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RACINE

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RACINE

BY PROSSER HALL FRYE

I

When Racine began his career as a dramatist, he found the general definition of French tragedy already formulated by Corneille. However the latter had come by his conception—whether freely and of his own instance, or in yielding to the pressure of official criticism, or what is even more likely, in attempting to effect a compromise between these two influences—the upshot of his labour was, to all intents and purposes, the doctrine of the three unities. All that remained for Racine was to adapt himself to these prescriptions. Nor should the difficulty of the task be underrated. It was one which Corneille himself had failed to accomplish. Classic by method and finally, perhaps, by conviction, he was incurably romantic by temperament and inspiration and was never wholly successful in conceiving an action thoroughly agreeable with his own formulæ. There is something bungling and unhandy in his efforts to cage a broad and rambling plot within the narrow limits required by his theory; something cramped and ungraceful about the result. In a word, it would hardly be unjust to say, whatever praise he may deserve for its discovery, that he never understood the practical working of his own invention; he never altogether grasped the principles of congruous simplicity characteristic of the classic drama.

To illustrate this statement I need only refer to *Rodogune*.¹ The *Cid* would be an even better example, though scarcely so fair an one, since it was written while Corneille was still serving his apprenticeship. But to the citation of *Rodogune* for such a purpose it is impossible to take exception since Corneille himself expresses a decided preference for it over all his preceding performances including both the *Cid* and *Cinna*. And the significant matter is the reason he assigns for his favouritism. Abstractly,

¹ *Examen de Rodogune*.

the framework is of the utmost severity, such as is ideally prescribed by the unities of time and place, as Corneille insists that he is practising them. But what he congratulates himself upon is anything but the harmonious accommodation of material to plan. Rather, he justifies his fondness for the play by "the surprising incidents," which, he assures us, are purely of his own "invention" and "have never before been seen on the stage." To be sure, he acknowledges that his "tenderness" for this particular drama may be in the nature of parental partiality—it contains so much of himself; but the very fact that he feels it at all, is pretty good evidence that he never quite realized the obligations which his own profession of the unities imposed upon him, particularly with reference to the selection of congruous subject-matter. And to this charge he pleads guilty in so many words in the *Discours de la Tragédie*.²

"It is so unlikely that there should occur, either in imagination or history, a quantity of transactions illustrious and worthy of tragedy, whose deliberations and effects can possibly be made to happen in one place and in one day without doing some little violence to the common order of things, that I can not believe this sort of violence altogether reprehensible, provided it does not become quite impossible. There are admirable subjects where it is impossible to avoid some such violence; and a scrupulous author would deprive himself of an excellent chance of glory and the public of a good deal of satisfaction, if he were too timid to stage subjects of this sort for fear of being forced to make them pass more quickly than probability permits. In such a case I should advise him to prefix no time to his piece or any determinate place for the action. The imagination of the audience will be freer to follow the current of the action, if it is not fixed by these marks, and it will never perceive the precipitancy of events unless it is reminded and made to take notice of them expressly."

Here, then, is his confession. Do the best you can to crowd

² In quoting Corneille and Racine I use the spelling and accentuation of Fournel's edition (*Librairie des Bibliophiles*) based on the last editions published during the authors' lives.

the incidents of your play into the compass of a single day and dodge circumspectly anything that may call the attention of the audience to the passage of dramatic time in the hope that they may not notice the imposture. Every Corneillean tragedy conforms more or less closely to this general rule. I can not think of one in which there is not some embarrassment in supposing that the whole action elapses within twenty-four hours.

On this account it is not quite fair to represent Racine as merely taking over Corneille's model. To the formal theory and criticism of French tragedy, it may be, the former contributed little. But if drama is a craft in any sense of the word, then the man who took up tragedy at the point to which Corneille had brought it and carried it on to the point where Racine left it, can hardly be said to have added little or nothing to it. And the misconception arises, I believe, from a persistent confusion with regard to one of the unities—to wit, the unity of action.

However it may be with the unities of time and place, we are commonly assured that all drama, the romantic not excepted, has one unity in common, the unity of action; for such unity, it is speciously added, is indispensable to a dramatic work of any kind. That the statement is true in one sense, may be granted; most statements are so in some sense or other. But that the romantic drama possesses unity of action in the same sense as the classic drama—or even anything that would have been recognized as a unity by Aristotle—such a position can hardly be maintained with any great show of plausibility. Indeed, so great is the difference in kind that the use of the same term with reference to the two dramas is misleading and bewildering in the extreme. As well say that romantic tragedy possesses unity of time and place because each individual scene is within itself continuous and stationary.

The fact is that the romantic and the classic action are conceived in two quite different manners and produce two quite distinct impressions. While the latter, as everybody acknowledges, is concerned only for the upshot or issue of a certain business or transaction; the former is concerned equally for its inception and development—for the soil in which the tragic seed is planted and

the climate in which it is ripened even more than for the fruit which it finally bears. It is as though the romantic playwright were absorbed in demonstrating how such a result was brought about by successive steps; while the classic playwright is interested only in the nature and symptoms of the disease itself. Scrupulous as is Sophocles in general, he is, to all appearance, quite indifferent to the antecedent improbabilities of his *Œdipus Tyrannus*; evidently he recognizes no obligation to account for his tragic consequences. In the romantic action this tragic matter is anatomized or parcelled out into its various constituent incidents, circumstances, and details, the which are all set forth severally and serially in such a manner that the spectator gains his notion of the tragedy as a whole by a retrospective and discursive act of the imagination. In the classic form the tragic affair is caught at its culmination or crisis in such a way that it is made to yield all it contains of human significance and purport. The former is historical, the latter moral. The one views its subject as a process or a becoming; the other as a state or a being. If I were not afraid of being misleading in my turn, I should insist upon this distinction and assert for the sake of contrast that in the matter of procedure the one is dynamic or kinetic, the other static—not that nothing happens in the latter but that what does happen, happens inside the situation. At all events, as far as names are concerned, the romantic drama, from the point of view of method, may safely be described as analytic, the classic as synthetic.

That these two ways of handling plot are, in reality, so diverse as to merit different names, and that the unities of time and place are thoroughly incompatible with the romantic conception, no modern reader with a sense for Shakespeare and Sophocles can deny, when actually put to it. On the very surface of things it is impossible to think of a moral fatality of tragic magnitude historically as originating, developing, and terminating all in the course of a single day—even a more or less elastic stage day—or to treat it historically as confined to such a period: the preparation alone would be prohibitive. In *Othello* Shakespeare has indeed tried something of the sort; but even here he has taken pains

to truncate his action uncommonly, beginning much farther in than is usual with him.³ And still in this case the result, as far as it is not purely romantic, is Corneilleian—the action, where it is not extended, is merely compressed and makes no pretense to the congruous simplicity demanded by the unities. In a word, it is still analytic, no matter what artifice has been used to make it appear foreshortened. And it is just Racine's distinction to have recognized this fact—of the essential incompatibility of such an action with the unities of time and place, a fact to which Corneille was totally blind—and to have succeeded in working out a genuine unity of action in the strict sense of the word—a synthetic action, that is,—which would be conformable with the other unities—though, indeed, it is a distinction that is usually overlooked or misesteemed.

As a matter of fact, the notorious rivalry between the two great poets, amounting to little less than open hostility, ought to be quite enough in itself to discredit the commonplace that Racine was a mere successor or continuator to Corneille. In reality, Racine, while accepting Corneille's definition of the drama in general terms, censures expressly his management of at least two unities, those of time and action, with severity. As Corneille was in the habit of handling it, the unity of time was by his own confession nothing but a barefaced trick or deception—barefaced to the reader, however it might appear to the spectator. It consisted, as he himself explains, in ignoring the actual duration of events in favour of an hypothetical stage-day of twenty-four hours or thereabouts. Upon his choice and organization of material it exerted little or no influence. For the playwright who is embarrassed by the extent of his subject or by a plethora of incident he has no better advice, as has been seen, than to refrain from mentioning the topic on the off chance that the audience may fail to notice the congestion of the action. In short, for all his floundering Corneille never succeeded in imagining, much less in defining, a unity of action commensurate with his ideal unities of time and place. The nearest he comes to doing so is in his "unity

³ I am referring, of course, to the so called "double time" of *Othello*.

of peril";⁴ and how unsatisfactory that was he was himself the first to acknowledge. To all intents and purposes his action remains of the same dimensions as that of the Spanish *commedia*; it is as diffuse and protracted, as wanting in concision and concentration:—his efforts are directed solely toward disguising its character. Apparently it never occurred to him that the solution of the whole problem consisted in such an *ordonnance* of his plot that the unities of time and place should be involved in the nature of the action itself and should result from it, instead of being imposed upon it as a durance or constraint. As a matter of fact, the unities of time and place, as far as they are valid at all, are only functions of the unity of action.

At all events, it is directly against this method of dramatic composition that Racine directs his satire in replying to the detractors of his *Britannicus*:

"What can be done," he asks, "to satisfy such rigorous judges" as these umbrageous Corneilleans. And he answers: "Nothing is easier in defiance of good sense. All you have to do is to abandon naturalness for extravagance. Instead of a *simple action* [*italics mine*] made up of a modest amount of material, which takes place in a single day and advances gradually to a conclusion sustained only by the interests, sentiments, and passions of the characters, you must cram this same action with a great quantity of incidents which could not possibly come to pass in less than a month, with a vast amount of stage clap-trap the more amazing the more unlikely it is, with a multitude of declamations wherein the actors are made to say just the contrary of what they should."

And to the same effect in a familiar passage of the preface to *Bérénice* he insists upon this pertinent simplicity of action:—

"Nothing matters much in tragedy save likelihood; and what is the likelihood that there should happen in a single day a multitude of things which could hardly happen in several weeks? Some there are who think that this simplicity is a sign of small invention. They fail to notice that on the contrary all invention consists in making something out of nothing and that all this

⁴ *Examen d'Horace*.

great mass of incident has ever been the recourse of those poets who have felt their genius too frail and scanty to hold their audience for five acts by *a simple action* [italics mine, again] supported by the violence of the passions, the beauty of the sentiments, and the elegance of the expression." As compared with Corneille's confessed weakness for "surprising incidents," the like of which had never before been seen on the stage, these expressions would seem to be sufficiently explicit. It is not the multitude or variety of incident which is to furnish forth the perfect tragedy; it is passion, sentiment, expression, which, so far from disagreeing with simplicity of action, in reality concur with it; for here as everywhere it is upon this significant simplicity of action that the whole weight and force of Racine's authority is brought to bear.

As for the unity of place—it is in itself a minor matter anyway. That is to say, the unity of place offers no such difficulty in the problem of verisimilitude as does the unity of time. There is no prohibitive improbability that an action of any extent, provided it be confined to the linear dimension, should not occur in a single place. One may be born, wed, and die in the same room, as far as that goes—though it is impossible to imagine all these events as taking place on the same day. It is for this reason, perhaps, that Racine nominally conforms to Corneille's receipt in setting all his dramas for a single room or apartment—with the exception of *Phèdre*, which is set, in accordance with an earlier recommendation of the same authority, for a single "site." Nevertheless his own practice implies a kind of criticism of Corneille's. With the latter the single room or cabinet which served as the local habitation of his drama was a stage fiction no less truly than his dramatic day. Conventionally—though as a matter of fact it often shifts from one spot to another—it was feigned to adjoin the apartments of the principal characters and to represent a kind of indifferent or neutral ground where all parties to the action were equally at home, and where etiquette and precedence were suspended in the article of entrances and exits. Actually, it was a mere theatrical spot, non-committally furnished and decorated, where the actors met regardless of verisimilitude, whenever the

playwright needed them, for the purpose of carrying on the play. In the hands of Racine, however, this convention becomes more or less of a dramatic reality. There is some difficulty, to be sure, in actualizing the "locations" of *Phèdre*; but as a general thing, his action does take place in the chamber where it is cast, whether the harem of a sultan or the anteroom of an emperor, the appearance of his characters in that particular spot is reasonable, and a violation of etiquette, if there is one, is always excused by the logic of the situation.

Now, all this was possible—Racine was able to make the unities of time and place a dramatic reality instead of a theatrical fiction by means of his own contribution to French tragedy—a contribution which I have spoken of, properly or not, as the discovery of a genuine unity of action. But no matter for the name; his originality consisted in seeing—what is fairly obvious at present but what at the time escaped the eye of the *grand Corneille*—that a drama as a whole is determined by the plot and that in order to have a certain kind of tragedy it is necessary to begin with a certain kind of action. Unlike Corneille he was sufficiently in sympathy with the Greek spirit to perceive the artificiality of the Corneillean tragedy with its arbitrary limitations of the plot as contrasted with the intimate connection between the action and what virtually amounted to the unities of time and place in the best Athenian tragedy, and to recognize that the success of the same unities in French and the perfection of the type to which they belonged hinged likewise upon the conception of an action which should reduce the dimensions of tragedy to the proportions of a *crise* or paroxysm. As Lemaître points out, he begins *Britannicus* twenty-four hours before Nero's first crime; *Bérénice* twenty-four hours before the heroine leaves Rome; and *Andromaque* twenty-four hours before Pyrrhus decides in favour of his captive. Only so was it possible to confine the drama to a single room or even site and to a single revolution of the sun. Tragedies do occur in rooms and they occur of a sudden, no doubt; but they are tragedies of emotion, not of incident. They are affective tragedies—tragedies in which much is felt and something is said, but in which comparatively little is done. They are

tragedies in which the characters suffer their fate—in a single word, they are tragedies of passion and the characters are patients.

And this is, I fancy, the explanation of that Christian passivity ascribed to Racine's drama and referred by Sainte-Beuve to his Jansenist education.⁵ While Corneille, it has been pointed out, remains a pagan to the end, Racine manifests, as the saying is, a genius naturally Christian. As compared with the softness and infirmity of Racine's characters, there is about Corneille's something a little extravagant and demonic, even Titanic—

Qu'il joigne à ses efforts le secours des enfers,
Je suis maistre de moy comme de l'univers.⁶

It is as though the former were concerned to point in them the moral of original sin and efficient grace. In themselves they are powerless for virtue—puppets of temptation like Phèdre, recipients of evil suggestion, *possédés*—without force or initiation of their own. That such is the effect of his drama I have said myself; nor would I deny that his schooling at Port Royal may have inclined his mind to such an interpretation of life and humanity. But I would insist that such an interpretation conforms also to the formal obligations of his tragedy and is not so very different after all from the tragic vision of the Greeks. Whether they were naturally Jansenist is a question I should hardly care to raise. But granted Racine's problem, he could scarcely have found another solution of it so happy as that afforded him by this tragedy of pathos and infirmity.

Nor is it without significance that so many of his dramas bear the name of women—*Andromaque*, *Bérénice*, *Iphigénie*, *Phèdre*, to say nothing of *Esther* and *Athalie*, which lie outside of my *cadre*, as do also *Alexandre* and *Les Frères Ennemis*. Of the exceptions—in *Mithridate* alone does an heroic figure dominate the stage, though even he is in his period of *défaillance* and eclipse. As for *Bajazet* it had much better been called after Roxane; while *Britannicus* too is something of a misnomer for a play that

⁵ *Port-Royal*, t. VI, p. 131.

⁶ *Cinna*, V, iii.

centres upon the adolescent Nero. The truth is that as a tragedy of passion the nature of Racine's drama—like the depravity of Nero himself with its long suppression and gestation, its violent spasm and its quick collapse—is essentially feminine.

Obviously, such a drama is not without its incidental technical advantages over and above its simplifications of the unities. Its preparation, for instance, is immaterial and subjective: it is all internal and mental, dependent upon the state of mind of the characters; and hence it requires little exposition save what is involved in the psychology of the situation itself and developed *pari passu* with the progress of the play. On the contrary, it is noteworthy that one of the best evidences to the artificiality of Corneille's dramatic construction is furnished by the inherent difficulty of his exposition—he complains of it himself—which makes pretty nearly every one of his entrances into the matter a *tour de force*. At the same time the Racinean outbreak or *dé-nouement* has the corresponding merit of being as sudden and violent, like an explosion or convulsion of nature. All that is necessary is to apply a match to the train—to invent the one little contingency capable of precipitating the catastrophe. Consider how simple is the machinery of *Andromaque* in comparison with that of *Lear* or *Hamlet*; it is a mere release or trigger. There is no difficulty in imagining such a tragedy as occurring in a single day and in a single chamber wherever the combustible happens to be stored. And it was to his conception of a tragedy of this sort—as an eruption of the most vehement of human passions—that Racine, I repeat, owed his invention of a modern action perfectly in keeping with the unities of time and place.

In this connection it would be unpardonable to omit a reference to what is after all the great superiority of the classic drama. The supreme merit of the simplified or synthetic plot which is the determining feature of that drama, whether in the hands of the Greeks or of Racine, consists in the fact that it allows the dramatist time and opportunity for the conception and development of a definite and deliberate theme. "Le premier mérite d'une œuvre dramatique," declares Vinet, "c'est qu'une idée s'en dégage nettement et vivement, c'est qu'on puisse, comme un discours oratoire,

la réduire à une proposition.”⁷ The great weakness of the romantic drama has always and everywhere been its lack of theme. And particularly is this statement true of the Spanish *commedia* as practised by Calderon, Lope de Vega, and Tirso de Molina. With the exception of a play or two like *La Vida es Sueño*, Spanish tragedy is almost themeless—unless for the tiresome *pundonor*, and that is a motive rather than a theme. Or if a romantic tragedy has happened to catch a momentary glimpse of something that might have served it for a theme, the pressure of incident has been so irresistible as to jostle it out of sight forthwith. In the best of instances it remains rudimentary and inchoate, hardly rising above the suggestion of a motive. There is no place or leisure for it in the serried procession of events, marching hurriedly by numerous degrees from a distant inception to a remote issue. The interest is distributed so impartially over the series that little or no attention is left with which to exhaust the sense of a single situation. As far as I can remember, there is nothing in romantic tragedy, for example, to parallel the discussion over the corpse of Ajax—the soliloquies of Hamlet, perhaps, excepted; and even they seem strangely clouded in comparison. As for Corneille, he does marvellously well in this respect for all his disadvantages, as witness *Pompée* and *Cinna*. But naturally enough, under the circumstances, it is in Racine, whose characters of passion have little more to do than just to exhaust the sense of their situation, that the theme attains its fullest development. And it is one of his aptitudes that this treatment should suit so well with the particular passion that he picked as the lever of his tragedy.

That, as compared with the Greeks, his conception of passion was limited must be conceded.

C'est Venus toute entiere à sa proie attachée.⁸

It would be idle to deny that his exclusive preoccupation with one master passion—this virtual identification, for dramatic purposes, of passion with sexual desire, gives his drama as a whole

⁷ *Les Poetes du Siècle de Louis XIV.*

⁸ *Phèdre*, I, iii.

an air of one-sidedness. But whether the theatre be dedicated to Cypris or Dionysus makes little difference; the point is that though the Greeks used other motives, they reached the same destination by the same route. Their action is viewed in the same manner, synthetically, as a spasm or fit of emotion; it is by madness, fatuity, or some other brief and violent distraction that the Greek *dénouement* is brought to pass. With them the tragic motive is a passion too—a something suffered or endured,—*ἐπειτά γ' ἔργα μου πεπονθότ' ἐστὶ μάλλον ἢ δεδρακότα*.^{8a} And like Racine again they were obliged to think of their hero's fatality as a kind of distemper or malady. It was not at random that Boileau with Racine in mind enjoined the tragic poet,

Et que l'amour, souvent de remors combattu,
Paroisse une foiblesse et non une vertu.⁹

Such a treatment is involved in the notion of the type, as the Greeks with their usual penetration had not failed to discern.

Ibsen, too, in reviving the type—the synthetic, as perhaps I may now be permitted to call it from my description of the action—has been forced to adopt the same dramatic tactics. Like Racine's his is, in its own way, the tragedy of an apartment and an obsession. Upon differences of tone and atmosphere it is needless to dwell; one has only to recall those ill-ventilated, stove-choked rooms of his, with their frost-blistered windows overlooking the snow-bound and sea-haunted moors and firths of the inclement north. But to all intents and purposes the mechanism is of the same sort—for all its moral confusion the action is subject to the same simplification and the motive is conceived as an infirmity.

To return to Racine, one-sided as his partiality for love may seem in the bulk, it still gives his single pieces a wonderful intensity and power; for after all there is no other human passion quite so impetuous and headlong. And what it lacks of itself in virulence it acquires by association with its accomplice passion, jealousy. Hence his constant employment of this second and

^{8a} *Œdipus Coloneus*, 266-7.

⁹ *L'Art Poétique*, Chant III.

subordinate motive as a prick or goad to the former. The perfection of his drama, therefore, consists in the complication of these two motives—love and jealousy. Hence while *Bérénice* serves well enough as a kind of outline of his tragedy, its fulfilment is represented by *Phèdre*.

To take *Bérénice*, for all its slenderness, as an example of his bare idea, is, I suppose, fair enough, since he himself in the preface seems to offer it as such. In the words of Vinet, whose comments on all this literature are uncommonly pertinent, "*Bérénice* n'est pas le chef d'oeuvre de Racine; mais c'est ce qu'il a fait de plus racinien."¹⁰ That the plot is meagre to the point of emaciation, may be granted; but for that reason the scheme itself is only the more salient. It consists obviously, in the author's own words, of "a simple action"—hardly more, to be exact, than a situation. It is a posture and a precarious one, terminating in a single expressive gesture of renunciation and regret:

Tout est prest. On m'attend. Ne suivez point mes pas.
Pour la dernière fois, adieu, Seigneur.

Helas!¹¹

The development, then, will consist of three parts: first an explanation or "exposition" of the relations of the parties in confrontation; second, a demonstration of the emotional tensions and their potency; and third, an exhibition of their release and an indication of the outcome. All that is necessary for a representation of this sort is that the personages should meet and speak together; and this they may do as well in one room as in the universe at large. As a matter of fact, I am not sure that the impression is not intensified by the sense of confinement and constraint so produced, as it might be with an explosion in a narrow space, and as it is also to my mind by the absence of blood-letting at the close. "It is unnecessary," says Racine, "that a tragedy should be glutted with blood and death. It is enough that the action should be noble, the actors heroic, the passions excited; and that the entire piece should be redolent of that ma-

¹⁰ *Poètes du Siècle de Louis XIV.*

¹¹ *Bérénice*, V, vii.

jestic grief which makes the pleasure of tragedy."¹² And there is, indeed, about the play a sort of appalling tightness or constriction—binding the characters like a fatal ligature—to which an act of violence would be a relaxation and to which the piece is indebted for its individuality as compared with the other dramas of Racine. It may not rise to the highest effect of which tragedy is capable; but at its acme, when Bérénice fancies that Titus is slipping from her, it does rise to a very high pitch of poetry.

"Pour jamais! Ah! Seigneur, songez-vous en vous même
Combien ce mot cruel est affreux quand on aime?
Dans un mois, dans un an, comment souffrirons-nous,
Seigneur, que tant de mers separent me de vous,
Que le jour recommence et que le jour finisse
Sans que jamais Titus puisse voir Bérénice,
Sans que de tout le jour je puisse voir Titus."¹³

Nevertheless, its merits and demerits aside, I am proposing *Bérénice* only as an illustration of the author's bare idea. For the elaboration of the sketch it is necessary to turn to *Phèdre*. If one were considering the "art" of *Phèdre* without reference to any particular thesis, it would be difficult to know where to begin or end. Certainly, one could hardly refrain from expatiating upon the delicacy and firmness of drawing in the characterization of the heroine,

La fille de Minos et de Pasiphaë;¹⁴

the subtlety with which from the first she insinuates herself, with all the morbid fascination of her moral distemper and personal disorder, into the blood and senses of the audience. The *début* of all Racine's heroines is tremendously effective—Monime's is a good instance; but *Phèdre's* is, in especial, insidious:

N'allons point plus avant, demeurons, chere Œnone.
Je ne me sôtiens plus, ma force m'abandonne;
Mes yeux sont éblouës du jour que je revois,
Et mes genoux tremblans se dérobent sous moy . . .
Que ces vains ornemens, que ces voiles me pesent!

¹² *Bérénice*, Préface.

¹³ IV, v.

¹⁴ *Phèdre* I, i.

Quelle importune main, en formant tous ces nœuds,
 A pris soin sur mon front d'assembler mes cheveux?
 Tout m'afflige et me nuit, et conspire à me nuire . . .
 Noble et brillant auteur d'une triste famille,
 Toy dont ma mere osoit se vanter d'estre fille,
 Qui peut-estre rougis du trouble où tu me vois,
 Soleil, je te viens voir pour la dernière fois!¹⁵

Nor would a critic at large be likely to overlook the knowingness of Hippolyte's "psychology" or the propriety of his preferences—only a novice in love would have had eyes for Aricie when Phèdre was by—nor would begrudge a word or two for Aricie herself, "*la belle raisonneuse*" of the *salons*, who takes love to be some kind of syllogism.¹⁶ But such matters and others like them deserve more than passing mention; and in view of my immediate subject I can dwell only upon what is indicative of Racine's fundamental reduction of the tragic motive to a passion in the primary sense of the word. From this point of view it is Phèdre's passivity, her incapability of self-determination that is significant both for this one play and for Racine's entire theatre in general. It is this impotence which has won her the doubtful distinction, already mentioned, of being cited as an illustration of Augustinian theology. But, however that may be, the characteristic trait of Racinean tragedy is unmistakable in this, its extreme instance. Phèdre is not merely a sufferer and a patient; hers is the debility of innate depravity, and invalidated and graceless as she is, her hapless soul is the prey of the whole passionate intrigue to which she is exposed. Hence her drama is the pendant and complement to that of the more limited and stubborn Bérénice, whose Hebraism stands her in good stead at her hour of trial.

In harmony with this difference of character the motive of *Bérénice* is simple and uncomplicated; it is the Racinean interpretation, sponsored by Boileau, of love as a passion or infirmity. By this one malady alone all the characters in common are afflicted; Antiochus himself is no more than a backing or foil to Titus and Bérénice. The intensity of interest is due, not to a conflict or

¹⁵ I, iii.

¹⁶ See her last speech in Act II, Scene i.

conspiracy of passions, but to the strangulation of this one passion by circumstances. The play consists wholly of the fluctuations of this same passion between hope and disappointment and its final settlement upon resignation. In *Phèdre*, on the other hand, this single passion, while it is still agitated by its fluctuations and before it has settled down either to resignation or to despair, is exasperated by the goadings of jealousy—a motive virtually absent from *Bérénice*, if we except a brief impersonal resentment at the meddling of circumstances, for jealousy as such is not in *Bérénice*'s character or in Titus' situation—there is too much of the prude in the former, too much of the *grand seigneur* in the latter; while Antiochus is too tame to be subject to it. But in *Phèdre*, if love is the emotional protagonist of the drama, jealousy is the deuteragonist. Nor is this all; there is a tritagonist also. In *Phèdre*'s situation love is not merely an infirmity, it is a crime and an impiety. And in the devastation of her ineffectual spirit the outrages of love and jealousy are fatally abetted by remorse. Such is the complicity of passions which instigates the emotional transport of the tragedy—one of the finest I believe in dramatic literature, as *Phèdre* is baited alternately by the taunts of one and another.

PHÈDRE

Ils s'aiment! Par quel charme ont-ils trompe mes yeux?
 Comment se sont-ils veus? depuis quand? dans quels lieux?
 Tu le sçavois; pourquoi me lassois-tu séduire?
 De leur furtive ardeur ne pouvois-tu m'instuire?
 Les a-t-on veu souvent se parler, se chercher?
 Dans le fond des forests alloient-ils se cacher?
 Hélas! ils se voyoient avec pleine license:
 Le Ciel de leurs soupirs approuvoit l'innocence;
 Ils suivoient sans remords leur penchant amoureux;
 Tous les jours se levoient clairs et sereins pour eux!
 Et moy, triste rebut de la nature entière,
 Je me cachois au jour, je fuyois la lumière. . . .

CÉNONE

Quel fruit recevront-ils de leurs vaines amours?
 Ils ne se verront plus.

PHÈDRE

Ils s'aimeront toujours. . . .

Miserable! Et je vis! et je soutiens le veuë
 De ce sacré Soleil dont je suis descenduë!
 J'ay pour ayeul le pere et le maistre des dieux;
 Le ciel, tout l'univers est plein de mes ayeux:
 Où me cacher? Fuyons dans la nuit infernale.
 Mais que dis-je? Mon pere y tient l'urne fatale;
 Le Sort, dit-on, l'a mise en ses severes mains.
 Minos juge aux enfers tous les pâles humains.¹⁷

This is the kind of thing that Racine is really capable of: it is not only great tragedy, it is great poetry; and it needs no commentary of mine by way of reinforcement.

In conclusion, I would not be understood to imply that Racine's entire drama squares in every respect with the lines of *Bérénice* and *Phèdre*. Of these two plays the one is too schematic, the other too consummate to be thoroughly representative. One does not repeat a *Phèdre* or a *Bérénice*—though for quite different reasons. But for all that, they define the type. They exhibit—all the more distinctly, if anything, for being exceptional in detail—the characteristic originality which I have been trying to vindicate for their author. They declare that simple or synthetic action, the discovery or invention of which converted the serious drama of Louis XIV from an artifice and made a modern classic tragedy possible for once. And they reveal the means whereby Racine accomplished this result by treating the plot as a *crise* of passion—typically, of love and jealousy—of which the characters were patients or sufferers, so harmonizing his action with the “unities” of time and place, which the criticism of the Academy and the example of Corneille had fastened upon his stage.

To be sure, his technical procedure was not that of the Greeks. The latter, by the force of circumstances of which the choric origin of their tragedy was undoubtedly the most influential, had developed out of the natural limitations of their action a congruous simplicity of treatment, from which the pragmatic crit-

¹⁷ IV, vi.

icism of the Renaissance had formulated the unities of time and place. Racine, in the presence of these canons, had found himself confronted with the problem of restoring, to a literature tumid with romantic elements, the simplicity in which it was wanting, by disengaging from the miscellaneous mass a unity of action to correspond with the conventions of his time. This was his contribution. And I have no hesitation in calling it original, and the drama to which he successfully appropriated it classic, though to that tragedy I shall have certain moral reservations to make a little later.

In the meanwhile it will not be amiss to devote a few words to the subject of his versification—or more exactly, his dramatic style, for as a foreigner I do not feel myself competent to criticize the *facture* of his verses. And here, again, though his originality may not be so vital and important as in the case of his innovations upon the dramatic structure of his immediate predecessor, still it is not to be overlooked or neglected. Now, dramatic poetry, naturally, is confined to the business of drama. And drama, as far as it expresses itself in language—that is, as far as it is a matter of poetry at all—expresses itself in dialogue—or exceptionally, in soliloquy. But dialogue, while always seeking something of the illusion of speech, will draw its individuality from the situation which calls it forth. Typically, the Corneillean situation in its significant scenes was essentially a disputation, wherein each character represented his own thesis and strove to convince or argue down his respondent or respondents, as may be seen by the scenario of *Polyeucte*. Hence the characteristic temper of Corneille's dramatic style is oratorical and its most elevated note is that of eloquence. As a matter of course, no tragedy in its serious moments—and Racine's is naturally no exception—can afford to be less than eloquent at the least, or it would sink to ordinary conversation and prose. But the peculiarity of Corneille is that he is so exclusively eloquent in his loftiest reaches, so seldom or never anything else. His political orations are concededly the best things he does. How greatly they were admired, how compelling their vogue is shown by the fact that Racine has executed one of the most prominent

scenes of his *Mithridate*¹⁸ in the same taste. And while such passages are not those that stick most tenaciously in my memory, even those that do are in the same vein:

La vie est peu de chose; et tôt ou tard qu'importe
Qu'un traître me l'arrache, ou que l'âge l'importe?
Nous mourons à toute heure; et dans le plus doux sort
Chaque instant de la vie est un pas vers la mort.¹⁹

Good lines; but their excellence is the excellence of eloquence. Like all Corneille's best they are perceptibly declamatory:

NERINE

Forcez l'aveuglement dont vous êtes séduite,
Pour voir en quel état le sort vous a réduite.
Vostre païs vous hait, vostre époux est sans foy,
Dans un si grand revers, que vous reste-t'il?

MEDÉE

Moy.²⁰

Conceivably, however, there is room for something else even in the most serious drama, as we who are the heirs of Shakespeare need hardly be told. Not that Shakespeare himself despised the embellishments of elocution. Such commonplaces as Antony's harangue over the body of Cæsar and Portia's apostrophe to mercy witness clearly enough to the contrary. But then Shakespeare had no prejudices against doggerel or balderdash either. Everything was grist that came to his mill with the result that he had the widest range of expression that ever was, so that pretty nearly every variety of dramatic style may be illustrated by his example. And while Racine's scale is much more limited than his, as it is bound to be in many cases by the different logic of their *genres* so that comparison is illegitimate; still Racine's reach is much more comprehensive than Corneille's and demonstrates much more favourably, just as does the former's conception of the action, the possibilities of the types with which the two were dealing.

¹⁸ III, i.¹⁹ *Tite et Berenice*, V, I.²⁰ *Medée*, I, v.

If now we place eloquence at one pole of the genuinely poetic tragedy, then at the other terminal we must as obviously set up lyricism, a lyricism adapted—paradoxical as it may seem at first sight—to the uses of the drama and adjusted to the nature of the situation. The word *lyricism*, I should perhaps add, I use in its fundamental sense to denote the essential quality of lyric poetry and without recognition of the rather derogatory connotation it has acquired recently from reactionary French criticism. But lyric expression is the result of intense personal absorption; hence it would appear wholly incompatible with the gregariousness of drama, except for the more or less anomalous soliloquy. From the nature of the case, then, it can occur in non-choric tragedy only at those rarer intervals when a character is rapt beyond the consciousness of his neighbours and his immediate surroundings either by recollection or by extreme excitement. And for the sake of clearness I will illustrate both of these cases by Shakespeare. Of the former variety Marcellus' speech in *Hamlet* after the disappearance of the ghost is a good instance:

It faded on the crowing of the cock.
 Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
 Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
 The bird of dawning singeth all night long;
 And then, they say, no spirit dares walk abroad;
 The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,
 No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
 So hallow'd and so gracious is the time.²¹

This is a lovely example of the dramatic lyricism of recollection. While the speech of Claudio, in *Measure for Measure*, on what he fancies to be the eve of his execution, though in another key altogether, is an equally good example of the dramatic lyricism of extreme excitement:

Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;
 To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;
 This visible warm motion to become
 A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
 To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
 In thrilling regions of thick ribbed ice;

²¹ I, i.

To be imprisoned in the viewless winds,
And blown with restless violence round about
The pendant world; or to be—worse than worst—
Of those that lawless and incertain thought
Imagine howling.²²

Such is a fair sample of the kind of lyricism produced and legitimized dramatically by a sudden or violent excitement—in this case the dread of death.

Now, the characteristics of these two influences—of recollection and excitement both, the one induced by reaction, the other by shock—coalesce and run together inseparably in passion of the Racinean type—which with one and the same motion provokes the spirit of the patient and throws it back upon itself. Just as the expression of elevated ambition is naturally oratorical, that of love is naturally lyrical. For this reason the “lyric cry,” which is almost wholly absent from Corneille, is audible again and again on the lips of Racine’s characters, especially his heroines. It is possible that verses as picturesque as the following may be matched elsewhere in French tragedy of the time, though I do not happen to recall any:

Et la Crete fumant du sang du Minotaure,²³

or this:

Ariane aux rocher contant ses injustices.²⁴

But in the passages that I have already quoted from *Bérénice* and *Phèdre* the novelty is undeniable:

Ils suivoient sans remords leur penchant amoureux;
Tous les jours se levoient, clairs et sereins pour eux!
Et moy, triste rebut de la nature entiere,
Je me cachois au jour, je fuyois la lumiere.²⁵

And it seems to me that there is a new note in Monime’s appeal to Xipharés at her *début* in the second scene of *Mithridate*:

²² III, i.

²³ *Phèdre*, I, i.

²⁴ *Phèdre*, I, i.

²⁵ *Phèdre*, IV, vi.

Seigneur, je viens à vous. Car enfin aujourd'hui
 Si vous m'abandonney, quel sera mon appuy?
 Sans parens, sans amis, desolée et craintive,
 Reine long-temps de nom, mais en effet captive,
 Et veuve maintenant sans avoir eû d'espoux,
 Seigneur, de mes malheurs ce sont là les plus doux.

It is not a purely lyric note, perhaps, and yet its plaintive simplicity has very much the effect of lyricism—at least of the applied lyricism of the drama. But I can not hope to detect all Racine's inflections, much less to illustrate them. I am satisfied to show that in introducing a certain lyric strain into his tragedy he has provided it with something of the dramatic relief of which the Greeks were possessed by virtue of their chorus and of which modern French tragedy was destitute until he supplied it.

II

Such, it appears to me, are Racine's principal services toward the revival of a classic tragedy in modern times;—the discovery of a congruous simplicity of treatment by the segregation of a synthetic or unitary action, and what is less momentous, the restoration of dramatic relief by the application of lyricism to tragic dialogue. With these subsidies neo-classic tragedy reached its highest point of perfection. That it staggered presently and declined is no detracton to its momentary excellence; in that respect it was but equal in fate with its Attic prototype. As for its most powerful supporter, Racine, aside from his well-known intimacy with Euripides, it would be absurd, in view of the merits that I have just mentioned, to deny that his sense for Greek drama was far finer than Corneille's, who, as a matter of fact, was never completely successful in shaking himself free of Spanish and romantic influence. And yet eager and sensitive though this taste of Racine's was, there are certain aspects of the Greek genius to which he is partially or wholly blind. That any one with even a tincture of the great Athenian tradition should find the invention of Eriphile or Aricie a happy one, seems incredible—though much may be forgiven Aricie as the mover of Phèdre's jealousy. In particular, however, he seems never to have fath-

omed the profound moral significance of the great Attic tragedians. Perhaps he was misled by his very devotion to Euripides, who is generally disdainful, if not oblivious, of the import of the material out of which Æschylus and Sophocles made so much. With Euripides, for example, Racine can see no sense in such a theme as the sacrifice of Iphigenia. "How shocking," he exclaims, "if I had stained the stage with the murder of a person so amiable and virtuous!"²⁶—a sentiment that corresponds perfectly with the opinion of Euripides' heroine,

μάλνεται δ' ὅς εὖχεται
θανεῖν. Κακῶς ζῆν κρείσσον ἢ καλῶς θανεῖν.²⁷

But even on those rare occasions when Euripides turns out to be a capable guide, Racine is not always equal to following him, as is conspicuously the case with *Hippolytus*.

In all Euripides' extant work, however, *Hippolytus* is exceptional in being conceived most nearly in the moral sense of his great predecessor, "the mellow glory of the Attic stage." To be sure, Racine owes a little something in this case to Seneca also; but his debt to the latter is merely that of one craftsman to another, and touches the *ordonnance* rather than the inspiration of the drama, which derives from Euripides direct. A comparison, therefore, of *Phèdre* and *Hippolytus* should be a fair test of the particulars in which Racine was insensible, as I have affirmed, to the deeper significance of the original classics. How thoroughly he—and not he alone but others before him—misunderstood the tragic logic of his original, he confesses naïvely in his preface:

"As regards Hippolytus," he says, "I had noticed among the ancients that Euripides was reproached with having represented him as a philosopher exempt from every imperfection—a circumstance which made the death of this young prince a subject of indignation rather than of pity. I have thought it necessary to give him some infirmity which would make him slightly culpable toward his father without impairing the magnanimity with

²⁶ *Iphigénie*, Préface.

²⁷ *Iphigenia in Aulis*, 1251–1252.

which he spares the honour of Phèdre and allows himself to be abused without accusing her. I call an infirmity the passion which he suffers, in spite of himself, for Aricie, the daughter and sister of his father's mortal enemies."

Need I call attention, in passing, to the use of the terms *infirmity* and *passion* as confirming in themselves that view of the Racinean tragedy which I have been developing, a view which in so far I think to be consistent with the Greek? But this matter apart, it is well nigh impossible to misinterpret Euripides' intention more egregiously than does this quotation. Hippolytus, "a philosopher exempt from every imperfection"! His own maker would never recognize him. For if one thing is certain, from a study not merely of Greek tragedy but of Greek thought in general, it is that Euripides and every member of his audience must have recognized the protagonist of *Hippolytus* as criminal—not in the old elemental Æschylean sense, or yet in the majestic, civic Sophoclean wise, but criminal, nevertheless, with respect to one of the most fundamental laws for private man, τὰ περὶ ἀνθρώπους νόμιμα, one grave enough to be inscribed above the temple of the god at Delphi, the law of μηδὲν ἄγαν or temperance, which seems almost to cover and include the two other great maxims of Greek wisdom, γνῶθι σαυτὸν and κατ' ἀνθρώπου φρονεῖ, Know thyself and Think as a mortal. A philosopher without σωφροσύνη or prudence. What Greek would have called such a mere mortal blameless?

Now, this difference of sentiment is decisive, not only for the two plays under discussion, but also for the ancient and modern point of view at large. And the difference involves a double change of feeling—one with regard to personal responsibility in general and the other with regard to the virtue of temperance more particularly. The fact is that the moderns have pretty well lost the sense for the moral qualities of acts as such. Superficially it seems curious that with our brutal Hegelian worship of the *fait accompli* it should be so. But this is the very point. If we are willing to forgive success its most heinous crimes, it is so because the deed itself appears to us without decisive moral

character of its own. And if we are reluctant, on the contrary, to condemn the well-meaning mischief-maker, it is so for much the same reason. The attitude may be due wholly or in part to our sentimentality. Our interest has come to be ethic rather than moral; it has come to centre in the characters, tempers, and dispositions of men and in conventions for accommodating and reconciling them, rather than in the great fundamental principles of humanity—the *ἄγραπτα κάσφαλὴ θεῶν νόμιμα*.^{27a} With this shift of attention to the ethic as distinguished from the moral our final verdict is swayed by the intention, for which alone we hold ourselves answerable, while we have ceased to acknowledge a like responsibility for our actions. With Pilate we wash our hands and protest the purity of our conscience. Our sympathies, like Racine's, are with the well intentioned; and we excuse the deed readily enough on the strength of the motive. Of course, this is nothing but casuistry pure and simple; it is nothing but a modern variation of the Jesuitical "direction of the intention," whereby a man might be absolved of the murder of his father provided only he killed him not with the idea of committing assassination but merely of securing his inheritance. But such is our modern emotional reaction; and it has already begun to affect our administration of justice so called, which a sane instinct of self-preservation has hitherto counselled us to leave intact. And since literature and especially tragedy is appreciated emotionally, it is in such manner that we apply ourselves nowadays to the appreciation of this kind of subject.

For the Greek, on the other hand, the act as such was neither indifferent nor negligible—on the contrary it had a distinct moral quality in itself. It was right or wrong, independently of intention, as it did good or harm—that is, as it respected or violated the institution of the supreme human polity, the *ἄγραπτα νόμιμα*;²⁸ and as such its initiator was responsible for it—he was wicked as it was evil, innocent as it was just. His intention was his own

^{27a} Sophocles, *Antigone*, 454–455.

²⁸ For this conception of a moral constitution superior to the conventions of social ethics, an idea we appear to have lost, see Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, IV, iv.

private affair—though it might serve to wheedle the pity of the spectators or bystanders or even the commiseration of the gods, as its theatrical representation did in the case of the spectators.

Now, in a good many cases, it must be acknowledged, there is a practical difficulty in deciding just what is the moral quality of an act as such, regardless of motive. But it seemed fairly safe to assume that those acts might be reckoned good which brought happiness in their train, and contrariwise. At least such a belief appears to be one of the natural tenets of conscience. To be happy is so evidently to have done well in life. “Τὸ δ’ εὖ ζῆν καὶ τὸ εὖ πράττειν ταῦτόν ὑπολαμβάνουσι τῷ εὐδαιμονεῖν.”^{28a} Here is the whole story, with the exception of Plato’s wise thinking. To be sure, the standard of happiness or well-being was likely to be low with the vulgar—hardly more than worldly prosperity, which is not much of a criterion either in ancient Attica or modern America. And perhaps it was this baseness of ideal which led Euripides to criticize and even condemn the old moral standard altogether, with its identification of righteousness and well-being, of wickedness and adversity, which constitutes Sophocles’ constant thesis—just as it was the general degeneracy of public opinion on the same subject which inspired Plato in his attempt to raise the ideal by disassociating happiness from all material accompaniments whatever and by confining it to the contemplation of the supreme good—an attempt which ultimately drove him to his doctrine of suprasensible ideas as the sole means of rescuing the eudæmonistic truism from the dissolving criticism of a Callicles or a Thrasymachus as well as of a Euripides.

In the *Hippolytus*, however, Euripides does for the nonce remain fairly loyal to the traditional belief in the moral quality of actions as a determinant of prosperity and misery. It is Hippolytus’ conduct, not his motive, which renders him obnoxious to divine as well as to poetic justice. The offense which he has committed unthinkingly (with Racine we should probably acquit him of ill doing) consists in his exclusive and hence excessive cult of Artemis to the neglect and disparagement of Aphrodite.

^{28a} Aristotle’s *Ethica Nicomachea*, I, 4, 2.

Not that his devotion to Artemis is blameworthy in itself; but Aphrodite has her claims also. And it was the Greek notion, not that a man might acquire merit and plead exemption for the others by satisfying this or that claim, but that he should satisfy all claims in their due and proper proportion. In Æschylean and Sophoclean tragedy this conception is axiomatic. The tragedy arises from the protagonist's inability or unwillingness to satisfy all just claims—in the great tragedies from his inability to do so, as in *Electra*, *Antigone*, and *Œdipus*. Naturally, the more august the claims and the more conflicting and irreconcilable, the more stupendous the tragedy. While the lesser tragedies, if I may speak of degrees of tragedy, turn, not so much on the fatal contrarieties in the nature of things, like traps to break the soul, as on those inconsistencies of character in which the protagonist seems less unable than unwilling to pay all his debts, like Ajax by reason of hybris or like Hippolytus himself by reason of ἀκολασία or intemperance. And if nowadays we fail to recognize Hippolytus' fault, it is because the obligation of sophrosyne or moderation has lost its authority either wholly or in part, just as is so often the case with one or another of the conflicting claims of Greek tragedy—the law of talion, for instance, which disputes with filial piety the *Electra* and the *Coephoroe*.

Nor is even the idea of sophrosyne an easy one for the modern; even Plato devotes an entire dialogue to the discussion of it—inconclusively, according to the critics. In this respect, however, I can not agree with them, since the positions which Plato pre-empted in the *Charmides* are those which he finally occupies in the *Republic*. The only reason for their temporary relinquishment in the former dialogue is the circumstance that the discussion has involved certain assumptions—principally that of the equivalence of happiness and meeting your obligations—which he will not at the time consent to have taken for granted, though he justifies them later. Hence it is that I can not look upon Plato's attempt at a definition as a failure. At least I can give no better account of the matter; and what that account implies is, in sum, that sophrosyne consists in taking one's own measure as a man and conforming to it—the virtue to know the measure

and to be moderate. Wherefor my earlier remark that the maxim, *μηδὲν ἄγαν*, or Nothing too much, by which the Greek aphoristically translated the idea, virtually absorbs the other two gnomes in which Greek wisdom is epitomized, *γνῶθι σαυτόν* and *κατ' ἀνθρώπου φρονεῖ*—Know thyself and Think as a mortal. In short, *sophrosyne* was much as I have been expressing it, the recognition and satisfaction of all just claims. And this virtue, in which Hippolytus was so sadly to seek, was the polar virtue to the Greek. Mere mortification, asceticism, even the excess or exaggeration of a single duty he would not have understood as righteousness. Saintliness in the sense of austerity is an oriental, not a Greek, ideal. Such a character, if the latter could have comprehended it at all, would have struck him as unnatural, even monstrous. “*Οὐ γὰρ ἀνθρώπικὴ ἐστὶν ἡ τοιαύτη ἀναισθησία*,” so says Aristotle.²⁹ And he would have expected to see it draw the lightning, just as Euripides has represented it as doing. For it is this immoderation on the part of Hippolytus in slighting the natural human affinities or inclinations and in unsettling the balance of satisfactions by discharging one set of duties exclusively to the prejudice of all the others—it is this partiality which is adjudged a criminal arrogance or *hybris*. About his very chastity there is designedly something *farouche* and savage like that of his tutelary divinity, the harrier of Actæon. And it is this partiality which brings him within the scope of Phædra's baleful influence. In this way is vindicated the inflexible justice presiding over the great tragedy of the Greeks—for which reason I have said that however it may be with Euripides in general, *Hippolytus* at least is in the great tradition.

All this is so clear that the wonder is how Racine could have missed it. And yet little or nothing of it appears in his *Phèdre*. The compromise whereby he seeks to excuse his hero's entanglement in the coils of a penal process by endowing him with a fancy for Aricie, is too trifling to take seriously. It is Phèdre's passion that inflames the play; and any mere affection is bound to show pale and ineffectual in the blaze of such a conflagration. At

²⁹ *Ethica Nicomachea*, III, xi, 7.

best, Hippolytus' attachment for Aricie may be a motive as regards Phèdre, who is sensitive in just that particular spot; but it is no term in his own sequence of dramatic liabilities, his τὸ δι' ἁλλήλα, as Aristotle would call it,³⁰ for it does not appear that there is any mesh, in the ancient sense, between his fate and his tenderness for the daughter of a hostile house. This is not the issue; and he is never called to account on this score. On the contrary, so far has Racine missed the point, that this very sentiment for another woman—any woman would do—which Racine imputes to him, does, as a matter of fact, clear him altogether of the charge on which he should by rights be sentenced and actually is sentenced in the original version. The Hippolytus of Racine has already paid his tribute to Venus and no longer stands within her danger. Whether he is guilty of filial impiety on the score of Aricie's ancestry and descent is another question than the one Racine has discussed. His injection of such a motive into his preface is simply misleading. As things are, the apprehension of Hippolytus by the fatal snare is fortuitous and unintelligible.³¹ In a word, Hippolytus is not responsible for the plight in which he finds himself. As a result his tragedy is harrowing but not edifying. This is not to say that his character or his conduct is without its interest or its lesson, but merely that the drama lacks the severe determinism which Euripides has known how to impart to this one subject at least.

But the *Phèdre*, it may be objected, is not Hippolytus' tragedy at all; and its author has given us to understand as much by the change of title. Granted. Racine's theatre is for the most part a *tragédie des femmes*; and it is not *Phèdre* which is the exception. But this concession only makes the predicament worse. With Phèdre in the leading rôle it is without a problem, as with Hippolytus in that part it is without a solution. I am still trying to occupy the Greek point of view. That I myself am no æsthete or æsthetician must be abundantly evident by this time; a problem has no terrors for me—nor yet a thesis or a theme. I am

³⁰ *Poetics*, IX, II.

³¹ Compare Arnauld's ejaculation, "Mais pourpoui a-t-il fait Hippolytus amoureux?" Sainte-Beuve, *Port-Royal*, t. VI, p. 130.

even abandoned enough to believe that literature is all the better for something of the sort, provided it is humane and not economic or sociological or anthropological. And so I have the effrontery to repeat that with the substitution of Phèdre for Hippolytus in the principal part the play is destitute of problem, and being without a problem, is destitute of thesis likewise. To be sure, there is a kind of justice in Phèdre's fate; but it is that obvious, anticipated, matter-of-fact sort of justice to which the conscience does not have to be reconciled. Her guilt is as sensible as her sentence. She is a sinner—the fascinating and sympathetic sinner with whom a long course of modern literature has sufficiently familiarized us. Her seduction is undeniable. But she is plainly a dangerous woman, a *femme fatale*; and it is better that she should be put away. And in this decision we acquiesce without difficulty. There is no ambiguity in her lot, no misgiving in the minds of her judges.

The only compunction that her lot arouses has to do with the fate of her victim, Hippolytus; and to that problem, it has been seen, no solution is vouchsafed. In short, the logic of the tragedy is of a thoroughly modern type, of which *Macbeth* and *Richard III* are the readiest examples—the tragedy of wickedness or depravity. And like all tragedies of the type, it is a little awry. For what we fail to notice in our preoccupation with such protagonists is the circumstance that the merited visitation of their iniquities provides no satisfaction or compensation for the sufferings of their victims—the endless procession of Duncans, Banquos, and Lady Macduffs. It is they who rise,

With twenty mortal murders on their crowns,

in speechless expostulation with the ordering of their destiny. What warrant can we produce for their ills? Theirs is the tragedy—unrecognized and unriddled; for every tragedy is something of a mystery as of a sacrament. No, such tragedies are out of focus somehow; and the Greek with his habitual tact avoided them. It is not Phèdre's subtle and pervasive corruption—that only proclaims her a moral outlaw and debars her from tragic

citizenship altogether, as Aristotle explains clearly enough³²—it is Hippolytus' waywardness which makes the Greek subject:

Οὐδὲς μ' ἄρεσκε νυκτὶ θαυμαστὸς θεῶν.³³

To Euripides the woman is a malign influence, a calamity to which Hippolytus' impudence exposes him. And if in the case of Racine's heroine there is a trail of fatality lying across her house, which simulates the immanence of divinity after the Greek fashion,

τὰ γὰρ ἐκ προτέρων ἀπλακῆματά νιν
πρὸς τὰσδ' ἀπάγει,³⁴

it does little more, in reality, than give depth to the tableau and perspective to the picture. It is physiological—an heredity, not a dispensation; a transmitted taint rather than a suspended judgment re-incurred for himself by every new successor to the title. Its moral, as distinguished from its æsthetic, effect would be, if anything, to raise a doubt of her responsibility and throw suspicion upon the criminal rationale of her catastrophe. And while it is hardly emphasized to that degree—being intended, I suppose, toward holding the sympathy of the audience a little more surely—still in the upshot, the whole affair, with respect to Phèdre as well as Hippolytus, comes in the modern version to take on the appearance of an act of wantonness on the part of Venus:

Puis que Venus le veut, de ce sang déplorable
Je peris la dernière et la plus misérable.³⁵

Not that Racine's drama has no sense; far from it. But it is not the sense of the antique. And if I am perchance singular in preferring the thorough consequence and conclusiveness of the latter's dialectic; on the other hand, I believe that I am only speaking in the spirit of my time when I add that I prefer the former's interpretation of character for its inherent momentousness and significance. In spite of the dubiety and indecision of

³² *Poetics*, XIII, 2.

³³ *Hippolytus*, 106.

³⁴ *Æschylus' Eumemides*, 935-6.

³⁵ *Phèdre*, I, iii.

Racine's *Providence*, I must confess that to me his *Phèdre* is more appealing than Euripides', not only in her reticences and indiscretions but in that by virtue of which they subsist—her own being. For after all, how much richer the character of the former than that of the latter! And the change of taste or sentiment, if I am right in my diagnosis, is far from trivial; for it is inevitable that this enhancement of personality, which is at the bottom of it, should have exerted a tremendous influence upon the modern treatment, not only of character itself, but also of the issues and eventualities of the action.

In order to explain these consequences, however, I must refer hurriedly to the intellectual structure of tragedy as far as it furnishes a scaffolding for the problem which is the peculiar concern of the *genre*.³⁶ Universally, tragedy would appear to include two components—the “fable,” which represents the fact upon which it is founded, and the “art,” whereby this raw material is fashioned into drama. As far as the subject-matter goes, the sentiment of tragedy seems to be aroused by the perception, in some event or other, of a dissidence between the demands of conscience and the data of experience—between our notion of justice or equity and our knowledge of actuality. Obviously this dissidence must be a serious one—so serious, indeed, as to upset momentarily our feeling of moral security—to trouble and perplex and even confound for the time being our intelligence. This temporary sense of queasy and vertiginous insecurity I would call, with Aristotle's term *catharsis* in mind, the tragic qualm. From what precedes it is evident that the subject of tragedy involves a *contretemps*—or as Aristotle puts it for his own stage, a *metabasis*—and implies the agency of fortune. Any occurrence which meets these conditions, does in a measure inspire the onlooker with the crude sentiment, and in so far raises the question, of tragedy.

But such a state of consternation is intolerable—especially if it is prevalent, as happens particularly whenever the tenure of

³⁶ I have already expressed myself at large on this topic in a paper on “The Theory of Greek Tragedy,” published in *UNIVERSITY STUDIES* for October, 1913, which I summarize here as briefly as possible.

life becomes generally precarious—in seasons of public insecurity, for example, in times of war or pestilence—conditions under which or the recollection of which tragedy is most likely to flourish. In the interests of sanity, then, it is necessary that the reason should be reconciled to existence and that the apprehensions to which it is subjected by the perfidies of nature should be composed and tranquillized. In other words, if the observer is to be brought to acquiesce in the shocking terminations of tragedy, he must be made to find in the apparent miscarriage of justice which the dramatist has chosen for his theme some solace of a sort for his own outraged sense of propriety. This is the “art” of tragedy. Without it there is only the representation of some harrowing and inscrutable casualty.

Now, as a matter of course, the gravest of such outrages occur in connection with the conflict of good and evil on those occasions when the latter seems to have won an unwarranted triumph over the former to the detriment of the personal happiness or well-being of its vanquished representatives. Hence tragedy has ever sought pretty much to this one kind of subject. It has always been moral and eudæmonistic. And it has been greatest where its preoccupation with this topic has been most exclusive, as was the case with the Attic drama of the great epoch. Among moderns the New Englander has had something of the same conviction of moral immanence which inspired Æschylus and Sophocles. For him as for them the world was compact of good and evil; there was no room for moral indifference, no neutral zone in his universe—nothing but “the gods still sitting around him on their thrones,—they alone with him alone.” But his end was not well-being but duty. And in this intent he was invulnerable to adversity, the stage-manager of the tragic scene. Nay, to the Puritan conscience with its suspicion of fortune and her works, the very name of tragedy was anathema.

To the Greek, however, with his moral and eudæmonistic leanings—nor should his intellectual and inquisitive temper be forgotten either—the problem presented itself in some such guise as this. Why did misery come to attach itself to a sort of action naturally calculated to ensure happiness? I say “why,” not

"how" advisedly; for unlike the modern, he was not to be fobbed off with anything less than a reason. In other words, with no discernible difference as between two acts—or at least, of two acts equally laudable as to purpose, why should the one promote disaster and disgrace, the other prosperity and repute? Or more narrowly still, why in this particular instance, say, should a certain design which might be predicted on general principle and analogy to further the advantage of its author—why should such a course of conduct, on the contrary, plunge its pursuer into an abyss of wretchedness and humiliation? How was such seeming perversity of circumstance to be explained? Such, I believe, was the riddle that Æschylus and Sophocles set themselves to read. And they solved it by the affirmation, tacit or explicit, of a cosmic law of righteousness, as a transgression of which they accounted every such outward act a crime, reckoning its frustration and disgrace a legitimate penalty of wrong-doing.

Nor was this notion of a supra-mundane policing of human activities singular to Æschylus and Sophocles. To be sure, it had its scoffers like Thrasymachus and Calicles, and its critics like Euripides. But it was so obviously a matter of course that the dramatist was safe in appealing to it as the basis of his solution and in deducing the necessary corollaries from it acceptably to his public. In this way, by the identification of adversity with guilt, he was in a position to explain the sufferings of his protagonist by holding him responsible for the misconduct (and notice how easily our own language falls in with the same kind of reasoning) of which they were supposed to be the consequences at the same time that he was able to soften the audience to the proper degree of indulgence for the sufferer by representing his transgression as uncalculated and involuntary. But though as the victim of a *contretemps*, he might well be regarded with a moderate pity, still as a transgressor and a source of impiety and pollution, he was an abomination³⁷ and an object of horror. Hence the complementary emotions of pity and horror by which Aristotle defines tragedy in exponents of the action.³⁸

³⁷ *Μίασμα* and *μίσωρον* in the language of Æschylus and Sophocles.

³⁸ *Poetics*, VI, 2, and XIV, 1.

With the modern conceit of personality and its surpassing importance, however, such a resolution of the contrarities of fortune becomes impossible. What is decisive in such an estimate of character is purity of motive, not precision of conduct. "Infirmity and misery do not, of necessity, imply guilt. They approach, or recede from the shades of that dark alliance, in proportion to the probable motives and prospect of the offender and to the palliations, known or secret, of the offense." Such, in the heart-felt words of De Quincey at the confessional, is approximately the modern and romantic doctrine of responsibility. Consistently with such a view a formal contravention of prescription can not be pleaded in extenuation of that loss of happiness to which one is felt to be entitled by virtue of such merit as consists with good intentions. That good intentions alone are no guarantee of prosperity, however, is a depressing certainty of daily observation. With the moral negligibility of conduct the centre of tragedy has begun to shift, and the old explanation is thrown out of focus. And yet the radical detestation of injustice persists unaltered—only it is now impossible to palliate the miscarriage by convicting the sufferer of involuntary culpability; he is exonerated by the sense of his personal worthiness. To all appearance, virtue has simply lost the *partie*; and there is nothing left for tragedy but to affix her signature to the humiliating admission.

And yet there does remain one way of escaping this recantation of our most earnest professions. While conceding, as now seems unavoidable, that there is but "one event to the righteous and the wicked," the dramatist may still claim a spiritual superiority for the former, not only in an equality of fortune, but also in an inequality of fortune which is all to the advantage of the latter. In other words, he may still solicit and win approval for a certain sort of character in the face of its material collapse. In this manner it is possible to restore that confidence in the primacy of the individual conscience by which the modern sets such store. In spite of an ineptitude for affairs, an inadequacy to the situation which the ancient would have construed as the infatuation of guilt, Hamlet, Othello, and Lear are esteemed to have the

nobler part for all their calamities, as contrasted with the wholly despicable conspiracy to which each falls a victim. And so this assertion of the sentimental pre-eminence of an approved character, irrespective of its ends and activities, has come—thanks to its conformity with our modern, and perhaps I should add our Christian, prepossession—to form the resolution of modern tragedy, of the neo-classic as well as the romantic.

That such a resolution is emotional rather than rational can not be disputed. All too obviously it supplies no genuine solution of the mystery of good and evil, happiness and misery which has vexed the heart of man for so many centuries. It is but a compromise at best; and as such it is an inherent defect of modern tragedy. Nevertheless there are two remarks to be made in extenuation. In the first place, the immediate appeal of tragedy is emotional any way; and such a reconciliation, though failing to satisfy mature reflection, does at least offer temporary alleviation of the heart-ache that accompanies the spectacle of such enormities as make the subject-matter of tragedy. While further, since it is unreasonable to expect a thoroughly congruous art of an age without consistency, it is only by some such compromise that the dramatist can hope to mediate between the warring tendencies of our post-renaissance mood. In an order purely physical, for example, it is inconceivable that righteousness should influence our material well-being in one way or the other. Or else, if a man's fortunes are to be taken as the index of his deserts, as antiquity was prone to believe, then the protestations of his own conscience are unreliable as against the evidences of adversity. But either of these alternatives we are loathe to embrace. The former implies an insensible determinism; the latter a moral causation. And in our reluctance we are driven to make the benefits and dignities of virtue, as of character, largely subjective and intimate—an affair of sentiment pretty exclusively.

As a result of this expedient of reconciling the heart, irrespective of the head, to the contingencies of the *dénouement* or catastrophe, there has ensued a momentous change of attitude toward the protagonist. I speak of the *dénouement* or catastrophe as a contingency deliberately; for in this light we are

bound to consider it, *ex hypothesi*, on the strength of its hideous disproportion with the presumptive innocency of the victim. At least, since the "hero" is no longer to be held to strict accountability for his conduct to the extent of sharing impartially in the obloquy of his misdeeds, there is no choice save to call the catastrophe morally indifferent whatever his instrumentality in its production. As *Othello* and *Hamlet* are written, it is impossible to visit upon the heads of the titular characters the full measure of abhorrence proper to their infamies as such. Taken in themselves, the crazing of Ophelia by the meditative Dane and the smothering of Desdemona by the valiant Moor are not exploits particularly creditable to their perpetrators. And yet in spite of the egotistic squeamishness of the one and the jealous credulity of the other character, we are induced to shift the blame from their shoulders to the instigation of circumstance and the connivance of opportunity—agencies admirably symbolized in the *Phèdre*, for instance, by the person of the nurse. Herein, obviously, consists the utility of the "villain"; he lets the "hero" out. For notice that with this gentry Sophocles and Æschylus, whose protagonists bear, like Œdipus, the opprobrium of their own mischief, have no traffic. And though there are foreshadowings of the villain, in the present acceptation of the word, in Euripides as a scapegoat for some of the interesting adventures, like Medea, for whom that author had such a particular tenderness; yet the rôle owes its sinister prominence to the exigencies of the sentimental reconciliation and the modern tragedian's efforts to save his hero's face at all odds—an effort in which he is inevitably led to develop the ethical rather than the moral possibilities of his action, treating it as revelatory of the complexity and richness of the protagonist's temperament, which to our notion constitutes its worth and value.

As a result of these conditions, then, the modern protagonist or hero is invariably a "sympathetic" character. If he were not—if he were to forfeit the indulgence of the audience, he would lose what standing he has and become identified with his own performances. In that event, being as he is the source of irre-

parable injury to others no less than to himself, the illusion of his merits would vanish and his tragedy would turn into the exceptional type of which I have already spoken as the tragedy of depravity or turpitude, exemplified by *Macbeth* and *Richard III* and of which, as it is anomalous, I need speak no further in this connection. Or else, the audience, deprived of their faith in his innate nobility, even if they succeeded by a miracle of subtlety in retaining a purely intellectual confidence in his conscientiousness despite the damning evidence of his own misdoing, would remain unreconciled to the hardship of his lot, and the tragedy itself as "art" would be a signal failure. There are no two ways about it: while the Greek protagonist might be represented as simply infatuate, the unavoidable outcome of the sentimental reconciliation is the "sympathetic" protagonist.

I can not disguise that in all this there is more than a trace of casuistry. But what then? Such is modern sentiment, romantic even at its best and in spite of itself; and since art must comply with the convictions of its devotees, such is modern tragedy. In contrast with the classic Greek it takes the hero subjectively, as he is reflected in the mirror of self-consciousness, and not objectively, as he would impress the dispassionate observer. It does not consider him an example but an exception, unique and individual. It is less concerned to bring him to trial as the citizen of a moral polity whose constitution he is under suspicion of having violated than to plead in his behalf the privilege of an unnaturalized sojourner in a strange land with whose institutions, customs, and manners he is unfamiliar and to whose jurisdiction he is not properly subject. So patently unadapted are Hamlet and Othello to their *milieu* that it is rather naïve to express surprise at the havoc they play with it. In this respect modern tragedy is uniformly confidential and biographical—not common and public, not historical. It embodies a distinct and hitherto unstudied variety of the "pathetic fallacy." Consistently, it has ceased little by little, notwithstanding its early deference for tradition, to draw its material from generally accessible and verifiable sources, and has taken more and more to

substituting invention for interpretation. As far as the results go, it is not wholly inexcusable to distrust the sincerity, if not the legitimacy, of "private" tragedy altogether. For once the dramatist has begun to rid himself of fidelity to the record written or oral, there is nothing to prevent him from abusing his audience's sympathy "at discretion" to the confusion of all moral values whatsoever. Indeed, he is bound by the nature of the case to do a certain amount of violence to the judgment of his audience. Euripides himself has shown how the trick may be turned in his *Medea*, and Racine has not been slow to imitate him in *Phèdre*. I will not go so far as to say that Racine has passed the bounds permissible to his *genre*, but I can not deny that he has pushed our indulgence for his heroine to something of an extreme. And if the "sympathetic" hero is capable of such license while still subject to the authority of legend or notorious fable, what limit to his excesses when these last fetters are finally removed? The answer, I suspect, is Ibsen. How many of the tremendous figures that dominated the Attic stage in the heyday of its splendour are "sympathetic"? Not Orestes, nor Agamemnon, nor Œdipus Tyrannus, nor Electra, nor Clytemnestra. Prometheus and Antigone? Or do they only seem so to us? For it is significant that these two pretty nearly exhaust the unqualified enthusiasm of the modern for ancient tragedy. I omit to mention Philoctetes and Œdipus Coloneus because the "happy" tragedy in which they figure is as anomalous to our experience as the tragedy of evil or turpitude was to that of the Greek, and hence lends itself as little to comparison. But if Antigone and Prometheus were, in reality, "sympathetic" characters originally, they at least were so by disposition, not by theatrical necessity, as is the case with their younger colleagues. As for Hamlet, I sometimes wonder, for example, whether he was actually so "sympathetic" as he is painted. The remark is fatuous, of course, since Hamlet is just what Shakespeare has made him, no more, no less. But it serves to illustrate the point, if the point is worth making at all, since it assumes an affect entirely at variance with Aristotle's first-hand impression. On the

authority of this one deponent, whose competence I fancy no one will question, the Greek protagonist, while laying claim to the pity of the audience for his reverses, was effectually disqualified as a "sympathetic" character by the horror that he excited by his misdeeds. The evidence is conclusive: the "sympathetic" protagonist, with the sentimental reconciliation of which he is an outcome, is a persistent characteristic of modern, in contradistinction from ancient tragedy.

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