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# REWRITING FOR REDEMPTION: ADAPTING THE EPIC IN LA CEPPÈDE'S *THÉORÈMES*

Russell Ganim

## INTRODUCTION

Jean de La Ceppède's *Théorèmes* (1613, 1622), raise intriguing issues concerning the question of generic adaptation. Elsewhere, I have shown that the *Théorèmes* can be classified under the rubric of the lyric not merely because the text consists of 520 sonnets on Christ's Passion, but because these sonnets, both individually, and within the collective context of the sonnet sequence, often represent appropriations of common Renaissance lyric subgenres such as the *blason*, the *baiser*, and the pastoral/*pastourelle*.<sup>1</sup> La Ceppède's structural adaptation of the lyric is supplemented by the presence of the *je/poète* who internalizes the narrative as he recounts it. Thematically, La Ceppède illustrates the lyric dimension of the *Théorèmes* by accentuating the relationship between the lover and the beloved, with the poet often assuming the former role and Christ the latter. Nonetheless, La Ceppède's reliance on lyric form and theme does not preclude him from incorporating key elements of the epic genre into his work. While the substantial length of the *Théorèmes* in and of itself does not qualify it as an epic text,<sup>2</sup> the scale of the work, which depicts Christ as the hero of a cosmic drama, where humanity's very existence is at stake, clearly lends a sense of urgency and grandeur indicative of epic. In addition, the references La Ceppède makes to Homer, Virgil, and Ovid in his annotations suggest a desire to imitate epic models so as to lend a sense of literary authority to the *Théorèmes*. Though this study will not include an exhaustive analysis of La Ceppède's allusions to epic poets, it will show how La Ceppède adapts certain structural, stylistic, and thematic elements of classical epic in order to suit his devotional project of representing literature as an instrument of salvation. Structurally, La Ceppède constructs an "epic" narrative composed of codependent episodes which lend unity and coherence to the various incidents that constitute the text's action. In turn, this "action" is recounted by the narrator who follows the Dantesque tradition of establishing a voice that is both impersonal and personal in nature. Like Homer, Virgil, and Milton, the presentation of La Ceppède's narrative is "classical" in the sense that there are several moments when the  *récit* seemingly relates supernatural, absolute truths recounted by a dispassionate narrator. Yet, the contemplative nature of the poet's work projects an internal, almost autobio-

graphical reality that is often relative, unstable, and subjective. The goal of the narrator's internalization is to heighten the identification between Christ, the poet, and the reader. Part of La Ceppède's "rewriting" of the epic lies in his focus on the meditant, be he the poet or the reader. The result is what Lance Donaldson-Evans calls an "Épopée méditative" (14–15).<sup>3</sup> La Ceppède thus creates a new kind of epic protagonist, one who experiences the principal hero's ordeal. Donaldson-Evans mentions this idea, but does not develop it to any great length. It is thus my goal to examine in detail the comparisons and contrasts between La Ceppède's "meditative epic" and other versions of the genre.

From a stylistic perspective, the travails of the protagonist, and by extension the reader, are frequently related in a digressive, tangential manner. Borrowing from Homeric and Virgilian tradition, La Ceppède makes use of the technique of delay in the exposition of his narrative. Often, the time between when an event is announced and the moment it actually takes place is unusually long. Apart from the traditional reasons of creating suspense, La Ceppède's use of delay can be explained by its relevance to the poet's devotional aims. Initially, delay allows the meditant sufficient time to contemplate Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection. Secondly, the extended moments the reader/*dévo*t spends internalizing Christ's Passion will impress upon him/her the patience and personal will needed to apprehend the breadth of Christ's sacrifice. Digression underscores the slow, asymptotic way God reveals and hides the mystery of his design for the universe.

That Christ accepts this plan in which he must not only suffer humiliation and death, but also redeem those responsible, distinguishes Christ from all other epic heroes. Adhering to epic tradition, La Ceppède depicts his protagonist as a warrior. Unlike Achilles and Aeneas, however, Christ is a hero whose strength is found in restraint and capitulation.<sup>4</sup> Christ, though capable of laying waste to his enemies, surrenders to them so as to save his people through compassion rather than brutality. La Ceppède undoes what Northrop Frye calls the "epic of wrath" in part by creating a hero who, in contrast to Achilles, exhibits no anger or, by extension, vanity. From the standpoint of literary criticism, Frye's various classifications of the epic prove useful to this study. Along with the "epic of wrath," Frye describes the "epic of return" based on the Greek motif of the hero's homecoming or *nostos*, primarily found in the *Odyssey*. On a general level, the *Théorèmes* portray God's return to Earth through Christ to reclaim his kingdom. On a more particular level, Christ's return to Jerusalem after his flight to Gethsemane also reinforces this topos. The link between Frye's third type of epic, which is "closely analogous in its symbolism" to the first two, and the *Théorèmes* seems self-evident in that it refers to narratives based on a "Messianic cycle of pre-existence, life-in-death, and resurrection" (317). According to this definition, La Ceppède's Christ embodies the culmination, if not the literalization, of the messianic topoi found in Homeric and Virgilian antecedents. Frye's fourth type, the "contrast-epic," makes the most direct appeal to the reader by establishing "two poles, one... is the ironic human situation, and the other the origin and continuation of divine society" (317). In Frye's view, Dante represents this latter type because the *Commedia* emphasizes both the human characteristics of the narrator (especially his fear), and a

greater divine vision.<sup>5</sup> With respect to the *Théorèmes*, the “contrast” can be found in La Ceppède’s two-tiered narration in which the poet gives an “objective” account of Christ’s salutary mission, while simultaneously testifying to his own subjective experience as he tries to comprehend what this mission means on an individual and a collective level. Frye’s analysis of epic is especially helpful in understanding La Ceppède because it indicates the various registers at which the poet’s version of the epic finds expression, while situating the *Théorèmes* within literary tradition. What one observes in La Ceppède’s text is an overlapping of these different epic types that reflects the synthetic, cumulative nature of the poet’s adaptation of the genre.

This essay, then, will discuss the “rewriting” of epic through imitation and appropriation of 1) narrative voice, 2) the technique of delay, and 3) the portrait of the hero/protagonist which encompasses both Christ and the *je/dévoit*, represented alternately by the poet and the reader. Close textual analysis, coupled with references to Frye’s categorizations of epic, will illustrate how the poet’s modulation of classical form hinges on the personalization of Christ’s struggle, thus rendering the Passion accessible to a modern, or in this case, early modern public. Before passing to specific examples, however, it will be useful to define the epic by looking more precisely at the historical models upon which La Ceppède draws, while also examining the state of the epic at the time the poet wrote.

#### HISTORY, DEFINITIONS, AND LA CEPPÈDE’S CHOICE OF THE EPIC

In many respects, one finds that the *Théorèmes* represent the convergence of various elements which have come to shape the epic over time, especially within the western tradition. A brief look at a standard definition of the epic reveals similarities to La Ceppède’s text:

In literature, an epic is a narrative poem on the grand scale and in majestic style concerning the exploits and adventures of a superhuman hero (or heroes) engaged in a quest or some serious endeavor. The hero is distinguished above all men by his strength and courage, and is restrained only by a sense of honor. The subject-matter of epic includes myth, legend, history, and folk tale. It is usually set in a heroic age of the past and embodies its country’s early history and expresses its values.

(Howatson 213–14)

The *Théorèmes* evoke many of these characteristics *in extremis* in that the “grand scale,” the “superhuman hero,” and the “heroic age of the past” ostensibly find their ultimate expression in Christ’s misery and rebirth. Because of La Ceppède’s need to “vouch for the truth of his story” (213), it would be difficult to assert that “folk tale” is part of La Ceppède’s project to combine epic poetry and religion. However, the poet does incorporate many mythical, historical, and to a lesser extent legendary motifs in order to underscore how Christ embodies the *telos* of these precedents by furnishing

a salutary response to all the narratives that have preceded his. According to J. B. Hainsworth, the subject of the epic often originates from the Homeric ethos of the *klea andron*, or “glorious deeds of heroes” (24). Added to the *klea andron* is the hero’s sense of valor and preeminence with respect to his peers (25). Christ’s superiority is such that he emerges as the *heros heroicum*, with his virtuous acts comprising the *fabula fabulum*. Given that most literary critics of the Renaissance and baroque periods considered the epic to be the highest-ranking literary genre, it is no surprise that La Ceppède sought to marry the supreme genre with the supreme literary text, i.e., the Bible.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, the *Théorèmes* become part of the literary type known as the “Biblical epic” in the early seventeenth century.<sup>7</sup> Because of its emphasis on magnitude both in substance and tone, the epic presents itself as an ideal medium for La Ceppède’s poetic ambition. In addition, the “superiority” of the epic is affirmed in Hainsworth’s assertion that the genre depicts a “continuous supernatural presence” (27), which in turn underscores the idea that most epics are characterized by a certain religiosity, regardless of whether or not they correspond to the specialized genre of the Biblical epic. Historically, the recitation of epic poems is linked to religious festivals. In this vein, the devotional nature of the *Théorèmes* is reinforced by the fact that La Ceppède wrote the text in part for meditation during Easter Week, especially the period from Good Friday to Easter Sunday. To the extent that the *Théorèmes* belong to a tradition of poetry written for religious celebration, the work reflects one of the epic’s most original, fundamental traits.

The epic’s religious dimension raises the question of what possible ties exist between the genre and divine mystery. That issues of mystery are central to La Ceppède’s text is evident in the title of the work, *Les Théorèmes sur le sacré mystère de notre rédemption*. In La Ceppède’s case, a *théorème* resembles not so much a mathematical proof as it does a reasoned examination of the events comprising Christ’s sacrifice as represented through poetic discourse. The *théorème* process articulates mystery and proposes explanations for it, but ultimately retains the inscrutable or the ineffable as a means of interpreting divine gesture and will. One can argue that the epic reveals similar traits in that human and sometimes divine action can be analyzed in either rational or emotional terms, but that often the Gods or Fate operate in a manner that remains largely indecipherable to humanity. Speaking of Greek epic, Hainsworth suggests that the Gods hold final authority not only because they are “powerful,” but “unpredictable,” and thereby “decide [outcomes] for their own reasons” (28). When considering the traits that historically constitute the epic, it becomes apparent that the mystery associated with the Gods’ actions in Greek versions of the genre can be easily transferred to La Ceppède’s Christian epic. The supernatural and the mysterious combine to form what R. A. Sayce calls the “merveilleux,” where pagan and Christian themes contribute to a “magical element” (162) in the Biblical epic which creates a “classical atmosphere” (163) that informs the early modern Christian poesis of the genre.

Nonetheless, the epic’s (classical and Biblical) sense of the supernatural is complemented by what Hainsworth calls a “believed historicity” endemic to the genre. Here, the public believes the poet is telling an “eternal truth” (25) about events that

have already happened. As a result, one characteristic of early epic is that at least theoretically, the audience of the period in which the epic is written accepts as truthful the incidents surrounding the battle of Troy, the founding of Rome, the battle of Roncevaux, etc. "Believed historicity" is crucial to La Ceppède's devotional public because without belief in the veracity of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, the narrator's project loses all legitimacy. It can also be argued that for a nonbelieving public, the poet's goal would be to convince the audience of the Passion's historical verity, thereby winning the conversion of those unreceptive or even hostile to La Ceppède's design.

Such coexisting supernatural and historical subtexts produce a collective sense of self for the people described in the epic tale. George Lord contends that the hero's challenge in some measure reflects that of everyone, "becoming a pattern for the initiatory rites for other members of society" (6). Clearly, Christ's doubt, death, and rebirth prefigure the spiritual ordeal of all believers ranging from the Apostles to the poet/*dévo*t. Within the Christian dispensation, Christ's life serves as a model for his followers, with individual experiences becoming universal. At the same time that the trials of Christ's life typify the suffering all his faithful will have to endure, the poet's internalization of Christ's trauma gives the reader a closer figure than Christ with whom to identify. Christ, like Achilles, Aeneas, and Francus, sets the standard for his people. But by definition, Christ is more God-like than these other figures and thus remains significantly inaccessible and indecipherable despite the narrator's attempt to humanize him. Within the contemplative framework of the *Théorèmes*, the poet/meditant becomes the most direct representative of the reader. La Ceppède's work is as much the narrative of the *dévo*t as it is Christ's, with the psycho-spiritual battle of the poet marking a distinctly Christian experience coterminous with the epic events that are the Passion. The two levels at which reader identification operates in the *Théorèmes* produce two interpretations of what constitutes the presumed truth of the Christian experience. On the one hand, the reader's attempt to emulate, or even to understand either classical epic heroes or Christ suggests the desire to find, in Lord's terms, "truths which are objective and spiritually authoritative in nature" (1). By contrast, Lord states that twentieth-century variations of the epic such as *Heart of Darkness* are much more "modern" in the sense that they depict a more personal, inconstant, vision of reality. By shifting between the early epic tradition, which claims to purport objective, eternal verities, and adaptations that portray more subjective points of view, La Ceppède emerges as both a "classical" and a "modern" epic poet. He becomes a mediator between epochs in part because his project requires him to do so. The poet's situation is problematic because he must communicate a timeless, immutable set of beliefs to a baroque public increasingly aware of its ability to question these convictions. In short, he must summon a collective voice when that of the individual increases in strength. Consequently, La Ceppède addresses two "peoples" in his epic: the Christian, especially Catholic nation needing to hear about the magnanimity of its Savior, and particular readers who must intellectually and emotionally struggle with their ability to apply Christ's munificence to their own lives.

From a generic standpoint, La Ceppède's decision to appropriate the epic changes

his role as a poet. Unlike the lyric poet who expresses his particular voice by developing his own persona, the epic poet, according to E. M. W. Tillyard, “must express the feelings of a large group of people living in or near his own time,” in effect becoming their “mouthpiece” (6). As many scholars have shown, the *Théorèmes* were written during the Counter-Reformation, and set forth a vigorous reaffirmation of Catholic beliefs. Yet, while La Ceppède’s text certainly mirrors the religious and political conditions of his day, the very nature of the *Théorèmes* is such that the poet must imbue the text with a timeless quality that appeals to future readers. La Ceppède accomplishes this goal by depicting his poet as a mediator between humanity and God and one who embodies human emotion and doubt, while echoing the divine word. Accordingly, La Ceppède’s poet comes to resemble a demiurge who, despite his sin and other shortcomings, does possess a creative skill that shows an entire people, as well as a single individual, how literary endeavor can lead to salvation. In the manner of Christ, La Ceppède’s narrator guides his people toward redemption by serving as an avatar of the mental and affective experience necessary to attain grace.

The combination of the classical and the individual coincides with the humanistic ethos of the Renaissance. As noted, the epic in the Renaissance and baroque eras constituted not only a popular, but prestigious genre which authors of La Ceppède’s intellectual background no doubt felt compelled to imitate in one form or another. Of the “national” epics in vogue at the time, Torquato Tasso’s *Rinaldo* (1562) and Ronsard’s *Franciade* (1572) come to mind as important examples.<sup>8</sup> “National epic” often coincided with the “historical epic” of this period, which David Maskell defines as epic based on either “what was narrated by historians,” or “in some cases contemporary events” (1). Maskell notes that “historical epic” had to have “a Christian subject” in order to be “acceptable” (3). Specifically, these “Christian subjects” were often “Christian kings” (114) whose exploits paralleled that of Biblical characters. Two examples Maskell discusses are Sebastien Garnier’s *Loyssée* (1593), as well as his *Henriade* (1593–94), which also raise the theme, typical in the epic, of the veneration of ancestors.<sup>9</sup> As a Medieval/Renaissance variation of the epic, the historical epic was in turn closely associated with the Biblical epic, which found expression in works such as Du Bartas’s *La Judit* (1574), as well as his *Semaine ou la Création du monde* (1578), and the *Seconde Semaine* (1584). Scève’s *Microcosme* (1562), and the Reformist D’Aubigné’s *Tragiques* (1616) also belong to this small, but relatively well-defined canon. What distinguishes La Ceppède and the *Théorèmes* from these authors and works is the poet’s ability to incorporate a sense of scale and unity into his text, while developing the singular voice of the poet/meditant. If one takes *La Judit* as a counterexample, the reader notes that while the text outlines vast plot parameters, “there is,” according to Sayce, “no hero who could unify these diverse elements by his continual presence” (41). At the same time, the narrator’s presence is also frequently muted. As a result, the uniqueness of La Ceppède’s project lies in his ability to sustain a macroscopic and microscopic perspective within what is ostensibly a grand narrative construct. More than these other authors, La Ceppède personalizes the epic to the point where lyric and epic voice become virtually indistinguishable.

ESTABLISHING THE *Théorèmes* AS EPIC IN THE WORK'S INAUGURAL SONNET

The epic construct of the *Théorèmes* is discernable in the text's opening poem. This sonnet is particularly remarkable because of the multiple levels—structural, technical, and substantive—that signal the epic dimension of the text's generic identity:

Je chante les amours, les armes, la victoire  
 Du Ciel, qui pour la Terre a la Mort combatu:  
 Qui pour la relever sur le bleu promontoire  
 A l'Avernal Colosse à ses pieds abatu.

J'ay long temps, ô mon Christ, cet ozer debatu  
 En fin je me resous d'entonner cette histoire:  
 Espure donc cet air de mes poulmons batu,  
 Et m'aprens à chanter ce Propiciatoire.

Pour fournir dignement cet ouvrage entrepris,  
 Remply moy l'Esprit qui remplit les esprits  
 Des antiques ouvriers du Tabernacle antique.

Purifie ma bouche au feu de ce Charbon,  
 Qui jadis repurgea la bouche Prophetique:  
 Et je te chanteray tout-puissant & tout bon.<sup>10</sup>

(I, I, I)

The most distinct parallel to the epic is the *invocatio*, a variation of Virgil's *Arma uirumque cano*. La Ceppède's poet, like Virgil's, will sing of arms and men, represented as "la Terre" in verse 2, but will sing primarily of heaven and its victorious struggle with sin and damnation, described in the same verse as "la Mort." From the beginning of the work then, the narrator creates a context reminiscent of epic in that the protagonist, Christ, must face the central challenge of confronting and defeating evil. Though the narrator assures the reader that Christ will triumph, he suggests that the battle has been waged, and will continue to be waged over a long period of time. The poet's doubt over his personal resolve, as well as the validity of his project (vv.5–6), suggests that "man" will have to "arm" himself spiritually as the conflict begins.

As in the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and the *Aeneid*, the *Théorèmes* begin *in medias res*, at the nadir of cyclical action in that the work begins with a tense lull before the principal events of the plot occur. Frye speaks of classical epic's "cyclical form" which is characterized by two main rhythms—the "life and death" of the protagonist, and the "slower social rhythm which...[over time] brings cities and empires to their rise and fall" (318). In La Ceppède, this notion is represented by the parallel between Christ's life, and the rise, defeat, and renewal of God's kingdom, here alluded to as the "Ciel" (v.2). To a significant extent, the *Théorèmes* deal with the menace to, and resurrection of God's kingdom, with Part I of the work focusing on Christ's suffering and death, and Part II describing the Resurrection. While the first sonnet does not yet



specifically indicate the sorrow awaiting Christ, it does suggest that his battle and victory will lead to a kind of restoration of the earth (vv.3–4), a restoration that echoes his departure from and eventual return to Jerusalem described two sonnets later.<sup>11</sup> From a critical standpoint, Frye's interpretation of both the "return of the hero" and the "messianic cycle" apply because the protagonist's ordeal eventually leads to the building or rebuilding of the homeland in which the individual hero, as well as his people, emerge unvanquished and redeemed.

With respect to reestablishing authority over the earth (I,1,1), and over Jerusalem (I,1,3), one notices a particular similarity between the *Théorèmes* and the *Iliad*, where the city is in a state of siege and captivity.<sup>12</sup> Unlike Troy, Jerusalem has a more powerful warrior who will resist its invaders and eventually free the city. In the bulk of the inaugural sonnet, however, the siege is more internal than external, as the narrator prays to maintain his constancy as he witnesses the ensuing turmoil. To a large extent, the prayer of the *invocatio* is a request for Christ to return in the form of the Holy Spirit in order to quell the narrator's agitated mind (vv. 9–11). The promise of Christ's return alludes to the *nostos* motif of the *Odyssey*, but operates on a spiritual as well as a physical level, as Christ inhabits not only the earth and the city of Jerusalem, but the heart of the meditant. As the narrator begins his own contemplative epic, it is important to bear in mind that his role is not passive. In effect, the poet will do the same type of rebuilding as Christ. The poet's mission to redeem poetry from its corrupt past and present state helps inform the analogy he draws between himself and the "ouvriers du Tabernacle antique" (v.11). This reference is important for two reasons. As a basic symbol, the tabernacle in Exodus 31 suggests a hall of worship erected in God's glory. In a figurative sense, the poet, and by extension the reader, will (re)build themselves from doubters to believers via the Holy Spirit. From the standpoint of epic, however, the tabernacle takes on a deeper meaning in that the Greek meaning of the term, i.e., a "tent," indirectly alludes to Achilles's retreat to his tent at the beginning of the *Iliad*. In Exodus 31:7, Yahweh directs Moses to build a "Tent of Meeting" equipped with all the necessary furnishings to welcome the faithful. The contrast between the Bible's tent and Homer's is clear enough. Achilles repairs to his tent to pout; in effect erecting a temple to his own egotism, while God constructs a dwelling that will serve as model for human salvation. Christ's charge, as well as the poet's, is to lead humanity to this tabernacle, be it in the physical form of an actual church, or the spiritual form of contact with God. The epic topos elicited from this shared effort to deliver humanity, or at the very least the poet/protagonist, from evil is that of *post tenebras lux* (Madelénat 44), as found in Homer, Virgil, and Dante. This topos implies, if not promises, a gloriously peaceful resolution of the disorder caused by cosmic and personal upheaval. Nonetheless, while Christ, the warrior/hero (referred to in the following sonnet as "cet Alcide," and "le vray Jupiter"), is assured of victory in his mission to redeem humankind, the poet/hero, charged with redeeming poetry, enjoys no such certainty of success. The narrator's dependence on Christ underscores the former's inferiority. One could argue that because of his doubt, anxiety, and total reliance on Christ, the daunted poet represents a human counterweight to Christ's perfection. Paradoxically, doubt and anxiety also produce a sense of trust in the reader

since a show of vulnerability closes the distance between the poet and the meditator. The narrator thus emerges as a lesser hero of sorts, but one whose odyssey of temptation and redemption produces the work's true suspense.

The narrative structure of the first quatrain reflects the external and internal dynamic typical of La Ceppède's appropriation of the epic. Despite the immediate presence of the *je*, the format initially implied is one in which the narrator observes and relates the events of the moral battle, while keeping his involvement to a minimum. As in Homer and Virgil, the narrator inscribes himself in the text, but hints that his presence will be subordinate to the incidents that make up the fabula. By at first suggesting that he recount Christ's passion as a detached *je/témoin*, and by later doing so, the poet presents himself as a "heterodiegetic narrator" who will neither directly participate in, nor shape the events described (Prince 20). Nonetheless, the images of Christ as a warrior-hero, and the poet as an omniscient, anonymous *je/témoin*, are suddenly contrasted in the second quatrain. The bold poet who announces himself as the herald of Christ's heroic victory, and as the inheritor of a literary tradition, now portrays himself as a weak, uncertain meditator who beseeches the hero for strength to accomplish his task. Since the first quatrain evokes an omnipotent Godhead, and the second a hesitant *dévo*t, one begins to see the formation of Frye's "contrast-epic," where the "divine vision" and the "human situation" commingle within the text's narrative framework.

In forcing the narrative back upon himself, the poet follows the Dantesque tradition of epic by rendering the narrator one of the main characters, if not a hero, in the twentieth-century sense of a simple protagonist.<sup>13</sup> La Ceppède appropriates the "modernity" of Dante's model by depicting a self-conscious, spiritually and psychologically tormented narrator who transposes the fight between God and Satan to his own soul. As a result, La Ceppède's narrator stresses that the war at hand concerns his own salvation, and that he himself will play a large role in finding redemption. The involvement of the poet/*dévo*t suggests, to use Prince's language, that a "homodiegetic" (20), or participatory level of narration also exists. At once expository and lyrical, these two narrative formats constitute a "mixed" narrative mode extending throughout the work.<sup>14</sup>

#### JOINT JOURNEYS AND DELAYED DESTINATIONS

At the same time both Christ and the poet seek to lead the reader/*dévo*t to salvation, the two protagonists follow different paths to achieve this aim. In effect, Christ must confront his suffering and death to save humanity, while the poet must lead the reader to Christ via written and contemplative discourse. For Christ and the reader, these journeys do not take place instantaneously. What La Ceppède attempts in these initial sonnets is to open distances between Christ and humanity which will be closed over the course of the work. The first sonnet, with its depiction of cosmic battle and the contrast between the bold Christ and the timid poet, creates large spaces between humankind and its God; spaces to be filled by the episodes of the journey about to be undertaken. Similarly, Christ's flight from humanity in the second sonnet increases these distances that underpin La Ceppède's narrative framework, and lend themselves

quite well to the epic technique of delay.<sup>15</sup>

Within the Greco-Latin epic tradition, the most common use of delay is in Homer. As George Duckworth points out, Homeric-style delay carries into the epic of Apollonius and Virgil (66). He calls this technique “retardation” and defines it as:

... a device which the poets use to heighten the anticipation of the reader. This often goes hand in hand with repetition or foreshadowing and serves to counteract the inevitability of the expected issue by delaying its fulfillment. (66)

Hainsworth also speaks of “digression” (31) and of “expansiveness” (14) which characterize Homer’s narrative. Both these notions contribute to a delay between the announcement of a particular action and its realization. In the *Théorèmes*, delay becomes a major component in the poet’s narrative structure, since it can be seen as creating space and time for the meditative element in the *récit*.

More precisely, within the episodic structure of the *Théorèmes*, the contemplation of an external incident sometimes comprises a delay between events; lengthening the narrative while intensifying the devotional process. Effectively, if one reduced the narrative content of the *Théorèmes* to a mere recounting of its thirty-or-so key events, the actual length of the work would shrink to about a third of its present content. The contrast between the *Théorèmes* and the Gospel accounts on which they are based is even more striking, as the Gospels devote only a few pages to Christ’s Passion and Resurrection, while La Ceppède composes two tomes on the subject. Louis Martz’s idea, applied by Terence Cave, of a devotional/narrative format of composition, analysis, and prayer comes into play especially because La Ceppède’s intellectual and affective “analysis” extends and deepens the reader’s contact with the text (26).<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, the time elapsed between an event, e[1], at a particular time, t[1], is considerably longer in La Ceppède than in any of the Gospels, with contemplation and self-exegesis accounting for much of the delay between e[1] and e[2]. The result is a heightened sense of the epic technique of *macrologia* or magnification, which increases the relative scale of the work, thereby lending a kind of structural grandeur to the text to complement the thematic.

In terms of the inaugural poems just discussed, La Ceppède’s narrator delays the meeting of Christ and his adversaries until the sequence beginning with sonnet I,1,49. The poet delays this encounter through meditations on Christ’s departure to the Mount of Olives, the Apostles’ loyalty, Old Testament prophecy, and questions concerning Christ’s humanity. These devotional ruminations integrate themselves into the narrative so that the reader may gain a greater understanding of the magnitude this eventual confrontation represents. Though small events do take place within this time period, none rivals the importance of the primary conflict in I,1,49, as these secondary incidents are subordinate to the act of meditation. Consequently, this general technique of delay is primarily didactic, not only revealing answers to mystery, but instilling within the reader/*dévoit* the notion that the meditative experience is a gradual and digressive one. At the same time, however, delay heightens the reader’s emotional

experience. Effects on the *dévo*t include those of anticipation, suspense, bewilderment, and anxiety. Meditants themselves add to the delay in taking time away from the straight reading of the text to comprehend fully the meaning of a particular incident. Given the influence of the meditative tradition of Church figures such as Ignatius Loyola and François de Sales, one could argue that the poet would encourage supplemental activity on the part of the *dévo*t as part of the self-exegetic nature of the reading process. La Ceppède also lengthens the meditant's contemplative experience by adding annotations to his sonnets, and by developing mysteries throughout the work as a whole. For example, questions of Christ's will, and his submission to the Romans and Hebrews in the series of sonnets I,1,49–62, resurface almost 200 sonnets later in I,3,37–40, as Christ is taunted on the Cross. Delay thus makes for an often interrupted and discontinuous reading process which corresponds to the cryptical and paradoxical nature of Christ's redemptive act.

#### CONFRONTATION AND RESTRAINT: THE MEANING OF CHRIST'S POWER AND WILL

From a formal standpoint, the sonnet sequence I,1,49–53, which centers on Christ's first encounter with his captors, displays the epic quality of the *Théorèmes* because it underscores the episodic dimension of La Ceppède's narrative.<sup>17</sup> In this case, the "episodic" refers to the narrator's recounting of related incidents that contribute to the definition and progression of the fabula. Sonnet I,1,49 relates Christ's ability to, in La Ceppède's words, "terrasser" (v.14) or "knock over" his Roman and Hebrew captors as he reveals himself as Jesus of Nazareth. The paradox of this act is the idea that although Christ sends his opponents sprawling to the ground, he still acquiesces to them. Such a contradiction lays the groundwork for a *théorème*, or argument and meditation on Christ's heroism. In many respects, the questions and interpretations that form a *théorème* can be likened to a contemplative or spiritual episode in the reader's devotional experience. La Ceppède's goal in depicting this scene is to establish Christ's dominance over his adversaries despite his eventual submission to them. Physical superiority serves as a precursor to moral superiority, with Christ's power to annihilate the other being subordinated to the will to annihilate himself in order to save the other:

Comme il arraisontoit le traistre Iscarien,  
Le voila tout couvert de lanternes & d'armes:  
Jamais le Grec n'emplit le mur Hectorien  
De tant de cris, que Christ oit ores de vacarmes.

Il dit à ces mutins, hé pourquoy ces alarmes?  
Qu'est-ce? [a t on] blasphémé le nom Cesarien?  
A quoy vous portez vous? Qui cherchez [vous] Gendarmes?  
Qui? (luy respondent ils) JESUS NAZARIEN.

Il replique, c'est moy. Ces paroles puissantes  
Abatent à l'instant ces troupes menaçantes,

Qui vont à la renverse au son de ces accens:

Non autrement qu'on voit au milieu d'une plaine  
D'un tonnerre allume les esclats menaçans,  
Terrasser les tuteurs du bestail porte-laine.

(I,1,49)

From a thematic standpoint, the poem most specifically refers to Christ's status as an epic warrior/hero in verses three and four, which compare him to Hector. In her critical edition, Yvette Quenot suggests that the allusion to Hector originates from the writings of the Celestine monk Pierre Crespet, a contemporary of La Ceppède whom the poet read extensively (195). Indeed, Quenot's remark is valid, but one may expand upon this idea to argue that the presence of Hector develops the epic dimension of La Ceppède's literary and spiritual project. To assert, as does La Ceppède's narrator, that the derisive screams the dying Hector heard pale in comparison to those endured by Christ at the moment of his capture (let alone his death), is to confirm the notion that Christ emerges as the consummate epic soldier in the ultimate epic conflict. Similarly, the Romans and Hebrews, by virtue of their ferocity, are far more vicious than one could ever imagine the Greeks to be. The Parthian champion thus takes on the Parthian foe, as Christ's supremacy is proclaimed from a literary point of view.

Christ's force becomes all the more evident in his ability to strike the advancing troops to the ground with the mere sound of his voice (vv.9–14). The contrast between John's Gospel account, (18:4–6, cited by La Ceppède in the poem's second annotation) and La Ceppède's version of the encounter, further elaborates the poet's epic characterization of Christ. As is typical of all the Gospels, John's style reads as quite economical, if not dispassionate:

Knowing everything that was going to happen to him, Jesus then came forward and said, "Who are you looking for?" They answered, "Jesus the Nazarene." He said, "I am he." Now Judas the traitor was standing among them. When Jesus said, "I am he," they moved back and fell to the ground. He asked them a second time, "Who are you looking for?" They said, "Jesus the Nazarene." "I have told you that I am he," replied Jesus. "If I am the one you are looking for, let these others go." (185)<sup>18</sup>

Clearly, John depicts Christ as a noble, selfless deity, ready to sacrifice himself for the unworthy. Yet, John's depiction contains no embellishment of Christ's demeanor. Nor, unlike the *Théorèmes*, does it amplify Christ's presence by representing Jesus as a figure whose voice is likened to "thunder" and "lightning" that scorch the very plain where Christ and his captors meet (vv.12–13). In the third annotation to his poem, La

Ceppède explains the comparison between Christ's voice and thunder by stating his desire to "exprim[er] la force & la terreur de la puissante voix de Jesus-Christ, à cette rencontre." Biblically, the poet justifies his analogy by drawing a parallel to God's thunderous voice in Psalm 103:9. But given the earlier reference to Hector, it is evident that at this particular moment, La Ceppède's Christ resembles more the heroes of ancient epic more than he does the assured, but compliant Savior in John. While La Ceppède does cite Biblical precedent in his portrait of Christ, the fact that this allusion is relegated to a note, rather than appearing in the poem proper, indicates at least a momentary desire to accentuate Christ's literary identity, thus extending his domain from the Biblical to the poetic universe.

As far as the poet's narrative function is concerned, the sonnet has a mixed structure, with the *je/témoin* relating the events not only by telling them but by representing them through dialogue between Christ and the Romans/Hebrews. From a formal standpoint, dialogue, along with the recounting of events by an omniscient narrator, can be considered a structural trait of the epic when one considers the verbal exchanges between Homer, Virgil, and Dante, for example. This mixed style dominates the sequence, demonstrating how the affective, intervening *je/protagoniste* slips behind both character and event. The aim of such an effacement on the narrator's part is to emphasize the analytical dimension of the narrative so that the reader may gain insight into its meaning. In these sonnets, there is no responding "je" inscribed in the text. However, the reader/*dévo*t's presence is implicit in virtually every poem because the descriptive style of the narrator lasts only so long as to yield to a more interpretive mode of response. Internalization still takes place, but in a less direct manner since the singular voice of his own persona is much less prevalent.

After this principal action of the series takes place, the next sonnet, I,1,50, begins the poet/reader's meditation. The poet, now in the role of interpreter rather than that of a *conteur*, speaks of Christ as the "Lyon de Judah," whose power over his adversaries is referred to as "les faits victorieux" (v.1), and moreover, is deemed as no less than "toute-puissance" (v.5).<sup>19</sup> The analogy between Christ's voice and the war cry at Jericho, as well as David's prediction in Psalm 54:8–11 that God's enemies would be struck down like dust in wind, suggest that Christ's present display of force expresses a divine plan, if not divine volition. La Ceppède's poet creates his epic warrior in part by constructing a strong portrait of Christ from various sections of the Bible that deal with God's might. Consequently, the reader/*dévo*t places Christ's act within a Biblical context, but attaches significance to it beyond that of physical triumph. In the poem's second annotation, La Ceppède remarks that Christ's voice reveals his "divine essence," which demonstrates to the Romans and Hebrews that they cannot seize Jesus without his consent ("qu'ils ne pouvoient saisir, ny mener Jesus-Christ prisonnier, s'il ne lui plaisoit").

Reinforcing this apparent contradiction between Christ's wish to be arrested and his ability to thwart capture, the poem's last tercet recontextualizes the paradox in terms of Christ's humanity and divinity:

Si jugeable, & mortel, par ces mots doucereux  
Ses haineux il terrasse, ô l'horrible defaite,

Lors qu'immortel, & juge, il tonnera sur eux.

(I,1,50,12–14)

By raising the issue of Christ's capacity to be judged as a mortal and to judge as an immortal, La Ceppède extends the parameters of his *théorème* to include questions concerning Christ's dual nature. Questions raised in the meditations touch on the contrast between human and divine motive and reaction under the same circumstances. Implicit in such issues is the extent to which Christ's capture can be termed a "horrible défaite," and what defeat means on both a human and divine level. Briefly, Christ's loss becomes humanity's gain, with Christ's heroism defined as withholding force rather than deploying it. As a result, though La Ceppède includes traditional notions of strength, victory, loss, and heroism in this sequence and in the work as a whole, the implication is that these notions take on new meanings when applied to Christ. While not immediately disclosing his final interpretation, the poet conditions the reader to expand his/her analysis of Christ's actions, thus enhancing the knowledge and faith needed for salvation.

As part of the narrator's technique of delay, neither this sonnet, nor the following I,1,51, explains why Christ shows his power at this particular moment. Much of La Ceppède's technique of delay hinges on gradual revelation of the causes and effects of particular events. Rather than deal with the fundamental causes and effects of the incident, La Ceppède's poet continues to recount the narrative's fabula by describing the blinding effect of Christ's eyes, while meditating on the paradoxes of divine beauty.<sup>20</sup>

The reasons for hurling the Romans and Hebrews to the earth become more apparent in the next sonnet, (I,1,52). In his role as interpreter, the narrator explains the event as an attempt to prove Christ's omnipotence to Judas. Since one scene didactically relates to another, the reader can begin to see the text's episodic structure emerge. In the poem's octave, the fallen disciple becomes the narratee, with the poet excoriating Judas for failing to recognize and accept Christ's effort to bring him back into the fold:

Ha! ce terrassement n'est pas fait sans mystere.  
 Qu'en penses-tu Judas? Son huyleuse liqueur  
 N'a jamais peu guerir la playe de ton coeur,  
 Peut estre le Seigneur t'applique ce cautere.

Puis que de son amour le baume salulaire  
 N'a peu vaincre à ce coup ta mortele rancueur,  
 Il tente si l'effroy t'en peut rendre vainqueur.  
 Mais tu es sans ressource au Demon tributaire.

(I,1,52,1–8)

This explanation suggests an additional feature to the portrait of Christ as hero, and expands the *théorème* by dealing with the issue of Christ's charity. It is true that the

first verse of (I,1,49) mentions Judas, but only in a general sense. Here, Christ's relationship with Judas, if not all of humanity, becomes clearer. Specifically, if the grounding of the Romans and Hebrews was meant as a "baume salulaire" for Judas, as well as the rest of mankind, then Christ's seemingly violent act becomes more a gesture of charity than aggression. In a sense, La Ceppède reverses the "epic of wrath" formula. Contrary to the standard depiction of the warrior/hero who seeks to destroy the enemy, especially the traitor, the portrait of Christ is one in which the protagonist seeks merely to frighten and/or warn his adversary so that the latter may be saved. One need only think of Ganelon's fate in the *Chanson de Roland* to perceive the contrast in Christ's reaction to those who betray him.<sup>21</sup> In effect, La Ceppède highlights the differences between divine charity and human betrayal, with Frye's notion of the "contrast-epic" again brought into play. Judas's treason acts as an allegory for man's sinful nature. Though it is Judas who is directly inscribed as the narratee in this sonnet, one can logically conclude that the poem is to be addressed to all who reject Christ.

As the sonnet's final tercet indicates, Christ's gesture gives all potential adversaries a final chance to save themselves, with their refusal to do so making their guilt complete:

Ce miracle pourtant ne reste sans effect:  
 Car s'il n'adoucit point de ses haineux la rage [,]  
 Il les rend sans excuse en leur rouge méfait.

(I,1,52,12-14)

Hence, the hero's tactics of force and fear have a benevolent design. Destined to all sinners, this interpretation slowly exposes the mysterious nature of Christ's charity, touching on some of the causes and effects of his behavior. The cause of Christ's gesture is his love not only of Judas, but of all those who deceive him. As indicated in the final tercet, the overarching effect of Christ's gesture centers on the notion of free will. Christ's redemptive act alerts humanity to the former's power and love, while at the same time evoking humankind's decision either to obey or disobey. In the process, the poet tries to enhance the spiritual growth of the *dévo*t. The sonnet's last line, asserting that humans are "without excuse" if they betray God or refuse to acknowledge his omnipotence, is meant to convince the meditants of their own power and will within the devotional process. To a large extent, the poet's emphasis on free will becomes the focal point of the *théorème*. La Ceppède outlines a mystery whereby Christ willingly chooses to die in order to give humanity the choice to accept this sacrifice or not. Christ's epic actively involves its reader, not merely from an intellectual and aesthetic standpoint, but from the perspective of the meditant's spiritual existence. As in Homer and Virgil, the epic hero delivers his people, but, within the theological construct the *Théorèmes* set forth, La Ceppède's adaptation of the genre allows the people to deliver themselves.



Sonnet I,1,52, while resolving some of the more metaphysical questions concerning Christ's encounter with his enemies, can be considered to have a delaying effect on the unfolding of the Passion's events. In the first quatrain of the next poem, I,1,53, the poet acknowledges as much, introducing dialogue that quickens the narrative pace while placing emphasis on the story proper:

Mais oyons le progrès de nostre Historien.  
 Christ ayant accoisé quelque peu ces vacarmes,  
 Demande encor' un coup. Qui cherchez-vous gendarmes?  
 Ils respondent encor JESUS NAZARIEN.

(I,1,53,1–4)

The reference in verse 1 to “nostre Historien” is explained in the sonnet's first annotation as an allusion to John (18:7), on which this section of the *Théorèmes* is based. By calling John a “historian,” the poet suggests that he believes in the historicity and absolute truth of the Passion. An opening of this type brings the narrative, and thus the reader, back to the events at hand, but more importantly shows the poet's consciousness of his own digressive techniques. The idea that ensuing incidents constitute “progress” (v.1) in the narrative suggests that the *je/témoin* is aware of the fabulistic and contemplative segments of his discourse. It should also be pointed out that the phrase “Mais oyons” marks a kind of reprise alluding to an oral tradition of which the epic was historically a part.

Introductions of this type evoke a change in what Prince calls “narrative speeds” (69). Now the pace of the sequence is accelerated, with the rest of the sonnet mentioning events which further attest to the magnitude of Christ's power and will:

Hé quel broüillard plus noir que le Cimmerien  
 Vous aveugle ô soldats? Il est emmy vos armes,  
 Ne le voyez vous point? Il n'en use pas de charmes,  
 Ainsi fut aveuglé l'escadron Syrien.

Ha! quele seroit or' s'il vouloit vostre veue,  
 Puis que la Synagogue en fut si despourveue  
 L'autre hier voulant au Temple à mort l'executer?

Puis qu'amené visible au plus hault de la crouppe  
 Du mont de Nazareth pour le precipiter  
 Il repasse invisible au milieu de la troupe?

(I,1,53,5–14)

As the second quatrain indicates, Christ now blinds his captors by casting a thick black fog in front of them. The reference to this fog as “plus noir que le Cimmerien” is important to the epic quality of the work since, as La Ceppède indicates in his second annotation, it directly evokes Book XI of the *Odyssey* entitled *The Kingdom of*

*the Dead* in Robert Fagles's translation (249), and the *Descent Into Hell*, in Alexander Pope's (262). The significance of the fog is twofold. First, it associates the Romans and Hebrews with the Cimmerians, a people whom Homer describes as blocked from all light:

The sail stretched taut as she cut the sea all day  
 and the sun sank and the roads of the world grew dark.  
 And she made the outer limits, the Ocean River's bounds  
 Where Cimmerian people have their homes—their realm and city  
 shrouded in mist and cloud. The eye of the Sun can never  
 flash his rays through the dark and bring them light,  
 not when he climbs the starry skies or when he wheels  
 back down from the heights to touch the earth once more—  
 an endless, deadly night overhangs those wretched men.

(Fagles vv.15–23)

La Ceppède's implied analogy suggests the depraved character of Christ's enemies, as well as their distance from Christ, and their blindness to his presence. Accordingly, their fate will be one of eternal damnation if they fail to recognize Christ. Secondly, Christ's ability to emit this fog implies that he, as Creator of the universe, has true power over darkness. La Ceppède, especially in Part II of the *Théorèmes* alludes to Christ's ability to overpower Satan, with the visit to hell in the second volume reaffirming Christ's dominion over this part of Creation. The voyage to the underworld calls to mind the epic *nekuia*, the tradition which is manifest in Homer, Virgil, and Dante.<sup>22</sup> In La Ceppède, Christ's power to blind and immobilize his enemies reminds the reader of his eventual victory over Lucifer, and thus over death, within the theomachy engaged over humanity's soul.

One remarks that La Ceppède entitles the first section of Part II, "La descente aux enfers," indicating that he attaches special importance to this series of sonnets, and suggests that the "descent" should be read as a narrative unit, if not an episode that integrates itself into the work as a whole.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, La Ceppède reinforces the structural unity of his epic as he begins its second volume. From a thematic and stylistic standpoint, the inaugural sonnet of Part II recalls many of the epic traits found in Part I:

J'ay chanté le Combat, la Mort, la sepulture  
 Du Christ qu'on a comblé de torts injurieux:  
 Je chante sa descente aux antres stygieux  
 Pour tirer noz ayeulx de leur noire closture.

Je chante (émerveillé) comme sans ouverture  
 De sa Tombe, il en sort vivant, victorieux.  
 Je chante son Triomphe; & l'effort glorieux  
 Dont il guinda là haut l'une et l'autre Nature.

Clair Esprit, dont ma Muse a cy-devant apris  
 Ses douleurs, ses tourmens, sa honte & son mespris,  
 Faites qu'or de sa gloire elle soit étofée.

Sus, Vierge, il faut tarir les torrens de vos pleurs,  
 Je veux (si vous m'aidez) élever son Trophée,  
 Et guirlander son chef de mille & mille fleurs.

(II,1,1)

The poet's variation of Virgil's *invocatio* is apparent from the first verse, with the shift from the past tense (v.1) to the present (vv.3,5,7) marking the temporal and narrative continuation of the epic. Terms such as "antres stygieux" (v.3) poetically reinforce the Greco-Latin antecedents from which La Ceppède draws. With respect to epic theme and characterization, La Ceppède extends his portrait of Christ as the warrior/hero whose "triumph" (v.7) the poet sings. Christ's victorious mission carries two purposes. In an immediate sense, Christ's goal is to rescue the souls of his ancestors (v.4), and in a larger sense, to prove his victory over death, as promised in the work's inaugural poem, and confirmed in the present sonnet (v.2). Within the corpus of epic literature, the rescue of, or at least contact with, ancestors or loved ones in hell is a frequent motif. La Ceppède shows himself to be aware of this tradition through his numerous references to Homer, Virgil, and Ovid in his annotations. What distinguishes La Ceppède from these authors, however, is the manner in which the poet depicts Christ as entering the underworld in order to do battle and emerge in a triumph consequential to all humanity. Christ's "victory" stems not from his outright destruction of the enemy, but from his ability to save souls from damnation. The victory is spiritual rather than literal, and shows that Christ's power, when combined with human faith, eclipses Satan's. To a significant extent, one may apply David L. Pike's interpretation of Odysseus's descent to Christ's in that the *nekuia* "involves a hero's rite of passage, a leave-taking from the past and orientation toward the future, and the prophetic voice related to it" (6). Christ's "passage" becomes that of asserting power in a realm other than that of the earth. In many respects, the "rescue" of the Hebrew Fathers represents Christ's first act as Savior, thus marking the transition from his "past" life as an earthly rebel and visionary to his present and future role as a redeemer. The "prophetic" dimension of Christ's descent manifests itself in the idea that a salutary future is accessible to all believers.

Like pilgrims, the readers/believers follow Christ into hell to test their own faith. From a representational standpoint however, it is important to note that La Ceppède divides hell into two main categories: 1) limbo, and 2) the part of the underworld reserved for the eternally condemned. The destination in Christ's mission to save his ancestors, while cited repeatedly as "les enfers" in the sonnet's first annotation, actually bears a greater resemblance to limbo. Indeed, it is in this intermediary state that the "ayeulx" (v.4), whom La Ceppède names in the same annotation as "Noé, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, & les autres Saints Peres," are portrayed as waiting,

“jusques à ce que le sang de Christ & sa descente en ces lieux les en retira.” The notion that these Old Testament figures accept Christ is based on the Patristic writings of John of Damascus and Luke’s Gospel, and is intriguing from a theological perspective because it sustains, in an almost absolute sense, Christ’s messianic role. If indeed the Hebrew Fathers rely on Christ to deliver them to heaven, then God’s promise of a redeemer has been fulfilled, and the divine plan for humanity has been consummated. In sonnet II,1,7, the Jewish elders exhibit their acceptance of Christ by kissing his knees:

Ces vieux Peres voyans l’Auteur de leur repos  
Embrassent ses genoux: luy disent ces propos.  
En fin vous voila donc nostre unique esperance.

(II,1,7, 9–11)

Recognition of Christ’s divinity by what La Ceppède’s narrator calls in the same poem “la troupe d’Adam” (v.8) serves as an example for all meditants, Gentile and Jew, because the holiest of the Hebrews have literally embraced Christ as their savior. As part of the motif of the triumphant hero, the union between Christianity and Judaism implies a victory for Christ not only over death, but over Judaism’s resistance to observe Christ as humanity’s redeemer. Frye’s notion of a messianic cycle in the epic becomes relevant because it matches La Ceppède’s representation of a salutary figure, eternal in nature, who resurrects himself and thereby provides the hope of salvation and victory to others.

La Ceppède himself makes a direct reference to the epic nature of this scene in the third annotation to the poem, where he states that from a religious standpoint, the motif of kissing knees is taken from Augustine, while it is represented in literature “au 1 & 14 de l’Iliad d’Homere & aux autres Poëtes.” The contrast between Homer and La Ceppède’s use of this gesture reveals striking differences concerning the nature of both texts. Though La Ceppède does not specifically quote the passages of the *Iliad* to which he alludes, one notes that in Book 1 of Homer’s first epic, the reference to the kissing of knees is found in Achilles’s plea to Thetis.<sup>24</sup> Imploring his mother to convince Zeus to avenge his honor by swaying the war in favor of the Trojans, the Achean warrior instructs Thetis to remind the son of Cronos of her loyalty to him during the revolt of Poseidon and Athena. However, at the same time she recalls her dedication for the purpose of winning Zeus to Achilles’s cause, Thetis must observe all protocol due the master of the Gods. Achilles exhorts:

This, goddess, to his remembrance call,  
Embrace his knees, at this tribunal fall;  
Conjure him far to drive the Grecian train,  
To hurl them headlong to their fleet and main.

(Pope 14)

Briefly, the issue of motivation distinguishes La Ceppède’s text from Homer’s. Abraham, Noah, et. al., clasp Christ’s knees in order to honor the God who has ful-

filled the covenant between the human and divine realms. The Hebrew Fathers' actual embrace of Christ's body signifies the figurative embrace of the messiah that God had spoken of in prophecy and has now sent. Accordingly, Christ embraces his ancestors in order to illustrate God's acceptance of the human past without Christ, and the human future with him. As a result, the motivation for the embrace is spiritual and collective in nature, as Christ represents the transcendent power the Godhead offers as a means for all humankind to overcome death.

The sacrificial and harmonious tone of La Ceppède's embrace runs counter to the self-interested motivation that characterizes Achilles's entreaty that his mother embrace Zeus. True, Homer does underscore Thetis's allegiance during the rebellion. But from a rhetorical, and to a large extent moral standpoint, the fidelity Thetis displays primarily serves the aim of achieving Achilles's personal aims. Thetis is to clench Zeus's knees so that her son may seek revenge for what he believes is Agamemnon's insult. Consequently, Achilles's wish is to make war on his own people. Rather than unite and deliver his nation in the manner of Christ, Achilles, at least at this moment in Homer's narrative, searches and obtains not only its division but its destruction. In addition, Achilles shows not loyalty to his king, Agamemnon, but disdain. That a Godhead figure such as Zeus could be convinced by such a plea attests to his inferiority as a deity, while Achilles's vanity and selfishness merely highlight Christ's altruism. As many critics have noted, La Ceppède's approach in combining devotional, poetic, and mythological texts can be easily termed "syncretic" in nature.<sup>25</sup> Yet, the goal of La Ceppède's syncretism, along with showing the apparently logical convergence of these modes of thought, is to show how the example of Christ's life, in whatever form it is expressed, supercedes all other artistic and historical endeavor. Within the context of La Ceppède's literary and theological model, Thetis's reverent hold on Zeus's knees becomes important chiefly in terms of how the Biblical and/or Patristic appropriations of this motif demonstrate the superiority of Christian theology.

As far as the tradition of the *nekuia* is concerned, the clutching of Christ's knees by the Hebrew Fathers also becomes significant because it illustrates how Christ succeeds where others fail. The example of Orpheus immediately comes to mind. La Ceppède directly refers to Ovid's adaptation of this myth, and while there is long-standing debate as to whether or not the *Metamorphoses* constitute an epic in the strictest sense of the term, most can agree with Mary Innes that Ovid's work contains many traits belonging to the epic (16). Given the number of references La Ceppède makes to Ovid in his annotations, it is clear that the poet ranks this Latin predecessor among the highest of all classical authors.<sup>26</sup> While La Ceppède's incorporation of the Orpheus myth does not occur during the opening sonnets of Part II, analysis of this adaptation corresponds directly to the appropriation of the *nekuia* from a formal and substantive point of view. The passage in question is found in the sestet of (I,3,20), which concludes La Ceppède's *blason* of Christ's love:

Son amour est si grand, son amour est si fort  
Qu'il attaque l'Enfer, qu'il terrasse la mort,

Qu'il arrache à Pluton sa fidele Euridice.  
 Belle pour qui ce beau meurt en vous bien-aimant  
 Voyez s'il fut jamais un si cruel supplice,  
 Voyez s'il fut jamais un si parfait Amant.<sup>27</sup>

(I,3,20, 9–14)

Structurally, this sonnet is important to the construction of La Ceppède's epic because it serves as a bridge between the work's introductory sonnets and the sequence that begins Part II. The idea in verse 10, "il terrasse la mort," clearly evokes the sequence dealing with Christ knocking his captors to the ground. In the same verse, the statement, "Qu'il attaque l'Enfer," and in the next verse, "Qu'il arrache à Pluton sa fidele Euridice," prefigures Christ's actual trip to hell in the second volume. The unity of La Ceppède's poetic text reflects the coherence of God's redemptive plan, as each event or image of Christ's salutary act is foregrounded and/or revealed in Biblical or literary authority.

With respect to Christ's descent to rescue his ancestors, the question that arises is what connection, if any, exists between them and Eurydice? One answer is found in La Ceppède's third annotation to sonnet I,3,20, where he portrays Orpheus's wife as a metaphor for the Church. Explaining the link from a theological point of view, La Ceppède states that, "la descente d'Orphée aux Enfers, pour en r'amener . . . son Euridice . . . [est comparable] à la véritable descente de Jesus-Christ aux Limbes pour en tirer son Eglise, c'est-à-dire, les Saints Pères." As in sonnet II,1,1, he cites Zachariah 9:11 to give the allusion Biblical confirmation. With respect to the theological and poetic representation of Christ, the equation of the Hebrew Fathers with Eurydice primarily serves the aim of depicting Christ as a lover seeking to rescue his beloved. The epic warrior image is tempered by that of the epic lover, as the final verse of the poem suggests that the venture to Hades contributes to Christ's status as the *amator amatorum*. Christ is able to "attack" hell (v.10), but at the same time displays the tenderness and loyalty of Orpheus. However, like other mythological figures such as Achilles and Zeus, Orpheus's qualities are offset by weaknesses that lower his standing in the reader's eye. Christ's "perfect" (v.14) nature is such that unlike Orpheus, he need not "persuade" the master of the underworld, in this case Satan, of the validity of his mission. Quite the contrary, Christ exhibits his dominance of Satan by heading unimpeded into hell upon his earthly death. Accordingly, there are no conditions under which Christ removes his beloved relatives, and as such, they are allowed to embrace him freely. The narrative of Christ's death and resurrection thus "redeems" the literary and devotional narratives that preceded them since Christ expiates or "frees" his predecessors from the flaws that caused their original downfall. Consequently, the *Théorèmes* fulfill the mission stated in their *avant-propos* to repair the shortcomings of literary characters and narratives, and restore poetry to its rightful glory by creating the consummate protagonist whose actions undo the errors of those who came before him.<sup>28</sup>

Christ's descent into hell surpasses that of his literary forebears because he overturns the concept of the underworld and damnation. In effect, Christ differs from

Odysseus and Aeneas in that he can prevent his people from reaching the inferno in the first place. The physical manifestation of this idea is represented in the notion that Christ's very presence in the underworld threatens Satan's rule:

Dés que cete belle Ame à cela se dispose,  
Que vers le Limbe obscur sa descente elle prend,  
Afin de retirer ceux qu'elle se propose,  
Une pasle frayeur tout l'Erebe surprend.

Le prince de Tartare alarme sa milice  
Craignant qu'apres les bons encor' on luy tollisse  
Judas, Cain, Choré, Abiron, & Dathan?

Mais Christ ne descend point aux Enfers à cete heure  
Pour ces durs reprouvez (seul gibier de Satan)  
Ains pour ceux qu'engageoit la coulpe de nature.

(II,1,2, 5–14)

Hell's "alarmed" response to Christ's entry (vv.9–10) demonstrates, at least theoretically, the power Christ wields as Creator of the universe. Frightened, Lucifer readies for battle, but is spared because Christ does not come for him at this time (vv.12–13). While the theomachy is not engaged, the poet alludes to it in such a way as to prefigure, if not delay, the apocalypse in which Christ will vanquish Satan. Much more than in Homer or Virgil, the epic hero in *La Ceppède* goes to hell in order to wage conflict with the guardian of the underworld. Odysseus visits the "Kingdom of the Dead" primarily to consult Tiresias, and to make contact with his mother as well as with Achean warriors such as Achilles and Agamemnon. Likewise, the chief purpose of Aeneas's visit is to speak with his departed father, Anchises, who informs his son of the travails and glory awaiting him as he founds Rome. At no time is the status of hell or its occupants menaced by these classical protagonists. For example, upon encountering infernal beasts such as Lerna and Briareas, Aeneas dashes after them with his sword only to discover that the monsters exist merely as images (vv.286–94). In addition, while Odysseus and Aeneas can indeed speak with the dead souls of their past, they can neither embrace nor retrieve them. As Homer's poet, in the voice of Odysseus, states:

And I, my mind in turmoil, how I longed to embrace  
my mother's spirit, dead as she was! Three times I  
rushed toward her, desperate to hold her, three times  
she fluttered through my fingers, sifting away like a  
shadow, dissolving like a dream...

(Fagles vv. 233–37)

Virgil speaks of a similar scene in which Aeneas tries three times to clutch his father, but fails at each attempt.<sup>29</sup> By physically and spiritually embracing his Biblical an-

cestors in the underworld, Christ demonstrates his divine character by making connections of which his literary ancestors are incapable. Christ's relationship with the dead redefines the concept of life since, according to Christian thought, this kinship allows for the possibility of salvation never before realized.

It should be pointed out, however, that La Ceppède does not cite classical examples solely to prove Christ's superiority to the models of Antiquity. Often, examples from epic literature shape the poet's imagery, as well as his theology. The epic work upon which La Ceppède draws the most in this section (and in the work as a whole) is the *Aeneid*, probably because Aeneas, to a larger extent than Achilles, Hector, or even Odysseus, evolves as a character over the course of the epic (Goelzer 16). Aeneas's intelligence, sensitivity, and variability render him more accessible as a human character than his Greek predecessors.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, the reader's ability to comprehend Aeneas from a personal perspective creates a sense of recognition and sympathy that La Ceppède seeks to emulate in his portrait of Christ. Of course, La Ceppède seeks a one-to-one identification between his protagonist and his reader that does not exist in classical epic. But given Virgil's more extensive development of his main character, one can see how La Ceppède may have been particularly moved by the *Aeneid*.

From the standpoint of language, La Ceppède borrows from Virgil's description of the underworld to establish the tone of the sequence. In verse four of sonnet II, 1,9, La Ceppède describes the "manoirs livides" to which Christ has descended. The poet, in the sonnet's third annotation, explains that the term "livide" refers to "tout ce qui est obscur, plombin ou noirastre," and is taken from Book VI of the *Aeneid*, entitled in certain translations as "The Lower World":

*"Dic" ait, "o uirgo, quid uolt concursus ad amnem?  
quidue petunt animae? uel quo discrimine ripas  
hae linquont, illae remis uada liuida uerrunt?"*

(vv.318–20)

The passage relates Aeneas's question to the Sybil of why Charon transports certain souls on the murky river but leaves others on the bank. More importantly, the appearance of the term "manoirs livides" in the sonnet, as well as its elaboration in La Ceppède's commentary, begins a series of quotations from Book VI that constitute an intertextual link with Virgil. It is evident that La Ceppède, in writing the *Théorèmes*, seeks to create a text that surpasses all others with respect to plot, character, and purpose. Nonetheless, as a faithful guardian of religious and literary tradition, La Ceppède also tries at certain moments to combine his text with those of his predecessors. He attempts to do so in such a way that respects the past and develops a parallel to the current narrative. To a certain extent, La Ceppède imagines that Aeneas's experience in encountering the "manoirs livides" corresponds to that of the reader/dévoit. In this case, Christ assumes the role of the Sybil/guide, and the meditant that of the ingénu/Aeneas. Virgil's language gives La Ceppède's poet a sophisticated but familiar frame of reference with which the reader may conceptualize the inconceivable.



Virgil's text informs La Ceppède's theology by shedding light on the concepts of eternity and damnation. The reference to eternity comes in the third annotation to sonnet II,1,11, where La Ceppède defines eternity by sending the reader once more to Book VI of the *Aeneid*. Here, he contrasts divine eternity, which has no beginning or end, with that of human eternity, which has a definite beginning but no end:

Les Latins appellent Dieu *seul sempiternel*, comme  
 tousjours eternel. C'est à dire sans commencement  
 & sans fin. Mais nous prenons icy l'Eternité pour  
 ce qui est & sera sans nulle fin. Comme Virgile parlant  
 des peines des Enfers au 6. de l'Eneide a dict. *Sedet  
 aeternúmque sedebit Infoelix Theseus*. Nous appelons  
 ainsi tous les jours les peines des damnez eternelles,  
 ores qu'elles ayent eu commencement. Bref nous parlons  
 icy de l'Eternité à *parte post*, non à *parte ante*, suivant  
 les termes des Theologiens.

In the passage La Ceppède cites, the Sybil explains and lists the various crimes and punishments the residents of hell are forced to endure. The point of such a list is found in Phlegyas's cry, *Discite iustitiam moniti et non temnere diuos* (VI, 620). Because divine justice is as eternal as it is inescapable, humanity must learn it in order to avoid the fates of Theseus and Phlegyas. From a theological perspective, it is important to note that Virgil's idea of hell, where the damned have committed specific crimes and thus begin their suffering upon death, corresponds to La Ceppède's Catholic interpretation of why souls are sent to hell. While this may seem obvious given pagan prefiguration of Christian concepts of divinity, the notion that human suffering can have a terrestrial beginning and cause (*à parte post*) becomes significant for the Renaissance and baroque eras in that it contrasts with the Calvinist reading of predestination, where souls can be condemned before birth (*à parte ante*). Though La Ceppède never mentions Calvin in his annotations, he could not have ignored the theological controversy that Catholic/Protestant division elicited in the late Renaissance. By using Virgil to affirm the traditional Catholic position that humanity can earn divine grace—or at least avoid celestial wrath—by respecting holy justice, La Ceppède intimates that classical literature supports and legitimizes his Church's view of salvation. At the same time, La Ceppède elevates Virgil's standing as an author and thinker by honoring his influence as a poet, while covertly according him the status of a "theologian" in the last line of the annotation.

To confirm the absolute nature of damnation, La Ceppède alludes to Virgil a second time in sonnet II,1,13. The reference to the Latin poet comes in an annotation to the following verses:

Quand on prend ce chemin jamais on ne rebrouce  
 La cheute dans l'Averne est du tout sans ressource .

## (II,1,13, 9–10)

Specifically, the words that end the distich, i.e., “sans ressource,” are elaborated by Deiphobe’s instructions to Aeneas as he enters hell:

Tros Anchisiade, facilis descensus Auerno:  
noctes atque dies patet atri ianua Ditis;  
sed reuocare gradum superasque euadere ad auras  
hoc opus, hic labor est.

(VI, 126–29)

Godly son of Anchises, the descent to Avernus is easy:  
by night, by day, the portals of dark Dis are open;  
but to retrace the steps back to the upper air,  
this is a task, this is toil.<sup>31</sup>

La Ceppède closes the annotation by citing Thomas Aquinas’s dictum, *in inferno nulla est redemptio*. By conjoining Virgil and Aquinas to reinforce his vision of hell, La Ceppède suggests that at certain moments in the devotional process, literary, Patristic, and Biblical texts are interchangeable in conveying religious meaning. La Ceppède’s syncretic approach is such that he relies not only on Biblical typologies, but literary ones as well. To a large extent, texts such as the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid* become the literary equivalents of the Old Testament as they foreshadow Christ’s redemptive act and render it intelligible. Within the literary and Biblical framework that supports La Ceppède’s poetic endeavor, Homer and Virgil become the literary equivalents of Church Fathers such as Aquinas, whereas Odysseus and Aeneas become figures that anticipate Christ.<sup>32</sup> In effect, La Ceppède uses the epic to transform the classical canon into a “literary bible” that changes the role of literature by conceiving secular poetry as an artistic means to a religious end. Literature itself undergoes a devotional exegesis, and in the process, is not only “christianized,” but is raised to the status of a textual authority for devout meditation.

## CONCLUSION: EPIC READER AS EPIC CHARACTER

Within La Ceppède’s adaptation of the *nekuia*, the goal is to prevent readers themselves from descending into hell. Christ, the Hebrew Fathers, Odysseus, and Aeneas, are able to return from the journey, but the simple human *dévo*t cannot, as the citations from Virgil indicate. Rather, it is to meditants to recognize that only Christ can save them from the corruption of their own souls. La Ceppède’s poet/meditant comes to this realization in the concluding sonnet of the episode relating Christ’s trip to the underworld:

Fay mon Sauveur descente en l’Enfer de mon ame:  
Mon ame est un Enfer tout noir d’aveuglement.

Que l'acéré trenchant de cent remors entame,  
Que sept traistres Demons traictent journallement.

D'un seul point mon Enfer, le nom d'Enfer dement  
(Dissemblable à l'Enfer de l'éternelle flamme)  
C'est qu'on n'espere plus en l'éternel tourment:  
Et dans le mien j'espere & ta grace reclame.

Descends donc par ta grace, ô Christ dans mon Enfer:  
Fay moy de ces demons desormais triompher.  
Pour te suivre là haut, fay qu'icy je patisse.

Fay que j'aille tousjours mes crimes souspirant,  
Et fay qu'en mon esprit je craigne ta Justice.  
Car le salut consiste à craindre en esperant.

(II,1,14)

In essence, this sonnet represents the meditant's complete internalization of Christ's voyage to hell, which in this case has become the reader/*dévo*t's struggle with sin. The epic becomes that of the meditant, who, after accompanying Christ to the underworld implores the redeemer/hero to come down into the human soul and grant deliverance from eternal torment. Little difference exists between the hell of the human mind and that of the literary/Biblical underworld in terms of suffering. Yet, the living can still be saved from both through Christ's intervention. La Ceppède's aim is to make the reader aware of this belief by directly involving the *dévo*t in the narrative. Via the *je/poète*, meditants understand that their role is not only to observe the epic hero, but to communicate with and pray to him. Unlike classical readers who admire Achilles, Odysseus, and Aeneas but who can in no way form an intimate bond with these fictional characters, La Ceppède's meditant seeks to establish a personal relationship with the authentic figure of Christ for the purpose of attaining divine grace (vv.8–9). Classical readers need not undertake an exhaustive moral exegesis of their lives in order to determine their worthiness before divine judgment. By contrast, La Ceppède's readers must come to terms with their own "blindness" (v.2), "remorse" (v.3), and "crimes" (v.12), in order to merit God's consideration of their souls. The Ancient heroes may act at times as moral examples, and may figuratively "save" their peoples on the level of a poetic narrative, but at the most, this "deliverance" consists of temporary preservation from physical death and/or harm. More importantly, salvation through an exclusively literary protagonist operates chiefly on the level of a fleeting artistic representation. The devotional *and* literary construct of the *Théorèmes* offers much more in that Christ introduces the possibility of the individuals giving themselves over to the hero in order to attain spiritual redemption that is as real as it is permanent.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>See Chapters 1, 2, and 3 of my study, *Renaissance Resonance: Lyric Modality in La Ceppède's Théorèmes*.

<sup>2</sup>In the *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye speaks of the "epyllion" or "little epic," which "occurs when a lyric on a conventional theme achieves a concentration that expands it into a miniature epic" (324). Similarly, Bruce R. Leslie, in *Ronsard's Successful Epic Venture: The Epyllion*, mentions that within the history of epic poetry, some versions of the genre such as the Russian *bylina* consist of only 23 lines (28). Leslie himself draws upon the work of C. M. Bowra's *Heroic Poetry*.

<sup>3</sup>This idea is mentioned in terms of La Ceppède's juxtaposition of the "proportions épiques de [son] récit," and the "expérience personnelle" (14) of the lyric. However, apart from a brief but insightful discussion of the links between Aeneas and Christ (89–90), it is not Donaldson-Evans's goal to examine the epic characteristics of La Ceppède's work to any great length. Likewise, Terence Cave, in *Devotional Poetry in France c. 1570–1613*, alludes to an epic quality in the *Théorèmes*, contending that the work "has all the significance of an epic interpreted as a moral and transcendent allegory" (227). Nonetheless, a detailed study of La Ceppède's adaptation of the genre is beyond the scope of Cave's contribution. For his part, Paul Chilton's *The Poetry of Jean de La Ceppède* does not refer to the epic *per se*, but does argue that La Ceppède's portrait of Christ includes that of the "warrior-king" (110), and that Christ's descent into hell in Part II marks "a battle between Christ and Satan...[that] foreshadows the ultimate triumphant entry into heaven" (113).

<sup>4</sup>This is not to say that Greco-Latin heroes are exempt from waiting and tribulation before their goals are achieved. Achilles, Odysseus, and Aeneas must show patience, courage, and endure pain, but their heroism does not lie in their humiliation.

<sup>5</sup>One should note, however, that in Frye's view, the "contrast-epic" normally begins its narrative on the divine plane and ends with emphasis on the human. As a result, the *Commedia*, while belonging in this category, "reverses the usual structure of the contrast-epic" (317).

<sup>6</sup>The epic underwent a resurgence during this period. Daniel Madelénat remarks that around 1550, numerous translations of Greek and Latin epics surfaced in France and Italy. In addition, the rediscovery of Aristotle's *Poetics* underscored this "tendance antiquisante" which in part contributed to a heightened consciousness of the epic during this period (218).

<sup>7</sup>Shortly, I will discuss this version of the genre, along with the "historical epic," in more detail.

<sup>8</sup>With respect to Tasso, one should of course mention his *Gerusalemme liberata*, published in 1581. It is highly probable that La Ceppède knew of this work. Yet, its influence on the *Théorèmes* is difficult to discern primarily because La Ceppède makes no reference to it, or to Tasso himself, in his annotations. In addition, the two works bear striking stylistic differences, as La Ceppède's text stresses personalized narrative much more than Tasso's.

<sup>9</sup>See *The Historical Epic in France: 1500–1700*, esp. Chapters 5 and 7.

<sup>10</sup>My source text for Part I of the *Théorèmes* is Yvette Quenot's critical edition of *Les Théorèmes sur le sacré mystère de notre redemption*. Quotes from Part II are taken from the a facsimile of the original edition prepared by Jean Rousset. In the interest of readability, I have modernized the orthography for passages taken from Part II.

<sup>11</sup>Sonnet I,1,3 reads as follows:

Tu dois bien à cette heure, ô Sodome obstinée  
Fournir de pleurs la terre, & le ciel de clameurs:  
Te voila miserable au dueil abandonnée,  
Depuis que ton bon Prince abandonne tes murs.

L'entrée de celuy, dont les barbares moeurs  
 T'apprendrent ce que peut la rage forcenée,  
 Sur toy ne versa point tant de noires humeurs,  
 Que l'issuë du Christ te laisse infortunée.

Car puis qu'il t'abandonne; Adieu ta royauté,  
 Ta richesse, ta paix, ta grace, ta beauté,  
 Contre tes ennemis te voila sans defense:

Il est vray que tantost on le r'amenera:  
 Mais las! ce ne sera que pour combler l'offense,  
 De ton fier Sanedrim qui le condamnera.

While verses 13 and 14 underscore the agony Christ will endure upon his return, La Ceppède suggests in Part II that after his Resurrection, Christ will reenter Jerusalem via the Apostles and the Word to reclaim the city. See sonnet II,3,3-4, as well as *Renaissance Resonance* (165-7).

<sup>12</sup>Madelénat explains that the motif of *in medias res* hinges in part on the idea of a "crise initiale" (152) which helps focus the narrative. This "crisis," be it dissension and plague in the *Iliad*, the tempest in the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*, or the threat of war in *La Chanson de Roland*, helps outline the action of the epic tale.

<sup>13</sup>It is important to note the curious absence of Dante in La Ceppède's annotations, because a person of La Ceppède's culture would certainly have read Dante, whose presence is evident not only in the mixed narrative style, but in the thematic adaptation of the descent into hell in Part II.

<sup>14</sup>I take this concept of a "mixed" narrative from Gérard Genette's article, "Introduction à l'architexte," from the volume he edited with Tzvetan Todorov, *Théorie des genres*. Genette uses the term while referring to Homer's format which presents both a detached narrator who describes events, as well as dialogue between characters (101).

<sup>15</sup>Sonnet I,1,2 reads:

Le jour qui precedoit la fest esolemnele  
 Du Phase, quand Salem ses Agneaux immoloit,  
 Cet Alcide non feint de l'horloge eternele  
 Oit l'heure, qui fatale au combat l'appeloit.

Il exhale soudain le feu qui le brusloit  
 Sur les siens: les exhorte à l'amour fraternele:  
 Les lave; les sublime au feu qu'il exhaloit,  
 Pour apres luy regir l'Eglise Paternele.

De sa Chair, de son Sang il leur fait un repas,  
 Qu'en mémoire à jamais de son cruel trespas  
 Il veut estre refait. Puis sort à l'entreprise,

Et va droit au Jardin qu'il souloit frequenter:  
 Pour monstrier qu'heroique il consent à sa prise,  
 Que nul sans son vouloir n'oserait attanter.

Of special note in this sonnet is the last tercet which emphasizes that Christ's heroism lies in the fact that he leaves Jerusalem and sacrifices himself to God's redemptive plan of his own volition.

<sup>16</sup>Cave holds that “composition” comes to mean a “description of events,” whereas “analysis” suggests their rational examination, and “prayer” the emotive, transcendental, internalization of these stages (26–27). Cave derives his argument from Martz’s *The Poetry of Meditation*.

<sup>17</sup>Considerations of space will only allow an in-depth discussion of sonnets I,1,49–53, as opposed to the whole episode, which extends to I,1,62.

<sup>18</sup>All Biblical quotes come from *The Jerusalem Bible*.

<sup>19</sup>In his first annotation to the poem, La Ceppède remarks that this epithet is taken from John’s version of the Apocalypse, (5:5). Consult Quenot’s edition (198).

<sup>20</sup>For an analysis of how this poem reflects La Ceppède’s adaptation of the lyric subgenre of the *blason*, see *Renaissance Resonance* (34–38).

<sup>21</sup>Ganelon is drawn and quartered. Consult *La Chanson de Roland* vv.3960–3974.

<sup>22</sup>Critically speaking, one should make the distinction between the *nekuomanteia*, rooted in the shaman-like calling of dead souls, and the *katabasis*, which describes the actual journey. In the *Théorèmes*, the former concept is more applicable because Christ’s purpose is to contact and save souls from the past, present, and future. The *katabasis* becomes less important by virtue of the fact that La Ceppède, unlike Homer and especially Virgil, devotes little if any time to describing the actual journey from the crypt to hell. For a larger discussion of these concepts, see David L. Pike’s *Passage Through Hell* (6–7).

<sup>23</sup>While La Ceppède does allude to hell in Part I, these references deal more with the poet’s adaptation of pagan mythology than with appropriation of the epic. For a detailed explanation of La Ceppède’s use of myth as it relates to hell in Part I, consult Donaldson-Evans (101–02).

<sup>24</sup>While the reference to the grasping of knees in adoration is indeed prevalent in Book I of the *Iliad*, I could find no distinct evidence of this motif in Book 14.

<sup>25</sup>Cave uses this term to describe La Ceppède’s “humanistic” practice of “reconcil[ing] the different realms of human experience” (228). Similarly, Chilton points out that “This willingness to draw upon the ancient world and on a contemporary secular thought is a symptom of La Ceppède’s humanism—a devout humanism with a rational strain” (69). Donaldson-Evans claims that La Ceppède follows thinkers such as Jean Seznec and Marsilio Ficino who claimed that classical mythology should be considered a kind of “theology” that “coincided” with Christian doctrine (91–92).

<sup>26</sup>Quenot’s index reveals that La Ceppède cites Ovid in the annotations to sonnets I,1,6, I,1,15, I,1,16, I,1,46, I,2,25, I,2,37, I,2,41, I,2,42, I,2,57, I,2,78, I,3,21, and I,3,22.

<sup>27</sup>For a specific explanation of how this poem operates within the tradition of the *blason*, see my *Renaissance Resonance* (56–57). Donaldson-Evans analyzes this sonnet in terms of the intellectual and mystical contexts in which the Orpheus myth can be linked to Christ (106–7).

<sup>28</sup>La Ceppède states these goals in the following manner: “je prins resolution de l’ [la Poésie] arrester encore avecque moy, & de tenter si par ce mesme moyen je pourroy restaurer ses anciennes beautez...j’ advisay qu’ on ne pouvoit mettre en oeuvre un outil plus utile que le rasoir tranchant de la profonde meditation de la Passion & mort de nostre Sauveur JESUS-CHRIST.”

<sup>29</sup>

*Ter conatus ibi collo dare bracchia circum;  
ter frustra comprehensa manus effiguit imago,  
par leubis uentis uolucrique simillima somno.*

Aeneis VI 700–2.

One is tempted to follow postmodern criticism on the *nekuia* and claim a parallel between the texts under consideration and Jung. Proustian scholars have discussed a link between the use of the “Underworld motif” in the *Recherche* and the Jungian search for either the maternal or

paternal archetype. Clearly, Christ's search for his "Saints Peres" mirrors Odysseus's encounter with Anticleia and that of Aeneas with Anchises. For a detailed study of Proust and Jung, see Robin M. J. MacKenzie, "Marcel aux Enfers: Modulations of Motif in Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*." Also consult Françoise Létoublon and Luc Fraisse's article, "Proust et la descente aux enfers: les souvenirs symboliques de la Nekuia d'Homère dans la *Recherche du temps perdu*."

<sup>30</sup>See also Note 3 regarding Donaldson-Evans's remarks on the link between Christ and Aeneas.

<sup>31</sup>I thank John Turner for the English translation of this passage. In his annotation, La Ceppède mistakenly attributes the quote to Anchises, and omits the opening phrase of verse 126, *Tros Anchisiade*.

<sup>32</sup>Donaldson-Evans also argues along these lines (90).

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