event of great significance for all concerned, the reconciliation of Bajazet and Roxane. We can only surmise the true nature of the occurrence but we expect that it was somehow different from each character's interpretation; or, perhaps, we discard the idea of a "real" event and are impressed with the enormous differences in reality as human beings perceive it. We are prepared for the event in the last scene of Act II when Atalide persuades Bajazet, by what Picard refers to as "une sorte de chantage généreux," to restore himself to Roxane's good graces by letting her believe that he loves her. The first report of the actual conversation between Bajazet and Roxane is that of Acomat to Atalide. His account is anticipated by Zaire who tells Atalide of the elation on Acomat's
face when he was called back to the palace after having been sent away by Roxane: "Le transport du Vizir marquait sur son visage/ Qu'un heureux changement le rappelle au Palais" (III, i, 798-799). As we might imagine, then, the vizier's story is full of emotion. Since Acomat's preoccupation is with his political ambitions, his joy arises from his certainty that the plan to make Bajazet emperor is about to be accomplished. In talking to Atalide, he dwells on this prospect and mentions Bajazet and Roxane only briefly as they relate to it: "—Enfin nos amants sont d'accord," and "La Sultane a laissé désarmer sa colère" (III, ii, 843, 845). In the latter line Acomat is speaking in a kind of understatement in terms of emotion, but a practical statement of the precise fact which makes feasible his political plans. The wording, however, recalls for the spectator the whole issue of Roxane's credulousness.

While Acomat speaks, Atalide is preoccupied with her jealousy which is seeking confirmation. She is struck by Acomat's reference to Bajazet and Roxane as amants, as well as the deux emportements which he subsequently attributes to them, in passing. Also, the understatement mentioned above leaves a mystery as to how Roxane's anger was dispelled. This language is exactly what is needed to activate Atalide's imagination. She presses Acomat for details of these transports (her word, III, ii, 862) which he has witnessed. Acomat is, of course, blind to the motivation for Atalide's question since he has no knowledge or intuition of either Atalide's love for Bajazet or Bajazet's love for Atalide. He sees in her question only disbelief in the sudden change of events. He will compensate for her scepticism by heightening his description: "Madame,
deutes-vous des soupirs enflammés? De deux jeunes amants l'un de l'autre charmés?" (III, ii, 863-864). This more passionate image of the lovers confirms Atalide's worst fears and she asks the question that is haunting her, one which she has already asked Zaïre: "L'épouse-t-il enfin?" (III, ii, 867). Acomat believes so and he launches into a word by word description of what happened. He had been led into a room "Où Roxane attentive écoutait son amant" (III, ii, 880), but, significantly, he did not overhear any of the conversation but watched from a distance:

Et respectant de loin leur secret entretien, J'ai longtemps immobile observé leur maintien. Enfin avec des yeux qui découvraient son âme, L'une a tendu la main pour gage de sa flamme; L'autre, avec des regards éloquents, pleins d'amour, L'a de ses yeux, Madame, assurée à son tour. (III, ii, 883-888)

This imprecise description of the meeting couched in visual imagery will fire Atalide's jealous imagination much more than would any description of what was actually said. An imagination which reinforces jealousy is a trait seen in many Racinean characters. It is ironic that, unknown to Acomat, his language is correlated with Atalide's preoccupations. On the other hand, we have the feeling that Atalide would have found what she sought in anything he might have said.

The first account of the reconciliation, then, has introduced us also to the second which is the one which Atalide conjures up in her own mind. While the reconciliation was her own idea, she had originally hoped that Roxane could be placated by an espoir incertain (II, v, 783). However, although she was unable to bring herself to tell Bajazet what to
say, she had hesitatingly advised him: "Dites... tout ce qu'il faut, Seigneur, pour vous sauver" (II, v, 792). Since Atalide knew that Bajazet was inept at lying, her refusal to put words into his mouth was tantamount to a wish that he fail in his enterprise. Now she is both surprised and alarmed that the change in Roxane's attitude has come so quickly. Upon Zaire's advance announcement of the visier's elation, Atalide tried rather unsuccessfully to prepare herself for the eventualty of marriage between Roxane and Bajazet. When Acomat arrives, then, Atalide has already imagined the worst, and his words, as we have seen, seem to confirm her fears. After he leaves she expresses to Zaire the conclusion to which she has jumped: everything is settled; Bajazet will marry Roxane. Despite Zaire's attempts to be reasonable, to show that the outcome is uncertain, Atalide insists. Blinded by her own self-pity and resentment, she has magnified "Le joie et les transports qu'on vient de m'expliquer" (III, iii, 932) to the point where she imagines that Bajazet has actually fallen in love with Roxane:

Tu vois que c'en est fait: Ils se vont épouser,
La Sultane est contente; il l'assure qu'il l'aime.

... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... 
Ah! peut-être, après tout, que sans trop se forcer,
Tout ce qu'il a pu dire, il a pu le penser. (III, iii, 904-905, 915-916)

Previously, Atalide feared that Bajazet might have responded to Roxane's offer of an empire (she, Atalide, could offer only love [see I, iv, 379-384]). Now she imagines that he has been moved in a more personal way, that he has been touched by Roxane's own charm and sadness and the persistence of her love, as well as by her power (III, iii, 917-921).
With Atalide convinced that she has been abandoned, Bajazet suddenly arrives to give his account of the meeting with Roxane. By his first words: "C'en est fait: j'ai parlé, vous êtes obéie" (III, iv, 941), he shows that he was indeed unaware of Atalide's mixed feelings when she sent him off to Roxane at the end of Act III. Completely oblivious to how Atalide is receiving his words, he expresses his good fortune to be alive and finally free, at the same time referring to his nagging guilt at the deception. He continues to emphasise his happiness that he is now free for a life of action, free to take up arms and pursue his reputation in battle. Delicate manipulations of sentiment are not his province; now he is able to pursue "de vrais combats" and "de nobles dangers" (III, iv, 951). Suddenly he becomes aware that Atalide is not responding to his enthusiasm: "Que vois-je? Qu'aves-vous? Vous pleurez!" (III, iv, 955). Atalide has not been listening or she would have realized that if Bajazet loved Roxane, he would have no cause to feel guilty about his meeting with her. Instead she has been dwelling on her fixed notion that Bajazet loves Roxane; now she reproaches him for: "tous ces gages d'amour qu'elle a reçu de vous" (III, iv, 968). Bajazet is astonished at the erroneous report she has received. He denies her conclusions and gives his version of the meeting:

A peine ai-je parlé, que, sans presque m'entendre,
Ses pleurs précipités ont coupé mes discours.
Elle met dans ma main sa fortune, ses jours;
Et se fiant enfin à ma reconnaissance,
D'un hymen infaillible a formé l'espérance.
Moi-même, rougissant de sa crédulité
Et d'un amour si tendre et si peu mérité,
Dans ma confusion que Roxane, Madame,
Attribuait encore à l'excès de ma flamme,
Je me trouvais barbare, injuste, criminel. (III, iv, 986-995)
The first two lines contradict sharply Acomat's statement that Roxane had listened attentively to Bajazet. Bajazet's account is slanted in terms of his own feelings of guilt. Because he felt in the wrong, he gives, perhaps, undue emphasis to her credulity, although doubtless it was great. Bajazet sees that his explanation has little effect on Atalide whose mind is set against him and who is determined to die. In this intolerable situation he decides that he must put an end to their deception of Roxane. At this moment Roxane appears unexpectedly. Shocked by the prospect that Bajazet will give himself up, Atalide barely has time to whisper: "Si vous m'aimez, gardez de la désabuser" (III, iv, 1012).

Roxane's version of the reconciliation is the most significant in terms of the other characters' since her decisions hold all their futures in the balance. She is filled with elation at the change of events but her interest is directed towards herself rather than Bajazet. Ironically, as she says to Atalide, she is astonished at her own sudden change of heart, the rapidity with which anger gave way to tenderness:

L'auriez-vous cru, Madame, et qu'un si prompt retour
Fut à tant de fureur succéder tant d'amour?
Tantôt à me venger fixe et déterminée,
Je jurais qu'il voyait sa dernière journée.
À peine cependant Bajazet m'a parlé,
L'amour fit le serment, l'amour l'a violé.
J'ai cru dans son désordre entrevoir sa tendresse:
J'ai prononcé sa grâce, et je crois sa promesse.

(III, v, 1019-1026)

The phrasing of her sentences highlights her credulity and the extent to which her own emotions colored the scene. She even uses the same expression Bajazet used to express his astonishment at her gullibility—
scarcely had he spoken than ... This is an example of what Van der Starre means when he says that language betrays the characters.\textsuperscript{5} Roxane's \textit{j'ai cru} anticipates the subsequent return of doubt. Since the love she thought Bajazet manifested is to a great extent her own creation, she cannot continue to believe in it when Bajazet does not act as she imagines he will. Roxane's speech also highlights an error of judgment that Bajazet has already mentioned to Atalide (III, iv, 991-994), an error of a kind that occurs frequently in Racine, the misinterpretation of an outward sign of emotion. Racinian characters are always looking for physical signs of the feelings which their own passion hopes or fears to find in others. Roxane continually seeks in Bajazet's manner some indication that he is at least moved by her love. Once before she mistook the uneasiness of guilt for sympathy (see II, i, 527-528, 559). Now she has made the same error during the reconciliation scene, interpreting Bajazet's embarrassment and guilt at her credulity as the confusion of love. This misinterpretation is also ironic in terms of her reaction to Bajazet's next speech.

As soon as Roxane has finished speaking, Bajazet declares:

\begin{verbatim}
Oui, je vous ai promis et j'ai donné ma foi
De n'oublier jamais tout ce que je vous dois;
J'ai juré que mes soins, ma juste complaisance
Vous répondront toujours de ma reconnaissance.
Si je puis à ce prix mériter vos bienfaits,
Je vais de vos bontés attendre les effets. (III, v, 1027-1032)
\end{verbatim}

After these words he leaves the stage. Roxane is stunned. It seems to her that Bajazet has completely reversed himself: "Quel est ce sombre
accueil, et ce discours glace/ Qui semble revequer tout ce qui s'est passe" (III, vi, 1035-1036). To what are we to attribute the change in Roxane's reaction? By his own admission, Bajazet reiterates what he said in the previous conversation with Roxane. Given the cohesiveness of his character, his concern for honesty, and the constancy of his love for Atalide, it is likely that he intends to speak in the same words and tone as before. However, Bajazet is troubled, even angry because of the jealousy he has just seen in Atalide. We know that it is always difficult for him to hide his true feelings and the necessity to face Roxane just after an emotional crisis of his own increases the difficulty. His last two lines with the words "a ce prix" indicate, perhaps more than he realizes, his unwillingness to love or marry Roxane. He is obviously disturbed as he leaves the stage and it is particularly this chagrin which alarms Roxane (see III, vi, 1047-1048). On the other hand, this physical sign of emotional distress is not unlike that which occurred in the first interview because of his guilty feelings, although his discomfort is somewhat aggravated this time. Whereas before Roxane saw in Bajazet's anxiety a sign of love, she now sees a contrary indication. It is in the paradoxical logic of passion that Roxane should see the confirmation which she seeks when her passion is frustrated and likewise to see the rejection which she fears when her love seems certain. In this sense passion is shown to follow its own way almost in spite of external events. Because a single character's perception varies ironically with the fluctuation of his emotional states, he seems to have nothing on which to rely to verify his judgments.
Roxane, then, must be at least partly responsible herself for her own disillusionment, if for no other reason than that her expectations are so high. This whole confrontation becomes doubly ironic when we compare it with an earlier speech of Bajazet:

Et ma bouche et mes yeux, du mensonge ennemi,
Peut-être, dans le temps que je voudrais lui plaire,
Peraient par leur désordre un effet tout contraire;
Et de mes froids soupirs ses regards offensés
Verraient trop que mon cœur ne les a point poussés.

(II, v, 744-748)

His misgivings have anticipated precisely the reality.

The irony which arises in Act III is not only one of dramatic effects created by the way specific lines and events anticipate and echo each other, but it is one of the total atmosphere springing from the nature of a universe in which passion is the driving force. Four different interpretations of a single event superimposed on each other cry out for a definitive version. It is significant that the spectator is never given the opportunity to witness the actual event and judge for himself—would not each spectator have his own interpretation depending on which character most stirs something within him? Still, we cannot help but ask ourselves, as does Roxane finally, what really happened, but the question is pointless. What is important are the actions which resulted from the scene. The significant question, then, is how do self-deception, misinterpretation, blindness affect the destinies of the characters?

Following the plunge from elation to despair, from credulity to
doubt in Act III, Roxane begins to look for an explanation. Once more she is puzzled by the contrast between Bajazet's abruptness and coldness and the interpretation of his feelings by Atalide, who skillfully provides logical excuses for his actions. Alone on the stage, Roxane reflects on the situation. As she begins her monologue she formulates the issue as precisely a question of interpretation: "De tout ce que je vois que faut-il que je pense?" (III, vii, 1065). This is the first of a series of monologues which show Roxane's progress toward lucidity which then ironically leads her back to illusion. The monologue in Racine is generally used to show the character's awareness of his own conflicting states of mind. But as De Mauroy emphasizes, the gift for self-revelation must never be confused with self-analysis which implies some objectivity. The exploration of the soul is directed by passion seeking its own ends. 6 We can see this clearly in Roxane. As she begins to suspect the truth, her doubt about Bajazet turns to jealousy. Since the agony of seeing Atalide as a rival is unbearable to her, her love for Bajazet begins to excuse his actions, to seek other explanations:

Mais peut-être qu'aussi trop prompte à m'affliger,
J'observe de trop près un chagrin passager.
J'impute à son amour l'effet de son caprice.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Non, non, rassurons-nous: trop d'amour m'intimide.

(III, vii, 1075-1077, 1081)

It is ironic that Roxane blames her own excessive emotion for distorting the truth at the very moment when, in fact, she has interpreted things correctly, and that it is precisely her passion which causes her to want to absolve Bajazet. Thus Roxane's very lucidity leads her back to her illusion.
In trying to explain away her suspicions about Atalide, Roxane has recourse to an erroneous assumption we saw earlier in the play—she views love as an exchange. Roxane reassures herself that Atalide has no attraction for Bajazet because she has nothing to offer him. We remember that Atalide makes the same error in reverse because she fears that Bajazet may be influenced by the offer of an empire. Jules Brody, in an article "Bajazet or the Tragedy of Roxane," sees Roxane's belief that politics can govern passion, whereas in reality passion governs politics, as the basic paradox of the play. In the midst of this error, Roxane has a moment of sudden insight:

Mais, hâlas! de l'amour ignorons-nous l'empire?
Si par quelque autre charme Atalide l'attire,
Qu'importe qu'il nous doive et le sceptre et le jour?
Les bienfaits dans un coeur balancent-ils l'amour?
Et sans chercher plus loin, quand l'ingrat me sut plaire,
Ai-je mieux reconnu les bontés de son frère?

(III, vii, 1085-1090)

She realizes suddenly from her own experience that love has nothing to do with what is offered, that all of the honors the Sultan bestowed on her did not earn him her love. She, herself, had admitted earlier that she fell in love with Bajazet "Malgré tous ses malheurs ..." (I, iii, 309). This glimpse of the truth which is so painful to Roxane is short-lived.

At the close of Roxane's monologue in III, vii when her moment of awareness is leading her toward the probability that Bajazet does love Atalide, she is interrupted by a message that the terrifying head of the Sultan's emissary Orcan has arrived from the Sultan. Lapp points out that the juxtaposition of the content of a monologue to the subsequent action, often a messenger's
speech, is a technique for creating dramatic irony which Racine uses frequently. Here Roxane is suspicious of Bajazet at the end of her monologue. But when she learns that Orcan has come demanding Bajazet's head, she is no more able to cause his death when she is uncertain of his feelings than she was able to offer him life under similar pressure at the beginning of the play.

A comparable ironic juxtaposition occurs with Roxane's subsequent monologue in IV, iv. By this time she has tricked Atalide into revealing her feelings about Bajazet, but she still has no certain knowledge that Bajazet actually loves Atalide. Pressed by time (Orcan cannot be put off indefinitely) she deliberates and reaches a decision to go ahead with the plan to crown Bajazet:

Voyons si, par mes soins sur le trône élevé,
Il osera trahir l'amour qui l'a sauvé,
Et si de mes bienfaits lâchement libérée,
Sa main en osera couronner ma rivale.
Je saurai bien toujours retrouver le moment
De punir, s'il le faut, la rivale et l'amant.
(IV, iv, 1239-1244)

We see that Roxane has almost willfully gone back to her former illusion about love and power. At the end of this monologue she affirms her plan to pretend ignorance. But no sooner has she uttered the words: "Je veux tout ignorer" (IV, iv, 1250) than Zatime arrives with proof that Bajazet loves Atalide. She has accidentally come into possession of a note Bajazet wrote to Atalide. Roxane reads his words:

. . . . . . . Ni la mort, ni vous-même
Ne me ferez jamais prononcer que je l'aime,
Puisque jamais je n'aimerai que vous.
(IV, v, 1267-1269)
Roxane, herself, anticipates the irony when, upon seeing Zatime, she says: "Ah! que viens-tu m'apprendre?" (IV, v,1250). Brody points out that Roxane's reaction to Zatime's arrival forms the second half of the single alexandrine which begins as an expression of her desire to remain uninformed (see above). "The will not to know and the inevitability of knowing are pitted against each other in Roxane's mind with a pressure that only the antithetical economy of the alexandrine is able to translate (ignorer--apprendre)."10 For Roxane, credulity is a way of running away from the truth she sees in moments of lucidity, but underneath her awareness of the truth always threatens to come back and surges up in doubt.

Another way Racine uses monologue occurs immediately afterwards in IV, v. Faced now with the evidence of the deception carried out by both Atalide and Bajazet, Roxane speaks of vengeance. But Zatime, in the voice of common sense, points out that although Roxane's wrath is justified and Bajazet is not worthy of living, Amurat is more to be feared than Bajazet. Roxane, however, is not even aware of Zatime's presence. She has lapsed into a kind of emotion-crazed state in which she verbalizes the images which float across her mind as they are called forth by her frustrated passion—the cruelty of Bajazet and Atalide, her own credulity, her "generosity"11 to Bajazet. She is insensed because she now weeps. Suddenly, becoming aware that Zatime has not left, she is jolted back to reality. Lapp discusses the dramatic value of this kind of unconscious monologue which occurs in the presence of another person: "Racine's greatest originality in the use of monologue lies . . . in his
employment of the device to indicate not merely distraction, but aberration; the lack of control of the tragic figure who slips involuntarily into reverie in what seems a half-conscious effort to escape from the harassment of the conscious world. 12 After being reminded of Zatime's presence, Roxane goes about planning her vengeance with sadistic cruelty, at times speaking in a semi-monologue. The arrival of Acomat prevents further reverie and shows once again Racine's practice of ending monologue in such a way as to create dramatic irony. Roxane exclaims: "Mais qui vient ici différer sa vengeance?" (IV, v, 1330), but when Acomat offers to take on her vengeance for her, she refuses. She, herself, will defer her vengeance as long as possible, and Acomat realizes this:

Tu vois combien son coeur, prêt à le protéger,  
A retenu mon bras trop prompt à la venger,  
Je connais peu l'amour; mais j'ose te répondre  
Qu'il n'est pas condamné, puisqu'on le veut confondre;  
Que nous avons du temps. Malgré son désespoir,  
Roxane l'aime encore, Osmin, et le va voir.  
(IV, vii; 1407-1412)

Acomat shares with the spectator his awareness of the extent to which Roxane is victimized by her own passion.

In this series of monologues we have seen the various mental postures of Roxane regarding her dilemma—the wavering between credulity and doubt, lucidity and confusion, the feelings of jealousy and anger, of disillusionment and despair. The spectator is not only intimately aware of all the contradictions. He sees how the indecision and procrastination caused by these states affect the destiny of Roxane. It is mainly the pressure of circumstances, finally, which forces a resolution.
Even with all the evidence of Bajazet's past conduct and the new proof of his deception, Roxane will make one final attempt to strike a bargain with him. She is amazed with herself:

_Ame lâche, et trop digne enfin d'être dégout, Peux-tu souffrir encor qu'il paraisse à ta vue? Crois-tu par tes discours le vaincre ou l'étonner? Quand même il se rendrait, peux-tu lui pardonner? Ne crois-tu pas encore être assez outragée? Sans perdre tant d'efforts sur ce coeur endurci, Que ne le laissons-nous périr?... Mais le voici._

(V, iii, 1461-1468)

Even though Roxane recognizes the futility, her passion pushes her to act in contradiction of her intuitions. She proposes to Bajazet that he save his life by witnessing Atalide's death and pledging himself in marriage. As we have seen before (Chapter II, page 94), Racinian characters seem to have a faculty for saying precisely what they should not say to another character; their own preoccupations preclude any insight into the hearts of others. Just as Roxane is completely unaware of how repugnant her ultimatum must be to Bajazet, he does not realize the effect of his references to Atalide on Roxane: "Loin de me retenir par des conseils jaloux,/ Elle me conjurait de me donner à vous" (V, iv, 1555-1556).

The audience has heard Roxane express the unbearableness of Bajazet's acting in accordance with Atalide's wishes: "Pour plaire à ta [her own] rivale, il prend soin de sa vie./ Ah! traître, tu mourras ... " (IV, v 1313-1314). Now, when Bajazet begins to plead for clemency for Atalide, it is the last straw. In jealousy and despair Roxane utters the fatal command "Sortez" (V, iv, 1564) which delivers Bajazet into the hands of the waiting Orcan. Orcan will also in accordance with the Sultan's
secret order "... sacrifier l'amante après l'amant" (V, xi, 1680).

Time has run out for Roxane. In fact it had already run out, really, at the beginning of the play, for Orcan must have been dispatched some time before in order to arrive when he did. Thus, even at the beginning it was too late for Roxane to return to loyalty to the Sultan. Likewise, her passion had already doomed her to unhappiness because she had seen that it was not returned. But in the space of the play Roxane has been destroyed internally. The crescendo-decrescendo mechanism of passion has led her from doubt to hope to despair and back again, each time with more force. Instead of rising to be "souveraine d'un coeur qui n'eût aimé que moi," she has fallen to become "... la première esclave enfin de ma rivale" (V, iv, 1532, 1538). The passions of the other characters have caused them to follow a similar pattern.

Besides the internal contradictions of each individual character's passion, there are a number of interesting ironic parallels between the passions of different characters which, although they may seem quite different, have striking similarities. Bajazet is repulsed by the values of a woman who could offer him the choice between marriage and death, and sees Atalide's love as infinitely more virtuous. Yet the difference is one of degree, for Atalide, too, has recourse to "un chantage généreux" (see above). She uses a more sophisticated but quite vicious moral torture to force Bajazet to do her bidding (see II, v). Both women have the same desire that their sacrifices be recognized and returned by Bajazet. We have already discussed their oscillations between doubt and belief. Ultimately, connotations of power are in-
separable from the context of the seraglio. Both women refer time and
again to their power over Bajazet, or their lack of it. We have seen,
too, that the error of equating love and power has been made by Roxane,
Atalide, and Acomat. It is also made by Bajazet, for he felt that if he
had been successful in gaining political power, he might have used it to
repay Roxane's love. 16 It is, ironically, Roxane who points out his
error to him (V, iv, 1525-1526). Finally, all the characters are so
obsessed with their own passions that they are equally blind to the
feelings of even those they love and thus to the ultimate consequences of
their acts. Passion, then, is seen as a destructive force from within
which, together with external fatality, or perhaps even in spite of it,
brings about the tragic disintegration of man.
FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER IV, PART III

1 For an interesting discussion of this idea see Odette de Hourtoues, *Racine or the Triumph of Relevance* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 31-32.


5 Starre, p. 216.

6 *Racine*, p. 59.

7 Even Acomat is astonished at Bajazet's refusal of Roxane's offer and says: "La plus sainte des lois, ah! c'est de vous sauver" (II, iii, 592).

8 *Romanic Review*, LX (December, 1969).


10 "Bajazet," p. 286.

11 In regard to Roxane's "generosity" Brody speaks of her use of the word bonté (IV, v, 1305) and the word bienfaits (III, vii, 1088) which she used to characterize Amurat's actions toward her: "By no small irony, Amurat and Roxane are presented as 'do-gooders' who kill with kindness." "Bajazet," p. 283, note 8.

12 P. 113.

13 "Plus vous me commandez de vous être infidèle, Madame, plus je vois combien vous méritez De ne point obtenir ce que vous souhaitez." (II, v, 710-712)
"J'épouserais, et qui (s'il faut que je le die)?
Une esclave attachée à ses seuls intérêts,
Qui présente à mes yeux les supplices tout prêts,
Qui m'offre ou son hymen, ou la mort infaillible;
Tandis qu'à mes périls Atalide sensible,
Et trop digne du sang qui lui donna le jour
Veut me sacrifier jusques à son amour?"  (II, v, 718-724)

14 Atalide threatens to go to Roxane with Bajazet and reveal everything so he will be forced to witness Roxane's wrath directed toward the one he loves. She begins her speech: "Venez, cruel, venez ..." (II, v, 761). Starre, citing Spitzer, characterizes this use of the imperative of aller and venir as an "invitation ironique." P. 34. See Leo Spitzer, Die klassische Dampfung in Racines Stil, Romanische Stil-und-Literaturstudien, I (Marburg am Lahn; Elwert, 1931).

15 They have lines which echo each other almost exactly. Roxane says: "Quand je fais tout pour lui, s'il ne fait tout pour moi" (I, iii, 520), and Atalide exclaims: "Que vous n'osiez pour moi ce que j'osais pour vous?" (II, v, 775).

16 "Et si l'effet enfin, suivant mon espérance,
Êt ouvert un champ libre à ma reconnaissance,
J'aurais, par tant d'honneurs, par tant de dignités
Contenté votre orgueil et payé vos bontés,
Que vous-même peut-être..."  (V, iv, 1521-1525)
CHAPTER V
TRAGIC IRONY

Phèdre is the tragedy which is generally viewed as the culmina-
tion of Racine’s career as a playwright, not only chronologically, as
the last play before years of silence, but also artistically. Weinberg,
who feels that ultimately the only test of a play is its effect, \(^1\) points
out that the emotional effect of this tragedy is more concentrated than
in most of the preceding works. He sees this as due to the complete
integration and subordination of all elements of the play to the central
action—the internal destruction of Phèdre. We have noted previously
that the cumulative effect of irony contributes enormously to the tragic
atmosphere of a Racinian play and to the emotion of the spectator. It
is also true that irony is extremely effective as a unifying element in
tragedy. It has the power to suddenly draw together past, present, and
future events in a pattern, to instill a seemingly chance incident with
portentous significance, to underline the ignorance of the characters as
they act to hasten their doom.

Irony grows naturally out of the tragic situation of Phèdre. Te-
t tally possessed by a criminal passion, she at the same time is totally
convincing of her guilt and the necessity to die. For the first time in
a Racinian protagonist conscience and passion are pitted against each
other with equal force. Earlier plays have certainly depicted absolute
passion before, as well as characters like Titus, Xipharès, and Monime
in whom the sense of duty prevails over passion. \(^2\) In addition, Atalide
struggles to rationalize a certain course of action based on virtue, but her moral sense at times seems almost an afterthought. She enters too easily into the deception of Roxane, expressing moral reservations only when Bajazet's self-incriminations imply that she has no scruples. Even though she blames herself for Bajazet's death and, like Phèdre, takes her own life, she does not demonstrate, even at the end, the same degree of self-horror that Phèdre shows from the very beginning. The coexistence of passion and conscience and the disastrous passivity to which they lead are the source of the tragedy. One of the ways this fundamental duality is made explicit is through irony.

We may wonder that there is little verbal irony in a play dealing with so momentous a clash between a character's values and his nature. But verbal irony implies at least a semblance of control. We saw that with characters like Néron and Hermione irony was an attempt to check the violence of their inner turmoil, but that ultimately irony failed them and they lost control. From the beginning Phèdre lacks even the will to muster verbal irony. She has admitted the inevitability of her passion and is ravaged by guilt and ready to die. Tragically, she does not have the strength to resist Oenone's efforts to wring her secret from her. Furthermore, in the presence of Hippolyte, her passion negates all self-composure, however carefully prepared: "Le voici. Vers mon coeur tout mon sang se retire./ J'oublie, en le voyant, ce que je viens lui dire" (II, v, 581-582). Even on those occasions when we might expect her to rally to verbal irony, there is none. When Hippolyte suggests that she has forgotten she is Thésée's wife, she reacts sharply
in anger, but her denial quickly gives way to confession. Likewise, when Phèdre hears the news that Thésée is still alive after she has confessed her passion to both Oenone and Hippolyte, we might anticipate some sort of irony directed at the gods in the manner of crest (see Chapter II), but Phèdre can only say in quiet desperation: "Mon époux est vivant, Oenone, c'est assez" (III, iii, 832). It is almost as if she expected the news. Such a subdued reaction hints at despair so great that it cannot be verbalized. Only a few examples of real verbal irony can be found in the play. Hippolyte, just after hearing Phèdre's confession which is so abhorrent to him, learns that Phèdre's son has been chosen by Athens as successor to Thésée; he exclaims: "Dieux, qui la connaissez, est-ce donc sa vertu que vous récompensez?" (II, vi, 727-728). Thésée and Aricie both use it briefly to each other in their confrontation near the end of the play (V, iii), but none of these characters is living in the inner chaos of Phèdre.

Instead of verbal irony, understatement, particularly in the form of litotes, is the rule in Phèdre. It is highly effective in this play because the experience, not only of Phèdre, but of others, too, is of such magnitude and strikes such depths within the characters that it cannot be spoken, only suggested. With Phèdre this is true because of the moral interdiction on her passion which is both adulterous and incestuous. Even when she is persuaded to break her silence, she is still incapable of openly stating her crime. She hints at it by evoking the persecution of her mother and sister by Venus, and then, unable to pronounce the name of Hippolyte, she mentions "ce fils de l'Amazone" so
that it is Oenone who finally says his name (I, iii, 262-264). Upon confronting Hippolyte, Phèdre begins, in spite of herself, to make veiled allusions to her love, speaking of "un secret regard" and calling herself "une odieuse mère," expressions unconsciously calculated to evoke protest from Hippolyte, but whose terrible meaning he cannot possibly grasp. Phèdre then expands the allusion:

Quand vous me hauriez, je ne m'en plaindrais pas,
Si pourtant à l'offense on mesure la peine,
Si la haine peut seule attirer votre haine,
Jamais femme ne fut plus digne de pitié,
Et moins digne, Seigneur, de votre inimitié.

(II, v, 596, 605-608)

Still, Hippolyte takes these remarks as a simple apology for her persecution of him. In calling her "une mère jalouse" he generously sees her conduct as the usual reaction of a step-mother favoring her own children. But Phèdre replies that she is an exception to "cette loi commune," suggesting by cette that she is subjugated to another loi commune, that of Venus. In spite of the fact that Hippolyte previously described himself to Aricie as "asservi maintenant sous la commune loi" (II, ii, 535), he does not understand Phèdre's meaning. Such understatements show in Phèdre a constant inner resistance to the impulses of her passion which is finally broken down by the overwhelming physical presence of Hippolyte that causes her to speak more and more pointedly until Hippolyte must understand. This is the kind of inner conflict Picard speaks of in his Introduction to the play when he says: "mais on a trop oublié que la faiblesse suppose la force: céder à une pression, c'est encore manifester
une certain résistance, sans laquelle la pression n’aurait pas de sens."

Even at the very end of the play Phèdre must ease into her confession to Thésée, saying not, "Hippolyte is innocent," but: "Il n’était point coupable" (V, vii, 1619). Other characters also not infrequently use understatement. Hippolyte several times alludes to his love for Aricie which is illegal but not immoral, although in his own eyes it is a weakness and a repudiation of his former self. He tells Théramène: "Si je la laissais, je ne la fuirais pas" (I, i, 56). The most dramatic understatement in the play is perhaps Théramène’s announcement to Thésée:

"O soins tardifs et superflus! Inutile tendresse! Hippolyte n’est plus" (V, vi, 1491-1492). His is a kind of vain attempt to shield Thésée from the unspeakable truth he must reveal. Understatement, by its form, constantly shows the reader a tension within the characters, a shrinking from the unbearable reality which must ultimately be faced.

In addition to understatement, irony of language in other forms abounds in Phèdre. We see cumulative irony through the repetition of key words at various points in the play. The network of ironic significations which reminds the audience of the future helps to create an atmosphere of instability in which the characters are tricked by appearances. A remarkable example of stylistic irony is built around the word rivale. At the beginning of the play Hippolyte reproaches Théramène for suggesting that Thésée may be dallying in new love affairs; he says: "Phèdre depuis longtemps ne craint plus de rivale" (I, i, 26). Hippolyte is obviously referring to the fact that since Thésée’s marriage to Phèdre, he has ended his amorous adventures. But the line has several other con-
notations: first, the audience, acquainted with the legend of Phèdre, knows that she is in love with her son-in-law and that if she needs fear no rival at the hands of Thésée, he, on the other hand, should fear a rival in regard to Phèdre in the person of his own son. The line is also ironic in regard to Hippolyte's love for Aricie, the knowledge of which will ultimately immobilize Phèdre with jealousy and thus prove fatal to Hippolyte himself. Farther along in the play, after Hippolyte has confessed his love to Aricie, Racine uses a similar line. Phèdre, in speaking of Hippolyte to Oénone who is now aware of Phèdre's passion, says: "Je ne me verrai point préférer de rivale" (III, i, 790). She is confident in what she says because of Hippolyte's reputation for being immune to love, a matter which will be discussed below. The irony derives from the phrasing of the sentence—not only do we know that she already has a rival, but that she soon, literally, will see that she has one. In another sense, the line implies that she will be unable to bear the thought of a rival; this meaning is valid because of the disastrous effect this knowledge will have, as mentioned above. All of these ramifications of Phèdre's situation are apparent to the audience when the word rivale is used one last time by Phèdre after she learns the truth: "Oénone, qui l'eût cru? J'avais une rivale" (IV, vi, 1218). This time her words call to mind her former false certainty. By repeating the word rivale in different contexts, Racine gradually extends its scope and increases the ironic intensity.

A similar series of repetitions begins when Hippolyte tries to justify to Théramène his desire to leave Trézène. In addition to the
pretext of seeking Thésée he says:

Cet heureux temps n'est plus. Tout a changé de face,
Depuis que sur ces bords les Dieux ont envoyé
La fille de Minos et de Pasiphaé. (1, i, 34-36)

Hippolyte notes here a change in his own feelings about Trésène which he wishes to attribute to Phèdre's arrival. He is certainly justified in feeling uneasy in her presence because she has persecuted him, but this is still a pretext. He refuses to admit that his desire to leave is prompted by his discomfort at his love for Aricie. The reference to Phèdre is, for the spectator, the obvious evocation of how much things have changed for Hippolyte in a way he is ignorant of. We see that he should flee, not Aricie, but Phèdre. This line prepares the ironic response of Théramène who minimizes the threat posed by Phèdre and at the same time uses the epithet "dangerouse marâtre" which augers ill for the future. A little later in the conversation Théramène takes up the same idea of change in order to force Hippolyte to be honest: "Avouez-le, tout change ... " (1, i, 128). He proceeds to list the modifications in Hippolyte's conduct which show a change of heart, notably, his neglect of the horses; we will see the ironic significance of this shortly. The change in his character which Hippolyte sees as a reason to leave Trésène, Théramène sees as a reason to stay (which is ultimately bad advice). Finally, the theme of change reappears in a different context in the mouth of Génèse who says to Phèdre: "Votre fortune change et prend une autre face" (1, v, 341). The audience knows, of course, that contrary to the report Phèdre has just received, Thésée is not dead and that if
everything seems to change for Hippolyte, nothing has changed for Phèdre.

Other ironic repetitions are organized around words such as l'inoc-
cence and around notions like the one that Hippolyte, in speaking of
love, uses a langue étrangère. By means of repetition Racine creates a
web of ironic meanings which corresponds to the web of fate formed by
the accumulation of circumstances, events, and the actions of the charac-
ters. Thus irony helps to build up the stifling atmosphere so character-
istic of Racine, the atmosphere which prevents the characters from breath-
ing and which provokes the famous line of Phèdre: "Tout m'afflige et me
nuit, et conspire à me nuire" (I, iii, 161).

Another manifestation of stylistic irony derives from the use of
imagery. I mention only briefly the chiaroscuro effects which are so
well-known, so abundant in the play, and so intimately tied to Phèdre's
guilty existence, her heritage and finally her death. Phèdre, descended
from the Sun, arrives on stage seeking the day in one last farewell, as
she looks forward to the release of death and darkness. She loves the
light and pursues it, but at the same time loves the shadow of the
forests—the favorite spots of Hippolyte. Here is the essential paradox:
Phèdre loves, honors and reveres the light—brilliance, life, innocence;
at the same time she is possessed with a guilty passion, which in her own
mind, requires that she die. She simultaneously seeks the light and
that which takes away the light. Her reverence for the day and her
essential morality are obvious when, after she has taken the first step
to increase her shame by telling Oenone of her passion, she says: "Je
voulais en mourant prendre soin de ma gloire,/ Et dérober au jour une
flamme si noire" (I, iii, 309-310). Significantly, she used the past tense, for now that her shame is known, even if only to Oenone, her death cannot be the same because her guilt is exposed. Through progressive revelation of her flamme noire she heightens her guilt so that she comes to dread death because of the confrontation with her father Minos, judge of the underworld, to whom she will have to reveal the blackness of her soul. Finally, the intensity of her passion consumes her: "Et la mort, à mes yeux dérobant la clarté,/ Rend au jour, qu'ils souillaient, toute sa pureté" (V, vii, 1643-1646). As she has revealed her crime she has made more and more dense the obscurity which encloses her. Only by burying herself in eternal darkness can she affirm the daylight. The irony of light/shade with its multiple symbolism—purity/guilt, knowledge/ignorance, confession/silence—throws into relief the contradiction in Phèdre's destiny which is at the center of the play.

The image of the monster gives rise to other interesting and complex ironies. Théramène's report of Hippolyte's death makes explicit the conception of the monster which informs the uses of this image throughout the play (and even elsewhere in Racine). He says:

Cependant sur le dos la plaine liquide
S'élève à gros bouillons une montagne humide;
L'onde approche, se brise, et vomit à nos yeux,
Parmi des flots d'écumé, un monstre furieux.
Son front large est armé de cornes menaçantes;
Tout son corps est couvert d'écaillés jaunissantes;
Indomptable taureau, dragon impétueux,
Sa croupe se recourbe en replis tortueux.
Ses longs mugissements font trembler le rivage.
Le ciel avec horreur voit ce monstre sauvage;
La terre s'en émeut, l'air en est infecté;
Le flot, qui l'apporta, recule épouvanté. (V, vi, 1513-1524)
The monster described here is a savage being of gigantic proportions, terrifying in his grotesque appearance and in the havoc which he threatens to unleash. He is violent and incapable of being subdued, characterized by tortuous sinuosities. He is neither human nor natural. The sea vomits him forth and all of nature—air, water, land, and sky—seem to draw back in fear and horror. By analogy, we can see as a monster a person who appears inhuman through some unnatural characteristic which leads him to excessive and violent actions, a person who inspires horror by the destruction he causes, who violates the natural or social order. The person who comes to mind is, of course, Phèdre. Paradoxically, while a monster destroys by action, Phèdre does so by inaction. Only at the end does she act, when she destroys her body by taking poison. The tortuousness of Phèdre's mind which allows her to remain passive until it is too late recalls the sinuosities of the monster's body.

The monster theme is enriched by its associations with Thésée's reputation as a killer of monsters, thus a protector of society. The legend is alluded to by Aricie to try to alert Thésée to Phèdre's guilt without betraying Hippolyte's request not to accuse her directly. Speaking to Thésée of the numerous monsters from which he has freed mankind, she says: "Mais tout n'est pas détruit, et vous en laissez vivre/ Un..." (V, iii, 1445-1446). The monster which has escaped Thésée destroys his own family. Hippolyte admires the heroic aspect of his father's reputation, and feels a lack in himself because he has not yet even one monster to his credit. Thus it is ironic when Phèdre refers to herself as a monster, challenging Hippolyte: "Délivre l'univers d'un monstre qui
t'irrite," and "Crois-moi, ce monstre affreux ne doit point t'échapper" (II, v, 701, 703). Of course Hippolyte's failure at least to denounce this monster to his father results in his death.

If the image of the monster is applicable to Phèdre, it is also fascinating, although perhaps less obvious, when applied to Hippolyte himself. The word is associated with him several times, first by himself in a negative fashion when he wants to let Aricie know that he does not share Thésée's exaggerated hatred for her and her family: "Croit-on que dans ses flancs un monstre m'ait porté?" (II, ii, 520). Next, Phèdre, in the fury of her frustrated passion, says: "Je le vois comme un monstre affroyable à mes yeux" (III, iii, 884). Her love has turned to hatred since Hippolyte has not responded to her, nor shown her the least sympathy or compassion. Now she fears he will denounce her to Thésée, although in fact he refuses to do so. Phèdre's use of the monster image is, in the last analysis, a transposition of her own self-horror to Hippolyte. Finally, Thésée curses Hippolyte, believing him to be Phèdre's lover: "Monstre, qu'a trop longtemps épargné le tonnerre" (IV, ii, 1045). Since Thésée has been misinformed, in none of these instances is the term monster appropriate to Hippolyte. Nevertheless, he is a monster in another sense—that is, by his extreme *orgueil*. He is a monster of virtue, so convinced of his own innocence that he refuses to vindicate himself to Thésée, preferring, ironically, to believe in the justice of the gods (although, as we saw, he earlier mocked them when Phèdre's son was chosen to rule Athens). His stance is: "Mais l'innocence enfin n'a rien à redouter" (III, vi, 996). This false confidence leads him to his death.
Thésée himself has a history of monstrous deeds of the kind of which he accuses Hippolyte, and which Hippolyte abhors. In addition, he is a sort of monster in terms of his blind anger and readiness to believe the worst of Hippolyte, in spite of his son's past blameless conduct. Oenone is also worthy of the name of monster by her complete lack of moral sense which is redeemed somewhat only by her complete devotion to Phèdre. Phèdre ultimately repudiates her with: "Va-t-en, monstre exécrable" (IV, vi, 1317). Thus, all the characters, with the exception of Aricie and Théramène merit, to a greater or lesser extent, the appellation of monster, and their individual actions, taken together, cause the destruction which affects each of them in a disastrous way. The tragedy and supreme irony of this image, which becomes a symbol, is that characters who appear monstrous mirror the distortions of which mankind is capable. No one word could embody in more concentrated form the tragic irony of the play.  

The discussion of stylistic ironies has already introduced some of the structural ironies of the play, particularly, certain uses of the legendary background. For example, we have seen how certain details of Phèdre's heritage enter into the light/dark symbolism discussed above. Phèdre's origins also represent in another way the duality inherent in her nature. As the daughter of Pasiphaé, she has a heritage of sexual aberration, for her mother mated with a bull. At the same time, as the daughter of Minos, a figure of wisdom, she has a model for conscience. The opposing aspects of Phèdre's parental heritage are played against
each other to highlight her internal disorder. That famous poetic formulation of the discordance: "La fille de Minos et de Pasiphaé" (I, 1, 36) rings out, in the first scene, a note of doom that resonates throughout the play. Hippolyte also has a dual heritage expressed in mythological terms. His mother was the Amazon Antiopa who, according to Hippolyte himself, nourished him not only with her milk, but also with her extreme pride (I, 1, 69-70), which he later sets up as a supreme value for himself. At the same time, he has a kind of ambiguous heritage in Thésée to whom he reacts with mixed feelings. He admires Thésée the hero, the killer of monsters (one of which, ironically, was the Minotaur, fruit of Pasiphaé's union with the bull), and he deplores Thésée, the seducer of countless women whom he then abandoned (one of whom was Phèdre's sister Ariane). However, he does feel that Thésée has at least partly atoned for his excesses by his noble deeds.

The characters are frequently referred to by their origins. But, the irony which comes from this use of legend is different from that which we saw in Athalie. In this latter play, referring to the characters as the daughter or son of _______ had a depersonalizing effect, reducing them to a particular role in the Old Testament scheme of things. In Phèdre, on the contrary, the characters have more depth and are highly individualized. Details from their past reinforce some aspect of the character's own personality and help to build up a kind of personal legend which is of dramatic importance in the play. The irony comes, particularly in the case of Hippolyte, in the use to which this personal legend is put in terms of the tragic situation.
when Phèdre designates Hippolyte as "ce fils de l'Amazone" (I, iii, 262), she names the parent who represents the trait for which Hippolyte is most known—his orgueil. He is continually described by all the characters as superbe, insensible, fier, inflexible, even sauvage. There are also references to his vertu, his rigueur, and his rudesse. All of the words highlight the trait of fierce pride, acquired from Antiope, which accounts both for his belief that love is a weakness and for his blind confidence in his own innocence. This reputation leads to Phèdre's presupposition, shared initially by others, that Hippolyte has never been in love and scorns love. The notion has a number of ironic consequences. It serves to nourish false hope in Phèdre. After her confession to Hippolyte, she tries to explain to herself his coldness by her belief that love is new to him:

Hippolyte, endurci par de sauvages lois,
Entend parler d'aimer pour la première fois.
Peut-être sa surprise a causé son silence. (III, i, 783-785)

Moreover, this supposition makes possible Phèdre's statement discussed previously that she would be unable to bear a rival, and thus prepares the emotional crisis which occurs when she learns of Hippolyte's love for Aricie. In an ironic parallelism, Aricie has also been attracted to Hippolyte because of his rigorousness. Thus, both women cherish the idea "de faire flechir un courage inflexible" (II, i, 449). Dramatic irony is also drawn from Hippolyte's legend when Aricie tells Ismène: "Tu m'entendras peut-être, humble dans mon ennui, Gémir du même orgueil que j'admire aujourd'hui" (II, i, 459-460). She will lose Hippolyte
because of this very pride. In spite of Hippolyte’s reputation, Thésée readily believes him guilty of loving Phèdre even when Hippolyte objects by citing his mother’s influence over him: "Elevé dans le sein d’une chaste héroïne, / Je n’ai point de son sang démenti l’origine" (IV, ii, 1101-1102). Paradoxically, this legend does prevent Thésée from believing Hippolyte when he says he loves Aricie. Thésée thinks that Hippolyte’s pride is so fierce that only Phèdre could break him. So, we see how Hippolyte’s reputation, which was so dear to him, leads to his own destruction. It is ironic, also, that there is a certain amount of truth in the legend based upon Hippolyte’s past conduct. The error of both Phèdre and Thésée was to accept it blindly and make it into a stereotype of the person that would never change.

Another aspect of Hippolyte’s private legend is his skill as a tamer of horses which he has learned from Neptune, and his love of riding in the forests. The significance of Neptune in the play will be discussed shortly. Hippolyte’s gift with horses has obvious ironic significance, when Hippolyte falls in love with Aricie he begins to neglect the horses and they forget the sound of his voice (II, ii, 552). This dramatically foreshadows the end when, frightened by the monster that Hippolyte has just wounded, his horses drag their master to his death. They no longer know either the reins or Hippolyte’s voice (V, vi, 1535-1536). The image of the horse takes on new dimensions when viewed as a symbol of passion in the play. Hippolyte’s falling in love with Aricie coincides with a waning interest in horses (neglecting Neptune for Venus); his death may be viewed, in a sense, as punishment for his yielding to passion.
In addition to using the legendary origins of the characters in 
Phèdre to create personal legend having ironic consequences, Racine also 
uses the mythological allusions to emphasize the ironic workings of 
fatality, fatality being the impression that certain facts of human 
experience are beyond man's control, that things happen in spite of, not 
because of human effort (How many times the words malgré moi appear in 
Racine!). Phèdre cannot escape either from that aspect of herself 
represented by Pasiphaé, nor from that aspect represented by Minos. In 
this connection Racine also uses the gods. There is a clear and well-
developed opposition between Neptune and Venus running throughout Phèdre. 9 
The opposition is stated very precisely by Leo Spitzer: 10 The two gods 
work in different ways but taken together their actions contribute to the 
destruction of the family; Venus acts upon Phèdre by "direct persecution," 
Neptune upon Thésée by "loving protection," and both vie for Hippolyte's 
loyalties. Venus, goddess of love, represents the gratuitous, involun-
tary nature of passion. She has struck both Phèdre and Hippolyte, who have 
resisted in vain, for Venus is implacable. Ironically, Phèdre prays for 
Venus to strike Hippolyte. Her words betray her for she says only: "Qu'il 
aime... " (III, ii, 823). Or perhaps it is events which betray her since 
her sentence is interrupted by the return of Oenone. We know that her 
prayer has already been answered to the letter, but not as she meant it. 
Théramène verbalizes to Hippolyte the vanity of resistance to the gods: 
"Ah! Seigneur, si votre heure est une fois marquée,/ Le ciel de nos rai-
sons ne sait point s'informer" (I, i, 114-115). What he says applies also 
to Neptune's actions. Neptune, god of the sea, of horsemanship, of the
hunt, of chastity\textsuperscript{11} has promised to honor Thésée's first wish which turns out to be that he avenge him for Hippolyte's alleged betrayal. Thésée is warned about the insidiousness of the gods by Aricie:

\begin{quote}
Craignez, Seigneur, craignez que le ciel rigoureux
Ne vous haïsse assis pour exaucer vos voeux.
Souvent dans sa colère il reçoit nos victimes;
Ses présents sont souvent la peine de nos crimes.
\((V, \text{iii, 1435-1438})\)
\end{quote}

Spitzer\textsuperscript{12} points out that Thésée's belated recognition of the truth of this statement is highlighted by his oxymorons: funestes bienfaits, faveurs meurtrières, and funeste bonté \((V, v, 1483 \text{ and vii, 1613, 1615})\); there is also his exclamation: "Inexorables Dieux, qui m'avez trop servi!" \((V, \text{vi, 1572})\). In a sense Neptune, like Venus represents the danger of passion, for Thésée is finally punished for his impetuosity in believing in Hippolyte's guilt and for the swiftness of his anger. He says in a moment of recognition: "Et j'ai trop tôt vers toi levé mes mains cruelles" \((V, v, 1486)\).

Hippolyte trusted the gods as much as Thésée. His trust is brought to the fore one last time just before he leaves to meet his death. Insisting that Aricie remain silent about Phèdre, he says:

\begin{quote}
Sur l'équité des Dieux osons nous confier:
Ils ont trop d'intérêt à me justifier;
Et Phèdre, tôt ou tard de son crime punie,
N'en saurait éviter la juste ignominie. \((V, i, 1351-1354)\)
\end{quote}

The ironic mixture of truth and error in Hippolyte's statement emphasizes man's precarious judgment. Hippolyte is mistaken because he will perish at Neptune's hand, still believing in his own innocence \((V, \text{vi,
1561), but he is right in that Phèdre will be punished and will die, even if by her own action, in ignominy. From a certain point of view, then, the gods seem intentionally to betray man’s trust and to will to destroy him. But this intention is attributed to the gods who themselves never speak. The question of the role of the gods is finally an open one. Is Hippolyte an innocent victim of his parents’ folly? Or of the rivalry of Venus and Neptune? Are the gods merely mocking men? Or, is Hippolyte guilty? We would perhaps say yes and no to all these questions, qualifying our answers to allow for an interdependence, a shared responsibility between gods and men. A case can be built for the characters as victims of divine wrath and also as victims of their own failings. The gods in Racine, particularly in Phèdre, are often seen by critics as incarnations of inner human realities. But this does not resolve the ambiguity as to responsibility. Whether they are seen as gods or as projections of man, the mythological deities represent a fatalistic aspect of experience. Racine uses them to underline a view of man groping to orient himself in a world without precise horizons; or, if the boundaries are fixed, man has no sure means of reading the signals. It is perhaps the recognition of this ambiguity of the human condition which is the ultimate tragedy. Such is the view of Spitzer who sees the events of Phèdre as taking place ultimately for the disillusionment of Thésée. Whether or not we agree with Spitzer on the importance of Thésée’s role, he is a gripping figure of man seeking enlightenment until he (and Théramène) are, ironically, “trop éclaircis” (V, vii, 1647). It is Thésée who formulates man’s desire for certainty: “Et ne devrait-on pas à des signes certains/
Reconnaitre le coeur des perfides humains?" (IV, ii, 1039-1040), and he who expresses so poetically the coming of human doubt: "Quei ne plaintive voix crie au fond de mon coeur?" (V, iv, 1456). In this dilemma the gods, contrary to the characters' supplications, provide no help to Thésée, nor to Hippolyte, nor to Phèdre.

If the gods seem deliberately to thwart human efforts, the conjunction of circumstances in Phèdre appears to conspire against the characters in the manner of previous plays. Political circumstances furnish pretexts for meetings which should never take place—for example, the confession of Phèdre to Hippolyte (Upon Oenone's advice she comes to ask his protection for her son against Aricie). The timing of chance events precipitates disastrous results. In the case of Phèdre, the news of Thésée's death which arrives just after her confession to Oenone, seems, at least in Oenone's eyes, to make her passion legitimate. Even if Phèdre does not accept Oenone's opinion, the report not only leads her to admit her love to Hippolyte, something she never would have done had she not thought Thésée dead; more insidiously, it causes false hope to well up within her: "Et l'espoir, malgré moi, s'est glisé dans mon coeur" (III, 1, 763). Then the news that Phèdre's son has been chosen ruler of Athens gives Phèdre what she thinks is a point of leverage with Hippolyte. Mistakenly believing him ambitious (through misinterpretation of his earlier plans for departure), she thinks she can seduce him with offers of power. But when her hope has been formulated into a plan for action, the most cruel blow falls: Phèdre receives word that Thésée is alive (Aricie and Hippolyte have suspected as much but Phèdre was only too
certain of his death [XI, v, 623-626]. Fate continues in this manner to the end. We have already noted that just at the moment when Phèdre is perhaps on the verge of confessing her crime to Thésée, she learns of Hippolyte's love for Aricie and jealousy stuns her into silence. Finally, the news that Oenone has drowned herself precipitates Thésée's plea to Neptune to call off his vengeance, but the deed is already accomplished.

The circumstances of place also have a dramatic significance. For characters plagued by inner turmoil and uncertainty lieu becomes very important as a point of reference. But like everything else in which the characters place their trust—the gods, the apparently hopeful cast of a particular event or circumstance, the reputation of another person, the advice of their own confidants (especially Oenone), place also betrays the expectations of the characters. Place often have taken on a kind of fixed association rather like the personal legends of some of the characters. Trésène had always been for Hippolyte "l'aimable Trésène" (I, i, 2), the preferred haunt of his childhood and adolescence. The disquietude he experiences upon falling in love with Aricie is reflected in his desire to leave Trésène. But it was upon the arrival of Phèdre that the place had ceased to be for him the refuge that it was formerly. By the end of the play this place has become "un lieu funeste et profané" (V, i, 1359). The same irony is apparent in the choice of the spot where Hippolyte finally dies, a holy place which was to be the site of his marriage. Hippolyte describes it:

Aux portes de Trésène, et parmi ces tombeaux,
Des princes de ma race antiques sépultures,
Est un temple sacré formidable aux parfumes.
C'est là que les mortels n'osent jurer en vain:
Le perfide y reçoit un châtiment soudain;
Et craignant d'y trouver la mort inévitable,
Le mensonge n'a point de frein plus redoutable. (V, i, 1392-1398)

This place of punishment for the perfide is where the gods witness,
not Hippolyte's marriage, as he had anticipated, but his death.16

The uncanny faculty of characters to predict the misfortunes which
will befall them without comprehending their own words also makes them
appear as unknowing collaborators in their own victimization by circum-
stance. There are very obvious examples like Oenone's: "Mon âme chez
les morts descendra la première" (I, iii, 230), Phèdre's: "Puisque Vénus
le veut, de ce sang déplorable/ Je périr la dernière et la plus misérable"
(I, iii, 257-258), and Aricie's explanation to Thésée of her conversation
with Hippolyte: "... il me disait un éternel adieu" (V, iii, 1416). But
in addition, the more one reads Racine, the more one sees in line after
line that the characters' ways of summing up their present circumstance
or expressing their immediate feeling contain hidden allusions to the
sequence of events which cause their doom. Hippolyte, trying to convince
Thésée that he is innocent, says: "Par quel affreux serment faut-il vous
rassurer? Que la terre, le ciel, que toute la nature ... " (IV, ii,
1132-1133), words which evoke Neptune's promise to Thésée and call forth
Théramène's description of nature's reaction to the monster. Everything
points to destruction.

While, on the one hand all the outward forces in Phèdre contri-
bute to the impression of external fatality, conversely, the characters'
destinies seem also to come from forces within themselves. If the gods
are viewed as a symbolic reflection of human passion the latter impression
is reinforced even more. Throughout this discussion we have seen examples of the conflicting impulses in the characters resulting from their passion. We have seen inner resistance to passion's desire to speak out reflected in the prevalence of understatement. We have seen how the dual heritage of a character pulls him simultaneously in opposite directions. We will now briefly examine the mechanism of Phèdre's passion as it destroys her. Initially it was stated that this tragedy derives from the coexistence of conscience and passion in Phèdre. Like the passion of Roxane, that of Phèdre is an autonomous force which seeks its own ends in spite of all obstacles. The major obstacle seems to be the criminal nature of the passion, hence Phèdre's own moral sense. As opposed to passion which impels to action, conscience is a negative phenomenon which tries to keep instincts in check. Although Phèdre's conscience condemns her passion, no degree of resistance can make love vanish. At the beginning of the play Phèdre is determined to die. Insidiously, however, passion shows its despotic nature. It weakens the resistance of her conscience until she gives in to Oenone and tells her secret. When the news of Thésée's death arrives, Phèdre, in the presence of Hippolyte, yields to the self-deception of passion and begins to hope, even forms a plan of action and sends Oenone to try to win over Hippolyte's sympathy. Thus, the real obstacle which kept passion from working was Thésée, not conscience. With the reappearance of Thésée and the end of hope, the other face of love, hatred, shows itself. Phèdre imagines the shame of having Hippolyte, who knows her guilty secret, see her face Thésée (IV, iii, 841-844). Her humiliation will be all the greater because Hippolyte has scorned her. In
addition, she fears that Hippolyte will denounce her to Thésée. In keeping with passion's way of finding pretexts, Phèdre now imagines her children being burdened with their mother's crime, as she was. In effect, her passion is using her conscience to find a pretext for getting back at Hippolyte. Nothing could be more treacherous. But it is the sight of Hippolyte's "yeux insolents" (III, iii, 910) (which her passion formerly read as "noble pudeur" [II, v, 642]) as he approaches with Thésée which confirms her hatred and which finally makes Phèdre ignore the objections of her conscience and acquiesce to Oenone's offer to accuse Hippolyte before he can accuse her. Passion once more overrides conscience, resulting in action.

In her next appearance on the stage Phèdre comes to Thésée to try to persuade him to spare Hippolyte (IV, iv). She learns that Thésée has invoked Neptune's vengeance (where is the supplice léger [III, iii, 902] which Oenone claimed would suffice for a father's anger?); in Thésée's next breath he discloses Hippolyte's love for Aricie. Now when conscience calls for action, calls for clearing Hippolyte's name to prevent his innocent death, Phèdre is seized by jealousy. Alone with Oenone, she is in torment (IV, vi). She imagines the young couple in the darkness of the forest following their lovers' inclinations without remorse, while she, for the sake of honor, has been forced to deprive herself even of the pleasure of her own tears. This anguish which leads her to the desire to punish Aricie is followed by self-horror as she becomes aware of what she is saying: "Chaque mot sur mon front fait dresser mes cheveux./ Mes crimes désormais ont comblé la mesure" (IV, vi, 1268-1269). But passion
vies with conscience even for the nature of Phèdre's suffering, forcing her mind to return to her frustrated love. She exclaims: "Hélas! du crime affreux dont la honte me suit/ Jamais mon triste coeur n'a recueilli la fruit" (IV, vi, 1291-1292). When Oenone tries one last time to excuse her mistress, to take away even the redeeming quality of her guilt, Phèdre is jolted into recognition and anger. Completely destroyed by what she has become, she repudiates Oenone for flattering her weaknesses. All that is left for Phèdre to do is to expose to Thésée both her criminal passion and the anguish of remorse which she feels. Phèdre's physical death is insignificant beside the annihilation of her inner being which she has experienced.

We have seen how many kinds of irony woven into the fabric of a tragedy contribute to the tragic emotion of the audience. By continual foreshadowing, dramatic irony contributes to the impression of the characters as victims of forces both within and without. Verbal irony and understatement communicate the shrinking back from their own experience which the characters undergo, the tension between concealing and revealing their inner selves. Tragic irony is ultimately inseparable from the kind of plays Racine creates.
FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER V


4 p. 741.


6 The role of Phèdre's passion in amplifying the legend is made clear in what she says when the illusion has been shattered:

"Ce farouche ennemi qu'on ne pouvait dompter,
Qu'offensait le respect, qu'imposait la plainte,
Ce tigre, qui jamais je n'abordeais sans crainte,
Soumis, apprivoisé, reconnaît un vainqueur."

(IV, vi, 1220-1223)

7 The difference in the nature and circumstances of their love is highlighted by the ironic juxtaposition of Phèdre's inability to pronounce Hippolyte's name to Oenone with the beginning of Act II which shows Aricie repeating joyfully the name of Hippolyte in anticipation of seeing him.

8 For an interesting and detailed discussion of this metaphor see Rupert T. Pickens, "Hippolyte's Horses: A Study of Metaphorical Action in Racine's Phèdre," Romance Notes, IX (Spring, 1968), 267-277.

10 "Récit," p. 93.

11 See Pickens on Racine's substitution of Neptune for Diana.

12 "Récit," p. 97.


14 "Récit," p. 93.

15 Paul Bénichou states that Racine has used three circumstances more pointedly than his modern predecessors: 1) the absence of Thésée, 2) the action of the nurse, and 3) the situation of Athens. See *L'Ecrivain et ses travaux* (Paris, José Corti, 1967), p. 310.

16 For further discussion see Spitzer, "Récit," pp. 127-128, note 6.
CONCLUSION

In summary, in this study the numerous manifestations of irony in Racine's tragedies have been grouped into two basic categories: verbal irony and dramatic irony. We saw in Chapter One how each kind of irony involves three different elements. First, there is an intellectually perceived paradox or tension between statement and meaning, appearance and reality, aspiration and achievement. Second, irony has a basis in emotion on a scale from mild disappointment to severe disillusionment. In verbal irony, the characters attempt to conceal their own emotions, while in dramatic irony, the audience anticipates the future disillusionment of the characters. This anticipated disillusionment is also tied up with the audience's own notion of the way things ought to be as opposed to the real order of the universe as seen in the play. Third, there is an element of mockery in irony. Verbal irony is used to ridicule oneself or others; dramatic irony results in the impression that the natural order mocks human effort and judgment.

Chapter Two treated verbal irony as used directly by the characters in their communications with one another. For characters preoccupied with frustrated passion and inner conflict, verbal irony provides a way of attempting to maintain control over or at least to conceal violent emotions. Verbal irony enables these characters to defend themselves from those who thwart their desires and thus threaten their autonomy. Particularly characters like Hermione, Pyrrhus, and Oreste, whose happiness depends on a person unmoved by their love, use verbal irony to throw up a shield around the vulnerable core of their person. Verbal
irony also makes it possible for a character like Néron to strike out at those around him who would check his power, to attempt to weaken others through a kind of refined intimidation which pretends to be within the limits of decorum. The attacker, while striking at the emotional center of the other person, feigns indifference on his part. By what it conceals and at the same time reveals verbal irony helps to center the attention of the audience on the source of tragedy in Racine.

Dramatic irony in these tragedies is the continual exploitation of the cumulative knowledge of the audience as juxtaposed to the continuing ignorance of the characters. In Chapter Three we saw how stylistic and vocabulary patterns highlight contradictions between the intentions and expectations of the characters and what the audience knows to be their future destruction. Set expressions such as "la dernière fois" and "c'en est fait" reflect the tendency of characters to look at their destinies in terms of absolutes, definitive steps. In contrast we see the simultaneous habit of regarding one's fate as always contingent on a word or a glance from another. The characters continually suffer the anguish but rarely experience the relief of finality. Another stylistic device is the use of antithesis and oxymoron for the ironic juxtaposition of contradictory tendencies and situations. Likewise, the repetition of key words and images in different contexts creates ironic effects. Autel in Iphigénie reflects the dual significance of the altar—marriage/death—which is at first unknown to the characters in all its ramifications.

Chapter Four shows how structural patterns are used to create ironic effects. Racine selected aspects of the legendary background of
the plays for their tragic value in terms of the destinies of the characters. References to future events beyond the scope of the action of the play itself contribute to the impression that the characters are doomed. Fatality is also developed through the role of the gods. In the most extreme case—Athalie—the characters are merely actors in God's drama—their own efforts are seen as futile from the beginning. Racine also creates irony through the nature of situation and event. The intermingling of politics and emotions, of public and private concerns enmeshes the characters in hopeless contradictions. Political circumstances brought together Bérénice, Titus, and Antiochus. These same circumstances force them to separate once they have become involved emotionally with each other. The timing and arrangement of chance events deepens irony in the plays. In Bérénice two delayed events—Titus' announcement to Bérénice that she must leave, and Antiochus' departure—ultimately increase the unhappiness of the characters. The whole action in Mithridate and his own downfall are precipitated by a false report spread by Mithridate himself. While circumstances and events seem to conspire against the characters, Racinian man at the same time appears to be a victim of forces within himself which work for his misfortune almost in spite of external events. The mechanism of passion in Bajazet moves Roxane from doubt to hope to despair. Each moment of lucidity leads her back to illusions. Passion results in fatal hesitation and vacillation before what the character knows he must do. It results in ironic errors of judgment, misinterpretations stemming from the characters' blind preoccupation with themselves. Racine continually emphasizes the way the characters'
own passions lead them to their destruction. In the final chapter we saw how all these various kinds of irony work together most admirably in Phèdre to contribute to the total tragic effect.

By his use of irony Racine was both a poet of his time and an original writer. Elbert Borgerhoff makes the statement that seventeenth century literature was predominantly a dualistic literature, that it was bred much more on irrationality, contradiction and paradox than the conventional descriptions would have us believe. Themes of paradox in human nature and the universe, of disorder, of the falseness of appearances as well as many of the rhetorical forms Racine uses to create irony were not uncommon. The devices of antithesis and oxymoron were part of the graco-latin rhetoric which everyone learned. As we saw in the discussion of language, Racine's originality did not lie in his seeking the unusual; rather it consisted in his way of using the conventions of the day and transforming them by his own art, making them his own. He gave new life to traditional forms and themes and made them an integral part of his work.

We have seen in this study how irony in many forms not only appears in Racine's tragedies, but seems to be called forth by the nature of events, by the complexity of the passions of the characters which clash with the rigidity of their social and political roles. The conflict between their values and their nature results in an experience of defeat and disillusionment. Irony contributes to the impression of the victimization of the characters. When events are continually shown to be different from what they seem, when assumptions and judgment are seen as lacking
the certainty on which the characters rely, when human effort works
against rather than for the characters, and the best intentions go astray,
the order of things, be it called gods or fate, seems to conspire for man's
destruction. The effect of dramatic irony is all the more powerful in
Racine because of the stylized nature of the tragedies. The ultimate
issues of destiny are always before the audience and the characters;
there is no comic relief; the characters experience no dissipation of their
energies or hopes in the daily business of living. Irony helps to keep
the tragedy at a high pitch. Its use might be compared to a flash film
technique: by continually projecting in the mind of the audience momen-
tary images of the ultimate destruction of the characters, of the dire
consequences of their actions, Racine creates the impression that the
characters are rushing to their doom. The futility of their efforts
and the treachery of the world is highlighted.

Tragedy in Racine does not come primarily from the death of the
characters. Death itself is often merciful release. The tragedy comes
from the fact that the characters do not submit to their destiny; there
is a constant inner resistance, to the end. Léon Brunschvicg points
out that even when a character like Oreste tries to accept the workings
of fate, he is unsuccessful in doing so. The constant inner resistance
to fate translates itself in verbal irony and understatement. Vera
Orgel says that Racinian characters are "pursuers by nature" but are
denied pursuit. Their nature is such that they demand the unlawful.
Bérénice, for example, is destined to love someone for whom love cannot
come first. But Bérénice, even though she must separate from Titus, will
never resign herself to her destiny. She will be internally destroyed by it as long as she lives. The protagonists of Corneille are above their fate—their inner happiness does not depend on fortune. But the heroes of Racine depend for their happiness on something outside themselves, usually the love of another person. Thus fate has a much greater hold on them. Their ultimate destiny is disillusionment and despair.

In a lecture given at Louisiana State University in New Orleans, Jules Brody defined tragedy as the processes, actions and attitudes by which characters achieve unhappiness. This definition appropriately reflects the fundamental paradox of Racinian characters: they believe they can find happiness, or at least hope and strive for it in spite of impossible obstacles; their efforts only bring them misfortune and unhappiness. Yet these words are too mild to characterize their experience, which, as we have seen, is finally indescribable. The most significant aspect of irony is what it hides, betrays, suggests, not what it says. Verbal irony arises from and reflects the present disillusionment of the characters; dramatic irony depends on the capacity of the audience to project the characters' future disillusionment. Much of the complexity of Racine stems precisely from the suggestive power of his lines. Suggestive power is at the basis of irony. It is also the foundation of poetry. In this respect the two aspects approach and complement one another in Racine, both of them working to involve the reader's imagination and shape his emotional reaction to the events of the play. Both lead us into the realm of inner human experience which remains always complex, always elusive, and in Racine, always tragic.
FOOTNOTES

CONCLUSION


4 For a discussion of stylization in Racine see Odette de Bourgues, Racine or the Triumph of Relevance (Cambridge, England: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1967), chap. III.

5 "De l'Ironie dans les tragédies de Racine," Pt. II, Revue des cours et conférences, 35th année, 1re série, 30 décembre, 1931, p. 145.


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