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**Médée, Clytemnestre and Phèdre: Female Heroism  
Revisited in Seventeenth-Century French Tragedy**

**Ramona-Dana Lungu**

**A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the  
requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts  
School of Modern Languages  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis reinterprets Médée's, Phèdre's and Clytemnestre's behaviour, actions and character in the dramatic works of Pierre Corneille, Jean Racine and Hilaire-Bernard de Longepierre, and provides new and original readings of their experience and deeds. This endeavour incorporates a comparative approach to the classical Greek and French early modern versions of these characters which emphasizes the development that the latter undergo in order to acquire psychological depth and complexity. The behaviour and actions of these early modern tragic heroines is then analysed through an ethical framework, which combines Carol Gilligan's ethics of care and Martha Nussbaum's valorisation of the role of emotions in the decision-making process. This reading engages with the tragic characters' experience and perception in a manner that acknowledges and values specific aspects of their behaviour and reasoning which so far have been devalued or overlooked, specifically their emotional reactions and their ideas about goodness and responsibility. This analysis argues that the ethical standpoint of female tragic heroines is as valid and valuable as the deliberation mode of their male counterparts and reclaims their place within the tragic hero category. The analysis of the characters' behaviour and actions is deepened through a psychoanalytical approach informed by transactional analysis and game theory, concepts developed and applied by Eric Berne. This approach challenges previous Freudian readings, to provide new and original interpretations of the characters' behaviour and a composite image of the factors that inform their actions, particularly inherited values and beliefs about themselves and the world. The final step of this study is the analysis of recent productions of these plays. This endeavour completes our reading of these tragic characters by presenting the new interpretations that emerge from recent performances in terms of characters' behaviour and interactions and the way they reinforce the readings incorporated in chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis. This study overcomes the biases of previous interpretations of these characters and provides original readings which enable us to perceive these characters and their behaviour from a different perspective.

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I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: Ramona-Dana Lungu

DATE: 03 October 2019

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## **Introduction**

### **1.1 Tragedy and the tragic character**

This section will begin with a discussion of Hans Lehmann's idea of a transhistorical tragic motif, an element which has endured, can be performed in postdramatic theatre, and attracts the interest of the audience. This tragic motif will be connected to Aristotle's theories regarding tragedy and the tragic character in order to get a sense of the way this element is presented and discussed in the Classical period which marks the beginning of the dramatic tradition. The discussion will afterwards move to the early modern ideas regarding tragedy which are inspired by an interpretation of Aristotle's principles, in order to reveal the way this tragic motif is developed in this period alongside a specific treatment of the tragic character informed by contemporary values and beliefs. This will indicate that the early modern tragic heroes who display the tragic motif identified by Lehmann, are relevant to a contemporary audience because this element is combined with a specific way of constructing the tragic character in the French classical period. This discussion will set up the main theoretical concepts of French classical tragedy, and will argue that the early modern dramatic texts I examine in this thesis have been chosen because they depict characters who display the tragic motif identified by Lehmann, and this in combination with a specific treatment of the tragic hero/heroine attracts the interest of the twenty-first century audience.

Hans Lehmann's analysis of tragedy focuses on finding an ahistorical tragic motif or model that can be achieved in the conditions of a postdramatic theatre performance which tends to be stripped down of plot or to unsettle the formal elements of the dramatic text. Drawing from Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger and Georges Bataille, Lehmann argues that the tragic does not reside in conflict but in presenting 'a manifestation of rupture, which occurs in and / or outside the subject

in the form of transgressive energy'.<sup>1</sup> According to Lehmann, the tragic is about the human being and the need to overstep boundaries, to reach too far, to be reckless and to take risks in the name of a desire for unrestrained love, power or vengeance. The essential feature of this tragic element is the violation of cultural norms and laws even though these possibilities represent part of the self. The tragic character loses oneself in order to find oneself. Tragedy becomes a process of self-destruction leading to self-discovery which at times can be accompanied by feelings of guilt and sin. Lehmann acknowledges that a conflict of values may arise in these tragic plots, but he argues that the tragic is defined mostly along these lines.

The critic places this transgression model alongside a conflict based one and argues that they represent the main tragic modes identified in recent times. Lehmann argues that in the case of the conflict model the condition for its fulfilment, namely, the idea that conflict must revolve around a significant matter which does not allow the hero's wound to be healed, has been rarely provided since the Renaissance. On the other hand, the heroes of tragedies written after this period display problematic behaviour and qualities reflecting the transgressive model, some examples include *Danton's Death* by Georg Buchner and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. Therefore, from Lehmann's perspective this transgression model has an ahistorical quality and makes the tragedies that incorporate it suitable for postdramatic performances and the taste of twenty-first century theatregoers.

I agree with Lehmann's idea that the excess displayed by the tragic character has an ahistorical quality that makes the plays suitable for the taste of the twenty-first century theatregoers and postdramatic theatre practitioners. However, I would like to take this further and argue that the female tragic characters who manifest this transgressive energy by performing violent acts like infanticide, parricide and incestuous desire, as for instance Medea, Clytemnestra and Phaedra, captured and continue to capture the interest and attention of a wider audience. These acts of

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<sup>1</sup> Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Tragedy and Dramatic Theatre*, trans. by Erik Butler (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 61.



violence have been and are still incompatible with the social role of women and beliefs regarding gender, and because of their taboo nature they represent a source of fascination for spectators, readers, critics and theatre practitioners. Infanticide was harshly punished in Classical Greece and early modern France and was accompanied by social opprobrium.<sup>2</sup> Even today mothers who murder their children are considered monstrous; one example is the case of Veronique Courjault, an infanticidal mother who was associated with the mythical figure of Medea, and attracted the interest of the media and the general public for several weeks during the trial proceedings.<sup>3</sup> Female incest was a transgressive and repugnant behaviour in early modern France and continues to be a taboo topic even today, as Anne Poiret's excellent book on this topic argues.<sup>4</sup> Parricide was considered an act of undermining natural and divine order in early modern France, an idea inspired by the Roman law in which the father has absolute authority in the household.<sup>5</sup> Even today, there is a limited understanding of this female criminal behaviour, and Katherine O'Donovan argues that the experience of parricidal women, even in domestic violence cases is 'limited to male definitions and behaviour practices' and their decision is often condemned by the court of law.<sup>6</sup> There is a constant interest in female violent behaviour as women's violent crimes, although a small percentage

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 1 pp. 93-5 on the type of punishment received by women committing this crime in Classical Greece and early modern France.

<sup>3</sup> Le Figaro compiled a Dossier de Presse on the case. Stéphane Durand-Souffland compares Courjault to Medea in 'L'énigmatique Véronique Courjault', *Le Figaro*, 10 juin 2009 <<http://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2009/06/09/01016-20090609ARTFIG00596-1-enigmatique-veronique-courjault-.php>> [accessed 4 December 2017]. Mazarine Pinget's novel *Le Cimetière des poupées* is a novel loosely based on this case. Christophe Regina, *La Violence des femmes: Histoire d'un tabou social* (Paris: Max Milo Éditions, 2011), ebook, loc. 2566 of 6269. He talks about infanticide as a deed incompatible with female social role and gender.

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Corneille mentions the repugnant nature of incest when discussing *Rodogune*, see Chapter 1, pp. 135-36. Anne Poiret, *L'Ultime Tabou: Femmes pédophiles, femmes incestueuses* (Paris: Éditions Patrick Robin, 2006), Estella V. Wellton, *Mother, Madonna, Whore: The Idealization and Denigration of Motherhood*, (London: Karnac Books, 2004) also discusses the problematic nature of this deed.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 1, p. 118 for a discussion of parricide in Early Modern France.

<sup>6</sup> Katherine O'Donovan, 'Defences for Battered Women Who Kill', *Journal of Law and Society*, 18 (1991), 219-40 (p. 219, 229).

of their offences, have been addressed in dozens of studies.<sup>7</sup> This suggests a fascination with the woman as a violent criminal, stemming from the fact that she transgresses social norms with regard to her gender as well as the law.<sup>8</sup> She fascinates because she challenges social and cultural norms about what represents normal, acceptable, female behaviour. These transgressive deeds represent taboos that have endured across cultures and time, and the tragic heroines displaying such behaviour are able to attract the attention and interest of contemporary audiences. Thus, I argue that female tragic characters who perform such acts of violence in a display of this transgressive energy, mentioned by Lehmann, can stimulate the interest of the audience in a way that other tragic characters may not because of the way social norms and values mould our ideas regarding female behaviour.

Lehmann's argument alongside this idea of the special interest in female violence explains the continued interest and fascination of audiences and critics with female tragic characters like Medea, Clytemnestra and Phaedra. This also indicates that these tragic heroines occupy a special position, as they were able to simulate and hold the spectators' interest across time and cultures on account of the particularly troubling nature of their deeds. This represents the reason why these characters were chosen for the analysis incorporated in this thesis. I want to examine and explore this transgressive behaviour which continues to represent a source of fascination for twenty-first century audiences, as the plays dealing with these characters are still performed and critical works dedicated to these mythical characters and their reinterpretations continue to be published.

The dramatic texts which I have chosen for the analysis of these characters' behaviour are not the Greek classical ones, but the early modern reinterpretations of these plays by Pierre Corneille, Jean Racine and Hilaire Bernard de Longepierre. The reason for this choice is the fact that the early modern versions of these plays

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<sup>7</sup> Véronique Jaquier and Joëlle Vuille, *Les Femmes et la question criminelle: Délits commis, expériences de victimisation et professions judiciaires* (Zurich et Genève: Editions Seismo, 2017), p. 74. The authors offer the example of female serial killers, who are very rare but are nonetheless addressed in a series of studies.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

incorporate a focus on the tragic character, their experience of the situation and their emotional turmoil, which provides more insight into the psychology and the factors that inform their behaviour than the ancient Classical texts, an idea which will be discussed in detail in chapter 1 of this study. This represents a fertile ground for an analysis which delves into the mindset of the characters and their unconscious and engages with their perspective which is the aim of this endeavour. Therefore, these early modern texts will be analysed in order to provide a comprehensive image of the heroines' actions by exploring the motives and the factors that underlie them, to find new meanings and to change the way we perceive and approach these characters in the hope of contributing to a wider discussion regarding the troubling nature of this type of female violence.

The idea that the early modern reinterpretations of the plays provide more space for the experience of the characters, the expression of their thoughts and feelings than their classical counterparts will be discussed and developed in a comparative approach to these texts in chapter 1 of this thesis. In this section I would like to discuss the way this treatment of the classical texts in the early modern period stems from an adaptation and development of the Aristotelian principles of tragedy in the light of contemporary norms and values. This discussion will be useful for setting up the main theoretical ideas regarding tragedy and the tragic character in the early modern period, and will reveal the way Corneille, Racine and Longepierre approached these classical texts and reinterpreted these heroines. Furthermore, these ideas that underlie this specific treatment of the dramatic texts and the characters contribute to the plays' ability to stimulate the interest of the audience alongside the display of violent and taboo behaviour. Therefore, I will discuss the way early modern playwrights interpreted, used and developed Aristotle's principles of tragedy in order to create dramatic texts and characters that corresponded to contemporary beliefs and values, provide more emphasis on the experience of the tragic hero and continue to stimulate the interest of the audience.

The theory of tragedy laid out by Aristotle focuses on the tragic plot. Four chapters of the section on tragedy in *Poetics* discuss the tragic plot whilst just one deals specifically with the construction of the tragic character.<sup>9</sup> The plot is of utmost importance whilst the character is seen as secondary. The action governs the tragic character's behaviour and defines the best form of tragedy:

it is not in order to provide mimesis of character that the agents act; rather, their characters are included for the sake of their actions. [. . .] Besides, without action there could be no tragedy, but without character there could be.<sup>10</sup>

Nonetheless, he discusses the construction of the tragic character. Aristotle introduces the concept of hamartia, a certain error or mistake, which affects the behaviour of the tragic character, who is otherwise 'not preeminent in virtue and justice, and [...] falls into adversity not through evil and depravity, but through some kind of error'.<sup>11</sup> This term has been translated and interpreted as fallibility, error, mistake. The meaning of this term has been extended, interpreted and applied in various ways like many other ideas from *Poetics*. Corneille translates and interprets this term as 'une faute ou faiblesse humaine' which leads to the tragic character's downfall.<sup>12</sup> Samuel H. Butcher's influential study *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art* (1898) also proposes flaw as one of the potential meanings of the word hamartia, and this particular interpretation of the concept became widespread in the

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<sup>9</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. by Stephen Halliwell, in *Aristotle: Poetics, Longinus: On the Sublime, Demetrius: On Style* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1995). Other chapters include discussions of the plot and the tragic character. However, these are the chapters that engage with these topics directly and specifically in the content as well as in the title.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>12</sup> Pierre Corneille, 'Discours de la tragédie et des moyens de la traiter selon le vraisemblable et le nécessaire' in *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. by André Stegmann, *l'Intégrale* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1963), pp. 830-840 (p. 831).

analysis of tragedy and tragic characters.<sup>13</sup> Lehmann's idea of excess, overstepping the boundaries and a sense of rupture which manifests itself in transgressive energy, discussed earlier in this section, is connected to this particular meaning of hamartia as a flaw leading to the tragic outcome. In spite of this discussion regarding the tragic hero, Aristotle's treatise focuses on action rather than the characters and their behaviour. The philosopher argues that reversals and recognitions within the structure of the plot are 'tragedy's most potent means of emotional effect' whilst the events depicted in these stories are responsible for stimulating the audience's pity and fear.<sup>14</sup> The plot and its development are of central importance whilst the tragic character occupies a secondary role.

This subsidiary position of the tragic hero can also be observed in the work of classical Greek tragedians. According to Christopher Pelling tragic heroes reflect the universal whilst the particular is drawn from their circumstances rather than unique and striking traits of character that emerge and develop alongside the tragic action.<sup>15</sup> The classical tragic character is somewhere between a type and the idiosyncratic individual with a complex inner life of modern literature. As Pelling argues, this reflects contemporary beliefs about human nature, social values as well as the taste of the audience alongside the principle that actions and decisions define the character.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the classical texts which presented such transgressive behaviour engaged mostly with the actions of these characters and incorporated a limited development of their perspective and experience, as this was in line with the contemporary principles of tragedy, values and beliefs. The transgressive actions depicted in *Medea*, *Oresteia* and *Hippolytus* continue to fascinate the audience. However, more insight into the experience of the tragic heroes/heroines, their emotions and their psychology would have brought them closer to the idea of a

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<sup>13</sup> Samuel H. Butcher, *Aristotle's theory of poetry and fine art: with a critical text and a translation of the Poetics* (London: Macmillan, 1932), p. 304.

<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, pp. 51, 73.

<sup>15</sup> Christopher Pelling, 'Conclusion', in *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature*, ed. by Christopher Pelling (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 245-62 (p. 259).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

distinctive, complex character of modern literature and implicitly the twenty-first century audience.

Another type of classicism, millennia later, considered both the tragic character and the plot to be essential elements for the success of a tragedy, and brought these tragic heroes closer to the idea of a modern literary character. French classicism reinterpreted and developed Aristotle's theories and the Greek and Latin classical tragedies. These texts became models for theorists and playwrights. However, their reception of the classical tradition was done in a critical manner as they sought to adapt the texts inherited from the Ancients to the tastes, values and beliefs of an early modern French society. As a result, Hippolyte Jules Pilet de la Mesnardière's *La Poétique* (1639), the first full-length French poetics of theatre, dedicates its lengthiest chapters to the construction of the tragic character and the manner in which the tragic hero contributes to the cathartic effect of the play, and the moral instruction of the audience. Although influenced by Aristotle, La Mesnardière argues that the troubles of the soul are the essence of theatre and the main goal of the dramatist is to engage the audience emotionally: '[...] puisque les troubles de l'âme sont l'essence du théâtre, certainement on conclura que le mouvement des passions doit être le premier objet de l'écrivain dramatique'.<sup>17</sup> According to the critic, the poet must have a knowledge of the rules and precepts of theatre as well as moral and physical philosophy in order to be able to create a successful tragedy that masterfully describes the passions of the soul.<sup>18</sup> The tragic hero becomes a central part of the dramatic text, as the depiction of the character's emotions has an essential contribution to the tragic effect and the overall success of the play.

L'abbé d'Aubignac, in *La Pratique du Théâtre* (1657), dedicates distinct sections to style, character construction and action. Although his treatment of these

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<sup>17</sup> Hippolyte Jules Pilet de la Mesnardière, *La Poétique*, ed. by Jean-Marc Civardi (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2015), p. 217.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 413.

elements is not as partial to the character as La Mesnardière's, d'Aubignac emphasizes that the main aim of the dramatist is to please the audience, and the action as well as the depiction of the characters are the main means through which he can achieve it. Characters need to reveal their desires and passions to the audience: 'Il faut qu'un Personnage vienne parler sur le Théâtre, parce qu'il faut que le Spectateur connaisse ses desseins et ses passions'.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, their discourse needs to incorporate the finest rhetorical devices and the most powerful emotions determined by the moral dilemma: 'les plus illustres figures de la Rhétorique, et les plus fortes passions de la Morale' in order to gain the sympathy of the spectators.<sup>20</sup> Thus, it becomes apparent that the early modern French theories of tragedy reinterpret the classical model and place more emphasis on the construction of the character and the depiction of his/her emotional reactions to the tragic situation.

Playwrights also contributed to this theoretical underpinning of tragedy and although they did not always agree with La Mesnardière or d'Aubignac, they considered the tragic character to be as important as the plot and the style. Pierre Corneille emphasizes the contribution of the tragic hero to the cathartic effect of the play and elaborates on the manner in which different types of characters can engage the audience's emotions. Although he is sceptical about the idea of a uniform and general audience reaction to tragedy in the form of the cathartic effect, he acknowledges the essential role of the tragic character in stimulating an emotional response from spectators and implicitly contributing to the play's moralising effect as well as its success:

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<sup>19</sup> Abbé d'Aubignac, *La Pratique du Théâtre*, ed. by Pierre Martino (Alger: Jules Carbonel; Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1927), pp. 38, 39, 334, 338. In terms of the audience that d'Aubignac as well as La Mesnardière have in mind, both theorists promote an educated audience of noble birth. They both acknowledge that the audience has a broader demographic. However, they do not fully engage with this aspect. La Mesnardière is satisfied to critique the philistines who fail to engage with the moral teaching of the tragic performance and seek solely the pleasure derived from it (p. 445). D'Aubignac argues that the lower, uneducated classes will have a taste for comedy whilst persons of high birth and education will appreciate tragedy as they have much in common with tragic heroes. (p. 74-5).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

établissons pour maxime que la perfection de la tragédie consiste bien à exciter de la pitié et de la crainte par le moyen d'un premier acteur [...] mais que cela n'est pas d'une nécessité si absolue qu'on ne se puisse servir de divers personnages pour faire naître ces deux sentiments.<sup>21</sup>

Jean Racine in his 'Préface' to *Bérénice* argues — in defence of his preference for simple plots not always involving bloodshed — that tragedy only needs a grave action, heroic characters and the stimulation of the passions together with a majestic, all-pervasive sadness in order to produce pleasure. According to him, talented dramatists can 'attacher durant cinq actes leurs spectateurs, par une action simple soutenue de la violence des passions, de la beauté des sentiments, et de l'élégance de l'expression.'<sup>22</sup> Thus, both dramatists acknowledge the essential role of the tragic characters and the depiction of their emotions and passions in the reception of a tragic play. As a result, they adjust the inherited classical principles and develop the tragic hero as the depiction of his/her emotional experience becomes an essential element of the dramatic text.

Whilst early modern French playwrights and theorists agreed on the essential role of the tragic character in the reception of the play, and the moral instruction that tragedy provided, they had different views on what represented a suitable tragic hero. La Mesnardière supports the idea of a tragic hero in line with Christian values, one that the audience can admire for their virtue. Modesty and humility are the traits able to stimulate the sympathy of a Christian audience. As a result a tragic hero is 'une âme douce et patiente qui reçoit modestement et avec humilité les peines que Dieu lui envoie pour la punir de ses erreurs'.<sup>23</sup> This interpretation of the tragic hero and of the term hamartia as error may be connected with the Augustinian view of

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<sup>21</sup> Corneille, 'Discours de la tragédie et des moyens de la traiter selon le vraisemblable et le nécessaire', pp. 831-32.

<sup>22</sup> Jean Racine, 'Préface *Bérénice*' in *Théâtre complet*, ed by. Alain Viala and Sylvaine Guyot, Bibliothèque du Théâtre Français, 16 (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2013), pp. 479-82,(p. 480).

<sup>23</sup> La Mesnardière, p. 220.



mankind which became popular during this period through the Jansenist order and their writings. According to Augustine, we are living in a futile world of deceit and distractions and we are easily led to err by deceptive appearances and our own desires.<sup>24</sup> In this context our will, our desire and our behaviour is blind and without the help of faith our virtues are imperfections. Humility is the only Christian virtue in Augustine's eyes, as it represents an appropriate soil for charity, and it is devoid of pride.<sup>25</sup> In the light of these contemporary ideas, it becomes apparent that La Mesnardière's vision of a tragic character is a Christian one. D'Aubignac also argues that some classical plays which incorporate infamous actions and debauchery are no longer suitable for a Christian audience.<sup>26</sup> Thus, these two theorists interpret the classical plays and their characters in line with the taste of an early modern society influenced by a Christian set of values and beliefs.

Corneille, Racine and Longepierre developed and created their own approach to the reinterpretation of these classical plays based on Aristotle's theories as well as their thoughts regarding tragedy, and the taste of the early modern audience stemming from their experience as spectators and playwrights. They were aware of d'Aubignac's and La Mesnardière's treatises and their ideas regarding this Christian morality which needed to be incorporated and reflected in the behaviour of the characters and the stories. However, the way they dealt with this aspect depended on their views of tragedy and the moral lesson that the dramatic texts need to incorporate. Corneille's *Médée* (1634-35) is an example of the playwright's unwillingness to follow the ideas incorporated in these early modern treatises of tragedy. If we are to believe La Mesnardière, the playwright failed to adapt this dramatic text to the contemporary principles of tragedy writing. The theorist harshly criticizes Corneille for his treatment of this classical story, particularly the transgressive behaviour of the heroine, and the fact that she does not suffer the

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<sup>24</sup> Phillipe Sellier, *Port-Royal et la littérature II* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2000), p. 258.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 145, 149.

<sup>26</sup> d'Aubignac, p. 339.

consequences of these deeds in accordance with the Christian moral of punishing vice and rewarding virtue in order to teach a moral lesson:

le poète doit penser à la morale [...] et ne pas commettre les fautes que nous voyons en plusieurs poèmes, ainsi que dans la *Médée* où [...] l'héroïne [est] meurtrière, non seulement du sang royal, mais de ses propres enfants, sans que l'une [Médée] soit punie d'une cruauté si horrible.<sup>27</sup>

Corneille defended his choice of subject and his treatment of the female tragic character. According to him, even evil characters like Medea are endowed with greatness and the audience cannot help but admire her in spite of her detestable actions. Moreover, he argues that the Ancients were satisfied with depicting virtue and vice and did not always reward the former and punish the latter: 'Les anciens se sont fort souvent contentés de cette peinture, sans se mettre en peine de faire récompenser les bonnes actions et punir les mauvaises'.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, according to the playwright the mere representation of vice and virtue, if it is well performed, will lead inevitably to appropriate responses — hatred of vice and love of virtue — regardless of the outcome of the play.<sup>29</sup> Corneille has faith in the audience's innate ability to distinguish between good and evil, and considers the representation of the characters' excessive and transgressive behaviour as a means of teaching a moral lesson. Nonetheless, this support of classical stories that do not take a firmer moral stance (in the form of punishing vice and rewarding virtue) is restricted to Medea, as he finds Sophocles's *Electra* too gruesome for the sensibilities of an early modern spectator. The dramatist cannot tolerate Orestes' and Electra's lack of pity, compassion and filial devotion towards Clytemnestra:

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<sup>27</sup> La Mesnardière, p. 174.

<sup>28</sup> Pierre Corneille, 'Discours de l'utilité et des parties du poème dramatique' in *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. by André Stegmann, pp. 821-30 (p. 823).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 826.

je ne puis souffrir chez Sophocle que ce fils (Oreste) la poignarde [...] cependant qu'elle est à genoux devant lui et le conjure de lui laisser la vie. Je ne puis même pardonner à Electre [...] l'inhumanité dont elle encourage son frère à ce parricide.<sup>30</sup>

Corneille considers this behaviour inhuman and unable to attract the sympathy of the audience. The same disregard that Medea has shown for family bonds is considered inhumane and indefensible in the case of Electra, as Corneille argues that he cannot tolerate this homicidal aversion towards her mother.<sup>31</sup> He is no longer satisfied by the mere depiction of vice; the characters and the action need to undergo changes in order to fit contemporary norms and he provides a few suggestions for a potential reinterpretation which incorporate important modifications to Orestes' and Electra's behaviour.<sup>32</sup> According to Corneille, filial duty and respect towards one's parents is more important than the parental duty to care for and protect one's children, and requires a different treatment in order to meet the expectations of the audience. Therefore, the playwright created and adopted a particular approach to the reinterpretations of these plays which is informed by his knowledge and interpretation of classical theories of tragedy and the taste of the audience.

It appears that Corneille's understanding of and sensitivity to the taste of the audience, stemming from his practical experience, was superior to La Mesnardière's as *Médée* had a moderate success. The playwright alludes to this in the letter to Monsieur de Zuylichem: 'Cette *Médée*, vieille ainsi tout à la fois et nouvelle, une nombreuse assemblée l'a approuvée avec un murmure favorable'.<sup>33</sup> *Médée*'s success was attested also by the fact that the play made it into the repertoire of Hôtel

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<sup>30</sup> Corneille, 'Discours de la tragédie et des moyens de la traiter selon le vraisemblable et le nécessaire', p. 836.

<sup>31</sup> Id.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 837.

<sup>33</sup> Pierre Corneille, 'À Monsieur de Zuylichem' in *Theatre II*, ed. by Jean de Guardia, Liliane Picciola, Florence Dobby-Poirson, Laura Rescia, *Bibliothèque du Théâtre Français* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2017), pp. 343-44 (p. 344).

de Bourgogne, and was praised by La Pinelière and Guez de Balzac.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, in an Epître to a ‘Monsieur P.T.N.G.’, Corneille argues that he has a better understanding of the taste of the audience and their reaction than what he refers to as ‘un étalage des préceptes de l’art’,<sup>35</sup> which can be interpreted as the sets of rules and principles put forward by contemporary theorists. Corneille’s *Médée*, an unrepentant character who is unpunished for her crimes, in a story that does not follow the Christian principle of rewarding vice and punishing virtue, stimulated the interest of the audience potentially on account of the playwright’s superior knowledge of the audience’s taste.

My interest in Corneille’s play and his reinterpretation of this tragic character stems from this particular aspect, namely, the fact that he manages to gain the interest and potentially the sympathy of the audience without undermining the transgressive nature of *Médée*’s behaviour or providing a reassuring ending by punishing the Colchian for her crimes. The playwright modifies the classical story, but all throughout he retains the sense that the tragic heroine is ‘ferox invictaque’.<sup>36</sup> Corneille combines this troubling aspect of the character with a focus on other factors involved as well as the experience and emotions of the heroine, and creates a tragic figure whose behaviour continues to fascinate spectators. This sets Corneille’s *Médée* apart from Longepierre’s version of the character created in 1694. This latter version of the tragic heroine avoids the triumphant and unremorseful pleasure that Corneille’s character derives from her crimes, as the infanticide is the result of a hallucination, and aims to save the children from a life of slavery. This crime is no longer an act of self-assertion and revenge but rather an act of love. This treatment of the story attenuates the violence and changes the motivation and meaning of the infanticide. Longepierre’s version of the character is

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<sup>34</sup> Henry Carrington Lancaster quoted in André Leyssac, ‘Introduction’ in Pierre Corneille, *Médée* (Genève: Librairie Droz S.A, 1978), pp. 7-82 (p. 11).

<sup>35</sup> Pierre Corneille, ‘À Monsieur P.T.N.G.’ in *Theatre II*, ed. by Jean de Guardia, Liliane Picciola, Florence Dobby-Poirson, Laura Rescia, pp. 257-58 (p. 257).

<sup>36</sup> Corneille, ‘Discours de l’utilité et des parties du poème dramatique’, p. 827. He quotes Horace’s observation regarding the depiction of Medea’s character: Medea ferox invictaque.

no longer the unrepentant figure whose behaviour troubled La Mesnardière. She becomes a mother trying to save her children who loses her ability to think rationally in the process and commits the infanticide as a result of a delusion. This undermines the violent nature of Médée's behaviour and presents a more subdued version of the character. She is a pathos-infused, delusional heroine who retains very little of the triumphant, unrepentant stance of the classical version. This represents the main reason why this play is not part of the corpus. Corneille creates a complex balance between classical elements and contemporary norms and values, which will be discussed in detail in chapter 1, in order to produce a character who is transgressive and troubling as well as human and able to stimulate the sympathy and admiration of the audience. He does this without undermining the violent nature of Médée's behaviour by changing her intentions and the meaning of her deeds. This particular treatment of the character is at the heart of the continuous interest that audiences and critics have showed in the tragic heroine and her story throughout time. It also represents a fertile ground for the analysis of Médée's perspective and experience in order to uncover the motives behind her decisions and actions which represents the main aim of this thesis.

Whilst Longepierre modifies the classical source significantly in order to create a character who is less transgressive and troubling in his *Médée*, his reinterpretation of *Électre* (1702) sought to follow the Greek model as closely as possible.<sup>37</sup> Longepierre's *Électre* is the only surviving reinterpretation: Pradon produced a version of the play in 1677 which was unsuccessful, and as a result no manuscript was preserved.<sup>38</sup> Although he writes this play 50 years after Corneille's *Médée*, Longepierre's treatment of the characters and the story is similar, potentially on account of his desire to follow the classical source more closely. His

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<sup>37</sup> Tobari, 'Introduction' in Longepierre *Électre* (Paris: Éditions A.-G. Nizet, 1981), 7-22 (p. 14). Corneille discusses the ways in which Sophocles' Electra can be adapted to the taste of the audience in 'Discours de la tragédie et des moyens de la traiter, selon le vraisemblable et le nécessaire', p. 836.

<sup>38</sup> Carine Barbafieri, 'L'Épisode amoureux ou comment s'en débarrasser: Révérence des anciens et modernité dans l'*Électre* de Longepierre' in *Dix-Septième siècle*, 229 (2005), 713-730 (p. 717).

Clytemnestre, in particular, is similar to Corneille's *Médée* as she rejoices in the power she has acquired through the murder of her spouse, actively pursues the death of her daughter and son and even prematurely celebrates the (false) demise of the latter. She enjoys this complete triumph over her antagonists with no remorse. Moreover, her children do not seek to inflict revenge upon her and Oreste accidentally murders his mother. Clytemnestre's death is an accident rather than a punishment for her misdemeanour. This transforms her into a transgressive female character who is not directly punished for her behaviour. Longepierre's *Électre* becomes a play which depicts the problematic story of an unrepentant, violent female tragic character. The playwright combines this aspect of the character with a focus on Clytemnestre's emotional experience, her thoughts and her perspective on the situation in a treatment that is similar to Corneille's approach to *Médée* and produces a troubling tragic heroine with a human side. Longepierre's play received mixed responses and did not have the success of Corneille's *Médée*. The play had three performances at l'Hôtel de Conti before a predominantly aristocratic audience and enjoyed a prodigious success.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, it did not gain the interest of the general public, as it had only six performances on the stage of the Théâtre du Palais Royal.<sup>40</sup> This was attributed to a conspiracy aiming to prevent Longepierre from attaining the success that his previous, more intimate performances enjoyed or to the playwright's lack of talent and stylistic prowess.<sup>41</sup> Voltaire argued that the dramatist 'ne connaissait pas assez notre théâtre' and 'ne travaillait pas assez ses vers'.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, *Électre* is part of the corpus which will be analysed in this thesis because it depicts a version of Clytemnestre that retains the classical element of the character, the unrepentant attitude, and combines it with a human side. Also, Longepierre does not undermine the transgressive nature of Clytemnestre's deeds

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<sup>39</sup> Tobari, 'Introduction', p. 16. Le Baron Roger Portalis, *Bernard de Requeleyne, Baron de Longepierre*, (Paris: Librairie Henri Leclerc, 1905), pp. 67-8. Portalis states that the play's success with aristocratic audiences is mentioned by le duc de Saint-Simon in his *Mémoires* and in in *Gazette de Rotterdam*.

<sup>40</sup> Emanuel Minel, 'Introduction' in Longepierre *Médée*, (Paris: Éditions Champion, 2000), 9-78, (p. 10).

<sup>41</sup> Marquis Dangeau quoted by Tobari, 'Introduction', p. 19.

<sup>42</sup> Voltaire quoted by Le Baron Roger Portalis, p. 73.

and does not introduce significant changes to her character which may modify her motives as in the case of his version of Médée. Therefore, this story of violent female transgression, difficult to adjust to the taste of the audience and the critics, will represent another primary source in our analysis of the decisions and actions of female tragic characters who commit taboo crimes, which continue to attract the interest of the audience.

Racine's tragic vision differs significantly from Corneille's. The glorification of will and heroism which defines Corneille's characters is replaced by a constant struggle with one's passions and desires which prevents the hero/heroine from finding his/her invincibility and loyalty to oneself.<sup>43</sup> Tragic heroines like Médée and Clytemnestre who pursue the triumph of their will at all costs, take pride in their excess and are unrepentant seem not to fit Racine's tragic vision. The playwright appears to follow d'Aubignac's and La Mesnardière's ideas regarding early modern tragedy, as he combines Aristotelian theory with Christian precepts. He constructs his characters following Aristotle's idea of a tragic hero who must be neither wholly guilty nor wholly innocent whilst adding elements of Christian morality to his plays. As a result, his *Phèdre* (1677) follows the classical story and Aristotle's tragic principles whilst incorporating a Christian morality, as virtue is emphasized whilst the mere thought of the crime is severely punished, and vice is presented in all its deformity.<sup>44</sup> Racine's interpretation of the classical tragedy was, as some critics also argue, influenced by his Port-Royalist education, and the construction of his characters and tragic plots reflect this influence.<sup>45</sup> Thus, Racine

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<sup>43</sup> Paul Bénichou, *Morales du Grand Siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), pp. 17, 105. There is an on-going debate regarding the influence of Jansenism on Racine's tragic vision. See John Campbell, *Questioning Racinean Tragedy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, 2005). I do not aim to settle this debate regarding the influence of this theological doctrine on Racine's work. There are different views about the way these ideas inform Racine's work. I sympathize with Bénichou's argument that Racine's characters display at times a pessimistic stance which has been associated with and reflects Augustinian theology and I think that John Campbell overstates the case against a Jansenist interpretation of the playwright's work.

<sup>44</sup> Racine, 'Préface' to *Phèdre*, pp. 832-33.

<sup>45</sup> On Racine's Jansenism see Paul Bénichou, *Morales du Grand Siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), and Phillippe Sellier, *Port-Royal et la littérature II* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2000).

adapts the classical plays to the values, and beliefs of his Christian audience, as La Mesnardière and d'Aubignac suggested in their treatises.

In spite of this shift in tragic vision, the idea of the female tragic heroine who transgresses the norm on account of excessive passion and does not receive a punishment for her behaviour emerges even in Racine's body of work. His *Phèdre*, which is imbued with a deep awareness of sin, puts forward a female tragic heroine who gives in to her illegitimate passion and is corrupted by it whilst receiving no chastisement. Unlike Médée and Clytemnestre, she expresses remorse for her behaviour towards the end of the play and commits suicide. No authority or character seeks to punish her, although she projects onto her father as a judge in the underworld a fantasy of his punitive reaction to her. Racine's *Phèdre* resembles Corneille's Médée and Longepierre's Clytemnestre, as she combines an excessive desire which leads her to overstep norms and bring destruction with a display of emotions and thoughts which is able to stimulate the sympathy of the audience. She shows remorse and displays guilt in order to meet the expectations of a Christian audience, but she is transgressive. *Phèdre* is the closest that the tragedian comes to representing the limits of female transgression and excess without castigation, and for this reason it is part of the corpus chosen for this analysis. The fact that the play has fascinated and continues to fascinate audiences, and is Racine's most performed dramatic text in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries also played a part in this choice, as this enables me to explore the various interpretations of her behaviour in performance and examine the new meanings which emerge from them.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, Racine's *Phèdre* is the third dramatic text which will be analysed in this thesis in order to explore the behaviour of this female tragic character and find new meanings that will enrich our understanding of her decisions and actions.

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<sup>46</sup> See Brigitte Prost, *Le Répertoire classique sur la scène contemporaine: Les Jeux de l'écart* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010), pp. 391ff, for a chronological table of the Racinian and Cornelian plays performed in France throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



The reason I chose these plays is the specific treatment of the characters and the fact that, as I have discussed in the beginning of this section, even today, excessive female violence such as the one depicted in these stories can seem problematic on account of the normative quality of social gender roles still applied to women. As a result, the way Corneille, Racine and Longepierre adapted the behaviour of these female tragic characters to the taste and values of a society in which women were still largely defined by their social role is relevant to a contemporary discussion about women. *Médée*, *Clytemnestre* and *Phèdre* display a type of transgressive behaviour which is problematic or even taboo, and combine this with a sense of the pressure (coming from their thoughts, emotions or other characters) to adhere to the social conventions, values and beliefs associated with their role as mother and wife which appeals to contemporary discussions regarding the way norms inform female behaviour. This endeavour aims to provide a more comprehensive image of this transgressive behaviour by delving into the motives and the factors that underlie it. This analysis engages with the experiences of these tragic characters and their perspective in order to find new meanings and to change the way we perceive and approach these heroines in the hope of contributing to a wider discussion around female tragic characters as well as potentially women resorting to such acts of violence.

Previous interpretations approached these characters and their experience from a traditionalist, androcentric standpoint. This thesis will analyse and explore Corneille's *Médée*, Longepierre's and Racine's *Clytemnestre* and Racine's *Phèdre* in a manner that acknowledges the complexity of their experience, finds value in their response to the tragic context and challenges these androcentric readings. Jean Racine's *Iphigénie* (1674) is part of the corpus in order to recreate and analyse Clytemnestre's gradual transformation from loving mother (at Aulis) to murderous parricide (after the Trojan War) and explore the motives that underlie it. This adaptation of the story was chosen also because Longepierre was a great admirer (and imitator) of Racine and his tragic style — in *Parallèle de Monsieur Corneille*

*et de Monsieur Racine* (1686) he argued the superiority of Racinian tragedy— and these affinities in terms of style and tragic vision contribute to a more continuous and comprehensive image of Clytemnestre.<sup>47</sup> This analysis will provide an interpretation which seeks to challenge previous readings and to promote new ways of finding meaning and engaging with these tragic characters and these dramatic texts. The aim of this endeavour is to adhere at least partly to Adrienne Rich’s credo to know the writings of the past ‘differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us’.<sup>48</sup>

## 1.2 Scholarship review

This section will engage with previous interpretations of the characters’ behaviour and will identify the gaps that this research is aiming to fill in order to provide new meanings and new ways of engaging with the characters. The readings incorporated in this overview focus on the study of female tragic characters in the works of Corneille and Racine and reveal the main approaches which have been adopted in the critical analysis of these heroines. I will provide an overview of these approaches for each character and I will indicate the way my research aims to challenge or build on these critical studies in order to produce a new interpretation of the characters’ actions and to enrich our understanding of their behaviour.

Whilst Longepierre’s dramatic creations have enjoyed little critical exploration, Corneille’s and Racine’s body of work has been the subject of numerous studies and analyses.<sup>49</sup> Corneille’s *Médée* has benefitted from a series of

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<sup>47</sup> For *Parallèle de Monsieur Corneille et de Monsieur Racine*, see Longepierre, *Médée: tragédie ; suivie du Parallèle de monsieur Corneille et de monsieur Racine* (1686) (Paris: Éditions Champion, 2000).

<sup>48</sup> Adrienne Rich quoted by Joe Winston in ‘Re-Casting the Phaedra Syndrome: Myth and Morality in Timberlake Wertenbaker’s *The Love of the Nightingale*’, *Modern Drama*, 38 (Winter 1995), 510-519 (p. 512).

<sup>49</sup> Le Baron Roger Portalis, *Bernard de Requeleyne, Baron de Longepierre*, alongside Tomoo Tobari’s ‘Introduction’ to *Électre* (Paris: Nizet, 1981) and to *Médée* (Paris: Nizet 1967) as well as his article ‘Racine and Longepierre: à propos de la querelle des Anciens et des Modernes’ in *Cahiers de l’Association internationale des études françaises*, 31, (1979), 169-176 and more recently Emanuel Minel’s ‘Introduction’ in Longepierre, *Médée* and Barbaferri: *L’épisode amoureux ou comment s’en débarrasser*. These are among the few critical works that approach Longepierre’s dramatic corpus.

studies dedicated to emphasizing various aspects of the play and the character depending on the methodological framework or approach applied to the text. Placed by Serge Doubrovsky, Paul Bénichou and Han Verhoeff outside the apparently monolithic concept of the hero on account of their gender, Cornelian heroines like Médée were considered to represent the Other. They are seen as intruders in a masculine world and their sole glory resides in the conquest of a powerful spouse of royal blood. These tragic heroines have also been placed on the other side of the heroic project on account of their association with nature and the human body in the everlasting nature versus culture, body versus reason, female versus male conflict.<sup>50</sup> This approach, which focused on the Cornelian hero and placed the female tragic characters in a secondary position was soon challenged by critics willing to explore these heroines from different perspectives and to undermine previous interpretations based on the comparison with a superior male counterpart. Mary Jo Muratore's study, which follows the evolution of the Cornelian heroine, represents one of the first steps in the direction of undermining this tendency to judge female characters by their inability to meet the male heroic standard.<sup>51</sup> Muratore's analysis classifies female tragic characters based on the nature of their motivation, in order to uncover the manner in which Corneille's ideas about heroic female behaviour evolved throughout his career. She defines these tragic characters through their intentions and actions. Nonetheless her classification (idealists, public servants, individualists and reactive heroines) reflects a desire to divide them neatly into uniform categories, which does not acknowledge their complexity. As a result, Médée's behaviour becomes 'nothing more than reactions to Jason's infidelity' in a reading that overlooks her sense of pride, her honour, her quest for justice and the self-assertive nature of her revenge.<sup>52</sup> It is true that her vengeful behaviour was determined by

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<sup>50</sup> Han Verhoeff, *Les Grandes Tragédies de Corneille: une psycholecture* (Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1982), p. 13. Bénichou, p. 20. Serge Doubrovsky, *Corneille et la dialectique du héros* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963) Doubrovsky and Bénichou are also discussed in John D. Lyons, 'Le mythe du héros cornélien', *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 2, 107 (2007), 433-448.

<sup>51</sup> Mary Jo Muratore, *The Evolution of the Cornelian Heroine* (Maryland: Studia Humanitatis, 1982), p. 2.

<sup>52</sup> Muratore, pp. 5, 107.

Jason's betrayal, but the scope of this revenge and its gruesome nature suggests a more complex motivational mechanism at play. For example, the ethics of care analysis incorporated in chapter 2 will argue that Médée perceives the infanticide as a test of her strength and ability to display invulnerability and omnipotence by putting an end to a relationship of care which defined part of her identity, namely the caring mother.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, Médée's actions are not just a reaction to Jason's betrayal, they stem from a particular interpretation of the situation. Muratore also praises Médée's lucid deliberation and devalues her emotional response arguing that she evolves from an 'emotional heroine' to 'a lucid one' passing from a 'lower state (unawareness) to a higher state (lucidity)'. This points to a tendency to find virtue in and to consider superior a stance which is generally attributed to the male heroic figure. The myth of the Cornelian hero cannot be kept away from this analysis for long. Nonetheless, Muratore's study carves a place for the Cornelian female tragic characters and represents the beginning of a movement towards challenging the idea that Cornelian heroism is a male prerogative.

Other works approach this topic either from the perspective of finding a feminist strain in Corneille's early dramatic creations or with the aim of engaging in a feminist reading of his dramatic texts. Whilst Constant Venesoen focuses more on a re-reading and reinterpretation of the earlier comedies in order to reveal 'Cornelian realism' and to reflect on the status of women, Josephine Schmidt's analysis seeks to engage with the experience of the tragic heroines and to find a 'heroic code and ethics' pertaining to women.<sup>54</sup> Her ambitious approach aims to treat women as a separate cultural group and to find value and virtue in their actions and beliefs. Her study focuses on the female tragic characters (Chimène, Camille, Sabine, Emilie and Pauline) in Corneille's 'four best known tragedies'.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> For the ethics of care discussion of Médée's revenge, see pp. 167-68, 174-75, 177-79.

<sup>54</sup> C. Venesoen, *Corneille apprenti féministe de Mélite au Cid* (Paris: Lettre modernes, 1986). Josephine A. Schmidt, *If There are No More Heroes, There are Heroines: A Feminist Critique of Corneille's Heroines, 1637-1643* (Lanham, NY, London: University Press of America, 1987), p. 5.

<sup>55</sup> Schmidt, pp. 5, 16.

Intriguingly, this work does not approach the infamous Médée, who is equally well-known, and has the potential to reveal a female heroic code because of her decision to undermine social norms and expose herself to the opprobrium of such deeds. Furthermore, as Schmidt concludes that love is the foundation of this female ethic, the reasons for which Médée and Cléopâtre have not been chosen for the analysis become clearer. They do not adhere to this system of values, as their actions seem to be guided by honour and pride or a desire for power. Médée does not fit this proposed idea of female heroism once again. Moreover, the ethics based on love proposed by Schmidt comes close (but not close enough) to Carol Gilligan's notion of ethics of care. Gilligan's study was published five years earlier and provides a deeper insight into a female view of morality, conflict and the self (as chapter 2 of the thesis will reveal).<sup>56</sup> Gilligan's argument that ethical paradigms stem from masculine experience, and are not suitable for the evaluation of the specifically feminine ethical perspective would have contributed significantly to Schmidt's argument. Despite this, Schmidt's work is illuminating because it puts forward a female ethical and heroic code derived from the characters' actions and behaviour, and no longer uses the male hero as a standard for goodness and bravery.

Unlike Schmidt, Claire Carlin is not reluctant to deal with the Cornelian female villains, as she applies Northop Frye's comic schema of the blocking character to three of his comedies (*Clitandre*, *La Suivante*, *La Galerie du Palais*) and three of his tragedies (*Médée*, *Rodogune*, *Théodore, vierge et martyre*). Her analysis includes Médée alongside Cléopâtre and Marcelle in the category of monstrous mothers and queens who put power and royal obligations above the love of a man and destroy men in order to usurp their role.<sup>57</sup> Hence, she perceives Médée's behaviour as more than a reaction to Jason's betrayal. Nonetheless, this focus on certain aspects of her behaviour and actions overlooks the significant

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<sup>56</sup> Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice, Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1982).

<sup>57</sup> Claire Carlin, 'The Woman as Heavy: Female Vilains in the Theatre of Pierre Corneille', *The French Review*, 59 (1986), 389-98 (pp. 395, 396).

difference between Médée and the other two heroines in her category: she does not desire power and she does not destroy Jason in order to usurp his role. Furthermore, this approach reinforces Médée's image as a monstrous mother, power-hungry and set on usurping the roles of her male counterparts, which does not reflect her complex situation or her experience of the tragic situation and the dilemma she faces. For example, the ethics of care analysis incorporated in chapter 2 will reveal that Médée's revenge stems from a desire to escape a position of vulnerability and isolation and to place Jason in a similar situation by depriving him of all meaningful relationships rather than mere jealousy or desire to usurp her spouse's role. Carlin's study focuses on fitting Médée within the methodological framework and does not consider the complex nature of her actions and character.

More recent studies in *Héros ou personnages? Le personnel du théâtre de Pierre Corneille*, a volume edited by Myriam Dufour-Maître, break with the myth of the male hero and adopt a complex approach to the characters (both male and female) combining readings drawing on ethics, psychoanalysis and the history of sexuality. Amongst the chapters that approach the concept of the tragic hero in exciting new ways are John D. Lyons' 'Vouloir, être, héros' which explores the Cornelian hero in relation to the dialectic between 'vouloir et être' in *Rodogune*, *Cinna*, and *Horace*, François Regnault's 'Le héros cornélien: une éthique du désir' and Matthieu Dupas's 'Sophonisbe queer?', which incorporate in their discussion the female tragic heroine.<sup>58</sup> Lyons argues that differences in the status of Horace, Auguste (*Cinna*) and Antiochus (*Rodogune*) can be defined in the light of the relationship between their will and their perception of reality (being), and proposes the latter two as tragic heroes who accept reality. In Lyons' interpretation there are tragic characters who accept the world as it is and are open to life and existence with all its contingencies (Auguste, Antiochus), and ones that follow their will in pursuit

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<sup>58</sup> John D. Lyons 'Vouloir, être, héros', pp. 227-41, François Regnault, 'Le héros cornélien: une éthique du désir', pp. 243-56, Matthieu Dupas, 'Sophonisbe queer?', pp. 63-79 in *Héros ou personnages? Le personnel du théâtre de Pierre Corneille*, ed. by Myriam Dufour-Maître (Rouen: Presses Universitaires de Rouen et du Havre, 2013).

of glory and seek an ideal (Horace). This is an interesting reading of the tragic characters which puts forward a new way of interpreting the behaviour of these tragic heroes. Regnault approaches the Cornelian hero using Lacan's 'proposition sur le héros' derived from his analysis of Antigone and Philoctetes, which puts forward an ethics of desire that touches masculine and feminine characters. He argues that Corneille's characters are able to reach heroic status only when they do not concede to desire and can be betrayed with impunity. This study produces a new way of interpreting the characters that goes beyond the traditional dialectic of will. However, in the case of the female tragic heroines the analysis is limited to one example, Laodice (*Nicomède*), which poses difficulties in understanding the way this framework would work, particularly in the case of plays like *Médée* where the tragic heroine rejoices in the pursuit of glory and desire, and at times her desire becomes this need for glory and power.<sup>59</sup> Dupas focuses on the heroines' relationship to gender, particularly the fact that they have the capacity to rise above their sex in a type of heroism which is interpreted as monstrosity in relation to a 'female nature', which becomes associated with love and sentimentality in the eighteenth century. Dupas's approach, which focuses on *Sophonisbe*, emphasizes the way 'female nature' as a social construct influenced the treatment and analysis of the Cornelian tragic heroines, and discusses the author's vision of female heroism. These approaches to Corneille's tragic characters and dramatic texts, informed by ethical, psychoanalytical and historical theories, suggest ways of reading which reassess the behaviour of the tragic heroes in order to put forward new interpretations regarding their ethical stances and their status in order to challenge previous ideas and to enrich our understanding of these texts.

In a way this endeavour is similar to mine. I also use recent theories drawn from ethics, psychoanalysis in order to reassess the behaviour and actions of *Médée*. Nonetheless my approach challenges previous readings put forward by Doubrovsky,

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<sup>59</sup> Regnault, pp. 254.

Bénichou and Verhoeff as well as Muratore and Carlin, aims to place Médée in a position equal to her male counterparts and to reinforce her image as a Cornelian tragic hero driven by an ethical standpoint not solely revenge. I will emphasize that the Colchian displays qualities befitting of a tragic hero (pride, courage and desire for glory), and she deserves to be in this category, in spite of Bénichou's and Doubrovsky's ideas that female characters are excluded from the Cornelian heroic project. I will also argue that Médée's actions and decisions are informed by an ethics of care approach to her situation, and are not mere reactions to Jason's betrayal or proofs of her status as a monstrous mother as Muratore and Carlin suggest.<sup>60</sup> Although my findings in chapter 2 challenge Schmidt's idea of a love-based feminine ethics, as care or abandonment of care becomes the guiding principle in the characters' ethical stances, this analysis is inspired by this critic's endeavour to engage with the experience of the female tragic characters and to find an ethical code pertaining to women. This reading that I am proposing is acutely needed, as critical approaches to Cornelian tragic characters seldom deal with the heroines and those that focus on them rarely incorporate Médée, as we have seen. There has been little exploration of this tragic character from the perspective of her experience of the situation, her values and beliefs, and the analysis incorporated in this thesis aims to fill this gap in knowledge and to enrich our understanding of the dramatic text by putting forward new readings.

Racinian tragedy has often been associated with femininity, and his tragic world is inhabited by exceptional heroines who have been the subject of extensive critical analysis.<sup>61</sup> *Phèdre*, the classical masterpiece, which provides insight into this incestuous stepmother's internal conflict between desire and duty, and is considered an example of the psychological accuracy of Racine's portrayals, has been analysed and reinterpreted through various critical lenses. Charles Mauron's

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<sup>60</sup> See pp. 167-68, 174-75, 177-79 for a discussion of Médée's revenge.

<sup>61</sup> André Malraux considered Racine's theatre a promotion of femininity and Georges Bataille associated it with femininity as well, both quoted by François Lagarde in 'Effets Racine', *Dix-Septième siècle*, 200 (1998), pp. 521-29 (p. 525).



*psychocritique* introduced a critical interpretation informed by Freudian psychoanalysis and the exploration of the unconscious aspects of the mind and personality, which opened new and exciting paths for the analysis of literary texts. His work on Racine sought to uncover the author's personal myth (an expression of his unconscious personality) in his dramatic creations. As a result, this psychoanalytical approach to the interactions between the characters puts forward a Phèdre who represents the monstrous archetypal mother threatening young Hippolyte. According to Mauron, the heroine is caught in a struggle with the father-monarch reflecting at times the author's unconscious impulses and the dynamic between his ego and his superego.<sup>62</sup> Roland Barthes deepens this psychoanalytical approach in his *Sur Racine*, and presents a Phèdre in a position of power, threatening Hippolyte's autonomy as well as his masculinity.<sup>63</sup> This interpretation of the dynamic between the characters is so ingrained that even ethical approaches to the Racinian text tend to perpetuate this image of Phèdre as an 'executioner among men'.<sup>64</sup> As her discourse throughout the play oscillates between devotion to her desire and a deep sense of guilt, some analyses and interpretations of the character emphasize this guilt-ridden aspect of her personality. Venesoen sees Phèdre as a being who is crushed by an implacable force, possessed, subjugated, inferiorized in body and in spirit, but nonetheless guilty on account of the active stance she takes in planning and desiring to subjugate the loved object.<sup>65</sup> Éléonore Zimmermann adopts an Augustinian view of true freedom as 'slavery to good', and considers Phèdre's decision to submit to the existing social order and to commit suicide a result of her sense of guilt, a refusal of passivity before destiny and a sign of greatness.<sup>66</sup> For Bénichou and Phillipe Sellier Phèdre's guilt and self-deprecatory

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<sup>62</sup> Charles Mauron, *L'Inconscient dans l'œuvre et la vie de Racine* (Aix-en-Provence: Éditions Ophrys, 1957), pp. 162, 170, 173.

<sup>63</sup> Roland Barthes, *Sur Racine* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1963), p. 29.

<sup>64</sup> Constant Venesoen, *Jean Racine et le procès de la culpabilité* (Paris: La Pensée Universelle, 1981), p. 46.

<sup>65</sup> Id.

<sup>66</sup> Éléonore M. Zimmermann, *La Liberté et le destin dans le théâtre de Jean Racine* (California: Anma Libri, 1982), pp. 48, 112.

stance reflect a Jansenist approach to sin.<sup>67</sup> More recent studies have continued and deepened these approaches to the Racinian tragic heroine. Małgorzata Budzowska's analysis of Phèdre reinforces the Jansenist interpretation of her behaviour, as she argues that the heroine's inability to make a decision, 'to pass from want/not want to can', reflects the Augustinian view of the human condition unable to comprehend the world and the self without God's grace.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, her idea that Phèdre relativizes formerly accepted values in order to fit her individual needs echoes Bénichou's argument regarding the downfall of the Racinian hero through a distraction of reason accompanying the violence of passion.<sup>69</sup> Mitchell Greenberg also continues and enriches the tradition of psychoanalytical approaches with a Freudian and Lacanian reading. He argues that Racinian tragedy, a 'tragedy of origins', reflects the 'impossible quest of a subject' dominated by the demands/imperatives of the absolute, seeking to be one, a unified subject whilst the body reveals to him or her the impossibility of this quest.<sup>70</sup> According to Greenberg, Phèdre is haunted by an unanswerable question about the origin of her passion – 'Why me?' – and oscillates between shameful desire and a curse she cannot understand.<sup>71</sup> These androcentric methodological approaches will be challenged in the analysis incorporated in this thesis. In Chapters 2 and 3 of this work I will move beyond Mauron's, Barthes's and Greenberg's interpretation of these female tragic characters' behaviour within a Freudian, androcentric view of human morality and psychology. In these sections I will also redefine Phèdre's experience of the tragic conflict outside of the pre-Oedipal framework of *L'Inconscient dans l'œuvre et la vie de Racine*. I will argue that she represents more than the archetypal mother defined by love and aggression, a symbolic representation of the id, opposing the

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<sup>67</sup> Bénichou, p.141-2, and Sellier, pp. 219, 222, 240-8.

<sup>68</sup> Małgorzata Budzowska, *Phaedra, Ethics of Emotions in the Tragedies of Euripides, Seneca and Racine*, trans. by Adriana Grzelak-Krzymianowska (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2012), p. 181.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174. Bénichou, p. 139-40.

<sup>70</sup> Mitchell Greenberg, *Baroque Bodies: Psychoanalysis and the Culture of French Absolutism* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 229.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259.

authority and moral rectitude of the superego embodied by Thésée. This analysis will do away with the nature versus culture, male versus female theme perpetuated by these studies allowing a more comprehensive understanding of the characters' experience, values and behaviour.

Other critics challenge these studies based on a Freudian reading which was later translated into an Augustinian interpretation. John Campbell shows scepticism with regard to the Jansenist interpretation of Phèdre's character. He argues that the theme of predestination and fatality caused by passions considered Augustinian belongs to a doctrine of the passions professed by the seventeenth-century Church as a whole, whilst Phèdre's language of dependency (emphasizing a determinist view) is part of the classical cultural heritage.<sup>72</sup> Alain Lipietz also challenges previous interpretations of Phèdre's behaviour. By using Luce Irigaray's theories he argues that the heroine wants to surpass her position as wife of the father/king, to break the patriarchal law. Phèdre's death is a consequence of her inability to assert herself as an autonomous, emancipated woman.<sup>73</sup>

Whilst Lipietz's reading of *Phèdre* draws attention to the androcentric nature of the previous Freudian-based methodologies adopted by Mauron, Barthes and Greenberg amongst others, it is Véronique Desnain's feminist approach that denounces the biased nature of previous approaches to Racinian tragic heroines. She provides a comprehensive summary of the ways in which previous critical interpretations of the Racinian corpus have put forward a patriarchal, male-centred analysis of the female tragic characters. Approaches using Freudian psychoanalysis (Mauron and Barthes, Greenberg more recently) view women as 'not being a male', as defined by their lack.<sup>74</sup> Other studies adopt an approach which associates women with passion and emotion (particularly their inability to control their emotions). As a result, these works present the tragic heroines as unreasonable and hysterical or

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<sup>72</sup> Campbell, pp. 223-24.

<sup>73</sup> Alain Lipietz, 'Phèdre: Identification d'un crime', *Les Temps Modernes*, 43/503 (1988), 93-130 (p. 112).

<sup>74</sup> Véronique Desnain, *Hidden Tragedies: Female Characters in the Plays of Jean Racine* (New Orleans, LA: University Press of the South, 2002), p. 12.

put forward a premise of universality which negates gender difference and ‘neglects to take into account the existential situation imposed on women by the patriarchal order. This premise of universality applied to female tragic characters suggests an equality when confronted to the divine which does not exist’ in order to conceal a phallogocentric view.<sup>75</sup> Desnain’s feminist reading of Racine was overdue, and sought to challenge the phallogocentric critical tradition by showing that tragedy is related to a large extent to patriarchy and the demands it places on both men and women. Racine’s tragic heroines are tragic because they are women in a world which grants them no rights, only duties. The critic uncovers the manner in which Racinian tragedy relies on ‘gender difference and the mechanisms of female difference to create pathos’.<sup>76</sup> She emphasizes the fact that these characters struggle to exist in a world that continually tries to keep them down. Although her new perspective is enlightening with regard to the biased nature of some of the previous critical approaches, Desnain’s study focuses on the manner in which Racinian tragedy provides ‘a blueprint of female oppression’, and does not explore the characters’ perception and experience of the tragic context and their decision-making processes in order to put forward their perspective of the situation.<sup>77</sup> She does not focus on this aspect because she perceives these characters as reflecting a biased interpretation of the female experience based on stereotypes (the bad woman versus good woman dichotomy which she identifies as a recurring theme in Racine’s tragedies, particularly in *Iphigénie* and *Phèdre*).<sup>78</sup> The problem with this idea is that, as I have mentioned in the discussion on tragic characters, particularly in relation to Racine’s tragic vision, *Phèdre* combines an excessive desire that leads her to overstep norms and bring destruction with a display of emotions and thoughts which is able to stimulate the sympathy of the audience. Racine follows Aristotle’s idea

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 8

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., pp. 32, 153.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., pp. 9, 163.

<sup>78</sup> Desnain, *Hidden Tragedies*, pp. 154-9, Véronique Desnain, ‘Les Faux Miroirs: The Good Woman/Bad Woman Dichotomy in Racine’s Tragedies’, *The Modern Language Review*, 96 (2001), 38-46.

that the tragic character is between the two extremes represented by virtue and vice.<sup>79</sup> If Phèdre represented a thoroughly bad woman the tragic effect of the dramatic text would be significantly diminished, there would be no emotional turmoil in her decision-making and no sympathy from the audience. Furthermore, Aristotle argues that the characters of tragedy must be appropriate (in the sense of displaying a behaviour compatible with their gender and social status) and like us in the sense of having a likeness in terms of basic humanity.<sup>80</sup> As a result, Phèdre needs to act, speak and behave as a woman of her status and in her particular situation would. Despite his patriarchal views, Racine had to construct credible tragic female characters. In the light of this, the experience, values, perception and motivation of these characters bring forward a different perspective, a feminine or female-like one.

All in all, Desnain, alongside Schmidt and Muratore, aimed to create space for the female character within the mass of critical material dedicated to the Racinian tragic hero, and to approach these tragic women through their actions and behaviour against pre-conceived ideas about female nature and femininity. The numerous critical studies dedicated to the analysis of Phèdre from various perspectives (psychoanalytical, moral, ethical, feminist) provide insight into the personality of the character and her tragic situation. However, some are biased by the androcentric nature of the methodology. Others place the behaviour of the heroines within a specific pattern, which can be found in all the plays, and do not engage with aspects of the characters' experience that do not fit this interpretative mode, as is the case with Desnain's study. What has been lacking is an analysis of the heroine's experience and perspective of the tragic conflict in the light of modern approaches to psychoanalysis and morality such as transactional analysis and ethics of care, which I will be developing in the body of this thesis. The aim of this analysis is to provide new readings of these characters' behaviour which challenge previous Freudian-based studies, reveal the different factors that inform the heroines'

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<sup>79</sup> On Racine's ideas regarding the construction of the tragic character see p. 22.

<sup>80</sup> Aristotle, p. 79.

interpretation of the situation and their decision-making processes, and put forward a new dimension of the characters. An example of the new meaning that this analysis puts forward in the case of Phèdre's behaviour is the fact that the decision to confess her passion to Hippolyte is informed by the need to fulfil a duty of care towards her son, an interpretation that challenges Venesoen's reading which considers the gesture a selfish and immoral deed.<sup>81</sup> This interpretation argues that the queen does not abandon her maternal duty but rather seeks to fulfil her desire in a context which allows her to simultaneously ensure her son's safety. This enables us to challenge previous interpretations which see her as dominated by desire and unable to consider any other responsibilities, such as the ones inspired by Freudian theories.

Clytemnestre receives a similar treatment to Phèdre. Many studies of Racine's *Iphigénie* focus primarily on Agamemnon and his dilemma, or on the relationship between him and Iphigénie, as Mauron does. Others adopt a male-centric methodology, as Clytemnestre is seen as either a 'femme virile et ambitieuse' or as the good parent fighting to save her daughter's life, an embodiment of Agamemnon's parental feelings.<sup>82</sup> The critical voices that attempt to provide insight into Clytemnestre's experience and story are, unsurprisingly, female ones. Séverine Auffret brings forward the full story of the queen's troubled relationship with Agamemnon in order to shed light on the source of her anger and hostility towards her spouse, and explores her strained relationships with Iphigénie and Électre.<sup>83</sup> Desnain also provides a feminist reading of Clytemnestre's behaviour in order to reinforce her image as a strong woman who takes a heroic stand in order to protect her daughter. The critic emphasizes her qualities as a tragic character, and argues that Clytemnestre's main flaws are: a strong sense of self, manifested in the rejection of the burden of guilt by association, which the other characters seek to impose on her, and a refusal to adopt the passive behaviour expected of women.

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<sup>81</sup> For the transactional analysis of Phèdre's confession see pp. 292-96.

<sup>82</sup> Venesoen, *Jean Racine et le procès de la culpabilité*, pp. 68-9, 78-9, Barthes, p. 106, Mauron, p. 138.

<sup>83</sup> Séverine Auffret, *Nous, Clytemnestre* (Paris: Des Femmes, 1984), p. 31-2.

Desnain's work on Clytemnestre brought forward a much-needed reassessment of the character, but her opinion that the queen would never have considered murdering her spouse if Iphigénie had survived at Aulis, as she does in Racine, is perhaps open to question.<sup>84</sup> Clytemnestre had a traumatic experience at Aulis, as she faced the imminent sacrifice of her daughter at the hands of her spouse. This singular context brought back past trauma related to her troubled relationship with Agamemnon. To think that she could continue living as before is improbable. As Campbell argues, in spite of Racine's apparently happy ending, relationships and identities do not remain as stable as they are at the beginning of the play.<sup>85</sup> Clytemnestre's experience at Aulis represents the beginning of her transformation into the parricidal murderess depicted in Longepierre's *Électre*, as this episode affects her system of values and her views of relationships. This experience determines Clytemnestre's change of character and influences her behaviour towards Agamemnon and her children after the Trojan War.

Longepierre's *Électre* reflects this transformation and presents a parricidal, tyrannical Clytemnestre. Nonetheless, critical work on Longepierre has focused on his treatment of the classical text, the reception of his play and his role in the *Querelle de Anciens et des Modernes* rather than on analysis of the characters.<sup>86</sup> An analysis which focuses on the construction of Clytemnestre and her experience in the aftermath of the Trojan War has been lacking. This study will provide an image of the queen's moral transformation. It will also reveal the heroine's perspective on her actions allowing, a deeper, more complex engagement with the thoughts, beliefs and values which influenced her behaviour. This endeavour will reveal that Clytemnestre is more than an embodiment of Agamemnon's parental feelings, the part of his personality which refuses the sacrifice of his daughter and opposes the

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<sup>84</sup> Desnain, *Hidden Tragedies*, p. 38-9 and 'Clytemnestre: Mythical Harpy or Feminist Paragon?' *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 22 (2000), 115-125 (pp. 117, 119,121).

<sup>85</sup> Campbell, p. 134.

<sup>86</sup> Barbafieri, pp. 713-730.

will of the gods as Mauron argues.<sup>87</sup> The analysis incorporated in chapters 2 and 3 will argue that the queen's behaviour at Aulis is informed by repressed anger towards Agamemnon and a satisfaction she derives from his betrayal whilst her actions after the Trojan War are influenced by a moral lesson she learned from her spouse, namely, that the strong do not have to care about relationships. This analysis presents Clytemnestre as a complex character, driven by different desires, values and beliefs, not merely parental feelings or a need for power. She is driven by an ethical code (ethics of care) and displays needs and desires related to unconscious beliefs about herself and the world, which do not involve her maternal role or power (the 'After' script). This treatment of the character informed by contemporary theories drawn from psychoanalysis and moral psychology places Clytemnestre on the same plane as her male counterparts, particularly Agamemnon. It also challenges interpretations which see her as inferior to the king, caught in the nature versus culture, emotion versus reason dichotomy (Mauron) or virile and ambitious (Barthes).

My analysis will rely on ethics of care and transactional analysis to challenge the androcentric interpretations of these female tragic characters and to put forward new meanings. The application of these theories drawn from the analysis of human behaviour will be controversial for theorists who resist altogether the drawing of parallels between theatrical representations and reality. However, these approaches follow the tradition initiated by Charles Mauron and Mitchell Greenberg who use psychoanalytical methods and concepts in the analysis of the tragic characters' behaviour and interpret the family relationships in the plays in the light of similar configurations of relations in real life. I do not share their reliance on Freudian concepts and theories, but I draw one methodology from the field of psychoanalysis (transactional analysis), and I use a theory stemming from the analysis of human behaviour (ethics of care). The careful application of these theories will help me see

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<sup>87</sup> Mauron, *L'Inconscient dans l'œuvre et la vie de Racine*, pp. 38, 128, 138.



more clearly the desires, needs and beliefs that inform the characters' mindset and may not be readily grasped by the literary or theatre historian, as for example the satisfaction that Médée derives from repeated betrayals or Phèdre's preoccupation with the well-being of her son.

Médée, Clytemnestre and Phèdre have qualities that correspond to human nature, behave in a way similar to humans and will be treated as such throughout this analysis. This decision is supported by the fact that Aristotle and Corneille both reinforce the idea that tragic characters need to display a human dimension. Aristotle in *Poetics* presents this idea as he argues that a tragic character needs to be 'like ourselves' within the range of our moral understanding and endowed with human vulnerability in order to stimulate pity and fear.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, as I mention in my critique of Desnain's view of tragic character, he also contended that the characters of tragedy must be appropriate (in the sense of displaying a behaviour compatible with their gender and social status) and have a likeness in term of basic humanity. Corneille follows Aristotle's idea regarding the characters' likeness to human behaviour and vulnerability. The playwright argues that although the characters are superior 'ces rois sont hommes comme les auditeurs et tombent dans ces malheurs par l'emportement des passions dont les auditeurs sont capables'.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, he considers contemporary ideas regarding 'l'âge, la dignité, la naissance, l'emploi et le pays de ceux [caractères] qu'il introduit' in order to manipulate the audience's response to the characters on stage.<sup>90</sup> Corneille would depict the characters and their behaviour in accordance with contemporary ideas regarding their identity in order to stimulate the audience's sympathy and in contrast to or at a distance from these ideas in order to arouse the spectators' disfavour: 'afin qu'il [poète] puisse y [l'âge,

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<sup>88</sup> Aristotle, p. 71. Other translations of the Greek expression use the same words 'like ourselves'. Other translations consulted include Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. by James Hutton (New York, London: Norton, 1982), and Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. by Stephen Halliwell (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

<sup>89</sup> Corneille, 'Discours de la tragédie et des moyens de la traiter, selon le vraisemblable et le nécessaire', p. 831.

<sup>90</sup> Corneille, 'Discours de l'utilité et des parties du poème dramatique', pp. 826-27.

dignité, etc.] conformer ceux qu'il veut faire aimer aux spectateurs, et en éloigner ceux qu'il leur veut faire haïr.<sup>91</sup> The behaviour and experience of the tragic heroines had to reflect values and beliefs which the audience would be able to identify as female since verisimilitude and attracting the sympathy and the emotional engagement of the audience were amongst the playwrights' main guiding principles. Furthermore, as women play a more active role at Court and in high society in the first half of the seventeenth-century, the female audience gains more importance and authors become keen to attract their favour.<sup>92</sup> The behaviour, actions and experience of these tragic characters had to stand the scrutiny of a mixed audience and gain the sympathy of powerful women. Therefore, these exceptional characters are endowed with a human dimension and reflect contemporary beliefs regarding the age and status of such women, and this part of their image as tragic heroines needs to be investigated, as their actions on earth will be generally judged by norms relating to this quality.

As I have mentioned in the first section, these dramatic texts continue to attract the interest of the audience and to be performed. The only exception is Longepierre's *Électre*, which has not been performed beyond the nineteenth century.<sup>93</sup> Recent approaches to the staging of these plays and the performances are able to generate new interpretations and new meanings. As Alain Viala argues, contemporary performances find different ways of engaging with the plays and put forward new standpoints because performers rediscover these texts through intuitive, sensible responses and without the guidance of critical works.<sup>94</sup> Therefore,

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., pp. 826-27.

<sup>92</sup> Linda Timmermans, *L'Accès des femmes à la culture (1598-1715): Un débat d'idées de Saint François de Sales à la Marquise de Lambert* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1993), pp. 133, 154, 157. According to Timmermans authors aimed to gain the support of high society women who could ensure more publicity for their works. High society ladies were active in the literary world. The duchess de Bouillon and Mme. Deshoulières supported Pradon against Racine in the Phèdre scandal.

<sup>93</sup> The reasons for this play not being performed may be related to the fact that practitioners may not be familiar with Longepierre's work as his dramatic texts have not received the same attention from the critics as Racine's and Corneille's plays. Longepierre's reputation as a playwright has been eclipsed by that of Corneille and Racine.

<sup>94</sup> Alain Viala, 'Tendances actuelles de la représentation de Racine', *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 22 (2000) 21-33, (p. 31).

contemporary performances of these dramatic texts represent a fertile ground for finding new interpretations of these tragic heroines' behaviour.

Recent studies dedicated to the performative aspect of Corneille's and Racine's tragedies provide a historical account of the trends that have informed the staging of these plays throughout the twenty and twenty-first century or discuss the performance and staging techniques during the early modern period. The studies on the performance of these classical plays in the early modern period are very useful, as they provide an extensive account of the way the staging and the performance techniques are developed in this period. Sabine Chaouche's comprehensive approach to seventeenth-century performance techniques and to the development of *mise en scène* techniques at the Comédie-Française at the end of the seventeenth and throughout the eighteenth century, provides a thorough analysis of performance and acting styles during the classical period.<sup>95</sup> Amy Wygant's *Medea, Magic and Modernity in France: Stages and histories, 1553-1797*, deals with the staging of Corneille's play and explores its reception by early modern audiences. Wygant focuses on the hold that Medea has on audiences, and the way the character takes on elements belonging to the different historical contexts in which the story is reinterpreted.<sup>96</sup> Wygant's main argument is that Medea is a symbol of modernity, and this gives rise to reflections on a variety of topics including demonic possession. Her study is illuminating in terms of the various reinterpretations of Medea and the hold that the myth has on audiences and readers whilst her interdisciplinary, transhistorical approach is inspiring. These critical works are important to all theatre history scholars and provide information which could be used in future stagings of these plays that seek to reconstruct baroque performances. This represents an approach to the staging of these classical plays which began in 1977 with Eugène

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<sup>95</sup> Sabine Chaouche, *L'Art du comédien. Déclamation et jeu scénique en France à l'âge classique (1629-1680)* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2013), *La Mise en scène du répertoire à la Comédie-Française (1680-1815)* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2013).

<sup>96</sup> Amy Wygant, *Medea, Magic and Modernity in France: Stages and Histories, 1553-1797* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

Green, who focused on reconstructing the acting style and the declamation of the baroque period.<sup>97</sup> They are also useful to theatre practitioners who seek to incorporate elements from seventeenth-century performance techniques in order to convey a specific meaning to the audience, as we will observe in the analysis of Yannis Kokkos's staging of Racine's *Iphigénie* (1991) incorporated in chapter 4.<sup>98</sup>

Myriam Dufour-Maître's edited volume, *Pratiques de Corneille* is amongst the studies that discuss performance practices and recent productions of these plays. This work incorporates an analysis of the editorial and theatrical practices surrounding Corneille's dramatic works whilst also incorporating the reception and critical analysis of the text.<sup>99</sup> Chapters approaching the dramatic texts in the light of contemporary acting techniques include Christian Biet's 'Corneille, ou la résistance', which deals with the challenges of performing the Cornelian plays using techniques based on psychological realism and psychoanalysis, and Julia Gros de Gasquet's 'Dire Corneille, un art du naturel?' which discusses how certain performance styles (those that are more physical and vocal, like baroque declamation) are more suitable to Corneille's works than a diction with a psychological emphasis.<sup>100</sup> Brigitte Prost's *Le Répertoire classique sur la scène contemporaine*, delves into various performance techniques and philosophies that inform the stagings of Racine's, Corneille's and Molière's dramatic works from the mid-twentieth century up to Patrice Chéreau's staging of *Phèdre* in 2003. She provides a comprehensive analysis of the most important and innovative mises en scène of the classical plays between 1950 and 2000 in an illuminating study of the various trends which have informed the staging of these classical texts. Noël

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<sup>97</sup> Eugène Green's stagings of classical plays with the theatre company he founded in 1977. The Paris-based, *Théâtre de la Sapience*, focused on the recreation of baroque gestures and declamation. His theories on baroque performance and declamation techniques can be found in *La Parole Baroque*, Collection: Texte et Voix (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2001).

<sup>98</sup> For the analysis of this performance see pp. 340-47.

<sup>99</sup> Myriam Dufour-Maître (ed.), *Pratiques de Corneille* (Rouen: Publications des Universités de Rouen et du Havre, 2012).

<sup>100</sup> Christian Biet, 'Corneille, ou la résistance' in *Pratiques de Corneille*, ed. by Myriam Dufour-Maître (Rouen: Publications des Universités de Rouen et du Havre, 2012), pp. 95-121 (p. 101). Julia Gros de Gasquet, 'Dire Corneille, un art naturel?' in *Pratiques de Corneille*, pp. 123-32 (pp. 131-32).

Peacock also produces a historical account of twentieth and twenty-first century performances of the classical texts in *Molière sous les feux de la rampe* (Paris: Hermann, 2012). He focuses on Molière's comedies and looks at the evolution of these performances and the way in which the social, historical and theatrical context influences them. Both these works are worthwhile endeavours, as they delve into the unexplored field of contemporary performances of the classical texts. However, they do not incorporate an in-depth analysis of these performances, as their aim is to present the various techniques of adaptation of these classical plays throughout the twentieth century and twenty-first century. Thus, as far as I am aware there has been no study dedicated to the analysis of twentieth and twenty-first century performances of *Médée*, *Iphigénie* and *Phèdre*, and the way these stagings as well as the critical responses to them (including the textual analysis incorporated in this thesis) produce new interpretations of the characters' actions and behaviours. My analysis will use contemporary performance theory, particularly Patrice Pavis's classification of contemporary approaches to staging, and the textual interpretations based on ethics of care and transactional analysis in order to analyse recent stagings of these plays, and to put forward the new meanings that emerge from these productions. This study will represent an original contribution to this field, as it analyses the manner in which the stagings of these dramatic texts contribute to an alternative interpretation of the tragic characters and their story, and strengthen the interpretation put forward in chapters 2 and 3 of the thesis. The analysis will focus on the way twenty and twenty-first century performances of *Médée*, *Iphigénie* and *Phèdre* and the responses they receive from spectators produce new interpretations of the characters' behaviour, experience and actions. This corresponds to the overall endeavour of this work to know and look at these tragic characters and their story differently.

Overall most critical approaches and studies do not explore these tragic heroines' emotional experience, their perception of the tragic situation and the unconscious psychological mechanisms at play within their behaviour, outside the

Freudian psychoanalytical framework and the ethical approach of justice and rights. There have been a few feminist readings of Racine and Corneille, but they did not incorporate an assessment of the heroine's character, beliefs and values based on an alternative ethical standpoint, such as the one proposed by Gilligan's ethics of care. These readings are also informed by traditional ethical systems and gender stereotypes which devalue the emotional experience of the character and consider it inferior to objective reasoning. As a result, they fail to explore the richness of information that this emotional experience provides in terms of 'one's own plan of goals and projects, valuable things in a personal idea of what it represents for one to live well.'<sup>101</sup> The analysis incorporated in this thesis aims to challenge previous androcentric interpretations, to undermine the nature versus culture divide which places these tragic heroines at the other side of the heroic project and in a position of inferiority in relation to their male counterparts by providing new and original readings informed by ethical, psychoanalytical and performance theories that reflect the recent developments in these fields. The aim of this endeavour is to reinterpret Médée's, Clytemnestre's and Phèdre's actions and behaviour from a new and original perspective provided by these theories and to carve a space for these female tragic heroines which places their experience of the tragic context, their values and beliefs at the centre.

### **1.3 Methodology**

This section contains a brief overview of the methodologies that will be used in the analysis of the characters' behaviour and actions. Each theory as well as its limitations and implications will be discussed in detail in the Methodology section of the chapter that applies it to the analysis of the dramatic texts or performances. As a result, this discussion will focus on the main ideas of these methodologies in order to specify the way their application contributes to the aim of this thesis.

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<sup>101</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 49.

I will combine an approach to the role of emotions in the deliberation process informed by Martha Nussbaum's revalorisation of emotions with Carol Gilligan's ethics of care in order to challenge the emotion versus reason dichotomy which has informed the interpretation of these characters' behaviour, and to provide an alternative ethical standpoint that puts the experience of these tragic heroines at its centre. I will use Nussbaum's idea that emotions are valuable sources of information regarding the beliefs of the character and represent judgements of value which reveal one's thoughts on leading and constructing a good life in order to revalorise and redeem this aspect of the deliberation process. This view of emotions challenges the emotion versus reason dichotomy and provides a nuanced image of the deliberation process in which feelings become part of human cognition, not only a source of moral corruption. This revalorisation of emotions enables me to reconsider the characters' responses to the moral dilemma as well as aspects of their behaviour which have been devalued in previous interpretations in order to provide a new reading of their actions and decisions.

This view of emotions will be paired with Gilligan's theory of ethics of care in order to produce an alternative interpretation of the tragic heroines' ethical standpoint which is not based on androcentric methodologies. Gilligan's theory is a suitable tool, as it acknowledges an alternative ethical perspective stemming from a marginal position, informed by different social constraints, realities and experiences. Furthermore, the theory draws its conclusions from the narratives of women and girls navigating an ethical dilemma. It seeks to find meaning and value in their experience which is considered inferior to the predominant ethical mode. Gilligan's ethics of care places women's ideas of the world and goodness at its centre and uses them to create an alternative ethical mode. According to her, women view life as a web of relationships and judge themselves on their ability to maintain these connections which are part of their identity.<sup>102</sup> This relational view of the

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<sup>102</sup> Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, pp. 8, 16, 48.

world and the self informs the way women approach moral dilemmas. Because women see morality as an issue of inclusion and maintaining connections rather than competing claims, which is the main approach of the dominant, androcentric deliberation mode, their views have been considered inferior. However, Gilligan argues that this represents an alternative approach to moral dilemmas as valid and as valuable as the predominant ethical mode. This alternative view of morality, which Gilligan defines as ethics of care, alongside Nussbaum's revalorisation of emotions will represent the main concepts used in this analysis which aims to find new meaning and value in the experience and behaviour of these female tragic characters. As a result, this methodology will enable me to bring forward and explore the manner in which these characters perceive themselves, goodness and their ethical dilemmas, together with their emotional responses to their situation, in order to provide valuable insight into their decisions and behaviour.

Nonetheless, this theory is not free of controversy. Philosophers argued that Gilligan abandons 'absolutism and objectivity' as well as the idea of 'disembodied knower' for 'moral relativism' and 'the babble of countless moral voices'.<sup>103</sup> However, as Hekman argues, Gilligan does not 'embrace relativism' but rather adopts an 'epistemological stance that displaces the absolute/relative dichotomy'.<sup>104</sup> Gilligan redefines knowledge as a product of discourse informed by context and connection. This theory engages with beliefs and experiences that do not fit the predominant ethical mode. As a result, it is able to provide an alternative perspective on these tragic characters' behaviour, which often falls short of the male heroic standard on account of the emotion versus reason, absolute versus relative dichotomy. For example, the ethics of care analysis incorporated in chapter 2 will reveal that Phèdre confesses her passion to Hippolyte out of a need to ensure her son's protection, as Thésée's death has put both mother and son in a vulnerable

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<sup>103</sup> Susan J. Hekman, *Moral Voices, Moral Selves: Carol Gilligan and Feminist Moral Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), p. 31.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.



position as well as a desire for her stepson. It is maternal duty alongside desire that informs her actions and not a selfish preoccupation for her own needs or a mere irrational gesture as other critics have argued.<sup>105</sup>

Feminist theorists also took part in this critique of Gilligan's work. Joan Tronto and Claudia Card argued that this concept 'perpetuates women's inferiority' and represents 'a revival of traditional middle-class conceptions of femininity'.<sup>106</sup> The fact that these theories can be interpreted as re-enacting the same binary concepts regarding masculine and feminine that led to the oppression of women is a valid argument. Furthermore, the focus and value placed on mothering is controversial on account of the fact that the imposition of this role has been a source of oppression for women. However, we can perceive this theory as an alternative to the justice and rights approach, a way of interpreting a moral dilemma from an experience and a position that does not fit the patriarchal norms and values regarding moral development. If we interpret it in this way, ethics of care is a valuable tool for exploring moral standpoints and behaviours which have been devalued, misinterpreted or overlooked because they did not reflect the predominant ethical mode. Furthermore, Gilligan argued that her idea of care is neither biologically determined nor unique to women.<sup>107</sup> This theory is useful to find new meanings in works that present ethical standpoints which fall short of the androcentric, predominant mode of deliberation particularly the ones that emerge from female experiences, although it can be legitimately argued that care has been an argument in justifying the limitations imposed to women. Overall, this methodological approach will enable me to analyse the actions of these tragic heroines from the perspective of an alternative ethical standpoint, and to argue that their behaviour, values and beliefs reflect a view of goodness, relationships and the world that is not inferior to the norm but complementary.

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<sup>105</sup> For the ethics of care analysis of the scene see pp. 207-209.

<sup>106</sup> Joan Tronto and Claudia Card quoted in Hekman, p. 23.

<sup>107</sup> Carol Gilligan, 'Reply to Critics' in *An Ethic of Care: Feminist and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. by Mary Jeanne Larrabee (New York & London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 207-214, (p. 209).

The analysis of the female tragic characters' experience is also explored in chapter 3 with a psychoanalytical approach to Médée, Clytemnestre and Phèdre's behaviour. This reading focuses on the characters' unconscious beliefs (about themselves and the world), desires and needs and the role they play in the decision-making process. This endeavour aims to provide a reading which goes beyond the moral and psychological aspects explored through the ethics of care approach. This analysis will delve into the unconscious motives of these tragic heroines in order to explore the way in which they inform their behaviour. Whilst in the ethics of care approach the characters pursued consciously their beliefs and values, this reading will reveal that there is a psychoanalytical dimension which underlies their actions that they may not be aware of. In other words, they may not consciously desire certain events to occur, but they will unconsciously work towards them. This endeavour will provide alternative motives for the tragic heroine's decisions and actions enriching our understanding of their behaviour. It will also challenge previous psychoanalytical interpretations largely based on the male versus female, nature versus culture paradigm, and will reveal that the behaviour of these tragic heroines is a complex result of needs and desires determined by specific unconscious beliefs regarding themselves and the world.

The methodology used for this endeavour stems from Eric Berne's transactional analysis, which focuses on unconscious motivations. Berne's theory brings forward a structural approach, which argues that the Self is divided into three ego states or patterns of behaviour, with a corresponding system of feelings and specific functions (Adult, Child and Parent). Berne focused on the influence of interpersonal and societal factors when he developed the ego states. He argued that they are different from the Freudian concepts of id, ego and superego because the former can be confirmed with observable behaviour whilst the latter are unobservable theoretical states.<sup>108</sup> These ego states manifest themselves

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<sup>108</sup> Eric Berne, *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy: A Systematic Individual and Social Psychiatry*, (London: Souvenir Press Ltd. 2001), p. 24.

consciously, react to different stimuli and perceive the environment depending on their specific function. They are ‘phenomenological realities’ and represent ‘real people who now exist or once existed, who have legal names and civic identities’ which also sets them apart from the id, ego and superego.<sup>109</sup> The early life experiences and observations of those closest to us (parents, grandparents) are transformed into these ego states which become manifest in our gestures, emotional responses, words and actions, and inform our behaviour and decisions. Behaviours and beliefs are passed down to us through these ego states and this emphasizes the deterministic nature of our life. These concepts also incorporate the specific conditions of one’s early life experience. For example, the transactional analysis will reveal that Phèdre’s family curse influences the Child ego state, more precisely it determines a specific belief about herself as well as the type of satisfaction she unconsciously pursues as the plot unfolds.<sup>110</sup>

Berne focused on the influence that early-life experiences have on adult behaviour, as the Child ego state thinks, responds and reacts as a child of a certain age, sometime between the age of two and five, and the Parent ego state represents the behaviour, the thoughts and the language of one’s parents when one was little. These ego states are remnants of those particular experiences incorporated in the Self. Berne emphasizes the importance of Parental influence in relation to one’s decisions about the life one wishes to lead as well as the manner in which they have an effect on one’s social interactions. Parents teach their children how to interact and introduce them to games as methods of structuring time that allow them to derive psychological satisfaction from each situation. For example, the transactional analysis will reveal that Minos contributed to Phèdre’s life plan as well as her decisions and actions. In his case the influence was in the form of the injunction: ‘You’ll End Up Like Your Mother!’ accompanied by a prescription on how to

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<sup>109</sup> Eric Berne, *What Do You Say After You Say Hello? The Psychology of Human Destiny* (London: Corgi Books, 1975), pp. 11-12, Berne, *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy*, p. 32.

<sup>110</sup> For a discussion of Phèdre’s family curse and its influence on her behaviour see pp. 289, 295.

structure time until this final pay-off: ‘Try Hard Not to Become Her!’ – but when you do become her you can still claim that you tried.<sup>111</sup> This indicates that Phèdre’s constant attempt to maintain her virtue represents a way of structuring time until she confirms this injunction which was passed down to her.

Games involve a certain type of subconscious cunning on the part of one player who tries to find his respondent’s weakness and exploit it. They have a repetitive nature providing a psychological payoff (which may be positive or negative) for both players, which mostly takes the form of a confirmation of their beliefs about themselves, the world and others.<sup>112</sup> In short, both players engaged in the game pursue a payoff and are interested in continuing this interaction. Thus, they cooperate for the sake of the satisfaction to be obtained at the end. For instance, in the case of Phèdre’s interaction with CEnone, the former stimulates and uses the servant’s maternal, selfless stance in order to obtain a psychological pay-off in the form of being able to claim that she is not responsible for this transgressive behaviour. The servant also derives some satisfaction from this interaction, as it incorporates the psychological advantage of martyrdom and confirms her belief that: ‘All People are Ungrateful!’ Therefore, this pursuit of satisfaction informs this interaction as the plot unfolds and reveals that CEnone’s stance is not a selfless one which challenges her image as Phèdre’s victim. According to Berne, the influence of the parents goes beyond social interaction and other methods of structuring time, and plays a decisive part on one’s choice of ‘how he will live and how he will die’, what kind of person he will become, whom he will marry.<sup>113</sup> Berne calls this a ‘life script’. According to him this life script, incorporating specific beliefs and values, is passed down from parents to children, and influences conscious behaviour and social interactions. The characters sustain relationships and collaborate in the unfolding of the plot in pursuit of the psychological payoff provided by game-

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<sup>111</sup> Berne, *What Do You Say After You Say Hello?* pp. 107-8.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

playing, and the development of their life script. This transforms the tragic outcome into a collaborative effort motivated by these unconscious desires and needs.

Overall Berne's theory is relevant for this psychoanalytical analysis of the heroines because it does away with the mother's image as a castrating figure defined by her lack and recognizes that parents have equal influence over their offspring. Phèdre is no longer an aggressive, domineering mother figure whilst Clytemnestre is not reduced to her maternal role. The characters emerge as complex personalities driven by various unconscious desires and needs stemming from inherited beliefs. Also, the influence of mothers on the development and behaviour of the offspring is brought to the forefront, as the analysis will put forward Pasiphaé's influence over Phèdre as well as Clytemnestre's influence over Oreste and Électre's behaviour and actions. This analysis revalorises the role of the mother enabling us to read differently these classical texts which are products of a patriarchal society and its values. Furthermore, Berne argues that the influence of parents and grandparents on beliefs and behaviour depends on the child's gender, the family's social status, and other particularities related to their ancestry and their specific situations, allowing for a more specific and complex analysis of the factors contributing to one's personality and behaviour. The characters' behaviour and actions will be analysed through this methodological framework in order to uncover unconscious motivations derived from parental influence and past experiences as well as games (social interactions with the other characters guided by the unconscious need to obtain satisfaction) and life scripts.

In relation to the characters' unconscious dimension I would like to specify that I am referring here to what Ellen Oliensis calls 'textual unconscious'.<sup>114</sup> All characters are products of language, and the art of the playwright is to endow them with expressions, slips and emphases which enable the reader to imagine an unconscious dimension and a complex personality. As a result of this treatment we

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<sup>114</sup> Ellen Oliensis, *Freud's Rome: Psychoanalysis and Latin Poetry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 6.

are able to perceive these characters as being driven by desires and needs which underlie or are concealed by their language.<sup>115</sup>

Unlike previous psychoanalytical readings of the dramatic text which aim to reduce the characters' actions to an Oedipal or pre-Oedipal relationship, this approach focuses on analysing their behaviour and actions in order to uncover the complex nature of the unconscious influences and motivations at play in the heroines' decision-making processes and their interactions. This analysis also reveals that the interactions between the characters, which sustain the development of the plot, are dominated by game playing. Consequently, all characters contribute to the unfolding of the plot and sustain this dynamic on account of their unconscious need to structure time and derive some form of satisfaction (psychological payoff) from each social interaction.

In spite of this, transactional analysis does have its limitations. Berne's theories are not widely used because they provide patterns of psychological functioning which claim universality in a postmodern and post-structuralist context. He does not incorporate cultural diversity or diverse family structures into his theories. Furthermore, this theory has a deterministic feature in the form of the life script which is passed down from parents to children as well as the influences that parents have over their offspring's behaviour. This is at odds with a post-modern society in which identity is multi-faceted, fluid and influenced by a variety of factors. Nonetheless, these dramatic texts have inherited from the classical tradition a similarly deterministic element in the form of fate or destiny, and Racine even incorporated it in the construction of his plots.<sup>116</sup> In this context, this deterministic aspect of the theory, particularly the life script, represents a way to overcome this

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<sup>115</sup> For a discussion on the use of psychoanalysis in literary analysis see: Michael Riffaterre 'The Intertextual Unconscious' in *The Trial(s) of Psychoanalysis*, ed. by F. Meltzer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 211-25.

<sup>116</sup> Georges Forestier argues that Jean Racine's tragedies follow the '*principe de la cause finale*': a creative process à rebours that uses the ending as a starting point and produces the adequate context (system of causes and effects) for the already established outcome. *Passions tragiques et règles classiques: Essai sur la tragédie française* (Presses Universitaires de France, 2003), p. 203-4.

issue regarding diversity, as it enables me to account for and incorporate the concept of tragic fate and the extraordinary aspects of the characters' family relationships. This will be discussed in more detail in the Methodology section incorporated in Chapter 3, but one example in which the life script allows me to consider this type of exceptional behaviour and its influence is Phèdre's 'Always' life script inspired by her mother. Pasiphaé's monstrous passion, which produced the Minotaur and became the subject of legends (including Thésée's), fascinated Minos's daughter and exerted an attraction that the harsh moral precepts instilled by her father could not counteract. Phèdre considers her predicament the fate of Pasiphaé's daughter, a divine ancestry marked by monstrous passion and the wrath of the gods. The life script concept allows me to analyse this aspect of the character's behaviour and to observe its implications in her actions alongside other factors which may inform her behaviour. Hence, the application of this theory in a strategic manner enables me to reveal the unconscious factors (beliefs, needs and desires) that influence interpersonal relationships and behaviour beyond the traditional Freudian dynamic. Overall, this approach is able to reveal the manner in which the tragic heroines' unconscious beliefs and desires influence their behaviour and their decisions, manifest themselves and are supported by their social interactions which directly contribute to the tragic outcome.

The use of modern psychoanalytical and moral psychology theories to analyse French female tragic characters from the early modern period may seem anachronistic. However, I take the same stand as Daniel Mesguich who argues that the meaning of a text is not fixed but changes as the text's relationship with present-day evolves. Society evolves, and we find new ways of connecting to the text and implicitly new meanings in it.<sup>117</sup> Anne Ubersfeld holds a similar view when she states that it is not important that Racine wrote before Freud; what is important is that we read after Freud.<sup>118</sup> This endeavour aims to enrich the meaning of these

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<sup>117</sup> Daniel Mesguich, 'L'Écriture et la lecture', *Le Débat*, 113 (2001), 81-85 (p. 83).

<sup>118</sup> Anne Ubersfeld, *Lire le théâtre* (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1977), p. 170.

dramatic texts in the light of the developments that have occurred in the fields of ethics and psychoanalysis. I engage with these plays in creative ways in order to provide new interpretative possibilities and new paths towards connecting with the characters, and although this might be subjected to some criticism, it is a worthy task pursued by literary scholars and staging directors.

The analysis of the stagings of these plays in order to uncover new meanings regarding the characters' behaviour and actions which will be incorporated in chapter 4, will use as a guideline Patrice Pavis's approaches to the *mise en scène* of classical plays. I have chosen this methodology because it considers the productions as stemming 'explicitly or implicitly from the dramatic text', and this allows me to analyse the way these texts are treated in performance and the meaning that emerges from these various treatments.<sup>119</sup> By using Pavis's approaches to staging I am able to observe how theatre practitioners find new ways of reading and interpreting these texts as well as the way our relationship with these plays evolves and we find new meanings in the characters' actions and behaviours.

The following approaches to the staging of classical plays will represent the basis for our performance analysis: archaeological reconstruction, historicization, the play in pieces, the return to the myth, the re-emergence of the body and recontextualization.<sup>120</sup> Each of these approaches focuses on different aspects of the dramatic text and the performance: following the letter of the text in the case of archaeological reconstruction, bringing the text closer to contemporaneity and using it to discuss present-day issues (historicization), the deconstruction of the rhetoric (the play in pieces) in order to create new meaning, the universal quality of the themes incorporated in the play in terms of the human unconscious (return to the myth), the way the body conveys aspects of the character's mindset and emotions and can represent a source of meaning (re-emergence of the body) and how placing

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<sup>119</sup> Patrice Pavis, *Analyzing Performance: theatre, dance and film*, trans. by David Williams (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), p. 212.

<sup>120</sup> Patrice Pavis, *Contemporary mise en scène*, trans. by Joel Anderson (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 207-12.



the story in an environment familiar to contemporary audiences and closer to the present can provide a new perspective on the story (recontextualization). A more detailed definition and discussion of these approaches to staging is incorporated in the methodology section of Chapter 4.<sup>121</sup>

By using these approaches in our analysis of contemporary performances we are able to consider different aspects of the production from the time and place of the action, to the treatment of the dramatic text, the main themes it incorporates and the performers' technique, in particular body movement, gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice. We are able to analyse the ways these different techniques are combined by theatre practitioners in order to put forward new readings of these plays and new interpretations of the characters. This is possible because Pavis argues that a strict typology is problematic, and productions often make use of several of these approaches whilst a performance that focuses on only one of the categories mentioned above is a rare occurrence.<sup>122</sup> This treatment of the performance opens up our analysis, as I do not have to commit to an overall approach to the staging of a play. The elements of the performance become the main source of meaning, and this allows me to consider various interpretative possibilities.

Pavis's classification has some limitations. The approaches he identifies do not acknowledge or discuss the fact that productions may incorporate elements from different cultures and different theatre traditions as Prost argues.<sup>123</sup> Incorporating in the performance of these classical plays elements pertaining to different cultures, as for instance references to India in the staging of *Suréna* by Anne Delbée (Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier, 1998), can represent a source of new and original meaning. Nonetheless, Pavis does not discuss this type of productions because he draws his conclusions from a series of recent performances which do not incorporate this

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<sup>121</sup> See pp. 317-321 for a discussion of Pavis's approaches to staging the classical plays.

<sup>122</sup> Pavis, *Analyzing Performance*, p. 212.

<sup>123</sup> Prost, p. 240.

reading of the play. The productions that I will analyse in chapter 4 do not claim to incorporate elements from other cultures or other theatrical traditions. However, I am aware that such elements may emerge in the performance or the reception of the play, and I will mention them as and when the occasion arises in relation to the way they may contribute to a new interpretation of the story and the characters.

The responses to these productions also represent a source of alternative readings and potentially new meanings. For this reason, they will also be incorporated in our analysis. I will use my experience as a spectator and the reviews of the plays as a means to engage with the potential responses to the performance. The analysis of the plays incorporated in the previous two chapters will also be considered as a potential response since reception theory acknowledges multiple ways of engaging with performance, and this endeavour will strengthen my argument. Therefore, the analysis of the performance will consider the responses to these approaches to the staging of the classical plays in order to observe the way they contribute to producing new readings of the story and potentially strengthen the interpretations presented in chapter 2 and 3 of this thesis.

Overall the methodologies discussed in this section will be used to analyse these dramatic texts in order to challenge previous interpretations of these female tragic characters, and to put forward new and original readings which enable us to perceive the heroines' behaviour and actions from a different perspective. This will transform them into tragic figures that are equal to the male heroes as they are driven by an ethical code and are endowed with needs and desires which go beyond the Freudian paradigm of the archetypal, monstrous mother or the dangerous woman. It will also reveal the way a different approach to the relationships and the interactions between the characters is able to reveal new aspects related to the issue of guilt and responsibility and to provide an innovative interpretation of the characters and the story.

#### 1.4 Outline of thesis

The analysis of the characters' behaviour through the methodological frameworks discussed in the previous section is preceded by a comparative approach to the Classical Greek plays and their early modern French versions in Chapter 1. This chapter compares Corneille's *Médée* (1635), Racine's *Iphigénie* (1674) and *Phèdre* (1677) and Longepierre's *Électre* (1702) to their classical source texts, namely, Euripides' and Seneca's *Medea* (respectively 431 BC and 50 AD), Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis* (c. 407 BC), Sophocles' *Electra* (c. 410 BC), Euripides' *Hippolytus* (428 BC) and Seneca's *Phaedra* (54 AD). The aim of this chapter is to explore the similarities as well as the differences between the French characters and their classical counterparts in the light of the reception of these classical texts and the theories of tragedy in early modern France. By adopting this comparative approach this chapter aims to reveal the process through which Medea became Médée, Clytemnestra transformed into Clytemnestre and Phaedra into Phèdre, whilst emphasizing the role that contemporary beliefs, values and principles of tragedy have in shaping their character and their actions. This analysis will reveal the way these female tragic heroines continue and develop the behaviour and traits of their classical counterparts and provide insight into the psychological and emotional aspect of their actions in order to stimulate the audience's emotional engagement and to follow contemporary ideology. The aim of this endeavour is to reveal the elements and traits which form the behaviour and character of Médée, Clytemnestre and Phèdre, and provide the complexity and specificity which enable the analysis based on modern theories incorporated in chapters 2, 3 and 4.

Chapter 2 analyses the complex experience and behaviour of these female tragic characters through an ethics of care framework in order to reveal their beliefs about goodness, themselves and the world. This analysis provides an alternative interpretation of their actions and decision-making processes which values their emotional experience and their specific perspective on their dilemma that deviates from the justice and rights approach. These characters are aware of the justice and

rights approach. However, they analyse their situation through an ethics of care perspective, and this tension and dialogue between these two views of goodness and morality also provide insight into their values, beliefs and specific experience of the tragic context. By engaging with this marginal and marginalized perspective, this endeavour promotes a more comprehensive approach to these tragic characters' experience and finds new meaning in their behaviour and decisions. This enables me to put forward original interpretations of the characters' actions which allow us to reassess their behaviour. An eloquent example which I discuss in the methodology section is the re-evaluation of Phèdre's confession to Hippolyte and the way it puts forward the fact that the heroine's behaviour is driven by a duty of care towards her son as well as passion, and she is not completely immoral or irrational as other critics have argued. This interpretation reduces Phèdre's guilt whilst emphasizing her commitment to her son's well-being. As a result, the manner in which these characters perceive themselves, goodness and their ethical dilemmas together with their emotional responses to the dramatic context are brought forward, explored and valued for the insight that they provide into the characters' mindset and beliefs and implicitly their decisions, actions and behaviour.

Chapter 3 continues this analysis of the characters' behaviour, actions and decision-making process by bringing in a psychoanalytical approach. This analysis aims to explore the unconscious factors involved in the dynamic between the characters with an emphasis on the way these interactions are guided by the pursuit of a certain type of unconscious satisfaction based on inherited beliefs about the world and themselves. The manner in which these unconscious factors inform the tragic heroines' behaviour and their interactions with the other characters will provide an alternative reading which goes beyond the moral and psychological aspects discussed in the previous chapter. This endeavour will challenge previous psychoanalytical readings that are based on androcentric methodologies. It will also provide interpretations of the characters' actions which have not been explored or discussed by other critics and will allow us to perceive their behaviour from a

different perspective. One example is the satisfaction that Médée derives from Jason's infidelity and the way she sets up a context that is favourable to betrayal through her agreement with Égée.<sup>124</sup> In this sense, the analysis incorporated in this chapter corresponds to the main aim of the thesis, namely, to provide alternative interpretations of the behaviour, experience and actions of these female tragic heroines in order to open these dramatic texts to new readings and to find different ways of connecting to them.

Chapter 4 of this thesis focuses on the performative dimension of these dramatic texts and explores the different meanings that emerge from contemporary productions of these plays in terms of the characters' behaviour, their dynamic and their story. The analysis of these recent productions will be paired with the interpretations incorporated in the previous chapters of the thesis, particularly chapters 2 and 3, in order to observe the way performance may reinforce these ideas or may put forward new perspectives. Consequently, this chapter will reveal the manner in which contemporary performances of the classical plays convey new perspectives on the characters' interactions and the story, enrich the meaning of the text and strengthen the argument put forward in the previous chapters of the thesis. This section contributes to the overall aim of the thesis which is to provide alternative readings of the characters' experience, behaviour and decisions. This also represents an original contribution to the field of seventeenth-century French studies as there are no contemporary studies dedicated to the analysis of the recent performances of these classical plays in the light of contemporary approaches to staging and an ethics of care and transactional analysis critical reading of the dramatic text. Overall the aim of this thesis is to challenge previous readings and to provide an alternative interpretation of these female tragic characters' behaviour and actions which will cement Médée's, Clytemnestre's and Phèdre's status as tragic

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<sup>124</sup> For a discussion regarding the satisfaction that Médée derives from Jason's betrayal and her agreement with Égée, see pp. 247-50, 255, 258.

heroines equal to their male counterparts and will enable us to gain a new perspective on their stories.

# Medea, Clytemnestra and Phaedra from Ancient and Classical Greece to Seventeenth-Century France

## 1.1 Introduction

This chapter compares Corneille's *Médée* (1635), Racine's *Iphigénie* (1674) and *Phèdre* (1677) and Longepierre's *Électre* (1702) to their classical source texts, namely, Euripides' and Seneca's *Medea* (431 BC, 50 AD), Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis* (c. 407 BC), Sophocles' *Electra* (c. 410 BC), Euripides' *Hippolytus* (428 BC) and Seneca's *Phaedra* (54 AD). The aim of this endeavour is to reveal the similarities as well as the differences between the French characters and their classical counterparts, in order to emphasize the way, the ideas and values incorporated in these source texts were continued, developed and transformed in the light of seventeenth-century ideology and theories of tragedy. As the Introduction revealed, the early modern French theorists and playwrights adapt the classical principles of tragedy to the taste, values and beliefs of the seventeenth-century audience. This reflects the playwrights' aim to please the spectators and to engage them emotionally through the dramatic text and the tragic characters they present.<sup>1</sup> As a result, the classical texts and the characters reflect or correspond with contemporary ideas, values and beliefs in order to stimulate an emotional response from the audience. As d'Aubignac argues, the passions of the tragic character must meet the spectators' approval in order to be able to engage them emotionally and produce the desired cathartic effect.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the spectators must be persuaded by the characters as well as the plot in order to be able to find pleasure and emotional stimulation in them, and the principle of verisimilitude —*vraisemblance*— is essential for achieving this aim. La Mesnardière, d'Aubignac and Corneille stress the importance of following history and historical sources as well as common

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<sup>1</sup> See the discussion on the playwrights' tragic vision, pp. 14-23.

<sup>2</sup> D'Aubignac, p. 338.

knowledge in the construction of the characters and the plot in order to persuade the audience and encourage them to engage with the story emotionally and mentally. Nonetheless, they all acknowledge that this verisimilitude is a theatrical one and although the plays maintain the connection with the Ancient sources for credibility, the playwrights need to adapt these plots and characters to the morals, beliefs and habits of the audience.<sup>3</sup> As John Lyons argues, ‘the historical society’ reconstructed in early modern French versions of these myths is adapted to a seventeenth-century ideology.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the adaptation of these classical texts is informed by the contemporary context and ideology as well as a desire to maintain the connection with the classical source texts. This aspect represents a source of tension as the violent behaviours incorporated in the source texts (regicide and infanticide in the case of our plays) are against the Christian morals and values of the seventeenth-century French monarchical state. As Corneille remarks in *Discours de la tragédie*: ‘le goût de notre siècle n’est point celui du sien [Aristotle] [...] ce qui plaisait au dernier point à ses Athéniens ne plait pas également à nos Français’.<sup>5</sup> Playwrights had to mediate this tension and this determines a specific treatment of these source texts and implicitly of these female tragic characters. Médée, Clytemnestre and Phèdre display the criminal and transgressive behaviour of their classical counterparts as well as qualities which reflect an endeavour to adapt their actions and their traits to early modern beliefs and values.

These factors related to contemporary ideology and principles of tragedy inform the playwrights’ treatment of these tragic characters and their stories, and lead to the emergence of Médée, Clytemnestre and Phèdre as early modern female tragic heroines, the product of this period’s interpretation of the classical tragedy. By comparing the classical source texts and tragic characters to their early modern

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<sup>3</sup> La Mesnardière, pp. 182-86, 193, d’Aubignac, pp. 35-37, Corneille, ‘Discours de la tragédie et des moyens de la traiter selon le vraisemblable et le nécessaire’, p. 835.

<sup>4</sup> John D. Lyons, *The Tragedy of Origins: Pierre Corneille and Historical Perspective* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 26.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 835.



versions produced by Corneille, Racine and Longepierre, this chapter aims to reveal the process through which Medea became Médée, Clytemnestra transformed into Clytemnestre and Phaedra into Phèdre, whilst emphasizing the role that contemporary beliefs, values and principles of tragedy have in shaping their character and their actions. The main focus is on the way the actions and behaviour of the characters correspond to contemporary ideas of female transgression and danger whilst simultaneously incorporating a focus on their emotional turmoil as well as other mitigating factors. This treatment aims to render them suitable to the taste of the early modern audience and implicitly able to stimulate the spectators' pity and fear. Medea, Clytemnestra and Phaedra undergo a process of continuation and transformation as their behaviour and character are adapted and transgressive elements are combined with redeeming traits, extenuating circumstances and factors which offer insight into their motives and decisions and their emotional experience. This analysis will reveal the way these female tragic heroines continue and develop the behaviour and traits of their classical counterparts and provide insight into the psychological and emotional aspect of their actions in order to stimulate the audience's emotional engagement and to follow contemporary ideology. This represents a preliminary step in the analysis of these characters' behaviour, decisions and actions which will be deepened through the use of modern theories of ethics, psychoanalysis and performance in the following chapters. Its aim is to provide an overview of the elements and traits that form Médée's, Clytemnestre's and Phèdre's character, and add a complexity and a specificity to their behaviour which enable these readings and interpretations based on modern theories.

This analysis will begin with an exploration of the early modern debate regarding women, the *querelle des femmes* which produced a series of discourses on the social functions and the qualities of the weaker sex, informed contemporary ideas regarding female morality, character, abilities and appropriate behaviour and shaped the audience's reception of these tragic characters and their stories. Since Medea, Clytemnestra and Phaedra represent queens having to deal with moral

dilemmas that have personal as well as public implications, their stories resonated with the source of this debate namely the regencies of Marie de Médicis (1610-1614) and Anne of Austria (1643-1651). Classical Athens and its treatment of women, particularly the fact that they were not allowed to hold any public function or to leave the household became an example of a suitable way of dealing with their lack of judgement and their ‘appétit sensuel’ in *Alphabet de l'imperfection et la malice des femmes*, a text heavily circulated in the aftermath of Marie de Médicis’ regency.<sup>6</sup> According to Olivier, the author of this work, ‘la femme est la chef du péché, les armes du diable, l’exil du paradis, la mère du délit, et la corruption de la loi’.<sup>7</sup> The plays echo some of these issues particularly the idea of women’s inability to control their passion. For instance, Phèdre rejects Œnone’s suggestion to rule arguing that her passion makes her unsuitable for such an endeavour ‘Moi régner! Moi ranger un État sous ma loi ! / Quand ma faible raison ne règne plus sur moi’.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, these dramatic texts incorporate references to the virtues of these tragic heroines and the injustices they suffer at the hands of spouses and kings which justify to a certain extent their behaviour: Médée is betrayed by her spouse and mistreated by Créon, Clytemnestre is a good mother and is betrayed by Agamemnon, Phèdre has a deep sense of morality. This treatment of the characters and the tragic texts engages with the issue of women’s qualities and their social function and corresponds to the ideas circulated in this *querelle des femmes*. As this debate problematizes the subject of these classical plays, an exploration of its origins and discourses will reveal the contemporary ideas regarding this topic. Furthermore, these discourses reflect contemporary beliefs about women and their qualities and

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<sup>6</sup> Jacques Olivier, *Alphabet de l'imperfection et la malice des femmes* (Paris: Jean Petit-Pas, rue Saint Jacques à l’Escu de Venise près les Mathurins, 1617), pp. 38-39. He mentions Plato and his idea that women lack the ability to deliberate because of their sensual appetite alongside the legend that Neptune and Minerva (Athena) issued three ordinances which support a heavy surveillance of Athenian women on account of their feeble and fickle nature.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>8</sup> Jean Racine, *Phèdre* in *Théâtre complet*, ed by. Alain Viala and Sylvaine Guyot, Act III, Scene 1, verses 759-60. Further references to this text will include the act, scene and verse number in the main body of the text.

behaviours which Corneille, Racine and Longepierre had to consider in the reinterpretation of their tragic characters. Tragic heroines had to attract the sympathy of the early modern audience and to do so they had to display a behaviour which the spectators would identify as female and implicitly correspond to contemporary ideas regarding their gender. *La Mesnardière* incorporates a list of gender-specific traits that the tragic characters must display. For the female tragic characters, the list is more complex than for their male counterparts. Also, women seem to display more negative attributes than men:

Les femmes sont dissimulées, douces, faibles, délicates, modestes, pudiques, courtoises, sublimes en leurs pensées, soudaines en leurs désirs, violentes dans leurs passions, soupçonneuses dans leur joies, jalouses jusqu'à la fureur, passionnées pour leur beauté, amoureuses de leurs visions, des louanges et de la gloire, orgueilleuses dans leur empire, susceptibles d'impressions, désireuses de nouveautés, impatientes et volages.<sup>9</sup>

These are according to *La Mesnardière* 'les qualités ordinaires des femmes' that playwrights have to consider when constructing their tragic characters.<sup>10</sup> An exploration of the discourses surrounding the *querelle des femmes* will provide further insight into the political and social context and the contemporary ideas regarding women and their abilities which had the potential to influence the playwrights treatment of these stories and the tragic characters on account of the need to adapt them to the taste, values and beliefs of the audience.

The discourses about the queen regents reveal the social controversy regarding this political construct as well as the contemporary ideas about women. Louis Turquet de Mayerne (1611) argued that male sovereignty was ordained by God and provided France with an advantage over most European nations while

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

queen regents who are capable ‘sont choses rares, approchantes de miracles qu’il ne faut ni renter, ni tirer à conséquence.’<sup>11</sup> Like other anti-regency discourses, Turquet de Mayerne’s ideas reiterated the biblical concept of female obedience and servitude and the Salic law of succession, which established that only male descendants could inherit the French crown: ‘qu’il n’y a rien de plus conforme à Nature que quand les hommes commandent et les femmes sont commandées’.<sup>12</sup> The basis of these arguments was the inferiority of all women even nobles ones who ‘quoi qu’on les dise de bonne race, peuvent être portées par leurs dérégles appétits’ and the superiority of men who were endowed with ‘fermeté, prudence, magnanimité, & autres telles vertus Royales par-dessus le féminin’.<sup>13</sup> The influence of this critique reached the political sphere, and *Le Code Louis XIII, roy de France et de Navarre*; established the regency of Marie de Médicis, and attempted to grant legitimacy to her rule in an article comprising the history of French regent queens, containing examples of their ‘gouvernement heureux’.<sup>14</sup> Previous regent queens like Brunehilde, Anne de Bretagne and Catherine de Médicis amongst others were praised for the way they generously preserved the crown for their sons and the queen was deemed ‘d’égale dignité, d’honneur semblable au Roi’.<sup>15</sup> This type of political discourse represents one of the methods used by the French monarchy to respond to anti-regency narratives, to challenge these essentialist beliefs regarding women’s abilities and to nuance the relationship between women and power.

The Bible and particularly Virgin Mary was associated with the image of the regent queens and became a source for the reinterpretation of the relationship

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<sup>11</sup> Louis Turquet de Mayerne, *La Monarchie aristo-démocratique*, 7 vols. (Paris : J. Berjon, 1611), vol. II, p. 62.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., vol. II, p. 60.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., vol. V, p. 290, vol. II, p. 62.

<sup>14</sup> Louis XIII (Roi de France, 1601-1643), *Le Code Louis XIII, roy de France et de Navarre, contenant ses ordonnances et arrests de ses Cours souveraines, pour les droicts de sa Couronne, police entre ses sujets, reiglement de la justice, forme et abbréviation des procez, recueillies, commentées et conférées avec celles des roys Henry le Grand, Henri III, Charles IX, François II, Henri II, François 1er et autres ses prédécesseurs*, par Jacques Corbin (Paris: Quesnel, 1628), Identifiant : ark:/12148/bpt6k116682f

Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Droit, économie, politique, F-2057.

Relation: <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb33815061s>, Livre premier, Titre premier, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

between women and power during this period in order to counter the political discourses against female regency. The Virgin Mother, one of the most prominent figures in Christianity, was elevated to a position equal to that of her son, Jesus, as a reflection of the political context and an attempt to endow French female regency with an element of divine authority and legitimacy.<sup>16</sup> In order to reinforce this association between the regent queen and the Holy Mother, Simon François depicted Marie de Médicis as the Virgin holding a Christ-like child (Louis XIII).<sup>17</sup> Moreover, in December 1637 Louis XIII put the kingdom under the protection of the Virgin Mary and thus directly associated Marie de Médicis with this revered figure.<sup>18</sup> Religious figures are used to mediate the difficult relationship between women and power and to give legitimacy to the female ruler.

This Christian way of mediating female behaviour that does not conform to the norm is problematic in the case of Médée, Clytemnestre and Phèdre. These female tragic characters resort to murder (Médée, Clytemnestre) and betray their spouses, behaviour which is incompatible with Christian values. Furthermore, they sacrifice their relationship with their children (Clytemnestre and Phèdre) and even murder their offspring (Médée) in the name of power, desire and jealousy. These deeds place them in conflict with the Christian image of a good mother, namely, Virgin Mary. Therefore, playwrights had to focus on their emotional turmoil, their motives and the factors that contributed to this behaviour in an attempt to reduce the transgressive nature of their actions and to stimulate the sympathy and admiration of a Christian audience.

This political debate permeated social as well as literary discourses and early seventeenth-century literary creations incorporate contrasting narratives and beliefs about women. *Les Caquets de l'accouchée*, published anonymously during 1622, presented the processes of childbirth as an all-female event that undermined the

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<sup>16</sup> Elaine Rhea Rubin, *The Heroic Image: Women and Power in Early Seventeenth-Century France, 1610-1661* (London: University Microfilms, 1977), p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> Wendy Gibson, *Women in Seventeenth-Century France* (London: MacMillan, 1989), p. 170.

<sup>18</sup> Rubin, p. 148.

patriarchal rule of the household.<sup>19</sup> A decade later François du Soucy in *Le Triomphe des dames*, challenged female status and patriarchal power by transforming Eve into the ‘symbol of life’ and praising Anne of France as ‘sage et très généreuse’ and Catherine de Médicis as ‘très sage et très judicieuse Princesse’.<sup>20</sup> Women are either sources of chaos or generous, wise figures, and a reconciliation of these two opposing views appears problematic. Contemporary literary discourses as well as religious stories were engaged in this public discussion attempting to identify and establish the role of women in society.

As this debate transitioned from political and social spheres into literary discourses early modern French tragedy also engaged with this topic, contributing to this ongoing discussion. As Mary Beard argues, ‘we are still using ancient Greek idioms to represent the idea of women, in and out of power’.<sup>21</sup> Early modern France marked by the resurgence of humanism as well as this political context which brought regent queens to the forefront turned to classical literature for stories that engage with this topic. The classical myths of Medea, Clytemnestra and Phaedra particularly, their behaviour as autonomous moral agents and women of noble birth, bring into discussion the relationship between women and power which is at core of the seventeenth-century discussion around women and their social status. However, the behaviour of these female tragic characters is in conflict with Christian beliefs and values. Their actions are far from those of a generous princess or a Christian mother and this represents as source of difficulty in terms of adapting the plays to contemporary ideas and beliefs. The balance between following the Ancient sources and stimulating the audience’s sympathy for the characters becomes problematic. In spite of these differences, the plays incorporate an interest

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<sup>19</sup> Kirk D. Read, *Birth Bodies in Early Modern France: Stories of Gender and Reproduction* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 28, 38. During this process the head of the household must pander to the whims of his wife, the midwives and the army of female friends that visit the new mother. For this short period of time the house becomes a female dominion and the author does not hesitate to identify the potential for social chaos that lies within this situation.

<sup>20</sup> François du Soucy escuyer, sieur de Gerzan, *Le Triomphe des dames* (Paris: Auteurs, 1646), pp. 194, 195.

<sup>21</sup> Mary Beard, *Women and Power: A Manifesto* (London: Profile Books, 2017), p. 58.

in women and their situation, which is able to provide fruitful ground for the continuation of the contemporary debate regarding the social status of women and their relationship with power. The reinterpretation and treatment of these classical plays is determined by this particular social and political context and the pervasive influence of this ancient culture.

There are some similarities between Classical Athens and early modern France regarding female status and this is part of the reason these classical myths incorporate some of the ideas put forward in the early modern discussion regarding women's rights and abilities. During the Classical period both in Athens and France, aristocratic women had fewer legal rights and freedoms than in Mykenaeen and Archaic Greece (8<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century BC) and medieval France. According to Elisabeth Meier Tetlow, from the Mykenaeen to the late archaic period, 'the status of women declined from independence to guardianship under the authority of men, from wealth and power to the inability to own or control property'.<sup>22</sup> Similarly in France the legal codes of Louis XIII (1628) and Louis XIV (1667) limited women's entitlements in terms of inheritance, children, widowhood and marriage. Medea's speech regarding the wretched condition of women in Euripides' play reinforces this idea of inequality and of male authority and control:

First of all, we (women) have to buy a husband with a vast outlay of money — we have to take a master for our body. The latter is still more painful than the former. [...] For divorce brings shame on a woman's reputation and we cannot refuse a husband his rights. We come to new ways of behaviour, to new customs — and, since we have learnt nothing of such matters at home [...].<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Elisabeth Meier Tetlow, *Women, Crime and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd., 2005), pp. 54, 104, 140.

<sup>23</sup> Euripides, *Medea and other plays*, ed. and trans. by James Morwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), v. 231-33, 235-39. Further references to this play will give the verse number as in this edition in the main body of the text.

Corneille's version of the character does not engage directly with this issue. However, she acknowledges Jason's sole authority over their offspring as she asks for his permission to take the children with her: 'Souffre que mes enfants accompagnent ma fuite.'<sup>24</sup> Médée's request echoes these ideas regarding male authority over the offspring and the household and implicitly women's limited rights over their children. Agamemnon also has the right of life and death over his children whilst Clytemnestra is left to lament the fate of her daughter in Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*: 'After three daughters, I bore you this son. And you are cruelly robbing me of one of the girls'.<sup>25</sup> Similarly Racine's *Iphigénie* incorporates the idea of Agamemnon's absolute authority over his offspring in his daughter's speech: 'Quand vous commanderez, vous serez obéi. / Ma vie est votre bien; vous voulez le reprendre.'<sup>26</sup> These discourses incorporate and reflect ideas regarding women's status and the daily inequalities in power and engage with the interaction between women's personal lives (desires and needs) and their legal and social treatment which limits them. These cultural parallels, in terms of discourses regarding women's status, their abilities and rights, enable classical literature and particularly tragedy to provide stories which engage with early modern preoccupations and ideas on this matter and participate to this debate that penetrated the political, social and literary sphere.

In spite of these similarities, these classical texts also present behaviours and values which are in conflict with contemporary beliefs. For instance, Medea resorts to double regicide and infanticide in order to avenge herself. Clytemnestra

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<sup>24</sup> Pierre Corneille, *Médée* in *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. by André Stegmann, Act III, Scene III, verse 930. Further references to this play will give the act, the scene and the verse number as in this edition in the main body of the text.

<sup>25</sup> Euripides, *Medea and other plays*, ed. and trans. by James Morwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), v. 1163-64. Further references to this play will give the verse number as in this edition in the main body of the text.

<sup>26</sup> Jean Racine, *Iphigénie* in *Théâtre complet*, ed. by Alain Viala and Sylvaine Guyot, Act IV, Scene 4, verses 1172-73. Further references to this text will include the act, scene and verse number in the main body of the text.



murders the king and abandons her children and Phaedra betrays the king and shows disregard for her son. The idea of regicide is an abomination to the early modern audience because as d'Aubignac argues 'vivant dans un État monarchique, nous tenons comme sacrée la personne des Rois, quand même ils seraient injustes.'<sup>27</sup> La Mesnardière considered Medea's infanticide 'une horreur désagréable', 'excessivement inhumaine' and a reason to exclude the play from the repertoire of theatres.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, these voluntary homicides, adulterous intentions and abandonment of children go against the values of a contemporary Christian audience for whom murder was a capital sin and being a good mother, similarly to the figure of Virgin Mary, represented a source of virtue as well as a matter of faith. Therefore, the plays also incorporated elements and behaviours which were in conflict with early modern ideology and the playwrights had to manage this tension between congruence with contemporary ideas and with ancient sources in order to stimulate the audience's mental and emotional engagement.

Contemporary ideology and the ideas incorporated in this *querelle des femmes* contribute to this renewed interest in these plays whilst simultaneously informing the treatment of the classical texts and of the female tragic characters. The relationship that develops between the audience and literary creations in seventeenth-century France is partly responsible for the influence that contemporary ideas, morals and beliefs have on the reinterpretation of the classical myths. As Alain Viala argues 'le public littéraire a pris corps et forme en même temps que prenait forme et consistance le champ littéraire'.<sup>29</sup> This connection between the public and literary creations in terms of a common ontogenesis excludes the pre-existence of one or the other. The Académie Française acknowledged officially the public's involvement in the reception and the success of a play in its verdict on Corneille's *Le Cid*: 'Ceux, qui abandonnent leurs ouvrages au Public, ne doivent

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<sup>27</sup> D'Aubignac, p. 339.

<sup>28</sup> La Mesnardière, p. 317.

<sup>29</sup> Alain Viala, *Naissance de l'écrivain. Sociologie de la littérature à l'âge classique* (Paris: Minuit, 1985), p. 124.

pas trouver étrange que le Public s'en fasse le juge'.<sup>30</sup> The audience becomes a powerful entity able to judge literary works and to give power to whomever earns their favour. Playwrights were aware of this and indicated through prefaces or dedications their commitment to satisfying the taste of the audience. Corneille's dedication to *La Suivante*: 'Notre premier but doit être de plaire à la Cour et au peuple et d'attirer un grand monde à leurs [poèmes] représentations' as well as the dedication to *Médée* indicate that the playwright's main preoccupation was to gain the favour of his audience: '[Le but] de la poésie dramatique est de plaire, et les règles qu'elle nous prescrit ne sont que des adresses pour en faciliter les moyens au poète.'<sup>31</sup> Meeting the expectations and the taste of the audience becomes the main task and the classical rules are the tools meant to help the playwright achieve this aim. Jean Racine acquiesces to Corneille's views regarding the importance of satisfying the taste of the audience as he argues in his preface to *Bérénice* (1671) that: 'La principale règle est de plaire et de toucher. Toutes les autres ne sont faites que pour parvenir à cette première.'<sup>32</sup> Racine's opinions change in his Preface to *Phèdre* (1677) where he argues that the main aim of playwrights is 'autant à instruire leurs spectateurs qu'à les divertir'.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless this transformation of Racine's idea regarding the aim of tragedy was a means to attract the interest and sympathy of a religious audience who was previously unfavourable to his plays: 'Ce [utiles instructions] serait peut-être un moyen de réconcilier la tragédie avec quantité des personnes célèbres par leur piété et par leur doctrine'.<sup>34</sup> This treatment of *Phèdre* was meant to attract a segment of the audience who had been resistant and even hostile to dramatic texts. Playwrights endeavoured to attract spectators and satisfy their taste, and, in the process, they had to engage with their values and beliefs as

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<sup>30</sup> Jean Chapelain (attrib.) and others, *Les Sentimens de l'Académie française sur la question de la Tragédie du Cid de Corneille*, ed. by Georges Collas (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1968), p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Pierre Corneille, 'À Monsieur \*\*\*' and 'À Monsieur P.T.N.G.' in *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. by André Stegmann, pp. 126-27 (p. 127).

<sup>32</sup> Racine, 'Préface' *Bérénice*, p. 481.

<sup>33</sup> Jean Racine, 'Préface' *Phèdre* in *Théâtre complet*, ed by. Alain Viala and Sylvaine Guyot, pp. 831-33 (p. 833).

<sup>34</sup> Id.

well as current political and social issues. On account of this symbiotic relation with the audience, seventeenth-century French theatre engages with contemporary issues, problematizes them to a certain extent and becomes according to Mitchell Greenberg ‘the most important venue of social exchange, a place where the anxieties and desires of a society in transformation were continually essayed and rehearsed’.<sup>35</sup>

Early modern playwrights had to consider a mixed, Christian, seventeenth-century audience and its values and beliefs in order to ensure the success of their plays. Theatrical performances broke social barriers in terms of audience and reached the lower classes as well as the aristocracy. Theatre was a popular form of entertainment enjoyed by ‘people in all walks of life: everyone went to the theatre’.<sup>36</sup> The stories of Medea, Clytemnestra and Phaedra become French classical tragedies as these plays and their characters are adapted to contemporary ideology and principles of tragedy in a desire to satisfy the taste of the audience. Therefore, the characters and the plays analysed within this chapter reflect the contemporary ideology as they had to persuade and engage female as well as male spectators from a variety of social backgrounds in order to fulfil the aim of providing pleasure and moral instruction for their spectators.

In spite of Jean-Marie Apostolidès’s argument that the field of looking for signs of contemporary history in Racine’s texts is exhausted, an area of research can be found in a comparative approach to the classical stories of Medea, Clytemnestra and Phaedra and their early modern treatment informed by contemporary ideology and theories of tragedy.<sup>37</sup> This relationship between context and literary work, theatre and audience influenced the playwrights’ treatment of these dramatic texts. Corneille’s, Racine’s and Longepierre’s construction of these female tragic

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<sup>35</sup> Mitchell Greenberg, *Racine from Ancient Myth to Tragic Modernity* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Jean-Paul Desai, ‘The ambiguities of literature’, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer in *A History of Women in the West: Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes*, ed. by Natalie Zemon Davis and Arlette Farge (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), vol. 3, pp. 261-94 (p. 268).

<sup>37</sup> Apostolidès quoted by Volker Schröder in ‘Racine et l’éloge de la guerre de Hollande: de la campagne de Louis XIV au “dessein” de *Mithridate*’, *XVII<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, 198 (1998), 113-136 (p. 113).

characters and their stories reflect this tension between adaptation and maintaining the connection with the Ancient source texts. *Médée*, *Clytemnestre* and *Phèdre* and their stories emerge as a combination of classical and early modern elements. They display the criminal or transgressive behaviour incorporated in the source texts alongside elements aiming to provide insight into their decision-making processes, to emphasize their emotional turmoil and to reduce the violent nature of their deeds. These elements aiming to explore the characters' violent actions, their motivations and their emotional experience in order to offer a justification for their deeds and to stimulate the audience's sympathy provide a multi-faceted image of these female tragic heroines and their behaviour. *Médée*, *Clytemnestre* and *Phèdre* share some of the qualities of their classical counterparts whilst being very much a product of this specific social and political context which provides a more comprehensive image of their character, their experience, their decisions and their actions. Consequently, this chapter will analyse the manner in which Corneille's *Médée*, Racine's *Iphigénie* and *Phèdre* and Longepierre's *Électre* continue and transform the classical versions of these stories and these female tragic characters under the influence of contemporary ideology and theories of tragedy. The aim of this endeavour is to reveal the way this specific treatment provides a more comprehensive image of their actions and behaviour which enables multiple interpretations and readings and represents fertile ground for the analysis incorporated in chapters 2, 3 and 4 which is informed by modern theories of moral psychology, psychoanalysis and performance.

## **2.1 Medea and Médée**

In a letter to Monsieur de Zuylichem (1649) Corneille critiques Euripides' and Seneca's treatment of Medea and presents his vision of the tragic character. According to the playwright, the Greek Medea is too pitiful and the Latin one is excessively cruel: 'Euripide l'a présentée aux Grecs, tremblante et adressant à Créon

d'indignes prières; Sénèque aux Latins mauvaise et terrible à l'excès'.<sup>38</sup> His version of the story borrows from the sources texts 'ces poisons, ces lamentations, ces cruels élans de l'épouse abandonnée balances par l'amour maternel' which he adapts to contemporary ideas: 'mon style industriel [...] a détourné à notre usage' and combines with new elements 'J'y ai ajouté bien des choses de mon fond'.<sup>39</sup> This endeavour proved particularly challenging on account of Medea's cruel, violent behaviour, and the fact that she suffers no punishment for her crimes, which undermines the contemporary principle of incorporating an explicit moral lesson — punishing vice and rewarding virtue — in the dramatic text. La Mesnardière's critique of Corneille's *Médée* focuses precisely on these two aspects:

le poète doit penser à la morale [...] et ne pas commettre les fautes que nous voyons en plusieurs poèmes, ainsi que dans la Médée [...] ou l'héroïne meurtrière, non seulement du sang royal mais de ses propres enfants, [...] sans que l'une [elle] soit punie d'une cruauté si horrible'.<sup>40</sup>

The critic uses these arguments in support of his idea that *Médée* is a flawed character and her story should not be presented on stage.<sup>41</sup> Corneille states in his defence that depicting vice and virtue is sufficient for the moral instruction of his audience:

[...] quand elle est bien achevée, [peinture des vices et des vertus] et que les traits en sont reconnaissables qu'on ne les peut confondre l'un dans l'autre, ni prendre vice pour vertu. Celle-ci se fait alors toujours aimer [...] et celle-là se fait toujours haïr'.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Corneille, 'À Monsieur de Zuylichem', p. 344.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> La Mesnardière, p. 174.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 174, 225, 317.

<sup>42</sup> Corneille, 'Discours de l'utilité et des parties du poème dramatique', p. 823.

Furthermore, he argues that the Ancients did not always reward vice and punish virtue in support of his treatment of Médée.<sup>43</sup> He does acknowledge though that contemporary playwrights who have adapted similar stories have encountered difficulty, because the audience experiences joy and satisfaction when the virtuous character is triumphant and horror when crime and injustice are victorious, and is inclined to favour the former rather than the latter:

Cela fait que quand il [honnête homme] demeure accablé nous sortons avec chagrin et remportons une espèce d'indignation contre l'auteur et les acteurs; mais quand [...] la vertu y est couronnée nous sortons avec pleine joie. <sup>44</sup>

The task of adapting this classical story is problematic as it did not correspond to contemporary ideas regarding the moral instruction provided by tragedy and the construction of a tragic hero, and this could affect the reception of the play.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, Corneille's treatment of this classical tragic character and the source texts will reveal the manner in which he negotiated the violent aspects of Medea's story with the aim of constructing a tragic heroine who appeals to an early modern audience and is able to deliver a moral lesson.

Corneille's treatment of the tragic character and the story reflects the aim to use and adapt the classical elements of the mythical heroine to the taste of an early modern audience which is stated in his letter to Monsieur de Zuylichem. Médée retains her criminal behaviour and her proud stance. She is not remorseful or pitiful. But nonetheless, as Corneille also argues, the audience is able to perceive her revenge as an act of justice and to sympathize with her plight:

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. See p. 17 for the quotation.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Corneille, 'À Monsieur P.T.N.G.', p. 173.

[..] la perfidie de Jason et la violence du roi de Corinthe la font paraître si injustement opprimée que l’auditeur entre aisément dans ses intérêts et regarde sa vengeance comme une justice qu’elle se fait elle-même de ceux qui l’oppriment.<sup>46</sup>

Furthermore, her criminal behaviour is accompanied by a ‘grandeur d’âme qui a quelque chose de si haut qu’en même temps qu’on déteste ses actions on admire la source dont elles partent’.<sup>47</sup> Without dramatically modifying the plotline, the playwright introduces the factors which influence Médée’s decision-making and actions (Jason’s betrayal and mistreatment, Créon’s oppressive stance) as well as redeemable features (heroism) in order to gain the sympathy of the audience. This endeavour produces a Médée who is vulnerable and heroic as well as cruel and violent, and this provides a nuanced perspective on her story. An exploration of Corneille’s *Médée* and the construction of this tragic character will reveal the way the playwright continued and adjusted elements of the mythical story in order to construct a female tragic character who is able to commit gruesome deeds whilst displaying a vulnerability and heroism able to inspire the sympathy and admiration of the early modern audience.

Medea’s story incorporated ideas present in the discourses surrounding the *querelle des femmes*, as she was endowed with exceptional abilities and power which she uses to commit deeply transgressive crimes (regicide, infanticide) and to avoid any punishment. This aspect had the potential to attract the audience familiar with this debate regarding women’s troubling relation with power as well as spectators finding pleasure in the sensationalist nature of her extreme acts of violence and her transgressive behaviour. Nonetheless, these qualities also made the play difficult to adapt, as playwrights needed to achieve a fine balance between Medea the Colchian witch, and Medea the abandoned wife and distressed mother,

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<sup>46</sup> Corneille, ‘Discours de l’utilité et des parties du poème dramatique’, p. 823.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 826.

subjected to the cruelty of Creon and Jason, in order to create a tragic character suitable to the taste of the early modern audience. Corneille constructed his character by adapting, innovating and developing these aspects of Médée's character under the influence of contemporary ideas regarding women and the construction of tragic character. The playwright focused on Médée's emotional turmoil, her heroism and other mitigating factors in order to partially justify her violent deeds and to attract the audience's sympathy and admiration. Corneille presents Médée's experience of the tragic context, her emotions and decisions and gives her behaviour a multifaceted dimension. This comparative analysis will reveal that Corneille's Médée incorporates elements which provide insight into the psychological and emotional aspect of her behaviour which is a rich source for the exploration of issues of guilt and responsibility.

The analysis of Corneille's treatment of Médée begins with an important feature of Medea's dangerous nature which the playwright had to consider and adapt in his early modern version of the myth: the fact that she is a foreign princess married to a Greek prince. Medea was born in Colchis, 'a remote Greek colony', and is introduced to the civilized world by Jason, her husband.<sup>48</sup> She is a representative of the barbaric world where according to Strabo:

women till the soil, and when they have given birth to a child they put their husbands to bed instead of going to bed themselves and minister to them and while at work in the fields, oftentimes, they turn aside to some brook, give birth to a child, and bathe and swaddle it.<sup>49</sup>

Herodotus also presented barbaric Egypt as an unusual land where gender roles were reversed: 'Women urinate standing up, and sell goods in the market, leaving men at

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<sup>48</sup> David Wiles, *Greek Theatre Performance: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 93. Colchis is modern Georgia.

<sup>49</sup> Quotation from Strabo with reference to the Iberians in Read, p. 160.



home to do the weaving'.<sup>50</sup> This inversion of male and female attributes and the transgression of gender norms characterized uncivilized societies, and represented a vision of social anarchy and a source of regression. In this context, Medea the barbarian carries within herself a potential for chaos, which no Greek hero could contain because of its foreign nature. Therefore, Medea embodied the obscure dangers of the barbaric world, threatening the established order and the sexual politics of a civilized society.

In Euripides' play Medea's barbaric origin is emphasized and becomes a source of her exceptional character and a dangerous, uncivilised nature. Jason reiterates this opposition between barbaric lands and civilised Greece as he argues that Medea should be grateful for the opportunity to live in a community that is ruled by justice and the law:

First of all, you live in the land of Greece instead of a barbarian country, you understand the workings of justice and know what it is to live by rule of law and not at the whim of the mighty. (536-38)

Furthermore, Medea's Colchian origin becomes the source of her ruthlessness as the warrior states that no Greek woman would have committed such gruesome acts: 'There is no Greek woman who could ever have brought herself to do this—and yet I chose you before all of them as a fitting wife for me.' (1340) Therefore, Medea's origin represents an indication as well as a source of her potential for transgression and her dangerous, unnatural behaviour in the Greek classical play.

Seneca also transforms Medea's origin into a source of cruelty and an indication of her potential to overturn gender norms. Colchis becomes a metaphor for the courage she must show in her dire circumstances and the resolve she must adopt in order to seek revenge: 'Drive out womanish fears, and plant the forbidding

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<sup>50</sup> Herodotus quoted by Wiles, p. 73.

Caucasus in your mind.’<sup>51</sup> Creon also emphasizes Medea’s foreignness and her dangerous nature when he refers to her as the ‘noxious child of Colchian Aeetes’ (179) and ‘a savage and fearful horror’ (191). Moreover, this source text connects her occult practices to foreignness, as Medea’s prayers conjure spirits and demons lodging in her homeland: ‘You too must leave Colchis and come, unsleeping serpent, lulled for the first time by my chants’. (703-4) Therefore, in both source texts Medea’s foreignness is the source of her dangerous nature and her potential for transgression, and this corresponds to Greek ideas regarding uncivilised barbaric lands.

This idea of foreign women as a source of danger was reflected at social and political levels during the regency periods of Marie de Médicis and Anne of Austria. The regents as well as their advisors were targeted by xenophobic remarks stressing the ill influence that foreigners have on nations. This pamphlet against Mazarin, Anne of Austria’s main advisor, illustrates this point as the Sicilian cardinal’s influence is a source of misery for the French people:

A-t’on jamais vu tel prodige  
Un Étranger qui nous afflige  
Nous veut contraindre à l’acheter,  
qu’il demeure dans l’Italie  
Nous ne voulons pas arrêter  
Plus longtemps dessous sa folie,  
quand notre Roi sera Majeur,  
Nous jouirons d’un plus grand heur.<sup>52</sup>

Furthermore, the influence that Mazarin had on Anne of Austria was considered of a satanic nature and in some anti-feminist political pamphlets of the time she is

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<sup>51</sup> Seneca, *Tragedies, Vol. I: Hercules, Trojan Women, Phoenician Women, Medea, Phaedra*, ed. and trans by John G. Fitch (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: Harvard University Press, 2018). v. 42-3. Further references to this play will give the verse number as in this edition in the main body of the text.

<sup>52</sup> Sarah Morris, ‘L’Achat de Mazarin’ (1649), *The Mazarinades Project at the University of North Carolina* <<http://scalar.usc.edu/works/the-mazarinades-project-at-unc/lachat-de-mazarin-en-vers-burlesques>> [accessed 25-04-2019], p. 11.

called ‘Chérie d’un Satan’.<sup>53</sup> Pierre de Belloy argued that the Salic Law reinforces agnation and does not allow women to become full rulers in order to prevent foreigners from acceding to government ‘pour la crainte que nos pères avaient d’un gouvernement étranger’.<sup>54</sup> Foreign women, particularly those acceding to power, were perceived as a threat to the state and the established order. Hence, these ideas regarding foreigners and their potential for disruption correspond to the ones present in classical culture and the source texts.

Corneille used this similarity in terms of the perception of foreignness as dangerous in the construction of his female tragic character and her story. Médée’s barbaric origin is a source of transgression and a sign of her exceptional nature in the early modern version of the play. Créon addresses her as: ‘Barbare, as-tu sitôt oublié tant d’horreurs ?’ (II.2.387) in order to emphasize her dangerous nature and her status as an outsider. Jason indicates the gruesome and outlandish nature of Médée’s crimes by referring to them as ‘barbaries’ (V.6.1565). Médée also refers to the occult powers of the spirits she summons in support of her revenge as ‘troupe savante en noires barbaries’ (I.4.209) and through the use of this term she emphasizes the supernatural and dangerous aspect of her behaviour. Nonetheless, Médée is not the only one displaying a cruelty worthy of this denomination. Créon’s order to leave her children behind inflicts upon the Colchian a suffering which makes her qualify this gesture as a: ‘Barbare humanité, qui m’arrache à moi-même, / Et feint de la douceur pour m’ôter ce que j’aime!’ (II.2.497-98) The violent treatment of the Corinthian ruler is closer to barbarian law rather than the pursuit of justice which defines civilised societies. Médée is not the only character who displays a behaviour worthy of this attribute: her antagonist is as ruthless and merciless as her revenge will be. This treatment of the text reduces the dangerous aspect of the Colchian’s behaviour stemming from her foreign origin.

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<sup>53</sup> Rubin, pp. 197-98. Quotation from *Le caton françois disant les veritez* (1652). Pierre de Belloy, *Examen du discours publié contre la maison royale de France* (Couvent des Grands Augustins: Pierre Haultin, 1587), p. 51.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239

As I argue in the beginning of this section Corneille considered that Créon's violent behaviour alongside Jason's betrayal justify Médée's revenge and transform it into an act of justice able to stimulate the audience's sympathy. His treatment of the source texts puts forward the heroic dimension of the character as she stands up to her oppressors which also aims to attract the admiration of the spectators. This is accompanied by further insight into her experience of this tragic context, as she expresses outrage and grief at the thought of being separated from her offspring who are part of her very being. Médée reveals her vulnerability and her maternal, human side. Corneille borrows and develops this element from Seneca in order to reduce the violence of her behaviour and potentially attract the sympathy of the audience. Nonetheless, La Mesnardière's critique of Médée's behaviour and cruelty as well as d'Aubignac's remark that regicide is an abominable crime in the eyes of the early modern audience for whom the king is a sacred being, indicate that Corneille's efforts to justify Médée's behaviour and gain the sympathy of the audience might have been too subtle in comparison to the gravity of her deeds.<sup>55</sup> The play however had a moderate success and Corneille even alludes to this in the letter to Monsieur de Zuylichem.<sup>56</sup> It appears that the audience sympathized with Médée's plight and the fact that she stands up to her oppressors acquiring a heroic dimension whilst displaying a maternal, vulnerable side did reduce her violence. Therefore, Corneille's treatment of the source texts produced a Médée who is vulnerable and heroic as well as cruel and violent which attracted the sympathy and interest of the early modern audience.

Medea's knowledge of the occult and her supernatural powers are associated with her foreignness and are part of her dangerous nature. The art of magic flows through Medea's veins: her aunt Circe is the renowned sorceress that lured Ulysses's

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<sup>55</sup> For a discussion of Corneille's tragic vision, his defence of *Médée* and La Mesnardière's critique of the play see. pp. 17-19.

<sup>56</sup> Corneille, 'À Monsieur de Zuylichem', p. 344. See p. 18 for the quotation. André Leyssac, 'Introduction' in *Médée* (Genève : Librairie Droz S.A, 1978), pp. 7-82 (p. 11). Leyssac quotes Lancaster who argues that Médée's success was attested also by the fact that the play made it into the repertoire of Hôtel de Bourgogne and was referred to by La Pinelière and Balzac.

men into her palace and turned them into pigs.<sup>57</sup> The occult pervades all aspects of her life from the very fibre of her being to her social and personal relationships and reinforces her image as an unnatural being. The classical source texts emphasize this aspect, as Euripides' *Medea* mentions Hecate, the goddess of magic, as her ally in the plot to punish Jason and his new bride and avenge her honour:

For never, I swear by the mistress whom I revere above all gods and have chosen as my co-worker, Hecate, who dwells in a recess of my hearth, never shall any one of them grieve my heart and smile to see it. (394-96)

Seneca's version of the play expands this aspect of her personality and includes a detailed depiction of the ritual performed by Medea in order to poison the gifts for Creusa. (675-816). During this ritual she invokes Hecate, the goddess of magic and witchcraft, twice (834, 840) and she uses her own blood as a sacrifice to the dark spirits: 'My blood must flow onto the altar. [...] With a blow I have offered the flowing sacrament.' (808, 811) Therefore, both classical versions of the story develop this particular aspect of her character and behaviour in order to emphasize her unnatural and dangerous skills and powers.

Medea's ancestry and her situation correspond to early modern demonological ideas according to which 'witchcraft travelled in the blood' and men who seduce and abandon women in the search for a proper wife stir the hatred of those women and generate works of witchcraft.<sup>58</sup> Medea is Circe's niece as well as an abandoned wife who seeks revenge, elements which correspond to these ideas regarding the use of occult practices in the early modern period. Furthermore, there was an association between the classical myth and contemporary witchcraft cases as a pamphlet published in 1617 after the trial and execution of la Marquise d'Ancre,

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<sup>57</sup> Wygant, *Medea, Magic, and Modernity in France*, p. 13.

<sup>58</sup> Lyndal Roper in Wygant, *Medea, Magic, and Modernity in France*, p. 96. *Malleus Maleficarum* quoted in Wygant, *Medea, Magic, and Modernity in France*, p. 94.

Leonora Dori Galigai was entitled: *La Médée de France dépeinte en la personne de la Marquise d'Ancre*. The public trial was famous and generated a number of pamphlets which associated Galigai with the devil.<sup>59</sup> *La Médée de France* depicts Galigai as the embodiment of Medea who has come from Hell to wreak havoc in France:

Les corps humains [...] ne sortent jamais de ce lieu ténébreux d'enfer [...] moi Médée [...] j'ay désiré jouir derechef de l'agréable lumière du Soleil, pour exercer en ce royaume un tragique convenable.<sup>60</sup>

Therefore, Medea's supernatural abilities correspond to contemporary beliefs and fears regarding women's potential to master the occult.

Corneille's version of the classical tragedy follows the source texts and reinforces Médée's image as a witch, by reiterating the roles she played in the quest for the Golden Fleece and depicting the magical ritual in which she poisons the gifts for Créuse. The playwright even chooses to stretch the classical rule of unity of place in order to depict Médée performing her ceremony in a grotto. According to Corneille, this modification aims to increase the verisimilitude of the plot as a public poisoning of the gifts had the potential to alarm her designated victims.<sup>61</sup> Nonetheless, this also reinforces the association of the character with the controversial figure of the witch which might be connected to the fact that the play was performed in a period marked by the trials and exorcisms related to the Loudun case of possession 1632-38. The possessions, the trial and the exorcisms became a public spectacle that attracted crowds from France as well as Europe, as many

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<sup>59</sup> Anne E. Duggan, 'Criminal Profiles, Diabolical Schemes, and Infernal Punishments: The Cases of Ravaillac and the Concinis', *The Modern Language Review*, 105, 2 (April 2010), 366-384.

<sup>60</sup> Anonymous, *La Médée de France dépeinte en la personne de la Marquise d'Ancre* (Lyon : Claude Pelletier, 1617), p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> Pierre Corneille, 'Examen' *Médée* in *Theatre II*, ed. by Jean de Guardia, Liliane Picciola, Florence Dobby-Poirson, Laura Rescia, pp. 337-341 (p. 337).

people believed that the Devil was roaming through the city.<sup>62</sup> These trial proceedings must have attracted Corneille's attention as he was a trained lawyer. Furthermore, *Médée* premiered in the winter of 1634-5 in the aftermath of the execution of the priest Urbain Grandier who was found guilty of corrupting Ursuline nuns believed to be possessed by the devil. Therefore, this emphasis on Médée's occult abilities and her supernatural powers reveal her dangerous character whilst simultaneously aiming to attract the attention of the audience as it brought on stage the dreaded as well as fascinating figure of the witch and tightened the play's connection with actuality.

Corneille uses a winged chariot for Médée's flight from Corinth, present in Euripides' source text in order to emphasize her power and her supernatural abilities and to strengthen the character's connection with witchcraft and magic. The playwright chooses to use the winged chariot for Médée's exit although Aristotle critiqued it in his *Poetics*. The philosopher argued that this is the least poetic part of the play because it does not solve the conflict following the logic of cause and effect within the plot.<sup>63</sup> The winged chariot also helps Médée escape justice which deprives the audience from the pleasure of seeing vice punished and is potentially problematic. The playwright justifies his decision by arguing that Médée's supernatural abilities alongside her suggestion that she will follow Ægée via a new route (v. 1279, on the following page) prepare this ending and follow a 'vraisemblance extraordinaire'.<sup>64</sup> However, Corneille's choice might also be connected to Jean Chapelain's argument that supernatural elements produce the effect of surprise and are 'ce qui ravit l'âme d'étonnement et de plaisir'.<sup>65</sup> The pleasure the audience derives from observing this supernatural spectacle replaces the satisfaction of seeing vice punished. Corneille's treatment of this scene

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<sup>62</sup> Robert Rapley, *A Case of Witchcraft: The Trial of Urbain Grandier* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 117, 162, 216.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>64</sup> Pierre Corneille, 'Discours des trois unités: d'action, de jour, et de lieu' in *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. by André Stegmann, pp. 841-46, (pp. 842-43).

<sup>65</sup> Jean Chapelain, literary critic and supporter of the Ancients quoted by Forestier, p. 168.

emphasizes the supernatural aspects of Médée's behaviour whilst mitigating the effects of the fact that she is not punished for her crimes. Médée's supernatural abilities surprise, delight and frighten the audience on account of their extraordinary and controversial nature and their connection with contemporary witchcraft trials and ideas about occult practices.

The Colchian princess's knowledge of potions and medicine, together with her involvement in rejuvenation and fertility processes, determines an association with another exceptional and controversial female figure: the healer who possesses knowledge of medicine. This creates an ambivalence regarding Medea's powers as they can be a source of either death and destruction or life and health. She has the qualities of a witch as well as a healer. Euripides' version of the classical story contains an indication of this aspect as Medea promises to put an end to Aegeus's infertility by using medicine: 'I shall put an end to your childlessness—through me you will beget children. I know the medicines for this.' (719) Medea's abilities to restore health and fertility were used to promote early modern French medical treatises that provide advice on maintaining good physical and mental health to the general public.<sup>66</sup> As a result, Corneille continues this association of the character with the field of medicine as the Colchian uses her knowledge of potions to heal and rejuvenate Jason's father.

Tu n'étais point honteux d'une femme barbare.  
Quand à ton père usé je rendis la vigueur,  
J'avais encore tes vœux, j'étais encore ton cœur. (III.3.806-08)

Even Jason acknowledges that Médée helped his dying father lead a new life: 'Mon père, tout caduc, émouvant ma pitié, / Je conjurai Médée, au nom de l'amitié...'

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<sup>66</sup> P. Jacquilot, *L'Art de vivre longuement, sous le nom de Médée, laquelle enseigne les facultez des choses qui sont continuellement en nostre usage & d'où naissent les maladies* (Lyon: Louis Teste-fort, 1630) is amongst the medical treatises that capitalized on Medea's myth.



(I.1.51-2) Furthermore, Corneille emphasizes the assistance that Médée provided to Jason and to the Greek warriors in the quest of the Golden Fleece, as the warrior argues that his wife's support was essential for the success of their endeavour:

Alors, sans mon amour, qu'eût fait votre vaillance?  
Eût-elle du dragon trompé la vigilance?  
Ce peuple que la terre enfantait tout armé,  
Qui de vous l'eût défait, si Jason n'eût aimé? (I.1.37-40)

Nonetheless, she does not promise to cure Ægée's infertility as Euripides' Medea does, she only agrees to marry him and bear him children:

Ægée: Disposez d'un pays qui vivra sous vos lois,  
Si vous l'aimez assez pour lui donner des rois [...]  
Médée: Allez, prince, et sans moi ne craignez point d'obstacle;  
Je vous suivrai demain par un chemin nouveau. (IV.5. 1267-68,1278-79)

A reference to the king's infertility might have been too close to actuality and too controversial for a playwright seeking to please the court and gain royal favour, as at the time of the play's performance Louis XIII had still not produced an heir —Louis XIV was born in 1638 — and there were rumours regarding the king's inability to procreate and his homosexuality.<sup>67</sup> Médée uses her knowledge of medicine and potions only to support her spouse's pursuit of glory and to help his ageing father. This aspect of her character attenuates the transgressive nature of her behaviour and puts forward an empathetic side of the character without risking royal disfavour.

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<sup>67</sup> Donna C. Staton, *The Dynamics of Gender in Early Modern France* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), p. 40.

Médée is depicted as a woman endowed with knowledge of herbs and potions who is dangerous in spite of the services she has rendered to her spouse and the entire Greek community. Créon as well as Pollux and her servant Nérine fear Médée's knowledge and abilities: Créon: 'Va, purge mes états d'un monstre tel que toi / Délivre mes sujets et moi-même de crainte.' (II.2.380-81) This derives from the ambivalence of medicine which is poised between healing and killing as medicine is linked to poison and abortionists to witches.<sup>68</sup> Médée's medical knowledge alongside her promise to provide Ægée with heirs determines an association of the character with the contemporary image of the sages-femmes. These were highly trained women who practiced medicine and had a controversial reputation during the early modern period as literary works constantly argued their incompetence and slandered their character.<sup>69</sup> Most of this literature reflected the anxiety surrounding the role of the midwife within the childbirth process, which is revealed in works such as *Les Caquets de l'accouchée* (1622). According to the anonymous author, the household of the father-to-be and especially the marital bedroom was taken over by a cohort of midwives entrusted with the life of his wife and new-born child, displaying and encouraging immoral behaviour and gossip.<sup>70</sup> Some midwives even resorted to illegal activities to benefit their customers: for the right amount of money they would conceal pregnancies, falsify birth records and even find foster homes for unwanted children.<sup>71</sup> This controversial reputation is also connected to the fact that male medical professionals were seeking to eliminate the sage-femmes from the profession, particularly the last territory dominated by them, namely, gynaecology. Since the thirteenth century when medicine becomes

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<sup>68</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *Sorcières, sages-femmes et infirmières : une histoire des femmes soignantes*, trans by L. Lame, coll. "Sorcières" (Paris: Cambourakis, 2014), p. 9.

<sup>69</sup> Lilian Corti, *The Myth of Medea and the Murder of Children* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), p. 92.

<sup>70</sup> Read, pp. 58, 19, 22. Gossip is considered a devilish attribute of women. This view is reinforced in *Les Caquets de l'accouchée* by the story of Saint Martin. According to this Christian tale the Devil was seen by St Martin at mass writing on a piece of paper the gossipy conversation of three or four women and when attempting to stretch the paper with his teeth (to write everything down) he cracked his head on a pillar.

<sup>71</sup> Sarah Hanley, 'Engendering the State: Family Formation and State Building in Early Modern France', *French Historical Studies*, 16 (1989), 4-27 (pp. 23-24).

established as a profession requiring university studies, the sages-femmes were gradually marginalized, as women were not allowed to study in universities. In the seventeenth century male practitioners enter the field of women's health and reproduction, the only area of medicine where the sages-femmes were predominant.<sup>72</sup> The circulation of these defamatory discourses and rumours undermined the reputation of the sages-femmes and supported the endeavour of male practitioners to enter and dominate the field. The sages-femmes's knowledge and practice of medicine, their life-and-death power over the new-born and the mother, transformed them into contentious figures of the period. Médée's knowledge of potions, her promise to provide Ægée with heirs whilst depriving Jason of his offspring corresponds to these contemporary ideas regarding women possessing similar skills and practicing a male-dominated profession, reinforces her image as a transgressive, immoral character and has the potential to attract the curiosity and the outrage of the audience on account of this connection with actuality.

The association between this facet of Médée's transgressive behaviour and the contemporary anxiety regarding the sage-femme has not been considered by previous critics who focus mainly on the figure of the witch, who is very popular during this period.<sup>73</sup> The connection presented here brings to the forefront another contentious female figure of the period which could have informed the reception of the character. Médée's healing abilities and her troubled relationship with her children may stimulate the audience's interest as well as their outrage on account of her association with several infamous female figures of the period, not solely the infamous witch. This tragic heroine is an amalgam of features and qualities informed by contemporary ideas regarding female behaviour.

This aspect alongside witchcraft and her barbarian origin, represent some of the elements that Corneille borrowed from the classical stories and adapted in order

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<sup>72</sup> Ehrenreich and English, pp. 12-14.

<sup>73</sup> Amy Wygant is one of the critics that focuses on Medea's magical abilities and her image as a witch.

to maintain the historical verisimilitude of the character and to attract the interest of the audience. These character traits corresponded to contemporary ideas regarding this mythical character and women endowed with similar abilities, and this strengthened the play's connection with both the classical tradition and actuality. Médée is the witch from Colchis translated and adapted to contemporary ideas regarding this type of female behaviour.

Medea's matrimonial status, the lack of male supervision and her unbridled sexual desire are also part of her exceptional nature and transgressive behaviour. According to Edith Hall, in Antiquity the absence of the legitimate husband together with sexual deprivation in marriage creates the tragic context in which the woman generates or increases significantly the difficulty of any issue.<sup>74</sup> Euripides' play emphasizes this aspect of her behaviour as Jason argues that sexual frustration is the source of her anger and the need for revenge:

But you women have sunk so low that, when your sex life is going well, you think that you have everything, but then, if something goes wrong with regard to your bed, you consider the best and happiest circumstances utterly repugnant. (570-71)

Seneca's version of the classical story also adds a sexual connotation to her behaviour as Medea claims that the murder of her first son has restored her virginity whilst the death of her second gives her an intense, voluptuous orgasm-like pleasure:

My realm is restored, my stolen maidenhood restored. [...] Whatever my regrets, I have done it. A great sense of pleasure steals over me unbidden, and it is still growing. (984, 990-92)

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<sup>74</sup> Edith Hall, 'Deianeira deliberates: precipitate decision-making and Trachiniae', in *Sophocles and the Greek Tragic Tradition*, ed. by Simon Goldhill and Edith Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 69-96, (p. 87).

Medea's behaviour is connected with her unbridled sexuality and the pleasure she derives from committing an atrocious deed. According to Aristotle, most women have enough virtue to exert self-control, and the fact that Medea is unable to display this quality reflects her dangerous and immoral nature.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, this emphasis on Medea's sexuality, her inability to control it and the perverse nature of her crime reveals the corruption of her character and contributes to the heroine's image as a dangerous transgressor.

This idea that female virtue is connected to the ability to exert self-control is present in early modern France as well. According to Linda Timmermans all throughout the seventeenth-century honest women had to display modesty and chastity.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, in *Recueil des exemples des malices des femmes* (1596) the story of Medea emphasizes the danger brought about by insatiable sexual desire:

Fut-il oncques vu plus barbare cruauté que celle de l'amoureuse Médée, laquelle afin que plus sûrement elle pût suivre Jason, duquel elle était extrêmement amoureuse, épandit par le chemin les membres d'Absirte son frère.<sup>77</sup>

These ideas of female virtue influenced the reception of the classical story, as Corneille's version of the myth does not incorporate any direct reference to this aspect of her behaviour. The playwright was familiar with the Latin text and claims Seneca to be his predominant source of inspiration. However, his *Médée* does not display or refer to this type of pleasure when plotting her revenge or committing the

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<sup>75</sup> Aristotle quoted by Helene P. Foley in 'Antigone as Moral Agent' in *Tragedy and the Tragic: Greek Theatre and Beyond*, ed. by M.S. Silk (Oxford, New York: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 49-73 (p. 50).

<sup>76</sup> Timmermans, p. 320.

<sup>77</sup> Anonyme, *Recueil des exemples de la malice des femmes, et des malheurs venus à leur occasion. Ensemble les exécrales cruautés exercées par icelles* (Paris : Pierre Hury, 1596), p. 12-13.

crimes.<sup>78</sup> Her main aim is to punish Jason's betrayal. Médée's behaviour is driven by ideas of justice rather than pleasure:

Il aime ses enfants, ce courage inflexible;  
Son faible est découvert; par eux il est sensible;  
Par eux mon bras, armé d'une juste rigueur,  
Va trouver des chemins à lui percer le cœur. (III.4.945-48)

Corneille does not allow his Médée to display signs of sexual desire, in order to reduce the transgressive and scandalous nature of her behaviour. Médée does commit these murders. However, she is driven by an idea of justice and seeks to punish Jason's betrayal. This treatment of the character partially justifies Médée's revenge, reduces the transgressive nature of her behaviour and aims to stimulate the sympathy and potentially the admiration of the audience as Corneille argues in his *Discours de l'utilité et des parties du poème dramatique*<sup>79</sup>

Medea's crimes are more difficult to adapt to the taste and sensibilities of the audience on account of their violent and serious nature. The infanticide is the culmination of her revenge plan and a sign of unnatural behaviour. Classical Athens considered infanticide a serious offence. Plato's laws for parents murdering their children in anger prescribed as punishment a ritual of purification, three years in exile, permanent separation from children and spouse as well as the interdiction to have other children. If the murder of a parent or child was done with intent and free will the perpetrator was executed, his naked body would be stoned outside the city walls, thrown across the border and left unburied.<sup>80</sup> The particularly cruel treatment received by criminals when there was evidence of free will and intent, reveals the

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<sup>78</sup> Corneille, 'À Monsieur de Zuylichem', p. 344. Corneille refers to Horace's theories of tragedy and Latin translations of Aristotle in his 'Discours de l'utilité et des parties du poème dramatique', pp. 821-30.

<sup>79</sup> Corneille, 'Discours de l'utilité et des parties du poème dramatique', p. 826. See p. 78 for a discussion of Médée's potential to stimulate the audience's sympathy and admiration.

<sup>80</sup> Tetlow, pp. 150, 154.

degree of public opprobrium and pollution surrounding these crimes. Furthermore, Horace in his *Ars poetica* (19 BC) argues some events should not be depicted on stage and Medea's infanticide is one of the examples he gives. The Latin author's suggestion to refrain from representing such behaviour on stage is determined by the cruel nature of such deeds as well as the inability to represent them in a credible manner which might lead to the audience's incredulity or distaste.<sup>81</sup> Therefore, the serious nature of this offence and its potential to stimulate the audience's disfavour when presented on stage lead to this prohibition of its representation in performance.

Despite these indications regarding the representation and depiction of the infanticide, the classical texts adopt different strategies in dealing with the crime which reflect their authors' beliefs on the appropriate dramatic treatment of such a deed. Euripides' *Medea* performs the infanticide offstage. However, spectators hear her child's cry for help, so they are not completely detached from this crime. Seneca completely disregards Horace's suggestions, and his *Medea* murders the two children on stage. Furthermore, she flees from her pursuers dragging one son who is alive and carrying the body of the other:

I shall climb to the lofty roof of our house, now the killing has begun. (*To the living son*) Come, you, in company with me. (*To the dead son*) Your body too I shall carry away with me. (973-75)

Although the classical authors treat the infanticide scene differently, they do not take it completely offstage. *Medea* performs the infanticide and her criminal behaviour may stimulate an audience response which involves contradictory impulses: on one hand they may abhor her deed and on the other they may be captivated by such violence. The classical authors' treatment of the violent scene incorporates the potential to fascinate as well as repel their respective audiences.

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<sup>81</sup> Horace, *The Art of Poetry* in *Classical Literary Criticism*, ed. by D. A. Russell and Michael Winterbottom (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 102, 104.

Early modern France shared Classical Athens's stance towards infanticide, and this crime was subject to a harsh legal treatment as well as social opprobrium. This was bound to affect the audience's sympathy for Médée and to reinforce the transgressive nature of her behaviour. Women would be charged with murder and receive an exemplary punishment for the death of their new-born even in situations where there was insufficient evidence for the court to distinguish between stillbirth and the actual offence.<sup>82</sup> This legal treatment was supported by the French royal edict of 1556 which stipulated that unmarried women had to declare their pregnancy and prescribed death penalty for those that failed to do so if the child died before being baptized, regardless of the fact that it might have been a still birth. Moreover, midwives were appointed to discover the perpetrators by examining their bodies for signs of recent childbirth or lactation.<sup>83</sup> The high degree of surveillance implemented by this legal framework resulted in a prevalence of this crime in some regions. According to William Monter, in Rouen (1575-1634) the number of death sentences for witchcraft was equal to the number of death sentences for infanticide whilst in Normandy 'more than six times as many women were executed for infanticide as for witchcraft during the apogee of the witch-hunting'.<sup>84</sup> The harsh legal framework for these female specific crimes established at social level the distinction between acceptable/normal and blameworthy/abnormal behaviour. The family matter of childbirth becomes public as population, the most valuable asset of the state, decreased because of war and disease.<sup>85</sup> In this social and legal context, Médée's crime is a failure to fulfil her duty towards her spouse and the state, an attempt to undermine spousal as well as state authority and an indication of her abhorrent, unnatural behaviour. This represents a crime against Jason's bloodline as well as against the patriarchal order, which relies on citizens for the economic and

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<sup>82</sup> Hanley, p. 11.

<sup>83</sup> Merry E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 52.

<sup>84</sup> William Monter, 'Toads and Eucharists: The Male Witches of Normandy, 1564-1660', *French Historical Studies*, 20 (1997), 563-95 (p. 580).

<sup>85</sup> Wygant, *Medea, Magic, and Modernity in France*, p. 98.



political development of the state, and a display of abnormal, illegal behaviour bound to stimulate the audience's disapproval and potentially fear.

Corneille's treatment of the infanticide reflects the social opprobrium surrounding this deed, as the crime is performed offstage (although he chose Seneca's version of the play as his main influence see page 6). The playwright follows Horace's precepts as well as La Mesnardière's idea that the depiction of such a bloody deed would not please virtuous souls and would excite horror and abhorrence.<sup>86</sup> Corneille argues in relation to Cléopâtre that such deeds although violent stem from a type of heroism which stimulates the audience's admiration.<sup>87</sup> However, the infanticide requires a particular treatment on account of the social opprobrium surrounding this deed. Part of this treatment involves showing more than one protagonist prepared to resort to this deed. As a result, Jason contemplates the infanticide as a means of punishing his wife:

C'est vous, petits ingrats, que malgré la nature  
Il me faut immoler dessus leur sépulture.  
Que la sorcière en vous commence de souffrir (V.6.1533-35)

By allowing Jason to nurture a similar murderous desire, the playwright aims to undermine the unnatural aspect of Médée's behaviour. This change creates an atmosphere in which Jason is equally capable of contemplating such deeds in order to manage the audience's response to Médée's transgressive act.

This modification meant to reduce the violence of Médée's behaviour is combined with the fact that the Colchian is fully aware of the gravity of this deed and does not exhibit remorse which maintains the controversial nature of the crime. She is torn between maternal feelings and her pride and jealousy, but unlike her

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<sup>86</sup> Mesnardière, pp. 183, 237. See quotation p. 72.

<sup>87</sup> Corneille, 'Discours de l'utilité et des parties du poème dramatique', pp. 822, 826. The playwright explicitly discusses Cléopâtre but his discussion of other villains including Médée reaches a similar conclusion. See quotation at p. 78.

Senecan counterpart she is not under the effect of a hallucination; she is fully aware of the choice she is making: ‘Je vous perds, mes enfants; mais Jason vous perdra;’ (V.2.1356). Furthermore, she takes delight in her crime and the effect it has on her husband, which increases the cruel nature of the deed. This treatment of the infanticide alongside other elements incorporated in the play in order to justify her behaviour (the injustice of the other characters, Médée’s proud stance against her oppressors) has the potential to stimulate a contradictory response from the audience in the form of admiration for her courage and pride and distaste for her crimes.

Medea’s fratricide is another serious crime which contributes to her reputation as a transgressive female tragic character and has the potential to determine the audience’s aversion. She puts an end to her father’s bloodline together with Jason’s, and this represents a grave matter in Classical Athens as well as early modern France. In the Greek world the preservation of the bloodline was the duty of each family member. In order to emphasize this sense of responsibility towards *oikos*, Herodotus tells the story of king Darius who arrested and sentenced to death Intaphrenes and his entire male line on account of treason and allowed his wife to save only one of her male relatives. The woman chose her brother on account of the fact that her parents were dead, and she had to preserve their bloodline.<sup>88</sup> Medea’s spillage of family blood is a violation of both *oikos* and *polis* laws and marks a deviation from gender as well as social norms and values.

Euripides’ version of the story emphasizes the terrible consequences of this crime. Medea remembers with regret and shame the killing of her brother: ‘O father, o city, how shamefully I left you, / I, the killer of my brother’ (166-67). Jason goes further and argues that this deed marked the beginning of their relationship and of his wife’s transformation into a ruthless murderess: ‘It was after killing your brother by your hearth that you embarked on the Argo, that fair-prowed ship. That was how you began,’ (1335-36). Seneca’s version of the story increases the significance of

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<sup>88</sup> Herodotus quoted by Bonnie Honig, ‘Antigone’s Two Laws: Greek Tragedy and the Politics of Humanism’ in *New Literary History*, 41 (2010), 1-33 (p. 14).

Apsyrtus's murder as the infanticide is justified by a desire to avenge her brother's death, and she has a vision of him as she decides the fate of her offspring:

Bid the avenging goddesses draw back from me, brother, and return contented to the deep shades. Leave me to myself, and act, brother, through this hand that has drawn the sword. With this sacrifice I placate your shade.  
(967-971)

The treatment of this crime in the classical plays reflects the severe and transgressive nature of such behaviour and its shameful and evil consequences. Medea is haunted by this criminal deed which marks her moral downfall, reflects her dangerous, undermining attitude and functions as an omen of the other serious crimes to follow and a pretext for her infanticide.

This crime was particularly grave in early modern France on account of a preference for male infants due to the superior legal status and rights of males. The custom of dowry and the male right to inheritance transformed daughters into a financial burden for their parents. The Bruix-La Ferté-Senneterre (1737) case reflected the lengths to which aristocratic families would go to avoid the financial implication of having a daughter, as they kept a pregnancy secret, delivered the female infant and with the help of a trusted midwife entrusted her to a foster family. Marie de Bruix (the daughter placed in foster care) sought legal remedy in court and the case brought to the attention of the public this practice.<sup>89</sup> In this context, the murder of a father's only son and heir becomes a gruesome act which undermines the established order of the transfer of power from father to son and deprives the family of its most valuable member able to ensure the family's assets and social status. Corneille's treatment of Apsyrtus's murder reveals the serious nature of this act as Médée references her brother's death several times throughout the play:

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<sup>89</sup> The Bruix-La Ferté-Senneterre case in Hanley, p. 19.

D'un frère dans la mer les membres disperses,  
Lui font-ils présumer mon audace épuisée? [...]  
Irai-je sure le Phase, ou j'ai trahi mon père,  
Apaiser de mon sang les mânes de mon frère? (I.4. 235-36, III. 3. 777-78).

This aims to emphasize the extent of her cruelty and the gravity of the deed. Furthermore, the play incorporates a reference to Médée scattering her brother's limbs into the sea: 'Semai-je avec regret mon frère par morceaux? / À ce funeste objet épandu sur les eaux,' (III. 3.795-96). This is a troubling image bound to affect the sensibilities of the audience. Consequently, it is intriguing that Corneille followed the classical stories and included this episode and its gruesome details. It might be on account of his belief that these events supported by the authority of history and common knowledge, are able to persuade the audience and will not be met with incredulity. The character's ability to transgress the norm in the name of desire (for love, power, revenge) and pride has the potential to fascinate as it reveals a total devotion to this purpose which is inaccessible to the audience. Corneille acknowledges that such deeds have the potential to offend the sensibilities of a Christian audience but relies on this type of aristocratic heroism manifested through an exultation of pride and will to stimulate the interest and potentially the admiration of the audience.

This heroic and proud dimension of Médée is also emphasized in an assertion of her exceptional, superior nature and her outrage at the prospect of tainting this illustrious lineage:

Oui, tu vois en moi seule et le fer et la flamme,  
Et la terre, et la mer, et l'enfer, et les cieux, [...]  
Tu vas mêler, impie, et mettre en rang pareil  
Des neveux de Sisyphe avec ceux du Soleil! (I.2.322-23, III. 3. 875-76)

According to Paul Bénichou, these aristocratic values and morals defined by a glorification of human power and exultation of noble pride, are present in Corneille's works and reflect the social context in which the play was produced, namely, the reign of Louis XIII.<sup>90</sup> Médée's proud and daring attitude corresponds to a moral incorporating an appetite for glory and the veneration of will which belongs to a noble society holding on to feudalistic, aristocratic values. The audience is expected to feel contradictory emotions simultaneously as they would find Médée's crimes abhorrent whilst admiring her daring and proud nature. This becomes a means to negotiate the outrage the spectators may feel regarding these criminal deeds without evacuating the violent nature of Médée's behaviour. Therefore, Corneille's tragic character retains the cruelty of her classical counterparts but combines it with an aristocratic heroism in an attempt to stimulate the audience's admiration in order to reduce their potential outrage and moral revulsion at Médée's violent deeds.

Corneille's rather detailed references to Médée's past crimes as well as his decision to present the regicide on stage might also be connected to the playwright's interest in 'le théâtre de l'échafaud' which according to Christian Biet marked the beginning of French classical tragedy.<sup>91</sup> As d'Aubignac aptly remarked the presence of these deeds on stage is incompatible with the beliefs of the early modern French audience who supported a legitimate ruler and were unwilling to sympathise with anyone seeking to usurp his authority.<sup>92</sup> Nonetheless, Corneille took this risk and presented the death of Créon and Créuse on stage. He argues that this decision was determined by the practical need to expand the fifth act in order to follow contemporary ideas regarding the duration of the action.<sup>93</sup> However, this can also

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<sup>90</sup> Bénichou, pp. 15, 16.

<sup>91</sup> The term is borrowed from Christian Biet, 'Naissance sur l'échafaud ou la tragédie du début du XVIIe siècle', *Intermédialités*, 1, (2003), 75-105, (p. 75). Biet plays on the two uses of the word échafaud which means both stage and scaffold (execution site).

<sup>92</sup> D'Aubignac, p. 78. See p. 72 for the direct quotation.

<sup>93</sup> Corneille, 'Examen', p. 175

be connected to Corneille's affinity for this incipient version of early modern French tragedy which incorporated depictions of the gruesome and the extraordinary. The playwright indicates his respect for Alexandre Hardy's *Scédase ou l'hospitalité violée* (1604), a play representative of this type of tragedy, by using it as a positive example in support of his interpretation of Aristotle.<sup>94</sup> Corneille's sympathy for this more violent and descriptive genre as well as potentially a belief that his *Médée* will attract the audience who found pleasure in these early tragedies might have informed his decision regarding the treatment of his heroine's crimes. Nonetheless, this treatment poses a problem in terms of audience response, as the spectators may have perceived the regicide as an abomination and a source of outrage. Therefore, we may be dealing with an audience response which incorporated contradictory impulses in the form of fascination and pleasure derived from this spectacle of violence alongside horror at such a transgressive and even impious deed. Corneille took the risk of presenting the regicide on stage, as he may have hoped that the audience's admiration for *Médée*'s courage and pride and their fascination with this violent spectacle would outweigh their outrage.

Corneille sought to provide more insight into the motives of *Médée*'s actions in order to justify her behaviour, to reduce the transgressive nature of her deeds and to stimulate the audience's sympathy. By emphasizing Jason's implication in her criminal actions as the main beneficiary who shares the moral responsibility for these deeds, the playwright seeks to reduce *Médée*'s responsibility, to justify to a certain extent her actions and to provide insight into her motives: 'Tu [Jason] présumes en vain de t'en mettre à couvert: / Celui-là fait le crime à qui le crime sert.' (III. 3. 859-60) Although her plea falls on deaf ears, this line of argument corresponds to the seventeenth-century legal approach to spousal responsibility. In Normandy and Brittany husbands were held responsible for their wives' behaviour. From a legal standpoint Jason is, as spouse, accountable for his wife's behaviour

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<sup>94</sup> Corneille, 'Discours de la tragédie et des moyens de la traiter, selon le vraisemblable et le nécessaire', p. 831.

whilst Médée, as representative of the weaker sex, can be considered as only partly responsible for her behaviour. As a result, the audience might sympathize with her denunciation of Jason's involvement and his profit from her crimes, particularly as the warrior's image as a seducer and user of women is emphasized in the first scene of the play. Corneille aims to redeem his female tragic heroine by making her criminal behaviour the composite result of her supernatural powers and the nefarious influence of her spouse. Therefore, the play reinforces Jason's moral responsibility for his wife's deeds which aims to reduce Médée's guilt, attract the sympathy of the audience whilst simultaneously making the issue of her responsibility for this criminal behaviour more complex.

Part of Jason's moral responsibility for his wife's criminal behaviour is represented by his betrayal and abandonment. The audience is able to sympathize with Médée's status as an abandoned wife with no material resources, subjected to the tyranny of Créon and his daughter, and to Jason's treachery and hypocrisy as it is similar to the challenges faced by early modern women in a similar situation. The bourgeoisie and aristocracy could dispose of an unprofitable union either through an annulment based on lack of parental consent or a separation with or without cause, both of them proving highly disadvantageous to the former wife and her children.<sup>95</sup> The economic and social well-being of the former wife and children was largely dependent on the kindness of the husband in early modern France. The precarity that Médée is facing on account of Jason's treacherous and selfish behaviour resonates with contemporary situations and is able to attract the sympathy of the audience.

Corneille retained Médée's noble pride, will power and courage in order to adhere to the principle of *vraisemblance* and to gain the spectators' admiration for her aristocratic values. Furthermore, he incorporated and referenced all the crimes that contributed to Médée's reputation as the ruthless Colchian witch and depicted

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<sup>95</sup> Hanley, pp. 13, 16.

her magical rituals in order to attract an audience who found delight in the performance of such extraordinary and controversial deeds. This was combined with an emphasis on the complexity of this situation as well as the vulnerable side of Médée's behaviour as an abandoned wife, subjected to Jason's Créon's and Créuse's mistreatment. In this way Corneille brought forward the unsettling aspect of the story related to the influence of circumstance and the actions of others on her behaviour, forcing the audience to contemplate their own susceptibility to such corruption. Médée's response to this singular context is transgressive and extremely violent but this specific treatment of her character and the story brings to the forefront a disturbing ambiguity and complexity regarding her deeds. This fine balance that the playwright sought to create between her emotional, vulnerable side and her exceptional, transgressive nature is able to provide fertile ground for new readings and interpretations and this might represent the source of its longevity on stage and of its appeal to modern audiences.

## **2.2 Clytemnestra and Clytemnestre**

The killing of children is one of the main themes of the cycle of plays which incorporate the story of Clytemnestra. The queen of Argos has to face the death of her daughter at the hands of her spouse and this produces a moral transformation which is at the heart of her transgressive behaviour. Unlike Medea, Clytemnestra is a devoted mother and wife who evolves into a violent character as a result of the loss of her child.

The violent deeds and behaviour incorporated in this mythical story prevented early modern French playwrights from reinterpreting all its episodes depicted in Aeschylus's *Oresteia*. The crimes performed by Clytemnestra and her children in this cycle of plays was deemed too cruel for the audience. Clytemnestra's regicide incorporated in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, also had the potential to outrage the audience and displease the Court, as this crime was considered monstrous on



account of France's recent regicides of Henri III (1589), Henry IV (1610).<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, the regency of Marie de Médicis was brought about by the assassination of Henri IV (1610), and depicting a queen willing to murder her spouse in order to usurp his role had the potential to cast further doubt on regent queens and to displease the court. Therefore, early modern French dramatists who aimed to please the audience and sought the favour of the Court adapted episodes that avoided such controversial behaviour or could be reinterpreted in a manner that observed contemporary ideology, the political context and the taste of the audience.

Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*, the play incorporating the event which marks Clytemnestra's moral transformation and brings forward the issue of child killing was reinterpreted by Racine. This episode of the mythical story is less problematic because it does not involve the spilling of Iphigenia's blood as the princess is saved by the gods and lives amongst them. This treatment of the child sacrifice would mitigate the audience's outrage at this violent deed. According to Racine the play also has the potential to arouse the audience's pity and fear. The French playwright considered the dramatic text suitable for the taste of his audience and adapted the story and the characters in his *Iphigénie*.<sup>97</sup>

Racine's play does not incorporate the gruesome crimes of the mythical story depicted by Aeschylus's trilogy (child sacrifice, regicide/patricide and matricide) and combines elements from *Iphigenia at Aulis* with the version of this story told by Stesichorus and Pausanias, as Iphigénie is saved at the last minute and an illegitimate daughter of Helen of Troy and Theseus is sacrificed.<sup>98</sup> However, it does present the emerging conflict between Agamemnon and Clytemnestre, and the character transformation that the queen undergoes as a result of her experience at Aulis. *Iphigénie* reveals the qualities that transform Clytemnestre into the female

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<sup>96</sup> Greenberg, *Racine from Ancient Myth to Tragic Modernity*, p. 19.

<sup>97</sup> Jean Racine, 'Préface' *Iphigénie* in *Théâtre complet*, ed by Alain Viala and Sylvaine Guyot, pp. 737-41 (p. 739).

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 738. Racine claims that Stesichorus' and Pausanias's version of the story was the source of inspiration for Ériphile, Hélène's illegitimate daughter who commits suicide on the sacrificial altar and saves Iphigénie.

tragic character who murders her spouse in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and oppresses her children in Sophocles' *Electra*. Racine's play emphasizes aspects of the queen's behaviour which suggest her exceptional nature and serve as indications of the crimes to follow. A comparison between Euripides's classical text and the early modern version will reveal the way Racine's treatment of the character and the story develops or modifies the ideas of the source text in order to observe the taste of the audience and contemporary ideology. This exploration will reveal the manner in which Racine adapts Clytemnestra's character traits and behaviour in order to reflect her potential for transgression whilst aiming to gain the audience's sympathy and seeking to follow the contemporary principles regarding character construction. This endeavour focuses on the process through which Clytemnestra becomes Clytemnestre and acquires the behaviour and the character traits which define her as an early modern female tragic character.

Sophocles' *Electra* is another episode of this mythical story which is adapted towards the end of the early modern period. According to Corneille, the subject posed significant challenges for contemporary playwrights. Nonetheless, two dramatists were willing to take up the challenge and adapt the dramatic text. Pradon reinterpreted the classical play in 1677 and his version of the dramatic text was unsuccessful. As a result, the play was not edited for publication and there is not material evidence of his adaptation.<sup>99</sup> This failure prevented other attempts at adapting this play until 1702 when Longepierre reinterprets this classical text in order to cultivate the taste of the audience for Greek theatre by creating a play with a simple plot and without love.<sup>100</sup> Longepierre's *Électre* had a limited number of representations and enjoyed a prodigious success with the aristocratic audience. The manuscript survived and reveals that his love of Greek tragedy, and his desire to support the Ancients in the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* informed the decision to approach this challenging subject rather than its potential to satisfy the

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<sup>99</sup> Barbaferi, p. 717.

<sup>100</sup> Tomoo Tobari, 'Introduction' in Longepierre *Électre*, p. 16.

taste of the audience as in Racine's case.<sup>101</sup> The playwright's treatment of the classical text combines an intention to follow the classical source texts as closely as possible whilst simultaneously observing the early modern ideas and principles of tragedy upheld by the Ancients. As this play deals with the problematic and troubling aspects of Clytemnestra's behaviour and character, namely, her oppressive behaviour towards her children and the moral transformation that she undergoes after becoming her spouse's murderer, this adaptation will serve as a basis for our comparative analysis. The manner in which the playwright adjusted Clytemnestra and her story to contemporary values and principles of tragedy whilst retaining the transgressive and scandalous aspects of her behaviour incorporated in the source texts provides insight into the traits and behaviour which make her an early modern version of this classical female tragic character.

This comparative analysis will begin with Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis* and Racine's adaptation as they incorporate the incipit of Clytemnestre's story, the events that determine her conflict with Agamemnon and the regicide as well as the character traits that prefigure her potential for transgression. This exploration will continue with a comparison between Sophocles' *Electra* and Longepierre's reinterpretation of this source text which presents Clytemnestre's image as a ruthless regicide and usurper of her children's rights. The focus of this comparative analysis in both cases will be the manner in which these authors adapted and developed this classical female tragic character and her story in order to follow contemporary ideology and principles of tragedy and to construct an early modern version of Clytemnestra.

Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* emphasizes Clytemnestra's image as a good mother and the fact that this devotion to her daughter and social norms places the queen in conflict with her spouse and determines an act of disobedience on her part.

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<sup>101</sup> Le Baron Portalis, p. 68.

Clytemnestra has to choose between obeying her spouse, the king, and being a good mother, and she chooses the latter:

Agamemnon: Do you know what to do, lady? Then obey me.  
Clytemnestra: In what matter? for I was ever accustomed to obey you. [...]  
Agamemnon: Go to Argos, and take care of your unwedded daughters.  
Clytemnestra: And leave my child? Then who will raise her bridal torch? [...]  
Agamemnon: Obey.  
Clytemnestra: No, by the goddess-queen of Argos! Go, manage matters out of doors; but in the house it is my place to decide [what is proper for maidens at their wedding]. (725-26, 730-31, 739-40)

Clytemnestra disobeys Agamemnon, an attitude which breaches one of the main principles of the social order in Classical Greece: the wife's duty to obey her husband. She compromises Agamemnon's rule over the household, his role as her legal guardian, and puts further strain on his decision-making, given the common Athenian belief that 'a man's domestic condition reflects his mental state'.<sup>102</sup> However, she resorts to this behaviour in order to fulfil her role as a mother to Iphigenia and to follow the established tradition. Therefore, Clytemnestra commits an act of disobedience, but her deed was motivated by a concern for norm and the well-being of her daughter.

Racine similarly presents Clytemnestre as a good mother preoccupied with upholding tradition. However, the playwright does not follow the classical source when it comes to the queen disobeying the king on account of her devotion to this maternal role. Clytemnestre uses strong, logical arguments to question Agamemnon's request and to support her plight but she does not have the last word on the matter. This treatment of the queen's behaviour may be determined by the

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<sup>102</sup> Victoria Wohl, *Law's Cosmos: Juridical Discourse in Athenian Forensic Oratory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 175.

fact that such disregard for the authority of a king has the potential to displease the Court and the people, given the political context in which Racine's adaptation was created, namely, the absolutist monarchy of Louis XIV. This reverence for the image of the king and his authority permeated into the literary treatises of the time as La Mesnardière argues that the tragic hero must show proper deference to the king as a figure of power and authority and criticizes Achilles' insolent attitude towards Agamemnon in Homer's *Iliad*.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, the discourses of the *querelle des femmes* reiterate the Biblical concept of female obedience and servitude as natural law. Clytemnestre's refusal to follow her husband's order may be perceived as a transgressive gesture which may affect the audience's sympathy for the character.<sup>104</sup> These contemporary values and beliefs might have informed Racine's treatment of this confrontation between the two spouses as he does not include Clytemnestra's refusal to obey the king. The political context of early modern France and the need to satisfy the taste of the audience influence Racine's treatment of this scene. Nonetheless, the queen's arguments put forward the problematic nature of this situation as she has to obey her spouse to the detriment of her daughter: 'Qui? Moi? Que remettant ma fille en d'autres bras, / Ce que j'ai commencé, je ne l'achevé pas?' (III.1.795-96) Therefore, Racine's Clytemnestre makes more salient the difficult position of the queen, forced to put aside her wishes, desires and even the norm in order to be a good wife and respect authority. It may also potentially raise questions regarding Agamemnon's authority and his use of it to conceal his wrongdoing since he sends his wife away in order to avoid telling her about their daughter's sacrifice. This treatment of the scene may stimulate the audience's sympathy for Clytemnestre as well as potentially a process of reflection on the manner in which Agamemnon uses his authority as a king for his own purposes.

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<sup>103</sup> La Mesnardière, p. 241.

<sup>104</sup> See the quotations from Louis Turquet de Mayerne, p. 67.

Another modification to the scene reflects the diligence with which Racine adapted this confrontation between the two spouses to contemporary ideas about royal and spousal authority. The playwright introduces a scene in which an insecure Clytemnestre blames herself and her lineage for Agamemnon's order to leave Aulis and decides to obey her husband:

Me croit-il à sa suite indigne de paraître? [..]

N'oserait-il d'Hélène ici montrer la sœur? [...]

Mais n'importe. Il le veut, et mon cœur s'y résout. (III.2.822, 824, 827).

Clytemnestre's remorseful and obedient attitude reflects contemporary ideas regarding the behaviour of a good wife and aims to gain the sympathy of the audience. Furthermore, this adaptation of the scene has also the effect of emphasizing the transformation that the queen undergoes once she finds out the truth regarding her spouse's intentions towards her daughter. The switch from this obedient wife stance to Agamemnon's violent and shrewd opponent is able to take the audience by surprise and increase the dramatic effect of the play. Hence, Racine's treatment of the character and the scene is influenced by contemporary context, a desire to gain the sympathy of the audience and to potentially increase the dramatic effect of the character transformation that the queen undergoes in the following scenes.

Clytemnestre's lineage mentioned in this scene is a reference to the queen's potential for transgression. Both Clytemnestre and her sister Hélène, are affected by a curse that makes them prone to adultery and dishonour.<sup>105</sup> This reference to Clytemnestre's tainted line corresponds to early modern beliefs regarding birth and ancestry as an indication of one's character, guaranteeing morality, honour and virtue. This concern with lineage was also part of the social and political anxiety regarding the regent queens' foreign origin. Furthermore, this preoccupation with

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<sup>105</sup> Tetlow, p. 31.

establishing one's origin and status in order to gain insight into their character was present at social level, as French marriage laws pressurized priests into verifying if the couple had parental consent and similar social status.<sup>106</sup> Consequently, the audience was familiar with this idea of an inherited potential for transgression and were able to perceive this aspect of Clytemnestre's character as a source of danger and an indication of her potential for transgression. Clytemnestre the good mother and obedient wife has a darker side.

The beginning of Clytemnestra's moral transformation and the development of this dark side of her personality occurs in response to the brutality and deceit of Agamemnon's actions. The queen finds out that her daughter has been summoned to Aulis to be sacrificed and she revolts against the authority of her spouse and the patriarchal system which threatens her daughter's life. Clytemnestra asserts her role in procreation, claims equal rights over her daughter through the process of childbirth and puts her duty as a mother above her duty as a wife in order to protect Iphigenia.<sup>107</sup> She also defies the norm and asks for Achille's protection which undermines Agamemnon's status as a husband, father and ruler: 'If you [Achille] have the courage to hold your hand over me in protection, we are saved'. (918) This is a controversial position as it breaches the social code of marriage, which required women to become a possession of the husband and to bear his children.<sup>108</sup> Clytemnestre challenges the existing gender norms and implicitly attacks the patriarchal system at state and family level indicating her potential for rebellion. However, Agamemnon's violent betrayal and the fact that Clytemnestra's actions aim to save her daughter, justify to a large extent this rebellious behaviour. Therefore, Clytemnestra's controversial stance reveals her potential for

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<sup>106</sup> Hanley, p. 9.

<sup>107</sup> Stuart Lawrence, *Moral Awareness in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 162.

<sup>108</sup> Luce Irigaray quoted by Candice Nicolas in 'Elisabeth: la Belle et la Bête de Kamouraska' in *Rebelles et criminelles chez les écrivaines d'expression française*, ed. by Chevillot, Frédérique et Colette Trout (Rodopi: Amsterdam/New York, 2013), pp. 217-228, (p. 221).

transgression and the fact that she becomes a threat to norm and social order whilst simultaneously raising questions regarding the established patriarchal system.

Racine's Clytemnestre displays a similar behaviour as she responds to Agamemnon's betrayal by requesting Achille's protection. This behaviour reflects a desperate desire to save her daughter as well as a disregard for the established order and Agamemnon's authority: 'Elle n'a que vous [Achille] seul. Vous êtes en ces lieux / Son père, son époux, son asile, ses dieux' (III.5.939-40). The fact that she encourages her daughter's marriage with Achille and fuels the conflict between these two powerful men also threatens the political stability of Argos. This reinforces the controversial nature of her stance as it echoes the idea that women's dominion over the household or the state is a source of chaos which is present in the literary discourses of the *querelle des femmes*.<sup>109</sup> Nonetheless, Clytemnestre's cause is noble and her behaviour is courageous, as she is willing to go against social order in the name of her maternal duty and has the potential to inspire the spectators' sympathy and admiration. Therefore, Clytemnestre's stance which marks the beginning of her moral transformation and reveals her potential for transgression may have stimulated two emotions: displeasure at the way she disregards norms and threatens the established social order and appreciation for her courage and maternal devotion.

Clytemnestra's confrontation with Agamemnon represents the epitome of the queen's potential for rebellion, as she abandons her duty as a wife and a queen and seeks to save her daughter at all costs. She accuses Agamemnon of being blinded by his position of power and challenges his decision-making abilities in order to expose the unjust nature of the sacrifice: 'Did you pause to consider this, or are you only interested in parading your sceptre and giving your army orders?' (1195). Furthermore, in order to expose the king's violent and unjust character Clytemnestra combines this harsh accusation with a reference to their past and Agamemnon's

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<sup>109</sup> See pp. 68-9 for a discussion of this idea.



mistreatment of her. This additional story presents Tyndareus' daughter as a victim of the king's bloodthirsty and abusive behaviour since her marriage was a gesture of atonement, from Agamemnon's part, for her rape and the murder of her husband and child.<sup>110</sup> This reference to the king's violent past and his crimes justifies her outrage and her transgressive actions during this attempt to protect Iphigenia. Therefore, in the Greek version of the story Clytemnestra's harsh accusations against Agamemnon and the transgressive nature of this stance are partially justified by their violent past and the injustice she has previously suffered at the hands of her spouse. She is not only a transgressor she is also a victim.

Racine's play does incorporate a confrontation between the two spouses which emphasizes the exceptional and controversial nature of Clytemnestre's behaviour. She accuses Agamemnon of following in the footsteps of his ancestors and sacrificing his daughter in exchange for glory and power:

Oui, vous êtes le sang d'Atrée et de Thyeste. [...]  
Tous les droits de l'empire en vos mains confiés,  
Cruel, c'est à ces Dieux que vous sacrifiez. (IV.4.1250,1287-88)

Furthermore, she perceives his behaviour as betrayal and a cowardly abandonment of his duty as a father. Clytemnestre's arguments are valid as the king has betrayed her trust and has agreed to his daughter's sacrifice. However, this behaviour is controversial as it represents an attack against her spouse and the established order as well as an abandonment of all respect for the king's authority. Furthermore, the play does not incorporate the account of Clytemnestre's traumatic past and Agamemnon's violence which justifies the queen's outrage in the classical source text, and this emphasizes the transgressive nature of her actions. Racine's decision

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<sup>110</sup> Euripides, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, v. 1148-1161. This version of the story, in which Agamemnon had killed Clytemnestra's first husband Tantalus and their child, was not universally accepted. It enables Euripides to increase sympathy for Clytemnestra.

not to include this reference might have been influenced by the fact that this version of the story is not very well attested or that this criminal behaviour as well as the idea of marrying the murderer of your spouse and child might have outraged the sensibilities of the audience.<sup>111</sup> It may have also been determined by contemporary principles of tragedy as La Mesnardière advises playwrights to hide the flaws of princes because they are representatives of divine authority and command respect.<sup>112</sup> Racine's treatment of Agamemnon partly adheres to this as the king's main flaw, the decision to sacrifice Iphigénie benefits from extenuating circumstances: the will of the gods, the pressure exerted by Ulysse and the threat of an army rebellion determine the king to agree to the sacrifice. Furthermore, Agamemnon attempts to prevent the deed, but this endeavour fails. He struggles with his responsibilities as a father and king and Iphigénie's sacrifice becomes part of the burden of leadership. This treatment of Agamemnon's behaviour is able to attract the sympathy of the audience and La Mesnardière's approval, as he argues that if we are to mention the flaws of kings 'il faut en parler pour les plaindre et non pas pour les condamner'.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, in this context Clytemnestre's stance may appear to the audience as harsh and unsympathetic, particularly since Agamemnon defends himself and expresses his grief with regard to the loss of his daughter. Racine does not include references to Agamemnon's past acts of violence either because he deemed it unsuitable for the taste of the audience or incompatible with contemporary ideas regarding the construction of this type of characters. Either way this treatment of the scene provides no additional justification for Clytemnestre's diatribe against Agamemnon apart from Iphigénie's imminent sacrifice. As a result, even in these exceptional circumstances, her hostile attitude towards her spouse, the king and her verbal assault have a transgressive nature as she undermines his authority as a father and ruler, and she is unsympathetic to his plight.

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<sup>111</sup> See footnote on p. 112 regarding Euripides' version of the story.

<sup>112</sup> La Mesnardière, p. 239.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 239.

Racine combines Clytemnestre's open hostility towards her spouse with an emphasis on her attachment to Iphigénie in order to justify her behaviour and reduce the transgressive nature of her actions. The play brings to the fore Clytemnestre's torment at the thought of her daughter's imminent sacrifice as the queen hallucinates the entire scene. She goes through the traumatic experience of this event and she describes her vision of it: 'Calchas va dans son sang... Barbares, arrêtez.' (V.4.1692.) The term barbarian as in the case of *Médée* is used to emphasize the inhumane cruelty of this gesture.<sup>114</sup> This scene aims to reduce the violent and unusual nature of her behaviour by emphasizing her devotion to Iphigénie and a commitment to her maternal role in order to attract the audience's sympathy. It also incorporates a troubling indication of her future attitude towards Agamemnon as in her hallucination a vengeful god emerges to punish her daughter's oppressors. This represents the first manifestation of Clytemnestre's desire to avenge Iphigénie and punish her spouse, deeds which are depicted in the other episodes of the myth. A new side of Clytemnestre has emerged. Racine's Clytemnestre is only beginning to reveal the signs of her transformation into the cruel murderess of the mythical story as her behaviour and character incorporate elements indicating a rebellious nature and a tendency to undermine and challenge the authority of the king and the established order.

Clytemnestra's transition from nurturing mother to ruthless criminal is complete in Sophocles' *Electra*. She is no longer a mourning mother but a murderous usurper. She has become the ruler of the city as she murdered Agamemnon upon his return in an act of blood vengeance, a duty normally assigned to male family members.<sup>115</sup> She is defined now by courage and wickedness rather than devotion to her spouse and children. Therefore, this classical play emphasizes Clytemnestra's transgressive behaviour and her deviation from gender norms.

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<sup>114</sup> See pp. 79-82 for a discussion of the use of this term in *Medea* and *Médée*.

<sup>115</sup> Brian Vickers quoted by Rachel M.E. Wolfe in 'Woman, Tyrant, Mother, Murderess: An Exploration of The Mythic Character of Clytemnestra in all Her Forms', *Women's Studies: An Inter-disciplinary Journal*, 38, 6, 692-719 (p. 699).

Longepierre's treatment of Sophocles' *Electra* reveals the manner in which the playwright continued and adapted the classical elements of the character and the story in order to fulfil his declared aim to revive the audience's taste for a classical tragedy written in the spirit of the Greek tradition.<sup>116</sup> Sophocles' dramatic text presents a subject that reflected the seventeenth-century social anxiety regarding women in positions of power, namely the idea of a political destabilization determined by the appointment of regent queens. Furthermore, Clytemnestra commits a regicide, a crime of severe gravity which is considered unnatural and horrific in early modern France.<sup>117</sup> The manner in which Longepierre negotiated between maintaining the classical elements of the plot and the character, that reflect Clytemnestra's transgressive behaviour, whilst simultaneously adapting certain aspects of the story and the heroine's behaviour in order to gain the sympathy and interest of the audience, will reveal the process through which she becomes an early modern version of this female tragic character.

Both Agamemnon and Clytemnestra commit grave acts of kin-killing which problematize the issue of authority within family. The king sacrifices his daughter for the success of the Trojan expedition and the queen murders him as atonement and retaliation for this deed: 'L'entreprise était juste et le ciel l'a soufferte: / J'ai vengé votre soeur, j'ai prevenu ma perte'.<sup>118</sup> This issue of authority and the legal and social practices surrounding it can confer more legitimacy to one crime or the other and provide mitigating circumstances for one perpetrator or another (Clytemnestra or Agamemnon). As a result, the perception and interpretation of their criminal behaviour is connected to the legal and social practices and beliefs surrounding the idea of male authority at family and state level.

Seventeenth-century laws, beliefs and practices regarding this issue are able to influence the audience's response to Iphigénie's sacrifice, the deed that

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<sup>116</sup> Tomoo Tobari, 'Introduction' in Longepierre *Électre*, pp. 16-1.

<sup>117</sup> Greenberg, *Racine from Ancient Myth to Tragic Modernity*, p. 19.

<sup>118</sup> Longepierre, *Électre* (Paris: Editions A. G. Nizet, 1981). Act 2, Scene 5, verses 580-81. Further references to the play will include the act, scene and verse number in the main body of the text.

determined this cycle of violence, and influenced Agamemnon's behaviour. The act was ordered by the gods and guaranteed the military success of the campaign against Troy and implicitly her father's glory. Although cruel, this use of children for the advancement of the family or the state was not unfamiliar to aristocratic and bourgeois families in the early modern period as contemporary laws and practices gave parents and particularly fathers extensive rights over their offspring. Certainly, seventeenth-century families would not go as far as disposing of their children's lives in the name of glory, but they would deploy them to preserve or improve the family's financial, social and political status by contracting advantageous marriages.<sup>119</sup> Parents manipulated their children's lives in order to suit their economic and political ambitions. The existing legal framework supported these practices as the law of 1556 outlawed secret marriages contracted without parental consent and extended the children's minority age from twenty to thirty for males and from seventeen to twenty-five for females, granting parents unprecedented rights over their children. These prerogatives were further extended by an Edict in 1639 which stipulated that all offspring regardless of age, sex or marital status were considered minors and needed written proof of parental consent in order to contract a marriage. Consequently, parents disposed of their children's domestic life through arranged marriages on account of their ability to dissolve an unsuitable or unprofitable union on grounds of lack of parental consent both in ecclesiastic and civil courts.<sup>120</sup> Furthermore, some seventeenth-century French families took a similar approach to Agamemnon's in order to protect the family reputation and financial status from undisciplined offspring. Parents corrected their children's inappropriate behaviour by sending them to 'maisons d'internement', which were meant to treat any form of irrational or deviant behaviour and became so popular that one in 100 Parisians was treated in one at some point of their life during this

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<sup>119</sup> Zimmermann, p. 79.

<sup>120</sup> Hanley, pp. 9, 10, 16.

period.<sup>121</sup> Due to the fact that the classical concept of madness comprised a variety of deviant behaviours from profanation, blasphemy, suicidal tendencies, superstitions and witchcraft, to homosexuality, venereal diseases, debauchery and extravagance, families could easily dispose of any unwanted or rebellious members through this method. The use of internment was left at the latitude of the bourgeois family given that the procedure required a court order and no medical certificate. Moreover, towards the end of the seventeenth century a police lieutenant was appointed to issue hospitalization requests, which were rarely accompanied by medical certificates.<sup>122</sup> Parents resorted to a variety of methods to promote their political and financial ambitions through their children whose obedience was induced either by legal proceedings or by the grim perspective of hospitalization in a mental institution. As family honour and financial interests guided the parents' behaviour towards their offspring, Agamemnon's advice to his daughter: 'Songez bien dans quel rang vous êtes élevée' (IV.4.1242.) echoes contemporary beliefs regarding parental rights and filial obligations. This connection between the play and the contemporary ideology is also tightened by the fact that the sacrifice is masked by and mimics a wedding arranged by Agamemnon, a situation familiar to the audience, and often a cause of conflict between parents and their offspring. Furthermore, the fact that the innocent Iphigénie is saved and she does not lose her life in the name of the gods, the glory of Greece and the House of Atreus, is able to produce a sense of justice being satisfied and to invite the audience to reflect on the issue of the father's absolute authority over the offspring and the consequences of exerting such power. Contemporary laws and practices as well as Racine's treatment of the story represent mitigating factors for Agamemnon's transgressive actions. Nonetheless the king's behaviour invites the audience to reflect on the extent of parental power over children's lives. Therefore, the king's behaviour may have

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<sup>121</sup> Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), p. 59.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 106-7, 142.

stimulated the audience's sympathy whilst simultaneously becoming a source of reflection on parental authority and its nefarious consequences.

Agamemnon's criminal behaviour is mitigated by contemporary ideas regarding the father's authority at family as well as state level which transforms Clytemnestre's revenge into a transgressive and immoral act. As Julie Doyon argues, in the juridical system of the absolute monarchy inspired by Roman law and the idea of *patria potestas*, the authority of the father is a model for royal power and the family structure is dominated by 'super-pères'.<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, towards 1720 the legal definition of parricide incorporates only the murder of the ascendants (mother, father, mother-in-law, father-in-law) whilst the other offence legally defined as parricide is 'le crime de lèse-majesté divine et humaine contre la personne sacrée du "Roi-père"'.<sup>124</sup> The father is the ultimate source of authority at social and legal level and his murder is associated with the undermining of state power. Thus, in a culture dominated by the rule of the Father and the idea of male supreme authority over household and family, the murder of the father outweighs the ritual sacrifice of the daughter and Clytemnestre's revenge is likely to be perceived as a transgressive act.

Longepierre's treatment of Agamemnon's murder reflects these ideas regarding the violent and transgressive nature of the regicide. The play incorporates a depiction of Agamemnon's murder scene in which the queen uses an axe, a manly weapon, to murder her helpless spouse which emphasizes her transgressive attitude: 'Une hache à la main, de cette main cruelle, / Lui portant sans frémir une atteinte mortelle.' (I.2.104-05.) The queen is also depicted as a ruthless murderer who displays a strange excitement whilst performing this act of violence which can be observed in her gaze 'l'œil farouche, l'œil éticelant' (I.2.104). This reference to pleasure gives a sexual connotation to the act and reinforces the scandalous nature

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<sup>123</sup> Julie Doyon, 'Le "Père dénaturé" au siècle des lumières', *Annales de Démographie Historique*, 118 (2009), 143-65 (pp. 144-45). Doyon undertakes a survey of paternal authority in previous periods before exploring the development of this authority at a legal level in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p.155.

of her behaviour, as sexual frustration becomes part of Clytemnestre's need for revenge, a theme put forward by the classical versions of Medea.<sup>125</sup> The queen has become a strange creature, the sight of whom horrifies her daughter. Furthermore, her parricide serves the purpose of usurping her spouse's role which undermines patriarchal authority and destabilizes sexual politics. Therefore, Longepierre's treatment of the story emphasizes Clytemnestre's deviation from norm as well as the undermining and scandalous nature of this behaviour.

Clytemnestra's complex relationship with her daughter Electra reflects the troubling nature of the queen's behaviour. The queen responds to her daughter's pursuit of revenge with persecutions and a harsh treatment, which reinforces her mother/monster duality. However, Clytemnestra's behaviour is not entirely unjustified, given that Electra neglects her duty towards her mother and dedicates her entire existence to preserving and honouring the memory of Agamemnon in Sophocles' *Electra*.<sup>126</sup> Electra upholds the social norms and the established order which Clytemnestra decided to undermine. Moreover, the young woman's attitude in this version of the myth reveals that she is more lenient towards men/her father/brother than towards women/her mother/sister in a display of disproportionate expectations supported by patriarchal society.<sup>127</sup> This behaviour is problematic as Electra acknowledges only her mother's wrongdoing and does not engage with Agamemnon's role in Iphigenia's death. Electra is biased and her constant accusations act as a reminder of Clytemnestra's transgression and represent the anxieties of a patriarchal society regarding this act which undermines the established order rather than a just evaluation of the queen's behaviour.

As the early modern social and legal context surrounding infanticide reinforced and disseminated the idea of nurturing motherhood as part of the natural

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<sup>125</sup> See discussion on Medea's sexual desire, pp. 91-93.

<sup>126</sup> Lawrence, pp. 157, 68.

<sup>127</sup> Phyllis Chesler, 'Mother-Hatred and Mother Blaming: What Electra Did to Clytemnestra' in *Motherhood: A Feminist Perspective*, ed. by Jane Price Knowles and Ellen Cole (New York: The Haworth Press, 1990), pp. 71-81 (p. 73).



female behaviour, Clytemnestre's disregard for her children and her inability to fulfil this social role was bound to be perceived as a manifestation of her abnormal and transgressive character.<sup>128</sup> Longepierre incorporates this aspect of Clytemnestre's behaviour in his version of the play in order to emphasize her deviation from gender norms and her cruelty. The queen condemns her daughter to a life of dishonour, poverty and solitude. She persecutes Agamemnon's offspring, depriving them of their rights and their home in order to disempower them, prevent revenge and gain peace of mind:

Ton frère est mort peut-être, ou fuit loin de ces lieux,  
Et je dois, prévenant vos attentats perfides,  
Dans ton sang étouffer the souhaits parricides. (II.5.627-9)

Clytemnestre disregards her duty towards her children and is unable to fulfil the nurturing mother role. This mistreatment of her children reinforces the idea that Clytemnestre's behaviour is unnatural and transgressive.

The fact that Longepierre's reinterpretation of the plot and the character incorporates these classical elements which emphasize the queen's criminal behaviour and her transgression of gender norms (parricide, usurpation of power, failure to fulfil maternal duty) determined Carine Barbafieri to argue that his Clytemnestre is an odious character who can only repulse the seventeenth-century French audience. Clytemnestre does display an oppressive behaviour which tests the limits of her humanity and has the potential to horrify the audience, particularly when she asks her son's murderer (Oreste in disguise) to kill her daughter as well:

Je dois me rassurer; quelque dieu favorable  
Ne pourra-t-il ....

[...]

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<sup>128</sup> Wygant, *Medea, Magic, and Modernity in France*, p. 99. The social and legal contexts surrounding infanticide contributed to the elaboration and dissemination of this concept.

M'affranchir de sa sœur?

(IV.1.1078-79.)

Nonetheless, the play contains scenes which emphasize the queen's vulnerability and have the potential to attract the audience's sympathy. Longepierre combines this violent dimension of Clytemnestre's behaviour with a focus on her experience and her emotions in order to create a complex female tragic character.

Clytemnestre's premonitory dream and its effects on her behaviour, actions and well-being, represents a scene that Longepierre develops for the particular purpose of depicting the queen's emotional turmoil. Whilst in Sophocles' play this nightmare is briefly described by her daughter Chrysothemis, in Longepierre's reinterpretation this element appears in three different scenes (I.3., I.4., II.4.) and is discussed by three different characters: Chrysothemis, Électre and Clytemnestre herself. Furthermore, the queen recounts the horrific nightmare in detail and expresses the distress and terror brought about by such an omen. The depiction of this macabre dream which revolves around Agamemnon's murder reveals that she is still haunted by this deed. Her criminal behaviour was a source of power as well as a cause of distress and fear. This aspect is also emphasized by Égisthe's remarks that Agamemnon's murder seems to have brought them endless fear, misery and remorse:

Surtout, ceux qui du sang cimentant leur puissance, [...]

Tourmentés de frayeur, de remords déchirés, [...]

Et punis par avance, ils souffrent ce qu'ils craignent.

(II.3.453, 456,458)

Longepierre's treatment of this classical element provides another perspective on Clytemnestre's experience after the murder of Agamemnon and emphasizes the consequences of her criminal behaviour. She is a criminal who is constantly haunted

by a guilty conscience and the thought of an imminent punishment. This emphasizes the vulnerable side of the character and aims to attract the sympathy of the audience.

Clytemnestre's reaction to this premonitory nightmare is also presented in detail in order to reduce the character's violence and cruelty. The queen is in a deep state of emotional turmoil which transforms every aspect of her being, from her behaviour to the tone of her voice and her appearance. This transformation is so radical that Égisthe can hardly recognize her: 'Madame, quels discours! quels regards pleins d'effroi ! / Est-ce vous que j'entends, est-ce vous que je vois ?' (II.4.498-99.). Clytemnestre also argues that she is on the verge of losing her sanity on account of this premonitory dream: 'Un si pressant effroi de tous mes sens est maître, / Qu'étouffant ma raison, j'ai peine à me connaître'. (II.4.496-97.) A Clytemnestre who can barely retain her composure seeks comfort and solace in Égisthe's advice. There is no trace of Agamemnon's ruthless murderess in this acknowledgement of anxiety and terror. Overall, this episode emphasizes the queen's emotional and mental turmoil which aims to reduce her violent nature and to stimulate the audience's sympathy.

Longepierre's Clytemnestre also provides insight into her behaviour towards her children which aims to partly justify her actions and emphasize the vulnerable side of the character. As Sophocles' Clytemnestra, this early modern counterpart is not completely deprived of maternal instincts and experiences sorrow at the loss of her son: 'Quel murmure plaintif s'élève dans mon cœur!' (II.7.671.) Furthermore, Clytemnestre explains the reasons for her inability to fulfil her maternal duty and her hostility towards the children. She reveals that fear of imminent retaliation as well as an awareness of Oreste's duty to avenge his father have led her to repress any trace of motherly inclination: 'Et livrée aux soupçons, enfants de la terreur, / Pouvais-je dans un fils lui laisser un vengeur?' (IV.1.1063-64.) It is a guilty conscience and the constant fear for her life which determine Clytemnestre to suppress these natural instincts. As a result, her ruthless attitude stems from fear and her survival instinct rather than a monstrous, inhuman nature. This emphasis on the

fact that her motherly inclination represents an inherent trait whilst the hostile behaviour towards her children is a consequence of this particular set of circumstances, aims to reduce Clytemnestre's monstrosity.

Longepierre's Clytemnestre displays a combination of vulnerability and ruthlessness, which resembles Racine's vision of the character in *Iphigénie*. The queen has moments of extreme distress and suffering: anguish to the point of hallucination at the thought of Iphigénie's imminent sacrifice (Racine), fear that threatens her sanity after a premonitory nightmare (Longepierre) as well as instances of cruelty: her ruthless diatribe against Agamemnon at Aulis (Racine) and her murderous intentions towards her offspring (Longepierre). Furthermore, Longepierre was an admirer of Racine and argues the superiority of the playwright in his *Parallèle de Monsieur Corneille et de Monsieur Racine* (1686).<sup>129</sup> It is likely that his treatment of this female tragic character is inspired by Racine's adaptation of *Iphigenia at Aulis* and the combination of rebellious, controversial behaviour and vulnerability displayed by the Racinian character. Therefore, Longepierre's Clytemnestre reflects the transformation that the queen of Argos undergoes after Aulis and the Trojan War whilst simultaneously evoking the character traits and the behaviour of Racine's version of the heroine. Overall, the treatment of this classical character by both Racine and Longepierre reflects a combination of classical elements inherited from the source texts and an emphasis on the emotional experience and the perception of the female tragic character, her motives and decisions in order to satisfy the taste of the audience. This denotes a willingness to emphasize the human dimension of the character and to explore the underlying psychological aspect of it in order to stimulate the audience's sympathy. These factors contributed to the construction of Clytemnestre as an early modern female tragic character endowed with character traits that correspond to contemporary ideas of female transgression as well as emotional responses, beliefs and values which

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<sup>129</sup> Longepierre, *Médée* (Tragédie). Suivie du *Parallèle de Monsieur Corneille et de Monsieur Racine* (1686) et de la *Dissertation sur la tragédie Médée* par l'abbé Pellegrin (1729) (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2000).

justify to a certain extent her actions and provide a more complex image of her behaviour.

### 2.3 Phaedra and Phèdre

Phaedra is a devoted wife and mother who undergoes a character transformation similar to Clytemnestra. She does not murder her husband, but she becomes an accomplice to her stepson's demise under the influence of an illegitimate passion. Phaedra moves from virtue to immorality and acquires the qualities of a female tragic heroine. Her story is reinterpreted for the early modern audience by Racine in 1677. The playwright's decision to adapt Euripides' *Hippolytus* was informed by his admiration for this tragic character and the dramatic text. According to Racine, the play's success and longevity lies in Phaedra's ability to stimulate the audience's pity and fear: 'ce caractère [Phèdre] [...] a toutes les qualités qu'Aristote demande dans le héros de la tragédie et qui sont propres à exciter la compassion et la terreur.'<sup>130</sup> Whilst the exceptional qualities of this tragic character and the play informed Racine's decision to reinterpret the text, his treatment of the dramatic text is influenced by an awareness of the adaptation it required in the light of contemporary theories of tragedy as well as values and beliefs. As a result, the playwright considers Phaedra's calumnious accusation, in both Euripides and Seneca's version of the myth, incompatible with her status and quality and modifies the story so that Œnone, her servant, displays such ill-natured behaviour. Furthermore, the dramatic text acquires an emphasis on morality determined by the playwright's aim to deliver a moral lesson to the audience through a depiction of vice and error being severely punished.<sup>131</sup> This treatment of the tragic heroine and the classical play observes La Mesnardière's ideas regarding the moral function of tragedy — punishing vice and rewarding virtue — and the construction of characters, particularly princes, who must not display low feelings as it is

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<sup>130</sup> Racine, 'Préface' *Phèdre*, pp. 831.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 833.

incompatible with their quality and status.<sup>132</sup> These changes also aim to please the audience, as plays that punish vice and depict the triumph of virtue provide a sense of joy and satisfaction, as Corneille aptly remarked when discussing the difficulties of adapting *Medea*.<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, according to Corneille, the playwrights had to consider contemporary ideas regarding ‘l’âge, la dignité, la naissance, l’emploi et le pays de ceux [caractères] qu’il introduit’ in order to manipulate the audience’s response to the characters on stage.<sup>134</sup> The playwrights would depict the characters and their behaviour in accordance to contemporary ideas regarding their identity in order to stimulate the audience’s sympathy and in contrast to or at a distance from these ideas in order to arouse the spectators’ disfavour.<sup>135</sup> According to these contemporary ideas the construction of the characters and the depiction of their behaviour were essential in guiding the audience’s response to them, and tragedians had to consider this aspect in order to ensure the success of their play. Therefore, Racine’s thoughts on Euripides’ *Phaedra* and his reinterpretation reveal that his treatment of the classical text was informed by an admiration for the qualities of this female tragic character as well as a desire to satisfy the taste of his audience, potentially by manipulating their response to the play.

Racine’s declared admiration for *Phaedra*, alongside his focus on the moral function of the play and the adaptation of the character to the taste of an early modern audience, determined a specific treatment of her behaviour. The playwright combined the character’s transgressive actions with a depiction of the emotions and beliefs which have the potential to attract the sympathy of his spectators. This emphasis on depicting the emotional aspect of *Phaedra*’s behaviour stems from the playwright’s belief that a successful tragedy relies on a simple action supported by violent passions and the beauty of emotions.<sup>136</sup> According to the playwright the

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<sup>132</sup> La Mesnardière, pp. 330, 353.

<sup>133</sup> Corneille, ‘Discours de l’utilité et des parties du poème dramatique’, pp. 823. See p. 77-8 for Corneille’s quotation and a discussion of his treatment of *Medea* in this respect.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 826-27.

<sup>135</sup> *Id.* See the full quotation from Corneille at page 41.

<sup>136</sup> Racine, ‘Préface’ *Bérénice*, pp. 479, 480. The full quotation is at page 15.

success of a dramatic text relies more on the depiction of emotional turmoil and feelings able to stimulate the audience's sympathy and to produce pleasure than on a complex plot with numerous incidents. Furthermore, this also reflects contemporary principles of tragedy, as both La Mesnardière and d'Aubignac support the representation of the character's passions and sentiments in order to stimulate the audience's sympathy.<sup>137</sup> This depiction of passions and emotional turmoil provides deeper insight into the heroine's behaviour, decisions and character which acquire a psychological dimension. Racine gives more space to these discourses which focus on the experience and the emotions of the tragic character in order to gain the sympathy of the audience, and this sets Phèdre apart from her Greek and Latin counterparts. The play incorporates Phèdre's transgressive behaviour whilst bringing to the fore and developing the depiction of her emotional turmoil, her experience and perception of the tragic situation.

A comparative analysis between Phèdre and her classical counterparts will present the playwright's treatment of the source texts and the mythical character and will emphasize the specific nature of this seventeenth-century female tragic heroine. Phèdre will emerge as a combination of classical elements continued, adapted, and developed in order to satisfy the taste of the early modern audience. Therefore, this approach to the texts focuses on the way Racine's *Phèdre* reinterprets Euripides and Seneca's classical plays in order to create an early modern version of the female tragic character and her story which combines transgressive behaviour with the display of emotions and an exploration of the character's mindset.

The dramatic transformation that Phaedra undergoes in both Euripides' and Seneca's plays represents the main source of her transgressive behaviour for classical Greek, Roman as well as early modern French audiences. Phaedra, the loyal and obedient wife of Theseus, undergoes a character transformation during her husband's prolonged absence under the influence of a hereditary, illegitimate

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<sup>137</sup> La Mesnardière, p. 235 and d'Aubignac p. 39, 334, 338.

passion for her stepson. This desire for her stepson, Hippolytus, transforms her character and puts in motion a series of events leading to latter's death and her suicide. Racine's treatment of Phèdre's desire and of this transition from one moral stance to another is essential for maintaining the tragic quality of the play and the character as well as stimulating the audience's emotional engagement.

The hereditary nature of Phaedra's passion represents a mitigating circumstance for her transgressive behaviour. Both classical versions of the myth mention the fact that Phaedra's unnatural desire is the product of a divine curse from Aphrodite (Euripides) or Venus (Seneca):

Aphrodite: Phaedra, the noble wife of his father saw him [Hippolytus] and through my designing a terrible love seized her heart.<sup>138</sup>

Phaedra: Venus hates the offspring of her enemy the Sun; she is avenging through us the chains that bound her dear Mars;<sup>139</sup>

In Euripides's play the goddess decides to punish Hippolytus for having neglected her and instils this passion into his stepmother mind and heart. In Seneca's version of the text Phaedra's immoral behaviour stems from a curse on her lineage determined by a conflict between Venus and the queen's divine grandfather the Sun. This reduces Phaedra's guilt and responsibility as she is no longer fully in charge of her behaviour and aims to appeal to an audience who holds equally strong beliefs in divine curses and the ability of gods to determine and influence human life.

Phaedra's guilt is also diminished by the fact that she initially displays the stance of an obedient wife and mother as well as an awareness of her duties at social and political level. Her value system is informed by the beliefs and norms regulating

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<sup>138</sup> Euripides, *Medea and other plays*, ed. and trans. by James Morwood, v. 27-8. Further references to this play will give the verse number as in this edition in the main body of the text.

<sup>139</sup> Seneca, *Tragedies*, ed. and trans. by John G. Fitch (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018). Verses 124-25. Further references to this play will give the verse number as in this edition in the main body of the text.



appropriate female behaviour in Classical Greece as well as Ancient Rome. She has a deep sense of honour which is directly connected with her morality and her ability to be a good wife: 'My spirit has not lost all sense of shame and honour. [...] I will not allow my reputation to be stained.' (250, 252) Furthermore, Euripides' Phaedra has a clear comprehension of the connection between her family's social and political position and the preservation of her status as a honourable wife: 'never may I be found guilty of bringing disgrace upon my husband or the children I have borne. [...] May their mother's reputation allow theirs to stand high.' (420-21, 423) She is aware that her children's future is dependent upon her compliance to social norms which connect the mother's character and social position to those of her children. As a result, she regards her passion for Hippolytus, her stepson, as an abomination and seeks to hold on to her honour even with the price of her life. Phaedra is ashamed by it and attempts to exert control over this passion which stems from a divine curse. Human will is pitted against divine power, and it is bound to fail. Phaedra's behaviour abides by social norms and beliefs, reflects a sense of responsibility and a desire to overcome fate, and these elements are bound to attract the sympathy of the audience.

Racine's Phèdre retains the idea that the queen's illegitimate passion stems from a divine curse as it has similarities with the early modern Christian doctrine of original sin and the idea of the corruption of the soul by passions.<sup>140</sup> She displays a sense of predestination stemming from her belief in the inherited nature of her unnatural desire which takes the form of a 'conviction intime qu'en dépit des apparences, tout est déjà joué, et que toute lutte est impossible'<sup>141</sup>: 'Ce n'est plus une ardeur dans mes veines cachée : / C'est Vénus tout entière à sa proie attachée.' (I.3.305-306). This transforms Phèdre into a victim of her heredity as well as the subject of a higher power. Nonetheless, Phèdre behaves as an independent moral

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<sup>140</sup> Sellier, pp. 17, 151.

<sup>141</sup> Christian Delmas, 'La mythologie dans la Phèdre de Racine', *Revue de la Société d'Histoire du Théâtre*, 23 (1971), 50-77 (p. 60).

agent, judges her actions and considers herself responsible for succumbing to temptation. She moves between an acute moral rigour and an awareness of the influence of an external power. She represents mankind's propensity to sin and the self-condemnation stemming from a rigid moral code. This treatment of her behaviour aims to reduce her responsibility and to attract the sympathy of an early modern Christian audience aware of their inherent guilt and their own subjection to a divine being who controls their fate.

Phaedra's awareness of the immoral nature of her passion and her sense of guilt is adapted by Racine in the spirit of the early modern French religious doctrine. Phèdre's strong belief in guilt through thought and intention incorporates elements from the Christian doctrine, namely, its concept of adultery-in-the-heart.<sup>142</sup> Her argument is strongly rooted in Christian theology as she perceives her adulterous desire to equal adultery. Although she does not pursue this desire (yet), it taints her morality and represents a sin. The act of confessing it becomes an acknowledgement of guilt: 'Quand tu [Œnone] sauras mon crime, et le sort qui m'accable,/Je n'en mourrai pas moins, j'en mourrai plus coupable' (I.3.241-42). Consequently, her behaviour conveys to the early modern French audience a deeper understanding of the notion of sin which reflects and corresponds to contemporary concerns and has the potential to attract the audience's sympathy. Furthermore, this connection with Christian morality enables the play to put forward a universal theory of human nature. According to Antoine Arnauld, a prominent Jansenist figure, the character represents a parable of the catholic theory of original sin.<sup>143</sup> Phèdre's passion is no longer simply a matter of divine revenge as in the case of the classical texts, as she becomes the embodiment of universal human susceptibility to corruption which contributes to diminishing her responsibility with regard to her transgressive behaviour and aims to arouse a fellow feeling with this tragic heroine.

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<sup>142</sup> Ruth Calder, "'La Seule Pensée du Crime...': The Question of Moral Rigour in *Phèdre*" in *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 20 (1998), 45-56 (p. 51).

<sup>143</sup> Sellier, p. 222.

Amongst the figures of authority that influence Phaedra's behaviour, her spouse Theseus plays an essential part and his absence represents another means to justify her moral downfall. Both classical source texts mention that Phaedra's emotional and moral crisis occurs whilst her spouse is away. Furthermore, Euripides' version of the text indicates that the king's presence would have prevented Phaedra from allowing her passion to dominate her behaviour:

Chorus: What you say is amazing, if her husband is prepared to tolerate this.

Nurse: That is because she hides her trouble and does not admit that she is sick.

Chorus: But can he not tell when he sees her face?

Nurse: No. He is in fact out of this country. (278-81)

This dialogue clearly reveals the degree of authority that Theseus as a spouse has over Phaedra as well as Edith Hall's idea that the physical absence of the spouse alongside lack of constant sexual activity represents the context in which the woman creates a problem or increases its difficulty.<sup>144</sup> Therefore, Phaedra's actions and behaviour are also the result of a lack of male supervision which renders her vulnerable to this illegitimate passion.

Thésée's absence also becomes a justification for Phèdre's transgressive behaviour in Racine's version of the classical play. Under Thésée's supervision she is able to fulfil her duties as a mother and wife and to control her desire: 'Soumise à mon époux, et cachant mes ennuis, / De son fatal hymen je cultivais les fruits.' (I.3.299-300.) Furthermore, the heroine contemplates confessing her illegitimate passion only after the (false) news of Thésée's demise, a behaviour which emphasizes her respect for his authority as well as the fact that his absence directly contributes to her moral downfall. This represents a significant modification of the source material and indicates that the queen considers giving in to her passion only

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<sup>144</sup> Edith Hall, 'Deianeira deliberates: precipitate decision-making and *Trachiniae*', p. 87.

when this deed no longer represents adultery. Phèdre's acknowledgement of Thésée's authority corresponds to contemporary ideas regarding the respect due to the spouse as absolute ruler of the household and the king as ruler of all loyal subjects.<sup>145</sup> Therefore, Thésée's absence becomes a suitable context for her transgressive behaviour whilst Phèdre's respect for his authority and implicitly devotion to her duty as a wife reflects contemporary beliefs regarding appropriate behaviour and aims to reduce the spectators' outrage towards her decision to pursue this illegitimate passion.

Phaedra's inability to control her passion and her behaviour are associated with mental instability and madness in the classical texts and this represents another alleviating circumstance for her immoral actions. In Seneca's version of the text Phaedra refers to the decision to pursue her passion as madness: 'I know that what you say is true nurse; but madness forces me to follow the worse path' (178-79). Euripides' play also associates Phaedra's behaviour with mental instability whilst emphasizing the fact that women are prone to such acts: 'Chorus: A woman's nature is an awkward compound [...] that goes with unreason and the pains of childbirth' (161-163). Therefore, Phaedra's behaviour is the result of madness as well as a female proclivity towards such acts of irrationality and mental imbalance which diminishes her responsibility regarding the acts she commits under the influence of her passion: the decision to falsely accuse Hippolytus (Euripides and Seneca) and to confess her desire to him (Seneca).

Racine emphasizes the idea of this passion as a sign of moral weakness and proclivity to irrationality in order to justify the queen's immoral behaviour. Phèdre's inability to control her desire and her rapid changes in mood and attitude reflect traits that La Mesnardière considered inherently female, as according to him, women are 'faibles, soudaines dans leurs désirs, violentes dans leurs passions, jalouses jusqu'à la fureur, susceptibles d'impressions'.<sup>146</sup> These aspects of her

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<sup>145</sup> See p. 118 for a discussion of the contemporary ideas regarding the father's authority in the household.

<sup>146</sup> La Mesnardière, p. 257.

character also correspond to early modern essentialist ideas about female moral weakness and women being defined by their sensuality and their animal nature rather than their ability to rationalize, present in the works which contributed to the *querelle des femmes*. Olivier argued in his *Alphabet de l'imperfection et malice des femmes* that 'il est hors de controverse que la femme ne soit plus lascive et plus insatiable que l'homme, et par conséquent moins judicieuse et moins capable de raison'.<sup>147</sup> This idea of Phèdre's mental imbalance is supported by the fact that she agrees to falsely accuse Hippolyte based on a misinterpretation of his behaviour. She sees her perdition in his eyes which denotes a paranoid stance and a guilty conscience: 'Ah! je vois Hippolyte. / Dans ses yeux insolents je vois ma perte écrite' (III.4.909-10). An inherent flaw affecting all women contributes to her immoral actions. Her behaviour corresponds to contemporary ideas regarding women's proclivity for a such conditions and this has the potential to justify her behaviour and gain the sympathy of the audience. Nonetheless, it is equally possible that Phèdre's display of inherently female flaws may condemn her twice, particularly in the eyes of those supporting these anti-women discourses. In this particular instance, the queen's moral rigorism and her penchant for self-condemnation may act as a redeeming feature. Even the harshest critic of female nature cannot help but sympathize with Phèdre's self-deprecating stance and her decision to commit suicide on account of her moral weakness. Therefore, Racine's treatment of the character combining a display of gender specific characters traits with moral rigorism reduces the transgressive aspect of Phèdre's actions and is able to gain the sympathy of the audience.

Racine's version of the tragic story develops Œnone's influence over her mistress's behaviour and decision-making processes in order to reduce significantly Phèdre's responsibility. The early modern version of the nurse has a more direct and active role in the queen's actions and decisions. Unlike her classical counterparts

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

who try to cure their mistress's incestuous passion, Œnone encourages Phèdre to fulfil it once the opportunity arises and becomes an active agent of the queen's desire to possess Hippolyte. Furthermore, she develops the plan to falsely accuse the young prince in order to save her mistress' honour and makes the accusation herself: 'Œnone: Vous le [Hippolyte] craignez... Osez l'accuser la première / Du crime dont il peut vous charger aujourd'hui.' (III.3.886-87) Therefore, Racine's version of the character has a direct and decisive influence on Phèdre's behaviour which diminishes the queen's responsibility.

This depiction of the queen's moral downfall as determined by a series of bad decisions made under the unfortunate influence of her servant might also stimulate the audience's animosity towards Œnone and their sympathy towards Phèdre. The servant's morally reprehensible behaviour corresponds to the early modern perception of wet nurses, nursemaids and midwives as controversial figures with a questionable professional reputation.<sup>148</sup> Whilst Racine provided a life pension for his nourrice and Louis XIV granted his gouvernante a peerage title, most nursemaids lacked appropriate education and had a rather scandalous behaviour, being notorious for gambling and giving birth to illegitimate children.<sup>149</sup> Furthermore, some wet nurses were responsible for stifling the infants under their care, either deliberately or accidentally, whilst poor ones would take on more children than they had milk thus contributing to the increased rate of infant mortality and gaining the unflattering nickname of 'angel-killers'.<sup>150</sup> Racine also acknowledges in his *Préface* to the play that such calumny suits the inclinations and character of a nurse of low birth.<sup>151</sup> Therefore, this treatment of the character corresponded to early modern beliefs about nurses and their immoral behaviour and aimed to attract the audience's sympathy for Phèdre as a victim of her servant's nefarious influence.

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<sup>148</sup> For a discussion on the controversial reputation of midwives see pp. 89-90.

<sup>149</sup> Gibson, pp. 79, 158, 22.

<sup>150</sup> Pierre de l'Estoile quoted in Gibson, p. 5. Wiesner, p.72.

<sup>151</sup> Racine, 'Préface' *Phèdre*, p. 831.

All these factors are meant to partly justify Phaedra's moral downfall during one of her husband's long absences, in Euripides' and Seneca's plays, and upon the news of her husband's death in the case of Racine's *Phèdre*. Euripides's Phaedra falsely accuses Hippolytus whilst Seneca's as well as Racine's version of the character confesses her incestuous desire and seeks its satisfaction before accusing the innocent prince of (attempted) rape. Just like Medea and Clytemnestra, Phaedra is not scared into submission by the strict social rules and Christian morality which regulate female behaviour. Phaedra/Phèdre commits all these actions despite her deep awareness of their transgressive nature. She gives in to this illegitimate passion whilst having full knowledge of its transgressive / sinful nature and this represents a source of danger to the established order as she falls into temptation fully aware of its destructive consequences.

Phaedra's desire to satisfy this incestuous passion present in Seneca is emphasized in Racine's version of the story and represents one of the main traits of her moral transformation and her transgressive behaviour. She allows herself to pursue this immoral passion when its adulterous nature is eliminated, although this change does not alter her relationship to Hippolyte: she is still his stepmother. This reflects the triumph of desire over her morality:<sup>152</sup> 'De l'austère pudeur les bornes sont passées. /[...] Et l'espoir malgré moi s'est glissé dans mon cœur' (III.1.766, 768). This moral laxity alongside the willingness to fulfil her incestuous desire indicates the corruption of her character. Furthermore, this image of Phèdre echoes Olivier's misogynistic ideas regarding female gender as 'chef du pèche, les armes du diable, [...] la corruption de la loi', which circulated during the *querelle des femmes*.<sup>153</sup> Her attitude reflects an inclination to irrational love and sexuality, which undermines morality. Phèdre is unable to contain her passion once the main figure of authority representing the law of the Father is presumed dead and this reflects

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<sup>152</sup> Mauron, p. 76.

<sup>153</sup> Olivier, p. 246.

these ideas regarding women's potential for transgression as well as her moral corruption.

Phaedra's confession to Hippolytus represents another aspect of her transgressive behaviour which Racine developed in his version of the play in order to emphasize the character's moral downfall. Phèdre reveals her secret and Hippolyte's outraged reaction reflects the scandalous nature of this act: 'Dieux! Qu'est-ce que j'entends? Madame, oubliez-vous / Que Thésée est mon père, et qu'il est votre époux?' (II.5.663-64). This behaviour represents a betrayal of Thésée as well as an incestuous act which the audience may have found outrageous. Corneille discusses the incestuous and scandalous aspect of a son's relationship with his father's widow in the 'Examen' (1660) to *Rodogune* (1644-45). He explains that he modified the story in order to avoid this aspect because it contravenes contemporary ideology and has the potential to horrify the audience:

Cette fiction m'était absolument nécessaire, afin qu'il fût tué (Démétrius) avant que de l'avoir épousée [Rodogune] et que l'amour que ses deux fils ont pour elle [Rodogune] ne fît point horreur aux spectateurs, qui n'auraient pas manqué d'en prendre une assez forte, s'ils les eussent vu amoureux de la veuve de leur père: tant cette affection incestueuse répugne à nos mœurs !<sup>154</sup>

The desire of a father's widow for the son has the potential to equally outrage the audience. Therefore, Phèdre's confession to Hippolyte marks her transformation from devoted wife to incestuous stepmother and aims to emphasize the forbidden nature of her actions.

Racine takes Phèdre's moral downfall a step further by depicting a downward pattern of behaviour as the queen becomes committed to allaying this incestuous

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<sup>154</sup> Pierre Corneille, 'Examen (1660)' in *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. by André Stegmann, pp. 416-18 (p. 417). Démétrius is killed before marrying Rodogune and the incestuous nature of his son's passion for her is evacuated.



desire. Phèdre is not deterred by Hippolyte's outraged reaction and attempts to lure her stepson into sin with the promise of power: 'Cherchons pour l'attaquer quelque endroit plus sensible. [...] C'enone. Fais briller la couronne à ses yeux' (III.1.794, 800). She devises a plan to convince the young Hippolyte to undermine the established order and betray his father. She seeks to encourage the prince to replace his father at family as well as state level: 'Peut-être il [Hippolyte] voudra bien lui [her son] tenir lieu de père' (III.1.805). This attitude represents a serious transgression of the state as well as the familial order, particularly in the context of the early modern belief of the father's/monarch's absolute authority over the household and the children/the state. Hence, Phèdre's seduction attempt was likely to be perceived as a serious transgression by the seventeenth-century French audience, because it aims to persuade Hippolyte to betray his father, the king, actively undermining the established order as well as social conventions.

Phaedra's dangerous nature is also reflected in her movements which contain indications of her desire to undermine the established order in Euripides' play. According to David Wiles, Phaedra's entrances and exits to and from the house reveal a tension between the private space assigned to women and the public space assigned to men as well as an attempt to enter this male territory.<sup>155</sup> The fact that the queen's desire incorporates a wish to enter a predominantly male space becomes apparent as she asks the nurse to take her hunting in order to see Hippolytus: 'I beg you, take me there [wood]! I long to shout to the hounds / and to poise by my blond hair a Thracian spear' (219-220). Furthermore, Phaedra confesses her passion once she is out of the palace (into the public sphere) and re-enters the house only to commit suicide. Her movement between these two spaces seals her tragic fate and brings about destruction of both in the private space as well as the public one, since she undermines the relationship between father and son, which is at the basis of patriarchal society and leaves the king without a potential heir. Therefore, this

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<sup>155</sup> Wiles, pp. 119, 121.

behaviour undermines the established order and reinforces Phèdre's dangerous nature.

Racine's reinterpretation of the story incorporates this tension between the private and the public space in Phèdre's behaviour and actions in order to emphasize the nefarious consequences of her desire to do away with convention and surpass her socially assigned role. The queen's attempts to fulfil a public role are constantly undermined by her passion as the essentially political meeting with Hippolyte becomes a confession of her desire. Phèdre's attempt to rectify Thésée's ill judgement and to save Hippolyte is also overturned by a bout of jealousy. The queen's desire to overstep her social function and interfere in the public, male sphere ruins her and has devastating consequences for those around her as well (Hippolyte, Thésée, C enone). This echoes contemporary discourses which argued that women's inherent weakness and lack of moral capacity prevents them from stepping into the public sphere and occupying positions of power, and any attempt to go against this natural order represents a sign of chaos and of a world upside down.<sup>156</sup> These ideas might have informed the reception of this aspect of Phèdre's behaviour in early modern France, as the tragic consequences of this attempt to interfere with the 'natural' order of things, and the established hierarchy of power can become a warning against such endeavours and similar behaviour.

The fact that in the classical versions of the myth Phaedra takes it upon herself to incriminate her stepson reinforces her responsibility in terms of the tragic consequences of this transgressive behaviour. In both Euripides' and Seneca's version of the story she directly contributes to the demise of Hippolytus as she falsely accuses him of rape in order to punish him for his haughty reaction to the confession of her passion and to conceal her transgressive, unnatural passion. In Euripides' version of the play Phaedra perceives herself as an agent of justice who punishes Hippolytus's arrogance in a stance parallel to Aphrodite who cast her curse

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<sup>156</sup> Derval Conroy, *Ruling Women, Volume I: Government, Virtue and the Female Prince in Seventeenth-Century France* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 25-7.

as punishment for the prince's conceit and failure to honour her: 'But through my death I shall bring calamity on another too — to make him learn not to feed his arrogance on my tragedy. (729-30)'. This conveys the fact that Phaedra is fulfilling the curse of the goddess by exacting revenge on Hippolytus which may reduce her responsibility regarding this behaviour. Nonetheless, Phaedra resorts to calumny in order to punish Hippolytus and conceal her unnatural desire and this emphasizes her moral corruption as well as the dangerous nature of her character. Phaedra becomes an accomplice to her stepson's demise and fulfils Aphrodite's curse in the process. This may stimulate a sense of dilemma regarding her transgressive behaviour because on one hand she is an instrument of the gods worthy of sympathy and on the other an incestuous stepmother who falsely accuse the object of her desire which has the potential to outrage the spectators.

Racine considered calumny incompatible with Phèdre's status and character traits and transformed the nurse, C enone, into Hippolyte's accuser. Nonetheless, this change does not considerably reduce the queen's responsibility for her stepson's tragic demise, as she is the nurse's accomplice and agrees to the plan to falsely accuse the young prince:

Ah! je vois Hippolyte.

Dans ses yeux insolents je vois ma perte  crite.

Fais ce que tu voudras, je m'abandonne   toi [C enone]. (III.3.910-11)

Moreover, Racine's Ph edre can prevent Hippolyte's tragic death but chooses not to, because she is overcome by jealousy at the news of her stepson's passion for Aricie. This modification of the classical story emphasizes the nefarious consequences of her behaviour as well as her responsibility regarding this tragic outcome. Racine adapts the behaviour of his female tragic heroine to contemporary ideas regarding the construction of characters of noble birth and reduces her implication in

Hippolyte's accusation.<sup>157</sup> Nonetheless, he maintains the transgressive nature of Phèdre's behaviour through her complicity in the deed and the abandoned attempt to save his life on account of jealousy. This treatment of Phèdre's implication in Hippolyte's accusation reflects the balance that the playwright had to strike between following the classical source texts and adapting the character and the story in the light of the contemporary principles of character construction in tragedy.

In spite of this immoral behaviour, Phaedra chooses to die with honour following the classical Athenian tradition that granted people convicted of capital crimes the privilege of taking their own lives in private to avoid public disgrace. The suicide enables her to avoid the social stigma attached to female infidelity and immorality as Athenian women who committed adultery were condemned to a life of misery, isolation and public shame.<sup>158</sup> Phaedra ends her life in Seneca's version of the story in an act which aims to liberate her from this unnatural passion and atone for her transgressive behaviour: 'With this hand I shall make you amends, thrust the sword into my evil breast, and release Phaedra from life and crime at one moment' (Seneca, 1177-78). Nonetheless, this final gesture also reflects an exceptional and dangerous nature, as in Euripides' play her death becomes a means to punish and falsely accuse Hippolytus whilst in Seneca's version of the story it is a way to pursue this passion further by following him into the underworld: 'We could not unite our spirits, but at least we can unite our deaths' (1183). Therefore, Phaedra's suicide reflects this dual aspect of her character namely transgressive actions and behaviour accompanied by a deep awareness of honour and morality which is able to stimulate the audience's fear and sympathy.

Racine's *Phèdre* follows the classical source texts as the queen ends her life in a gesture aiming to redeem her stepson, acknowledge her guilt and atone for her deeds. Phèdre's slow death by poisoning is accompanied by her confession of guilt

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<sup>157</sup> See p. 124 for Racine's thoughts on the idea of a calumnious accusation as well as *La Mesnardière*, pp. 330, 353.

<sup>158</sup> Tetlow, pp. 93, 89.

as the act becomes, according to critics, a sacrifice meant to reinstate order and justice, to restore the purity of the world that had been tainted by her passion:<sup>159</sup> ‘J’ai voulu, devant vous exposant mes remords, / Par un chemin plus lent descendre chez les morts’(V.7.1635-36). This death scene also incorporates Phèdre’s depiction of the poison’s lethal effects in order to stimulate the audience’s sympathy and admiration. The severe nature of Phèdre’s transgression determines this emphasis on her suffering and remorse which aims to redeem her and gain the favour of the audience. Female infidelity was perceived as a grave deed in early modern France. Women found guilty of this offence received a harsh treatment: the standard punishment comprised two years of confinement in a convent, during which the spouse would decide his wife’s future, either taking her back or condemning her to a monastic life.<sup>160</sup> Furthermore, some women did not survive their spouse’s wrath, and wronged husbands would take the lives of both perpetrators, as in the cases of Madame de Maintenon’s father who murdered both his wife and her lover and a Parisian saddler who stabbed his wife to death on account of her marital infidelity.<sup>161</sup> Loss of morality equalled loss of social status, public opprobrium and even a dishonourable and scandalous death in the case of women, which emphasizes the grave nature of the transgression. Therefore, Racine’s treatment of the final scene which combines Phèdre’s slow, painful death with a confession of her transgressive behaviour aims to mitigate the serious nature of her deeds and to maintain the audience’s sympathy for the character.

Phèdre’s confession of guilt incorporated in this final scene also aims to reduce her responsibility for this immoral behaviour and its tragic consequences by invoking the hereditary nature of her passion and Œnone’s decisive influence on her decision-making process and her actions. The queen exposes the servant as an evil mastermind and emphasize her role in the prince’s tragic demise whilst describing

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<sup>159</sup> Jean-Pierre Landry, Edward James and Gillian Jondorf are also amongst the critics that adopt this interpretation of the scene and are quoted by John Campbell, p. 242.

<sup>160</sup> Hanley, p.18.

<sup>161</sup> Gibson, p. 65.

her own involvement as a weakness of character: ‘La perfide abusant de ma faiblesse extrême. / S’est hâtée à vos yeux de l’accuser lui-même’ (V.7.1629-30). This is a distorted interpretation of the events, as it shifts the entire blame onto a loyal servant who committed suicide as a result of Phèdre’s verbal attack and accusations. The queen is slightly hypocritical, but this emphasis on the nefarious influence and the ill-advice of a nurse corresponds to contemporary ideas regarding the immoral behaviour of such women and has the potential to make the audience sympathetic to her version of the events. Therefore, the playwright’s treatment of this final scene reveals a focus on diminishing the transgressive nature of Phèdre’s behaviour which indicates the fact that her actions and deeds were perceived as particularly grave and dangerous. This scene is free of the morally ambiguous acts incorporated in the classical versions of the story — the accusation of Hippolytus in Euripides and the confession of her desire to be united with him in death in Seneca — which also denotes this preoccupation with attracting the audience’s sympathy. In this final scene Racine’s Phèdre acquires a victim as well as martyr-like dimension through this emphasis on C enone’s nefarious influence and her slow, painful death which aims to reduce her responsibility and diminish the violent, immoral nature of her past deeds.

Racine’s treatment of this classical myth revealed the playwright’s preoccupation with adapting the character and the story to a contemporary audience and principles of tragedy in order to create an early modern version of this female tragic character. His Phèdre continues, develops and adapts the transgressive traits of her classical counterparts — incestuous desire for her stepson, the corruption of her character by passion and complicity to Hippolytus’s murder — and combines them with a deep awareness of sin and morality and an emphasis on the other characters’ influence on her behaviour (Th es e’s absence and C enone’s malevolent influence) which aim to redeem her. Ph edre displays an immoral behaviour which brings death and undermines the established order. However, the play incorporates an emphasis on her experience of the situation, particularly her emotional distress,

and other factors which influence her behaviour (heredity, Thésée's absence, Œnone's ill advice) which provide a more comprehensive image of her actions and decisions and set Phèdre apart from her classical counterparts. This treatment of the story and the character renders the issue of her guilt and responsibility more complex and stimulates the audience's pity and fear. As this aspect of Phèdre's behaviour is more developed, her actions, decisions and emotions become a rich source for the exploration of the issue of guilt, responsibility and transgression.

### **3.1 Conclusion**

Médée/Medea, Clytemnestre/Clytemnestra and Phèdre/Phaedra embody versions of female unnatural behaviour that challenge the established order in Classical Athens as well as early modern France. Medea/Médée, the Colchian witch and the infanticidal mother reminded patriarchy of the dangerous nature of an educated woman with access to power and the freedom to act according to her wishes and desires. Clytemnestra/Clytemnestre embodied the queen corrupted by the appeal of power and transformed into a tyrannical, male-like ruler whilst Phaedra's/Phèdre's story presented the nefarious consequences of unregulated, unrestricted female sexuality.

The early modern reinterpretations of these tragic female heroines by Corneille, Racine and Longepierre follow the classical source texts whilst simultaneously observing contemporary ideology with the aim of satisfying the taste of the audience. This determined a particular treatment of the classical source texts and these female tragic characters which combined transgressive actions that echoed contemporary ideas regarding inappropriate, unnatural behaviour with an emphasis on their experience of the dramatic context, their vulnerability as well as the nefarious influence of other characters. In Médée's case her gruesome retaliation is combined with her abandoned wife stance, her pride and courage, as she stands up to Créon and Créuse's mistreatment and oppression, as well as Jason's betrayal, hypocrisy and involvement in her criminal behaviour. She seeks justice

contemplating the loss of her marriage and her family and has a deeply human side which is emphasized by the fact that Jason treats her as an instrument to be used and discarded. In Clytemnestre's case her potential for misbehaviour and her parricide are partially justified by the traumatic experience of contemplating her daughter's sacrifice, which tests the limits of her sanity, the constant terror of an imminent punishment for her crime that influences every aspect of her being and her behaviour as well as the maternal instincts which constantly resurface despite her effort to suppress them. Clytemnestre's behaviour is driven by maternal duty and the anxiety of losing her daughter in Racine's play whilst in Longepierre's *Électre* her guilty conscience and fear completely transform her character and her actions. She is transgressive, and her crime is monstrous by early modern standards but her perception of the dramatic context, her emotions and thoughts make her human. Clytemnestre is guilty but this comprehensive image of her behaviour, her motives and the factors that contributed to her decisions enables a deeper exploration of the issue of responsibility and presents to the audience a multifaceted character. In the case of Phèdre, her incestuous desire for Hippolyte is accompanied by a constant awareness of the immoral nature of her passion which echoes contemporary ideas of morality and sin, a deep sense of duty and an emphasis on her emotional turmoil which aim to stimulate the audience's sympathy. This aspect of her behaviour alongside the other factors which influenced her decisions and actions (heredity, Cœnone's ill-advice, Thésée's absence) provide a more comprehensive image of her transgressive deeds, add complexity to the issue of responsibility and guilt, and stimulate the audience's sympathy and admiration. This particular treatment of the tragic characters and their story denotes an interest in their emotional experience of the tragic context and the potential motives and factors which determine their violent and criminal deeds. As a result, the character and behaviour of Médée, Clytemnestre and Phèdre acquire a multifaceted dimension which is a rich source for the exploration of issues of guilt and responsibility.



This chapter emphasized the manner in which Médée's, Clytemnestre's and Phèdre's actions and decisions acquire a more complex image as a result of Corneille's, Racine's and Longepierre's specific treatment of the source texts and the classical characters. This represents a first step in the analysis of their character and behaviour which is continued with an ethical and psychoanalytical exploration aiming to provide insight into their decision-making processes, their values and beliefs as well as the unconscious aspects of their actions in chapters 2 and 3. This exploration will open these classical texts to new readings in the light of contemporary theories of morality and psychology in order to find alternative ways of understanding and interpreting the behaviour of these female tragic characters. The final chapter of the thesis will observe the manner in which the performances of these dramatic texts open them to new readings and meanings and the effect it has on audience reception. This chapter contributes to the thesis's overall endeavour to explore and reinterpret the behaviour of these female tragic characters, as it emphasizes the aspects and elements which provide a comprehensive image of their behaviour, actions and experience and will represent the basis for the analysis incorporated in the following sections of the thesis.

## **Exploring Médée's, Clytemnestre's and Phèdre's ethical perspective: An ethics of care approach**

### **1.1 Tragedy's relationship to ethics: moral approaches to the tragic conflict**

Literary works, according to Aristotle, are 'more philosophical and more serious' than history, as the latter tells us about 'events which have occurred' whilst the former show us general plausible patterns of action, 'events which could occur' leading us to an exploration and further understanding of our possibilities.<sup>1</sup> In this context, tragedy fulfils a unique philosophical function in incorporating truths about the human condition and the possibilities of human life. Martha Nussbaum draws on Aristotle to develop an ethical way of dealing with tragedy and the moral learning that it incorporates. Nussbaum follows Aristotle's idea regarding the importance of a rich emotional and intellectual response to the particulars of a situation in the process of deliberation, as she emphasizes the role of tragedy in learning about practical reasoning and life. She argues that tragedy incorporates both a sustained attention to the singularity of the practical situation and the complex nature of the human deliberation process, involving both emotional and rational responses and, in this respect, it can teach us about the human condition and morality. Her discussion about the role of tragedy in providing a further understanding of practical reasoning and the possibilities of human life relies on reconsidering the importance of the complexity of a situation and a revalorisation of emotion as a judgement of value, ideas drawn from Aristotle. According to Nussbaum, the truths about the human condition incorporated in tragic plots vary: some emphasize the 'fragility of goodness', our vulnerability derived from openness to risk and luck in pursuit of values we believe will promote a rich and good life, depicted in stories of good people being destroyed by things that they cannot control; others depict moral dilemmas, real cases of wrong-doing determined by circumstances that prevent the

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, p. 41.

agent from adequately fulfilling two valid ethical claims, situations in which the agent has to choose between one thing or another because circumstances do not allow him/her to have both, an eloquent example is *Iphigenia at Aulis*.<sup>2</sup> These tragic plots present the complex practical situation, the richness of human value and the fact that our main concern and responsibility lies with the particular and not the general. In this respect tragedy's approach to this practical knowledge about the human possibility for good differs from deontological ethics which is 'preoccupied with universality'.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the tragic text focuses on the singularity of practical situations and finding solutions tailored to them whilst revealing the inability to incorporate this infinite possibility of contexts in a general norm. Moreover, tragedy, unlike philosophical discussions of the same stories, incorporates the history of a complex pattern of deliberation, reveals its origin in a certain way of life and looks at its consequences in that life. These tragic plots present the complexity and uncertainty of the human experience of the deliberation process. Consequently, tragedy puts forward the human experience of practical reasoning in the particular context, which brings about the moral situation.

As the tragic texts focuses on the complex human experience of moral conflict, tragic heroes are moral beings who learn through practical wisdom as well as emotional responses. According to Nussbaum, thought and feeling work together to create knowledge and some tragic conflicts emphasize the role of pathos in bringing about learning and contributing to ethical deliberation.<sup>4</sup> Tragedy integrates an important part of human experience and knowledge into the deliberation process and presents wisdom as an interaction of human qualities. Thus, tragedy presents the whole human experience of the decision-making process by incorporating both the complexity of the dramatic situation and the emotional responses of the hero.

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<sup>2</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 12, 25.

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Phillipe Pierron, 'Imaginer plus pour agir mieux. L'imagination en morale chez Carol Gilligan, Martha Nussbaum et Paul Ricoeur', *Les Ateliers de l'éthique*, 103 (2015), 101-121 (p.111).

<sup>4</sup> Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, p. 47.

Racine, Corneille and Longepierre observed the principles of classical tragedy, aimed to construct their tragic characters and their plays in accordance with them. Both Corneille and Racine were familiar with Aristotle's *Poetics* and use his theories regarding the moral function of tragedy in a manner that is different from Nussbaum's approach. Corneille discusses them in detail and argues that these dramatic texts enable learning, as they reveal a common, human vulnerability to passion.<sup>5</sup> The tragic hero is able to convey a moral lesson, as he has a human quality and is, as the playwright argues following Aristotle, 'un homme ni tout à fait bon, ni tout à fait méchant'.<sup>6</sup> Corneille acknowledges these ideas regarding the moral lesson which is delivered by arousing the audience's pity and fear by recognising in the tragic character and his/her experience a common humanity as well as a vulnerability to misfortune which determines a further understanding of our possibilities. However, he argues that some deviations from Aristotle's tragic principles will still enable a moral learning through the stimulation of emotions. As a result, Corneille considers that some form of moral lesson can be taught even when the experience of the tragic character stimulates fear. He uses the example of Cléopâtre in *Rodogune* to argue that because the spectators are able to observe the excess of a human weakness being severely punished, they explore and learn about their own vulnerability. They fear 'non pas un pareil malheur, mais une infortune proportionnée à ce qu'elles sont capables de commettre'.<sup>7</sup> Presenting the nefarious consequences of a particular human trait taken to excess enables the spectators to become aware of the dangers that lie in giving in to immoral passions. However, there is more to this moral learning through fear than Corneille suggests in this *Discours*. This process is also connected to the fact that these characters display a 'grandeur d'âme' which becomes a source of admiration (Corneille's French word

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<sup>5</sup> Corneille, 'Discours de la tragédie et des moyens de la traiter selon le vraisemblable et le nécessaire', pp. 831-33. See pp. 17-9 and 40 for a discussion of Corneille's views of tragedy and the tragic characters.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 831.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 832.

admiration has a meaning that is closer to awe and wonder).<sup>8</sup> By punishing severely such excess worthy of a certain respect, the moral lesson becomes more poignant. Admiration for the tragic characters and fear regarding the human vulnerability to misfortune which they put forward, work together to deliver the moral learning when tragic heroes/ heroines are unable to stimulate pity. Therefore, Corneille, considers Aristotle's model as an example of perfection to be aimed for whilst acknowledging that there are other, less perfect, means to fulfil this moral function. This might be an attempt to respond to his critics and rehabilitate some of his plays (including *Médée*) but it nonetheless indicates his treatment of the tragic characters and their experience of the dramatic context in relation to the philosophical dimension of the tragedy.

Racine also acknowledges the philosophical quality of tragedy as he argues in the Préface to *Phèdre* that the main aim of the tragic poet is to instruct as well as produce pleasure. The poet has to teach a moral lesson by depicting vice and its nefarious consequences.<sup>9</sup> According to the playwright, the stimulation of pity and fear 'sont les véritables effets de la tragédie' which enable this moral learning.<sup>10</sup> For this purpose he aims to construct his characters following the Aristotelian model and *Phèdre* embodies according to Racine the fine balance between guilt and innocence necessary to produce the cathartic effect.<sup>11</sup> The construction of the tragic heroes/heroines and the depiction of their emotional responses occupy a central role in Racinian tragedy. As the playwright argues, a dramatic text does not have to incorporate a complex plot in order to stimulate the emotional engagement of the audience: 'une action simple, soutenue de la violence des passions, de la beauté de sentiments et de l'élégance de l'expression' is equally effective.<sup>12</sup> This is a response to the criticism he received for *Bérénice*, a tragedy entirely based on the depiction

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<sup>8</sup> Corneille, 'Discours de l'utilité et des parties du poème dramatique', p. 826.

<sup>9</sup> Racine, 'Préface' *Phèdre*, p. 833.

<sup>10</sup> Racine, 'Préface' *Iphigénie*, p. 739.

<sup>11</sup> Racine, 'Préface' *Phèdre*, p. 831.

<sup>12</sup> Racine, 'Préface' *Bérénice*, p. 480.

of the main protagonists' experience of the deliberation process. Nonetheless, it reflects the playwright's belief that depiction of the complex human experience of this process of practical reasoning is able to produce a tragic effect and to bring about moral learning. Therefore, according to Racine, tragic heroes/heroines and their process of deliberation which reveals thought and emotion working together to produce knowledge are central to conveying the philosophical dimension of tragedy.

Longepierre, a firm supporter of the Ancients in the famous *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, also acknowledged the importance of constructing characters according to the Aristotelian model and depicting their experience of the dramatic context in fulfilling the moral function of tragedy. He argued that the greatness of Racine lies in his ability to create tragic heroes/heroines who are able to arouse pity and fear. According to Longepierre, Racine is able to achieve this because he focuses on the human quality of the characters and their experience of the moral situation. Racinian tragic heroes are 'animés et vivans' and display with sincerity the emotional turmoil determined by their dramatic situation.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, Longepierre considers the tragic character and the depiction of his/her experience of the dramatic context essential for producing a tragic effect and fulfilling the moral function of tragedy.

Corneille, Racine and Longepierre acknowledge Aristotle's principles of tragedy and the moral function of the dramatic text. They believe that the tragic hero/heroine and his/her experience of this singular context are necessary for conveying this philosophical dimension of tragedy. The tragic heroes'/heroine's emotional responses reveal their vulnerability to chance, convey the complex human

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<sup>13</sup> Longepierre was part of the Hellenistic movement aiming to cultivate the French audience's taste for Greek theatre between 1680 and 1700. He also contributed to the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, with a 'Discours sur les Anciens'. See T. Tobar, 'Introduction' in Longepierre, *Électre*, pp. 7-22 (p. 14). Longepierre, 'Parallèle de monsieur Corneille et de monsieur Racine (1686)' in *Médée, suivie du Parallèle de monsieur Corneille et de monsieur Racine (1686) et de la Dissertation sur la tragédie de Médée / par l'abbé Pellegrin (1729)*, ed. by Emanuel Minel (Paris: Honoré Champion ; Genève: Diff. Slatkine, 2000), pp. 163-85 (p. 173).

dimension of this process of deliberation and engage the audience in a process of moral learning. As a result, similarly to their classical counterparts they aim to incorporate the whole human experience of the decision-making process in order to emotionally engage their audience and to convey truths about the human condition. This section has brought together two different ways of using Aristotle which focus on the moral learning incorporated in tragedy. Although, they are products of different periods and cultural traditions, they both acknowledge the role played by the emotional experience of the characters and their singular context in the process of deliberation and in providing a deeper understanding of the human condition and of practical reasoning.

## 1.2 Methodology

The experience of the tragic heroines is essential to the tragic effect of the play and to conveying its philosophical dimension. However, the analysis of their behaviour reflects the dichotomy of emotion versus reason, and passions are considered a source of weakness and irrationality. According to Éléonore M. Zimmermann, Constant Venesoen and Paul Bénichou, violent passions corrupt reason and represent a source of guilt for the characters.<sup>14</sup> These interpretations do not reflect the manner in which thought and emotion work together in the characters' deliberation process. By devaluing emotion, they are overlooking an important source of learning and of insight into the characters' values, beliefs and ideas of goodness. As Nussbaum argues emotions are judgements of value which reveal a view of the world from the perspective of one's goals and projects.<sup>15</sup> They are important sources of information regarding the values and the beliefs of the characters. These pathos infused discourses incorporate the characters' thoughts on leading and constructing a good life in the particular circumstances of a moral

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<sup>14</sup> Zimmermann, pp. 104-7. She argues that Phèdre's actions are corrupted by passion. Constant Venesoen, *Jean Racine et le procès de la culpabilité*, p. 44-5. Phèdre's passion determines her moral downfall. Bénichou, p. 140. The violent passions of the Racinian characters are accompanied by a distraction of reason.

<sup>15</sup> Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, pp. 37-49.

dilemma. Such a revalorisation of emotion goes beyond the dichotomy emotion versus reason and produces a nuanced image of the deliberation process in which feelings are not merely a source of moral corruption but also a part of human cognition. Nussbaum's approach to the tragic characters' ethical perspectives prompts a reconsideration of their moral judgements, intuitive responses and behaviours, pointing to a complex image of the tragic conflict and the vulnerability of the tragic hero in pursuit of a good life.<sup>16</sup>

By using this methodology in the analysis of the deliberation process of Médée, Clytemnestre and Phèdre this chapter aims to reveal the manner in which their emotional reactions to the moral dilemma reflect their experience of the situation, their beliefs with regard to what it represents to lead a good life and inform their decision-making process. Thoughts and beliefs regarding justice, goodness, love, duty, emerge from the characters' emotional responses to the dramatic context. This puts forward the human quality of their experience and contributes to a reading of Médée, Clytemnestre and Phèdre's actions and decisions in the light of these ideas and beliefs. This provides an image of their decision-making as a composite process in which emotion and reason work together and contributes to the overall endeavour of the thesis to produce an alternative reading by incorporating aspects of the tragic characters which have been devalued in previous interpretations.

The analysis of emotions recuperates this aspect of the deliberation process and is able to provide a comprehensive image of the characters' experience and their decision-making process but if we are to produce an alternative interpretation of these female tragic heroines' ethical perspectives, we need to detach ourselves from androcentric methodological approaches. We need to move beyond Charles Mauron's interpretation of these female tragic characters' behaviour within a Freudian, androcentric view of human moral and psychic development. We need to redefine Phèdre and her experience of the tragic conflict outside of the pre-Oedipal

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<sup>16</sup> Pierron, p. 104.



framework of *L'Inconscient dans l'œuvre et la vie de Racine*. She represents more than the archetypal mother defined by love and aggression, a symbolic representation of the id, opposing the authority and moral rectitude of the superego embodied by Thésée. Clytemnestre is also more than an embodiment of Agamemnon's parental feelings, the part of his personality which refuses the sacrifice of his daughter and opposes the will of the gods.<sup>17</sup> Similarly Médée cannot be reduced to the tendencies and impulses of the id whilst the male heroes represent the superego and the ego, figures of authority and morality.<sup>18</sup> In this reading the male heroes are representatives of the law whilst women become figures of disruption and violence. As a result, their experience of the dramatic context reflects their failure to meet the male standard of goodness and positions them outside the heroic project. Their values and beliefs are considered a sign of their inability to move to a higher level of moral development. In order to find value and virtue in the female tragic characters' behaviour we need to adopt an approach which does not place the male experience at its centre. For this purpose, this revalorisation of emotion in order to produce a nuanced image of the deliberation process will be paired with an ethical approach which acknowledges and values moral standpoints that fall out of line with the predominant androcentric ethical mode: ethics of care. This theory denounces the androcentric nature of the predominant mode of deliberation and is able to cast a new light on aspects of the characters' decision-making and behaviour which have been considered signs of their inability to reach higher levels of moral development and of their inferior status. I will continue to work on psychoanalysis, as ethics of care draws its theory from the psychology of early human development and is a form of moral psychology and use this new development in the field to move beyond previous Freudian-based interpretations. Nussbaum's approach to emotions will be paired with this theory which

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<sup>17</sup> Mauron, *L'Inconscient dans l'œuvre et la vie de Racine*, pp. 38, 128, 138.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Mauron, *Des Métaphores obsédantes au mythe personnel: Introduction à la Psychocritique* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1964), pp. 266-68.

acknowledges that the idea of ethical maturity has been distorted by the fact that the male practice has been taken as the norm and provides an alternative ethical standpoint for decisions and behaviours that do not fit this androcentric moral stance.

Carol Gilligan's ethics of care represents a suitable approach to this analysis because it places women's views on goodness, the self and the world at its centre and uses them to construct an alternative moral theory. Gilligan relies on Nancy Chodorow's analysis of the differences between sexes in terms of early development to explain the origin of this alternative ethical mode. According to Chodorow, men and women have different experiences of psychological and moral development: the formation of the female identity takes place in a context of on-going relationship with the mother whilst in the case of boys the formation of the masculine identity involves a separation from the mother, as this differentiation is intertwined with sexual issues.<sup>19</sup> Gilligan argues that these two experiences identified by Chodorow lead to different views of identity, relationship and dependency: women perceive their personality as more relational than men as masculinity is largely defined through separation. As a result, women view life as a web of relationships and judge themselves on their ability to maintain and care for these connections which are part of their identity. This informs women's moral outlook, as according to Gilligan, they value interdependence more than autonomy and their idea of morality is an issue of inclusion rather than competing claims.<sup>20</sup> They are aware of the importance of autonomy in development and of a justice and rights approach to a moral dilemma, but they favour a view based on connection and inclusion. Since the benchmark for assessing human behaviour and moral development has been based on male experience and practice, which values autonomy, independence and a justice and rights approach, mainly informed by the Freudian psychology, women

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<sup>19</sup> Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, pp. 6, 2. Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 150, 166-7.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 16, 48, 160.

fail to meet this standard and are put at a disadvantage for holding these views.<sup>21</sup> Gilligan mentions and works against Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development according to which women are arrested at stage three of the six stages of moral development, a stage defined by concern with helping and pleasing others to meet their approval and linked to the institution of family.<sup>22</sup> Male experience and perspective is established as the norm whilst this alternative view is perceived as a deviation and this difference is interpreted in the paradigm better and worse. This relational, alternative, view of morality which Gilligan defines as ethics of care represents the main concept of this theory which I will use in the analysis of the characters' behaviour and decisions.

Other critics have used this relational view of morality to revalorise the behaviour and decisions of female characters. Helene Foley and Deanna Davis both use ethics of care to re-evaluate the ethical standpoints of Sophocles' *Antigone* in the case of the former and the heroines of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*, *North and South*, *Wives and Daughters* in the case of the latter. Foley uses Gilligan's theory to argue that *Antigone's* moral standpoint has been misjudged because it represents an alternative to Creon's justice and rights approach which has become predominant in later Western culture.<sup>23</sup> She also claims that *Antigone* puts forward an ethical mode as valid as Creon's whilst the dramatic text uses the difference between these two moral positions to reinforce them or raise questions about them, challenging previous interpretations of the character and the play. Davis also challenges previous critical approaches to Elizabeth Gaskell's novels which have misjudged and misinterpreted the idea of care and nurturing in an article entitled 'Feminist Critics and Literary Mothers: Daughters Reading Elizabeth Gaskell'.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, pp. 7, 9, 21.

<sup>22</sup> Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1981). Kohlberg later argued that he was evaluating justice reasoning and not moral maturity. See Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Psychology of Moral Development: The Nature and Validity of Moral Stages* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1984).

<sup>23</sup> Helene Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

<sup>24</sup> Deanna L. Davis, 'Feminist Critics and Literary Mothers: Daughters Reading Elizabeth Gaskell', *Signs*, 17 (Spring, 1992), 507-532.

She uses Gilligan's revalorisation of care and mothering to argue that Gaskell's work puts forward the problematic aspects of the Victorian ideal of feminine care and raises the issue of self-care versus self-sacrifice. This analysis is used to position Gaskell between the two extreme interpretations put forward by feminist critics (supporter of patriarchy or working against the ideal of motherhood) and to provide a more complex understanding of her works which present women as beings preoccupied with care who realise that their needs must also be considered. I am aware of the difference between Antigone, Gaskell's heroines and Médée, Clytemnestre and Phèdre. However, the way these critics use Gilligan's relational morality to re-evaluate previous interpretations distorted by an androcentric methodology (Foley) or a misinterpretation of the idea of care (Davis) has a connection with this endeavour to challenge previous readings of the moral reasoning of these female tragic characters and to put forward an alternative perspective on their behaviour.

Gilligan draws general conclusions about female morality in spite of the fact that her work relies on the experiences of Western white women and girls.<sup>25</sup> It does not engage with aspects related to class, race, age, nationality and cultural difference which are important in shaping one's moral outlook. Our tragic characters are products of a different period and culture and their experience of a moral dilemma is different from the one Gilligan observed in her subjects. Nonetheless, these female tragic characters display a similar difficulty in dealing with competing claims which arise from attempting to negotiate between two ethical standpoints, ethics of care and the rights and justice approach, namely their role at family and social level and self-care and their own needs. For example, the women involved in Gilligan's abortion study view this dilemma as a question of self-sacrifice (ignoring their needs and their wellbeing and keeping the child in order to adhere to the

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<sup>25</sup> Lucy E. Bailey, 'Feminist Critiques of Educational Research and Practices' in *Gender and Higher Education*, ed. by Barbara J. Bank (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), pp. 38-46 (pp. 40-41).

conventional idea of goodness) versus hurting others (ending the life of the baby in order to take care of themselves).<sup>26</sup> Our female tragic characters view their respective situations in similar terms: Phèdre's moves between the ideas of self-sacrifice and hurting others all throughout the play, Clytemnestre choses to hurt others (Agamemnon as well as her children) in order to protect herself and Médée choses to sacrifice her children in order to uphold her honour, acquire a feeling of invulnerability and power and punish Jason. In both cases it becomes about the way women negotiate between these aspects of their life: caring for themselves (their needs, their desires, their well-being) and caring for others (fulfilling their roles as wives, mothers, queens). By acknowledging this aspect of their situation, we are able to interpret their behaviour beyond the traditional emotion versus reason dichotomy which informs the previous analyses based on an androcentric view of morality. This will bring to the forefront the idea that the characters' behaviour is driven by an alternative view of the moral dilemma, the world and the self and not by a deficit in terms of moral development. Despite the fact that this theory does not incorporate differences relating to social and cultural background, these ideas are useful for the analysis of the moral reasoning of these female tragic characters as they convey the way this alternative, relational moral outlook stemming from women's experience and their role at social and family level informs the interpretation of a moral dilemma.

The fact that Gilligan discusses further this conflict between self-care and self-sacrifice and explores the consequences of this dilemma is an important aspect of this theory which will be used in this analysis. According to her, the awareness that either choice involves suffering, particularly in the case of the abortion dilemma mentioned above, determines some women to relinquish this 'vulnerability derived from love and care' and to abandon responsibility of care altogether.<sup>27</sup> This moral transformation stems from an understanding of connection as a source of weakness,

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<sup>26</sup> Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, pp. 88-90.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90

suffering and danger to self. Not all the women involved in the study had the same response but a significant number of them adopted this attitude before making a choice. This idea is useful in the analysis of the female tragic characters who undergo a dramatic moral transformation, namely, Médée and Clytemnestre. Both heroines find themselves in a position of suffering, contemplating the loss of valuable relationships (their children) and as a result of this experience, they begin to perceive connection as a source of vulnerability and abandon it in favour of survival in the case of Clytemnestre, or glory, omnipotence and revenge in the case of Médée. Both in the case of real and fictional women maintaining these connections becomes a source of harm, danger and even a threat to their identity. This interpretation of the moral dilemma and their situation determines a moral transformation and defines their behaviour towards their spouses and children. This aspect of Gilligan's theory enables us to see the characters' actions as stemming from a specific interpretation of the moral dilemma rather than an emotion-driven reaction and a sign of their moral inferiority.

In spite of this, Gilligan's theory is not free of criticism. Joan Tronto and Claudia Card argued that this concept 'perpetuates women's inferiority' and represents 'a revival of traditional middle-class conceptions of femininity'.<sup>28</sup> The fact that these theories can be interpreted as re-enacting the same binary ideas regarding masculine and feminine that led to the oppression of women is a valid argument. Furthermore, the value placed on mothering is deeply problematic as the imposition of this role has been seen as oppressive to women in different ways. However, Gilligan argued that her idea of care is neither biologically determined nor unique to women.<sup>29</sup> This concept represents a particular way of seeing the world and approaching moral dilemmas which does not fit the dominant patriarchal norms and ideas regarding moral development. If we interpret these theories from this

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<sup>28</sup> Joan Tronto and Claudia Card quoted in Susan J. Hekman, *Moral Voices, Moral Selves: Carol Gilligan and Feminist Moral Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), p. 23.

<sup>29</sup> Carol Gilligan, 'Reply to Critics' in *An Ethic of Care: Feminist and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. by Mary Jeanne Larrabee (New York & London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 207-214, (p. 209).

perspective, they can be used to re-evaluate experiences which have been overlooked, misjudged and devalued because of their problematic relationship with the predominant ethical mode. Furthermore, Gilligan's revalorisation of mothering as an attitude of care towards other people not related to biology or the female sex has been used to revisit negative feminist critical attitudes towards this theme in the works of Elizabeth Gaskell. Davis shows the manner in which feminist critics have interpreted the theme of mothering in Gaskell's works as a reinforcement of patriarchal values overlooking the issues that the author raises in terms of the problematic aspects of this ideal and the tension between self-care and caring for others.<sup>30</sup> It can be legitimately argued that care has been an argument in justifying the limitations imposed to women. However, this theory is useful to re-evaluate experiences and ways of dealing with moral dilemmas which have been overlooked, undervalued or misjudged because they fall out of line with the patriarchal norms, as in the case of *Médée*, *Clytemnestre* and *Phèdre*, or they appear to reinforce these norms as in the case of Gaskell.

Gilligan's theory, drawn from psychology, is used by Foley and Davis to inform their analysis which presumes that the understanding of human beings is also an understanding of representations of human beings. Moreover, Nussbaum uses an analysis of fictional characters and their experience to draw conclusions about the human deliberation process and moral learning in *Fragility of Goodness* as well as *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*.<sup>31</sup> Whilst this approach may be controversial to theorists who resist altogether drawing parallels between theatrical representations and reality, critics have been using representations of human beings and the actual experience of humans to enrich our knowledge about both these aspects. Furthermore, the careful application of this methodology will help us reconsider parts of the characters' behaviour which have been overlooked,

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<sup>30</sup> See the discussion on Davis's use of ethics of care on pp. 154-55.

<sup>31</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

devalued or misinterpreted by previous critical approaches, as for example the fact that Phèdre's confession to Hippolyte may be interpreted as a manifestation of her responsibility of care towards her son rather than an act driven solely by passion. This endeavour can reveal new and original aspects of the characters' behaviour and decisions despite the fact that some critics may find it controversial.

This theoretical framework is not able to account for the manner in which the characters' divine ancestry and their exceptional nature inform their decision-making process. This represents a limitation of this theory. Médée, Clytemnestre and Phèdre have divine ancestors (the Sun in the case of Médée and Phèdre, Zeus may be Clytemnestre's father) and their families do not follow the traditional structure incorporated in this developmental theory (Médée's mother is not mentioned in Corneille's play, Phèdre's parents are Minos the judge of the Underworld and Pasiphaë, the mother of the Minotaur).<sup>32</sup> Gilligan does not discuss the impact of divine origin or diverse family structure on the ethical standpoint of the characters. Nonetheless, it represents a useful means for analysing Médée's, Clytemnestre's and Phèdre's decisions and behaviour because these characters incorporate qualities that correspond to human nature and behave in a way similar to humans. Corneille acknowledges that these tragic characters are 'hommes comme les auditeurs' and depict a similarly human vulnerability. Longepierre also argues that Racine's characters are successful because they have a human quality.<sup>33</sup> These tragic characters have a human dimension and this aspect of their image needs to be investigated as their behaviour will be judged in general by norms relating to this quality. I am aware that their divine origin may inform their behaviour. However, ethics of care allows me to analyse the human dimension of their decisions and actions which can also be an important source of insight regarding aspects of their behaviour that have been overlooked or devalued by previous critical approaches.

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<sup>32</sup> Médée's mother is mentioned in Hesiod's *Theogony*. She is a daughter of the Ocean and her name is Idyia. Hesiod, *Theogony and Works and Days*, trans. by Richard Caldwell and Stephanie Nelson (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2009), p. 59, v. 959-61.

<sup>33</sup> See p. 149 for a discussion of these ideas.



By applying this theory with caution and reservation, I will be able to reveal that the female characters' behaviour and decisions are the result of an alternative ethical perspective and a different view of the world rather than a sign of their inferiority and their failure to meet moral standards.

I will not be using the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' when referring to the characters' ethical standpoint because I consider that these binary terms limit the recognition of difference to the one between men and women and do not render the methodology's potential for inclusivity. I believe that the most important aspect of ethics of care is the fact that it acknowledges ways of deliberating and approaching a dilemma which does not correspond to the established ethical mode that values a justice and rights approach. Ethics of care privileges difference and this aspect should be considered in relation to all those who fall out of line with the mainstream, patriarchal values and hierarchies on account of class, gender, race or sexual orientation. As a result, for the purposes of this analysis I will use the terms ethics of care, responsibility of care or duty of care to identify those standpoints which correspond to Gilligan's concept of preoccupation with nurturing and maintaining relationships and justice and rights approach or conventional morality for the stances which reflect the predominant justice and rights ethical mode.

Gilligan's theoretical framework serves as a critical strategy and supplements Nussbaum's approach which focuses on a revalorisation of emotion. Just as Gilligan has argued in a modern context that Kohlberg's ideas about ethical maturity are distorted by the fact that male experience is seen as the benchmark, I argue that the analysis of these female tragic characters has been informed by an androcentric view of what represents a valid ethical standpoint. The relational view of morality alongside the way that it informs women's interpretation of a moral dilemma will be the concepts I use to analyse the characters' behaviour, explore and present an alternative moral stance. These are the elements drawn from Gilligan's theory which will inform the analysis incorporated in this chapter.

This methodology enables us to provide an interpretation of Médée's, Clytemnestre's and Phèdre's actions and decisions from the perspective of an alternative ethical standpoint and system of values. This helps us find in their behaviour values and beliefs which reflect a view of goodness, relationships and the world that is not inferior to the norm but complementary. Médée's, Clytemnestre's and Phèdre's actions and behaviour will be interpreted through this methodological approach which combines Nussbaum's revalorisation of emotions as judgements of value with ethics of care. This analysis will reveal that Médée's revenge stems from a need to escape a position of vulnerability and isolation and to place Jason in a similar situation by depriving him of all meaningful relationships rather than mere jealousy or desire to usurp her spouse's role as Claire Carlin argues.<sup>34</sup> It will also emphasize that the Colchian displays qualities befitting of a tragic hero (pride, courage and desire for glory), and she deserves to be in this category, in spite of Bénichou's and Doubrovsky's ideas that female characters are excluded from the Cornelian heroic project.<sup>35</sup> In the case of Clytemnestre, we will discover that the incident at Aulis produces a moral transformation which is at the basis of her transgressive behaviour. The ending of the play does not give her a sense that heroic virtue has been reaffirmed and all is well, as Richard Goodkin argues but marks Clytemnestre's moral transformation into Agamemnon's murderess and the persecutor of her offspring.<sup>36</sup> The analysis of Phèdre will reveal that she does not completely relinquish her responsibility of care towards others and the decision to confess her passion and pursue it, is driven by a concern for her son's wellbeing, and is not a sign of irrationality, selfishness and aggression as Thierry Maulnier, Harry Barnwell, Jean Rohou and Constant Venesoen argue.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, this analysis will provide alternative interpretations of the characters' behaviour which

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<sup>34</sup> See pp. 28-9 for Carlin's critical approach to Médée.

<sup>35</sup> See pp. 26-7 for Bénichou's and Doubrovsky's ideas regarding the Cornelian tragic heroine.

<sup>36</sup> See p. 188 for a discussion of Goodkin's argument and the end of *Iphigénie*.

<sup>37</sup> See the analysis of Phèdre's confession on pp. 207-210.

challenge previous readings and put forward a new perspective on their decisions and actions.

## **2.1 Médée: the strong are invincible**

Médée is a female tragic character who undergoes a moral transformation on account of her spouse's betrayal. She puts an end to her spouse's bloodline and the relationships that ensured Jason's safety and authority in Corinth in a gesture of retaliation which undermines patriarchal authority. She deviates from social rules, abandons conventional morality and subverts gender norms. As a result, her behaviour has been interpreted as a monstrous act determined either by an exceptional, transgressive nature or the corruption of her morality by passions.<sup>38</sup>

Corneille reinterpreted the story in 1635 and created a character of psychological and emotional depth. He presented to the audience a tragic heroine that commits an act of gruesome violence but manages to retain her humanity. She acknowledges her crimes but this does not render her entirely monstrous.<sup>39</sup> Unlike La Péruse's reinterpretation of the myth (1556) which exacerbated the ferociousness of the Senecan character and Longepierre's version of the classical story (1694) which transformed the infanticide into an act of revenge as well as salvation, and emphasized the maternal nature of Médée's character, Corneille's play presented a tragic heroine torn between humanity and monstrosity who inspires admiration instead of terror. Her human, emotional response to Jason's betrayal and the singular context in which she finds herself, surrounded by enemies with no haven, is combined with the cruel, calculating nature of her revenge to capture all the factors that influenced her behaviour and deeds. Corneille's play deepens the issue of Médée's guilt and motivation: his depiction of her actions and attitude captures the complexity of the decision-making process.

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<sup>38</sup> Schweitzer, *Une 'héroïne exécration aux yeux des spectateurs'*, p. 62

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 136, 138.

This section will analyse Médée's behaviour and her deliberation process in order to reveal the manner in which it represents an alternative ethical mode based on Gilligan's ideas of care and maintaining connection as a source of goodness. This approach will be paired with a re-evaluation of Médée's emotional responses in the light of Nussbaum's emphasis on their role in human cognition and deliberation in order to provide further insight into the tragic heroine's interpretation of the situation. This endeavour will enable us to trace the evolution of Médée's moral downfall, to reveal her experience of the tragic situation and the factors that contribute to her criminal behaviour in order to present an alternative image of the character's decision-making processes and to delve deeper into the issue of her responsibility and motivation.

The first scene of the play reveals Jason's perception of the situation as well as his thoughts regarding Médée, which reveals the dynamic of the tragic couple and the influence that the warrior has on his wife's behaviour. In a friendly dialogue with Pollux, a fellow Argonaut, Jason boasts about his ability to combine his love interests with political ones as he announces his upcoming nuptials to Créuse, the only daughter of the Corinthian king Créon, and his decision to abandon his wife, Médée:

Vous n'y pouviez venir en meilleure saison ;  
Et pour vous rendre encor l'âme plus étonnée,  
Préparez-vous à voir mon second hyménée.  
[...] Elle [Médée] vit;  
Mais un objet plus beau la chasse de mon lit. (I.1.4-6, 8)

He also brags about the way he uses his charms as a means of seducing these women and manipulating their behaviour for his personal interest. He appears to cultivate a corrupted type of love in which the other is an object to be possessed and used for his own pleasure and the satisfaction of his goals. This type of love does not support

relationships of concern in which people are treated as agents with their own aims and objectives. As a result, he is unable to acknowledge the humanity of the women he uses, and to extend compassion towards them. This preoccupation with the satisfaction of his needs and desires is reflected in his decision to abandon his wife: he makes no effort to imagine the salient features of both sides of the dilemma and to consider the deliberate wrongdoing that his choice involves.

Nous voulant à Lemnos rafraîchir dans la ville,  
Qu'eussions-nous fait, Pollux, sans l'amour d'Hypsipyle?  
Et depuis à Colchos, que fit votre Jason,  
Que cajoler Médée, et gagner la toison? [...]  
Maintenant qu'un exil m'interdit ma patrie,  
Créuse est le sujet de mon idolâtrie;  
Et j'ai trouvé l'adresse, en lui faisant la cour,  
De relever mon sort sur les ailes d'Amour. (I.1.34-37, 41-44)

Furthermore, Jason's perception of the situation reveals his thoughts regarding his wife. Médée, the witch from Colchis, is another victim of his charms who will respond to his mistreatment and betrayal with laments and reproaches: 'Médée en son malheur en pourra faire autant: / Qu'elle soupire, pleure, et me nomme inconstant' (I.1.15-16). He has an awareness of her human qualities but sees this only as a vulnerability for him to exploit.

This awareness of Médée's weakness for his charms is combined with first-hand knowledge of her supernatural powers since he has witnessed and inspired her gruesome deeds. Jason's account of the horrific crime, which determined them to seek exile in Corinth, incorporates a vision of Médée's monstrous side. The act, motivated by Jason's mistreatment at the hands of Pélée, indicates that she is devoted to maintaining her marital relationship to the point of relinquishing all concern for others and focusing solely on their needs and desires. She has been influenced by

the lack of reciprocity cultivated by Jason's passion. As a result, Médée is unable to treat people as agents with aims and goals rather than objects to be used or discarded for the purposes of Jason's well-being, the flourishing of her relationship and the satisfaction of her desire. This leads to a disregard for social participation and acceptance through adhesion to values and norms.<sup>40</sup> Médée is unable to contemplate or acknowledge the harm and suffering she inflicts upon others in the name of her passion. As a result, Jason perceives his wife as a hybrid creature endowed with supernatural powers, capable of horrific crimes, planned and executed voluntarily and cold-bloodedly, yet susceptible to his charms and manipulation. This image of his wife incorporates an awareness of Médée's character, which enriches our understanding of her actions and emotions whilst simultaneously defining his influence over her decision-making processes and her crimes.

Médée's reaction to her spouse's betrayal could not be further from the lamenting victim attitude Jason envisioned. Perceiving his actions as a breach of his marriage oath and an insult to her pride and honour, she contemplates retribution in a state of angry upheaval. As a result, she summons the support of the gods, guardians of their marriage laws, to avenge this wrongdoing:

Souverains protecteurs des lois de l'hyménée,  
[...]  
Voyez de quel mépris vous traite son parjure,  
Et m'aidez à venger cette commune injure. (I.4.197, 201-2)

Médée appears to hold the traditional belief that ethical agreements and practices

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<sup>40</sup> Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, p. 79. According to Gilligan the transition from selfishness to responsibility is a move towards social participation. In this second stage of moral development defined by responsibility, 'moral judgement relies on shared norms and expectations.' The woman adopts societal values in order to validate her claims to social membership. Survival now depends on acceptance by others and the primary concern is 'consensual judgment about goodness.' Médée does not move towards this level of responsibility as she focuses solely on her family's well-being and has no consideration for social participation or norms and expectations.

are set out externally and independently of humans and their way of life as the gods watch over them. She cannot accept Jason's attempt to nullify or ignore them. She perceives his betrayal as an act of impiety and an offence against her honour, worthy of both divine and human punishment. Furthermore, the fact that he willingly caused her this significant harm and placed her in a position of vulnerability and isolation justifies her anger and the need to right this wrongdoing. This emotional reaction reflects Médée's views regarding Jason's behaviour and represents an attempt to find solace and regain control over the situation. Anger provides the Colchian with the pleasure of contemplating revenge, whilst the thought of retribution allows her to take delight in the power this plot will give her over her unsuspecting enemies.<sup>41</sup>

The extreme nature of Médée's revenge plot and the urgency of her emotions indicate that her marriage to Jason was amongst the most important projects and goals:

La mort de ma rivale, et celle de son père;  
Et si vous ne voulez mal servir mon courroux,  
Quelque chose de pis pour mon perfide époux. (I.4.218-20)

This marital connection was an essential part of her personal idea of what it means to live well, and its loss triggered her rage as well as the desire to punish those who voluntarily deprived her of a good life alongside Jason. The punishment she envisages for her treacherous spouse in the form of a fate worse than death, a life of isolation marked by the lack of security provided by relationships, reflects a view of danger belonging to ethics of care, as it places value on connections and the safety that they provide:

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<sup>41</sup> Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, p. 410. The pleasure that Euripides' Hecuba derives from plotting her enemies' downfall is similar to the pleasure and power Médée takes from structuring and organizing her revenge plan.

Qu'il coure vagabond de province en province, [...]

Banni de tous côtés, sans bien et sans appui, [...]

Qu'à ses plus grands malheurs aucun ne compatisse. (I.4.221, 223, 225)

Médée herself is in a vulnerable position, forced to leave Corinth, with no haven, feared and dreaded because of her criminal deeds, with no web of relationships around her to provide protection. Hence, this view of relationships as a source of safety and personal flourishing has influenced Médée's decision to inflict upon Jason the same experience of isolation and vulnerability, he has forced upon her.

Médée's also interprets Jason's decision to end their relationship as an affront to her exceptional character and her sense of honour. If not love and consideration for her well-being, then fear of her supernatural powers and her ability to suppress any human weakness or emotion and show strength in the pursuit of an aim should have prevented him from choosing this course of action: 'Sachant ce que je puis, ayant vu ce que j'ose, / Croit-il que m'offenser ce soit si peu de chose ?' (I.4.233-34). Moreover, she seems to believe that Jason may associate an inability or unwillingness to respond to this offence with the fact that she is position of vulnerability and danger brought about by the loss of her family relationships and the disintegration of her marriage. Accordingly, she transforms her revenge into a matter of asserting and defining her identity outside of these caring relationships, since they have become a source of weakness that her enemies, including her spouse, are willing to exploit. She needs to show strength and courage by abandoning these connections. This belief determines an abandonment of her duty of care towards him and a focus on responsiveness to herself since her well-being is at stake. Consequently, it is her duty to envision a revenge befitting her birth and strength of character that will provide her inferiors with enough examples of her superior nature.

There is no room for modest desires and ambitions in her plot as they are evidence of weakness of character. Only a masterpiece will satisfy this desire to



show her strength and acquire glory: 'Il faut faire un chef-d'œuvre, et qu'un dernier ouvrage / Surpasse de bien loin ce faible apprentissage' (I.4.253-54). Anger, hatred, resentment but also ambition, honour, premeditation and desire for glory influence Médée's revenge plot as well as her behaviour towards her future victims. These emotions and beliefs combined with her supernatural abilities transform the Colchian into a vengeful Fury.

Médée's openness about her intentions prompts Nérine, her servant, to remind her that she is at the mercy of her enemies and only prudence and moderation will ensure her safety:

Madame, pensez mieux à l'éclat que vous faites :

[...]

Et songez qu'à grand-peine un esprit plus remis

Vous tient en sûreté parmi vos ennemis. (I.5.301, 303-4)

This reminder of the obstacles, dangers and oppression she is facing, transforms Médée's pride into heroism as she asserts her power and her confidence in her abilities and courage in a stance that grants her nobility:

*Nérine:* Dans un si grand revers que vous reste-t-il?

*Médée:* Moi,

Moi, dis-je, et c'est assez. (I.5.320-21).

Furthermore, she begins to consider this position of isolation as an opportunity to assert her independence and self-reliance rather than a source of danger. This attitude also reveals that she adheres to an aristocratic morality in which heroism is steered towards the exaltation of pride and the achievement of 'gloire'. Médée seeks to affirm herself as superior to fate by finding a brilliant solution for this unusual

situation posing insurmountable problems to common souls.<sup>42</sup> She moves between a deep awareness of the value of relationships and the safety they provide, and a heroism focused on the assertion of her will, passion and pride against all obstacles which has been defined by critics as ‘masculine’.<sup>43</sup>

This wish for glory has a direct influence on her decisions and actions. As a result, she becomes the female embodiment of a Cornelian hero. Although the tight framework of this concept constructed by Bénichou, Doubrovsky and other twentieth-century literary critics exclude female characters from the category of the tragic hero, Médée displays qualities befitting of this status. She becomes the epitome of potency, endowed with confidence, self-assertion and a grandiose tone, which denote power and set her apart from the weak male counterparts. This reinforces John Lyons’ idea that this concept of ‘le héros cornélien’ has a problematic and at times conflictual relation with the Cornelian text, and that the complexity of the dramatic work cannot be contained or explained within such tight constructs.<sup>44</sup> Médée’s words and actions are the main evidence of the heroic stance she adopts as a result of her beliefs about pride and honour.

This heroic attitude is reinforced by Médée’s encounter with Créon, marked by the pursuit of a just treatment and incorporating her perception of her guilt, her past crimes and her feelings towards Jason. She willingly admits to these gruesome deeds. However, she is reluctant to take full responsibility for them, as they were committed out of love for Jason and in order to save him and his fellow Argonauts: ‘Si j’eusse eu de l’horreur de tant d’énormes fautes, / Que devenait Jason, et tous vos Argonautes?’ (II.2.433-34). She does not consider the repression of passion as a condition of human courage or the constraint of duty over the appetites of the self as a source of good.<sup>45</sup> Courage for Médée represents following one’s desire, severing family ties, transforming her passion for Jason into the main source of well-

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<sup>42</sup> Bénichou, pp. 9-17,47.

<sup>43</sup> Bénichou as well as Doubrovsky, see discussion on the Cornelian tragic heroine pp. 26-27.

<sup>44</sup> Lyons, *Le mythe du héros cornélien*, p. 435.

<sup>45</sup> Bénichou, p. 17.

being and deriving her virtue and identity from the ability to sustain this connection. As a result, courage is related to the ability to assert her desire by abandoning the safety of the web of family relationships and transgressing social values and norms. She chooses to reject all restriction on self-expression and desire and to face the vulnerable position of isolation and social opprobrium brought by her gruesome crimes and disregard for authority, social participation and acceptance. Médée's courage is the prevalence of desire over duty and of responsiveness to self and Jason over responsibility of care towards others (her parents and siblings). The pursuit of her passion and the need to sustain its fulfilment through her marital relationship become the essential elements of Médée's idea of what it represents to lead a good life.

Despite the strong arguments she invokes in support of her cause and the honesty she displays, the king refuses to discuss his decision further and gives Médée a direct order: she is to leave Corinth within a day, and she is to part with her children. This demand leaves Médée feeling as if her self is torn apart, underlining the importance of her offspring to her goals and aims: *'Barbare humanité, qui m'arrache à moi-même, / Et feint de la douceur pour m'ôter ce que j'aime!'* (II.2.497-98). This emotional reaction reveals an experience of powerlessness, as she has no control over the persons in whom she has invested a good measure of her own well-being. Furthermore, the disintegration of this primary bond with the vulnerable other would deprive her of all connection and threaten her identity. As a result, she is determined to maintain at all cost her control over her offspring and protect this relationship which ensures her well-being: *'Si Jason et Créuse ainsi l'ont ordonné, / Qu'ils me rendent le sang que je leur ai donné'* (II.2.499-500). Nonetheless, the king is unwilling to show compassion for her plight. Thus, Médée is forced to contemplate the loss of the most important persons for her conception of the good life, and the disintegration of the connections that define a significant part of her personality.

Médée's dialogue with Créon also reveals the belief that she is entitled to

Jason's love because of her strength, courage and the glory she has bought at the price of her moral corruption. Unable to acknowledge the reciprocity and compassion of love, she treats Jason, like a prize to be possessed, not a human being whose happiness should be considered, an agent with his own aims and goals. Médée's love is tainted by a desire for complete control and possession of the source of good stemming from an infantile wish for omnipotence. Her love for her children appears equally affected by this need to exert complete control over the life and well-being of the persons who are essential to her idea of the good life. Médée's views on Jason's moral responsibility regarding her crimes reflect a just perception of her past and current situation, whilst the idea that her husband is a prize to be possessed, won and negotiated emphasizes the nature of the passion that determined her criminal actions.

Médée's encounter with Jason is the only dialogue in which the two spouses deal with the current situation, their relationship and their past. This scene provides further insight into Médée's perception of Jason's behaviour, her view of their relationship and her current position as well as the emotional experience of his betrayal:

C'est pour vous que j'ai fui, c'est vous qui me chassez. [...]

Irai-je sur le Phaxe, où j'ai trahi mon père, [...]

Irai-je en Thessalie, où le meurtre d'un roi

Pour victime aujourd'hui ne demande que moi ? (III.3.787, 789,791-92)

Isolated and feared, as she has proved unwilling to limit her desire and self-expression, she can no longer be integrated and accepted as a citizen and member of society. Médée has an acute sense that her past crimes as well as Jason's betrayal have left her with no web of connections to ensure her safety, no source of comfort or care. Furthermore, she exposes Jason's bad character by highlighting his use of women as objects to be discarded when no longer needed, and love as a means of

manipulating them:

Le dragon assoupi, la toison emportée,  
Ton tyran massacré, ton père rajeuni,  
Je devins un objet digne d'être banni. (III.3.814-16)

However, this attitude also denotes hypocrisy as she blames Jason for failing to show compassion and reciprocity whilst she revealed during her confrontation with Créon an equally selfish desire to possess her spouse despite his wishes, goals and aims. Jason was not alone in benefitting from her crimes, as Médée uses her past deeds to invoke a duty of care and gratitude in the hope that this will prevent him from abandoning her. The sacrifices she has made for her spouse and their relationship provided her with the means and the right to demand his complete loyalty and support whilst also ensuring her control over him.

The fact that Médée invokes her preference for love over duty in support of her cause whilst condemning Jason for making the same choice and disregarding his duty in the name of a new passion also reveals that she is prejudiced, and her well-being is the only concern:

Et lors préfère-moi Créuse, si tu l'oses.  
Qu'ai-je épargné depuis qui fût en mon pouvoir?  
Ai-je auprès de l'amour écouté mon devoir? (III.3.802-4)

Médée's perception of Jason's behaviour is affected by her desire to hold on to and exert control over this source of good. She is unable to see beyond personal interest, to accept his independence and autonomy and to acknowledge that context does not transform vice into virtue. The betrayal of her family and the abandonment of her duty of care towards them, like Jason's unfaithfulness, remain serious wrongdoings regardless of the reasons for which they have been committed. The fact that these

crimes were committed out of love for her spouse or for his direct benefit provides her with mitigating circumstances, but she remains guilty and needs to show remorse rather than use them as evidence of her superior character and loyal nature. Médée perceives the situation from the perspective of her personal interest and her feelings towards Jason.

Médée interprets Jason's new marriage as a lack of respect for her noble lineage on account of an awareness of her superior bloodline: 'Tu vas mêler, impie, et mettre en rang pareil / Des neveux de Sisyphe avec ceux du Soleil!' (III.3.875-76). The perspective of this alliance together with Jason's suggestion that she should adopt a passive stance and resign herself to her fate, deeply offends the Colchian's sense of pride. This attitude places Médée above common characters, as she no longer recognizes the law that aims to limit the expression of her courage and pride:

Ce corps n'enferme pas une âme si commune;  
Je n'ai jamais souffert qu'elle [la fortune] me fit la loi,  
Et toujours ma fortune a dépendu de moi. (III.3.882-84)

This exaltation of the ego above all else transforms her into an object of fear and desire.<sup>46</sup> Médée's actions and revenge plot are influenced by this sense of upholding the honour of her bloodline in spite of all obstacles. Consequently, the gruesome nature of her retaliation is determined by a sense of pride, a specific perception of the situation as well as a desire to take revenge for the injustice she has suffered.

Médée's encounter with Jason has deepened her resentment towards him and revealed his main weakness – an attachment to his children. As a result, she is determined to deprive him of this object of his paternal affection as punishment: 'Il aime ses enfants, ce courage inflexible: / Son faible est découvert; par eux il est sensible' (III.4.945-46). However, Nérine intervenes and directs her mistress's

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<sup>46</sup> Mitchell Greenberg, *Corneille, Classicism and the Ruses of Symmetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 23.

attention to Créuse, as the princess's desire for Médée's dress facilitates the initiation of the revenge plot and the Colchian's transformation from betrayed wife to mythical witch by taking justice into her own hands. As a result, she poisons the dress Créuse wishes to possess with the help of magic. Médée considers her anger and her gruesome retaliation (in the form of the poisoned dress which induces a slow, painful death) proportional to the size of the harm she thinks she has incurred. She has gone through the emotional experience of the self being torn apart on account of the princess's attempts to deprive her of Jason, her children and the symbols of her noble birth, and she seeks to inflict the same suffering upon the princess, as the dress causes internal combustion as well as the body's physical disintegration. Moreover, she has no compassion for the victim because she believes that Créuse's suffering is the result of her own wrongdoing and is proportional to her fault and the harm she sought to inflict. Nonetheless, this ruthless punishment is informed by her jealous hatred of this object who enjoys Jason's favour and her envious wish to remove this competitor: 'L'amour à tous mes sens ne fut jamais si doux / Que ce triste appareil à mon esprit jaloux' (IV.1.979-80). Accordingly, Médée's revenge reflects her experience of the harm she has suffered because of Créuse's actions as well as the need for complete control over the object of her desire.

Médée's commitment to the execution and fulfilment of the revenge plot influences her character and actions in a decisive manner. Her courage becomes boldness, as it serves no communal obligation, solely her personal aim, whilst wisdom is clever plotting in order to make sure that her goal is reached, and her supernatural powers turn into evil witchcraft.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, Médée treats her children as instruments of revenge and not as human beings by sending them to

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<sup>47</sup> Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, p. 415. In the analysis of Euripides' *Hecuba*, Nussbaum discusses the manner in which revenge changes the traits of the queen. Hecuba transforms revenge into her main aim which 'takes over the entire world of value' and all elements of her character (including maternal love) become instruments to be used for the purposes of fulfilling this aim. This is similar to the way Médée treats her revenge plot and the manner in which her behaviour, particularly maternal love, transforms as a result of it.

present the poisoned dress: maternal care is replaced by a sole concern for retaliation. Médée's willingness to incriminate her offspring and expose them to the danger of a potential revenge in order to satisfy her anger and pride emphasizes a detachment from the maternal role and from her responsibility of care towards them, providing a clue regarding her future behaviour. Thus, Médée's adhesion to this revenge plot, determined by the constant mistreatment of her enemies, a strong sense of honour, a specific emotional experience and interpretation of the situation, has transformed her character.

Médée's attempt to forge an alliance with Égée in order to ensure her safety after the fulfilment of the revenge also reveals her thoughts regarding the retaliation and her situation. Despite her experience with Créon and Jason, Médée continues to value a relationship based on trust and mutual help because she believes that these principles remain sacred, incorruptible and binding to men of honour who stand by their word. Égée attempted to uphold his honour by opposing Créon's and Créuse's breach of agreement, which suggests that he shares Médée's beliefs regarding the binding nature of one's word. As a result, Médée frees him with the help of magic, and the king is eager to show his gratitude by avenging her: 'Si votre heureux secours me tire de danger, / Je ne veux en sortir qu'afin de vous venger' (IV.5.1231-32). However, Médée's sense of honour requires her to perform this deed by herself and the thought of obtaining assistance represents a source of shame: 'Je veux une vengeance et plus haute et plus prompte; / Ne l'entreprenez pas, votre offre me fait honte' (IV.5.1241-42). This belief might stem from a complex demand for perfection and implicitly an inability to tolerate imperfection or lack of control connected to narcissism and the infantile desire for omnipotence.<sup>48</sup> She is ashamed of her humanity, her needy self is perceived as insufficient for the omnipotent control of the source of good/Jason; this shame also sustains the ambivalent nature of her love. Médée needs to assert her perfection and invulnerability to herself and

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<sup>48</sup> Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, pp. 198, 344-45.



others. In this context the statement that the day she avenges herself she is Médée: ‘C’est demain que mon art fait triompher ma haine; / Demain je suis Médée’ (IV.5.1250-51), denotes that she has an ideal of perfection, an image of herself devoid of human weakness and vulnerability, which has shame as its permanent possibility. Furthermore, the bond offered by Égée provides her with the possibility of engaging in a relationship of care, as the king proposes a marital alliance. This represents a chance to initiate a marital connection based on mutual interest and respect rather than passion, and since desire did not serve her well in the relationship with Jason, Médée chooses to follow her judgment and her interests by accepting his proposal. Thus, Médée moves between the need to uphold an ideal of heroism and perfection and the human side of her personality, and she cannot fully adhere to one or the other as her actions and her behaviour seem to emphasize this constant tension.

Once she has ensured her safety through the alliance with Égée, Médée is eager to know the development of her revenge plot. The slow torture and death of Créon and Créuse do not seem to appease her wrath. Médée wants Jason to feel the same vulnerability and isolation she had experienced because of his selfish, disloyal behaviour. Consequently, she contemplates murdering the children to deprive him of all relationships of care:

Des bras de mon perfide arracher une femme,  
Est-ce pour assouvir les fureurs de mon âme?  
Que n’a-t-elle déjà des enfants de Jason,  
Sur qui plus pleinement venger sa trahison!  
Suppléons-y des miens; immolons avec joie  
Ceux qu’à me dire adieu Créuse me renvoie. (V.2.1329-34)

This thought triggers a moral and emotional conflict as Médée is torn between her humanity and the inhuman cruelty stemming from pride and anger as well as her

idea of strength and perfection. She is aware of her offspring's innocence and feels compassion towards them:

Mais ils sont innocents; [...]

Mais quoi! J'ai beau contre eux animer mon audace,

La pitié la combat, et se met en sa place. (V.2.1357, 1361-62)

However, the desire to deprive Jason of all relationships of care and to make him suffer as a father as well as lover, as she suffered as a mother and wife, counteracts these maternal feelings: 'Il faut que leur trépas redouble son tourment; / Il faut qu'il souffre en père aussi bien qu'en amant' (V.2.1339-40). She moves between love and anger, as her deliberation process appears guided by emotions and beliefs rather than a sense of right or wrong: 'De l'amour aussitôt je passe à la colère, / Des sentiments de femme aux tendresses de mère' (V.2.1345-46). This emotional turmoil has a moral dimension, as Médée appears trapped between responsiveness to herself as a betrayed woman, a proud granddaughter of the Sun, and her responsibility of care towards her children as a mother. The infanticide will put an end to this relationship of care that defined her identity since murdering the children represents murdering herself as a caring woman and a caring mother. As a result, the dilemma is about the children as well as Médée's willingness to sacrifice herself in order to hurt Jason, uphold her honour and assert her superior, heroic nature. Because she perceives this situation as a test of her strength and the ability to display invulnerability and omnipotence in order to become her superhuman ideal, and in the words of John Lyons to return to her full self, Médée decides to murder the children.<sup>49</sup> This crime reduces Jason to a position of helplessness whilst she displays power and strength and asserts her invulnerable, omnipotent self. She has chosen responsiveness to herself because she believes that the strong do not have to care

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<sup>49</sup> John D. Lyons, 'Tragedy Comes to Arcadia' in *Theatrum Mundi, Studies in Honor of Ronald W. Tobin*, ed. by Claire L. Carlin and Kathleen Wine (Rookwood Press, Charlottesville, 2003), pp. 198-205 (p. 204).

about relationships and she has to prove her superior nature through deeds that defy human law.

Jason also contemplates murdering his children as a way of harming Médée. According to Schweitzer, this reveals that he has an equally violent nature:<sup>50</sup> ‘C’est vous, petits ingrats, que malgré la nature / Il me faut immoler dessus leur sépulture’ (V.5.1533-4). Nonetheless, Médée is the one to perform the gruesome deed, to feel the satisfaction of having transformed her pride into glory and of having placed Jason in a position of powerlessness:

Et que peut contre moi ta débile vaillance?

Mon art faisait ta force, et tes exploits guerriers

Tiennent de mon secours ce qu’ils ont de lauriers. (V.6.1558-60)

Furthermore, she is defiant, feeling no remorse for the past crimes against her family, which become evidence of her strength and ability to overcome the responsibility of care towards others and conventional morality for the purpose of satisfying her desires and adhering to a position of omnipotence and invulnerability. This final crime has brought her glory and has placed her in a position of power and control.

Médée’s revenge, which culminates with the infanticide, is a consequence of the series of injustices she has suffered. It reflects a desire to inflict upon her oppressors a punishment similar to the harm they caused her. Furthermore, Médée’s devotion to an idea of justice, which follows the law of the talion (an eye for an eye),<sup>51</sup> determines the Colchian to sacrifice a part of her identity (the caring mother) for the purpose of avenging her honour and inflicting a suitable punishment: ‘Je vous perds, mes enfants; mais Jason vous perdra’ (V.2.1355). These aspects of her

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<sup>50</sup> Schweitzer, *Une ‘héroïne exécration aux yeux des spectateurs’*, p. 143.

<sup>51</sup> Florence de Caigny, *Sénèque le Tragique en France (XVIe-XVIIe siècles): Imitation, traduction, adaptation* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2011), p. 523.

retribution blur the moral boundaries of these crimes, which may be interpreted as heroic acts.<sup>52</sup> Nonetheless, her actions denote besides this inclination towards morality, a character corrupted by the relationship she has with Jason and the ambivalent love that it cultivates. Médée may be heroic but she is nevertheless immoral.

The injustice that Médée's has suffered at the hands of Jason, Créon and Créuse and the emotional experience of this situation determine the Colchian's need for revenge. Furthermore, the ambivalent, selfish nature of her love towards Jason causes her to move from love to hatred and jealousy as soon as there is a rival for his affection. This wrath towards Jason and Créuse exacerbates her feeling of being unjustly treated and the need for retribution because she must face the experience of losing control over the source of the good (her lover) alongside the threat of being deprived of the main relationship of care. This position of lack of control and vulnerability also feeds her need for revenge and determines important changes in her behaviour and character, as her wisdom becomes cunning, her courage boldness and her maternal feelings an instrument to be used for the purposes of the retaliation. However, Médée's revenge incorporates a sense of honour and a wish for assertion through exceptional deeds and will power together with a desire to inflict upon Jason a punishment that reflects her experience of this dramatic context namely isolation and powerlessness. Therefore, Médée's course of action becomes the complex result of the interpretation of her particular circumstances and of the other characters' behaviour in the light of her beliefs and emotional experience.

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<sup>52</sup> Zoé Schweitzer, "Si vous ne craignez rien que je vous trouve à plaindre: Violence et pouvoirs dans la Médée de Corneille" in *Comparatismes en Sorbonne, Spectacle de la violence*, 2 (2011), p. 12, <[http://www.crlc.paris-sorbonne.fr/FR/Page\\_revue\\_num.php?P1=2](http://www.crlc.paris-sorbonne.fr/FR/Page_revue_num.php?P1=2)> [accessed 9 April 2018].

## 2.2 Clytemnestre: only the weak value relationships

Clytemnestre is a female character that undergoes a moral transformation from good woman to bad within the singular context of her tragic situation. The queen of Argos fails in her duties as a wife and betrays her husband. She murders her spouse and king, a crime, which has been compared with the worst transgression in the history of mankind, the Lemnian women's murder of their husbands.<sup>53</sup> This deed that marked the queen of Argos's undermining of social norms and values represents a direct attack on patriarchy and a subversion of gender norms. Thus, Clytemnestre like Médée seems to completely abandon conventional morality, gender norms and boundaries. Moreover, this entire process transforms the queen into an androgynous being, with 'the heart of a woman and the deliberative capacities of a man'.<sup>54</sup> This indicates an interesting evolution of Clytemnestre's moral character and her view of the world.

Racine's *Iphigénie* (1674) and Longepierre's *Électre* (1702) are the early modern French plays which reinterpret the story of Clytemnestra (from Euripides *Iphigenia at Aulis* and Sophocles' *Electra*) and provide the seventeenth-century audience with this tale of intrafamilial conflict that led to the destruction of the House of Atreus. Racine's play takes place before the Trojan War and focuses on Agamemnon's moral dilemma (having to choose between the life of his daughter and the success of the Trojan expedition), and the consequences that his behaviour and decision have on Clytemnestre who must choose between her spouse and her daughter, her duty as a mother and her role as a queen and a wife. This play reveals the way this context, and Agamemnon's attitude, influence the queen's ethical stance, transforming her into the woman who will murder her spouse and usurp his role. Longepierre's dramatic text follows Clytemnestre's moral evolution and behaviour after the Trojan War and the murder of her spouse and reveals the impact

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<sup>53</sup> Simon Bennett, *Tragic Drama and the Family: Psychoanalytic Studies from Aeschylus to Beckett* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 46. The interpretation is with reference to Aeschylus's *Oresteia*.

<sup>54</sup> Helen P. Foley quoted by Wolfe, p.702.

that her actions and decisions together with Agamemnon's behaviour at Aulis have had on her character, her perception of the situation and the relationship with her children. Thus, the two plays trace Clytemnestre's evolution from mother to monster within the context of the intrafamilial conflicts she must face, the decisions she must make and the acts she commits.

Racine's *Iphigénie* focuses on the first episode of this story, represented by Agamemnon's dramatic situation at Aulis. The king must choose between obeying the gods and protecting his own blood as the oracle demands the sacrifice of his daughter in exchange for favourable winds for the Trojan expedition. His duty towards his family becomes incompatible with his role as king, and he is unable to make a choice. However, his indecision is not a virtue as it stems mostly from a series of fears: fear of an army uprising, of Ulysse, Achille and even Clytemnestre. The fact that the king fears reprisals from his army and military leaders as much as his wife's reaction to a potential sacrifice reveals the influence that Clytemnestre has over her husband, and the dynamic of this royal couple throughout the play. As a result, Agamemnon perceives his wife as a powerful opponent, a force to be reckoned with once his decision to sacrifice their daughter is revealed: 'D'une mère en fureur épargne-moi les cris' (I.1.147). This anxiety regarding Clytemnestre's behaviour influences his deliberation process as well as his interaction with his wife.

The first encounter between Agamemnon and Clytemnestre is determined by the king's intention to hide his decision to sacrifice their daughter in order to postpone a potential conflict. For this purpose, he asks his wife not to attend Iphigénie's marriage ceremony: 'M'en croirez-vous? Laissez de vos femmes suivie / À cet hymen sans vous marcher Iphigénie' (III.1.793-94). Unsurprisingly, the king's request is met with outrage as the queen considers it an abandonment of her responsibility of care towards her daughter, as her participation in the ceremony is established through tradition and convention: 'Ce que j'ai commencé je ne l'achève pas? [...] / Je refuse à l'autel de lui servir de guide !' (III.1.796, 798). Clytemnestre feels bound by the responsibility to protect and guide her offspring, which is set out

in the social norms that structure the marriage ritual as well as the conventional morality influencing her behaviour. As a result, the king must use his authority to impose his will and orders Clytemnestre to obey his request. Agamemnon's unwillingness to sympathize with her position alongside his request to break away from tradition by not participating in the marriage ceremony, are interpreted by Clytemnestre as evidence that the bond she shares with her sister H el ene, the bad woman who neglected her duties as wife, mother and queen, represents a source of embarrassment for her spouse: 'N'oserait-il d'H el ene ici montrer la s eur ?' (III.2.824). The queen perceives her identity as defined by the network of relationships she sustains. This view of connection alongside a sense of maternal duty towards her daughter indicate that Clytemnestre's idea of goodness is based on care. As a result, she is reluctant to obey Agamemnon and leave her daughter at Aulis in a gesture which can be interpreted as an abandoning of her responsibility of care.

The queen behaves as a good wife and decides to obey her spouse and allow the marriage ceremony to take place without her, denoting a willingness to go against tradition and her wishes in the name of her duty toward Agamemnon. However, the servant that arrives to escort the young princess reveals to her the nature of the ritual, and Agamemnon's decision to sacrifice his daughter in exchange for favourable winds for sailing to Troy. Thus, Clytemnestre discovers the truth about Iphig enie's wedding as well as the fact that she has been a pawn in Agamemnon's gruesome plan.

This change of context determines Clytemnestre to reconsider the situation as well as her relationships and her duties. She must choose between her responsibility of care towards her daughter and her duty towards her spouse. Maternal morality indicates a duty to protect the unequal and the dependant.<sup>55</sup> This duty towards her child is reinforced by the fact that she sees Agamemnon as an evil

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<sup>55</sup> Gilligan, *In A Different Voice*, p. 74.

and unjust man who has betrayed her trust and abandoned his responsibility of care towards his family by wilfully aiming to harm them. Consequently, Clytemnestre chooses responsibility of care towards her daughter and puts Iphigénie under the protection of her future spouse, Achille: ‘Elle n’a que vous seul. Vous êtes en ces lieux / Son père, son époux, son asile, ses dieux’ (III.5.939-40).

This new situation influences Clytemnestre’s behaviour as well as her character. The queen showed openness to her spouse and trusted him to abide by the same norms and moral codes.<sup>56</sup> However, this betrayal of her trust begins to poison her character, as she is no longer able to be open and to show understanding and compassion towards Agamemnon: ‘Le barbare à l’autel se plaint de sa paresse. [...] / Et croit pouvoir encor cacher sa trahison’ (IV.2.1146, 1148). Agamemnon’s manipulative behaviour has influenced Clytemnestre’s actions and character, making him partly responsible for her moral corruption.<sup>57</sup>

Clytemnestre’s decision to conceal her true feelings and intentions in order to assess her spouse’s commitment to deceiving her represents the first sign of the transformation undergone by her character: ‘Il vient. Sans éclater contre son injustice, / Voyons s’il soutiendra son indigne artifice’ (IV.2.1149-50). She has lost her openness; prudence and moderation have been corrupted and transformed into cunning for the purpose of confirming Agamemnon’s perfidy. Suspicion has infiltrated her mind, and her virtues are gradually corrupted for the purpose of extracting herself from the position of powerlessness brought about by the current context.<sup>58</sup> Clytemnestre interprets her spouse’s decision as disregard for her beliefs and values – a selfish gesture brought about by his position of power. He is proving that the powerful do not have to follow the rules of the powerless, and this moment

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<sup>56</sup> Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, p.405. Nussbaum’s analysis refers to Euripides’s *Hecuba* and her experience of Polymestor’s betrayal. However, the two women’s emotional responses contain similarities as they both contemplate the death of their offspring at the hands of a trusted and loved person and modify their behaviour and character as a result of this experience.

<sup>57</sup> Wolfe, p. 712.

<sup>58</sup> Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, pp. 410-15.



marks the irreparable deterioration of the bond of trust between the spouses, the moment her beliefs, values and character begin to transform.

Clytemnestre's encounter with Agamemnon before their daughter's sacrifice also emphasizes the queen's thoughts regarding her spouse and his actions which reveals the way this interpretation of the situation influences her behaviour and character. Whilst Iphigénie is susceptible to her father's argument that her individual sacrifice is needed in order to support the law and to ensure the well-being of the entire Greek community, Clytemnestre has a strong negative reaction to this speech: she expresses 'emotion fuelled by a sense of outrage and injustice', both understandable feelings in this particular context.<sup>59</sup> Unwilling to allow Agamemnon to relinquish responsibility with regard to his daughter's sacrifice, she sees this situation from the perspective of his responsibility of care towards his family. She believes that he has made this choice because of his dreams of power and greatness as well as a view of relationships as easily replaceable.<sup>60</sup> Agamemnon displays his ancestors' willingness to sacrifice family connections in the pursuit of power and glory, and to use their offspring as instruments of their will and desire:

Vous ne démentez point une race funeste.

Oui, vous êtes le sang d'Atrée et de Thyeste.

Bourreau de votre fille, il ne vous reste enfin

Que d'en faire à sa mère un horrible festin. (IV. 4. 1245-48)

She observes that his behaviour and emotions do not reflect those of a good person because he acknowledges that the situation involves wrongdoing, but he does not consider himself the wrongdoer worthy of punishment.<sup>61</sup> He is also unable to sympathize and fully understand the extent of the irreparable harm he is doing to

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<sup>59</sup> Campbell, p. 137.

<sup>60</sup> Gilligan, p. 44.

<sup>61</sup> Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, p. 41.

both his daughter and his wife, because the focus of his thoughts becomes the need to justify his behaviour and to avoid blame. As a result, Agamemnon embodies the bad parent, disregarding his duty of care in the name of a selfish desire for power with no concern for the suffering of others. Clytemnestre's devotion to her daughter makes her willing to change the rules in order to maintain this relationship, as she questions Calchas's interpretation of the oracle. She does not want to believe that the gods are cruel and unjust and uses reason rather than faith to interpret the oracle.<sup>62</sup> From her perspective, it is not logical that the gods should demand the sacrifice of their daughter because of Hélène's error: 'Si du crime d'Hélène on punit sa famille, / Faites chercher à Sparte Hermione sa fille' (IV. 4. 1265-66). Unlike Agamemnon who is willing to sacrifice Iphigénie in order to prove the integrity and supremacy of his faith (and authority)– in a stance similar to Abraham – Clytemnestre challenges the established order and the norm in order to save the life of her child. This is an ethical position which places value on connection and sustaining life rather than abstract principles higher than herself:

Est-ce donc être père? Ah! toute ma raison  
 Cède à la cruauté de cette trahison. [...]  
 Non, je ne l'aurai point amenée au supplice,  
 Ou vous ferez aux Grecs un double sacrifice.  
 Ni crainte, ni respect ne m'en peut détacher.  
 De mes bras tout sanglants il faudra l'arracher. (IV.4.1295-96, 1305-08)

Clytemnestre's adhesion to this view of morality, her selfless mother stance alongside eloquence and cynicism transform her into Agamemnon's most redoubtable adversary in the ethical/political battle for her daughter's life.<sup>63</sup> She brings to light her spouse's responsibility in this matter and his failings as father and

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<sup>62</sup> Barthes, p. 106.

<sup>63</sup> Greenberg, *Racine From Ancient Myth to Tragic Modernity*, p. 178.

husband. From an ethics of care perspective neither faith nor law can justify the sacrifice of this connection, and consequently she considers Agamemnon's actions a result of his selfish and immoral greed and weakness. As a result, Clytemnestre's duty of care lies with her vulnerable daughter rather than the unjust and oppressive spouse that betrayed her trust. Her ethical principles, which value connection, as well as the maternal morality of ensuring care of the unequal and dependant together with her perception of this dramatic context, transform her into Agamemnon's enemy.

The queen's diatribe against her spouse seems to have stimulated his commitment to family relationships and his paternal role, as he decides to aid his daughter to leave the camp and avoid the sacrifice. However, the two women's relief and joy are short-lived as Ériphile betrays them and they find themselves surrounded by the army, much to Clytemnestre's dismay and horror. As a result, Iphigénie agrees to the sacrifice and is able to maintain her transparent honest nature and her trust in her father, because she believes that he is doing this deed unwillingly. This belief that Agamemnon is a victim of the gods together with her conventional idea of goodness as selflessness prevents her from nurturing feelings of resentment and anger towards him. Iphigénie is able to show sympathy and understanding to both her parents and to consider the implications of her choice for all the parties involved, an attitude which neither Agamemnon nor Clytemnestre can contemplate throughout the play.

As she is forced to face her daughter's imminent sacrifice once more, Clytemnestre thinks of revenge and the punishment of all those involved. She cannot bear this position of powerlessness nor return to the trust she had in her spouse, his authority and the law. Her pleas for retribution turn to the gods who are meant to right the wrong and bring similar pain and horror to the offenders:

Mer, tu n'ouvriras pas des abîmes nouveaux ? [...]

Les vents, les mêmes vents si longtemps accusés,

Ne te couvriront pas de ces vaisseaux brisés ?  
Et toi, Soleil, et toi, qui dans cette contrée [...]  
Reculer, ils t'ont appris ce funeste chemin. (V.3.1680, 1683-85,1688)

This endeavour stems from her anger, a sense of injustice as well as a desire for 'power and safety'.<sup>64</sup> She needs the closure and self-sufficiency provided by revenge as she has been rendered vulnerable by the betrayal of her spouse, her subjects, her allies and the law and order she was keen to uphold. Grief and distress also inspire Clytemnestre to visualize the entire scene of the sacrifice. However, this vision incorporates a vengeful god who puts an end to the gruesome ceremony: 'J'entends gronder la foudre, et sens trembler la terre. / Un dieu vengeur, un dieu fait retentir ces coups' (V.4.1698-99). This god born out of her grief and aiming to spare her the pain of losing her daughter, might represent the refashioning of the queen's character in the light of the current dramatic context. Thus, her thoughts of retribution together with the vision of Iphigénie's sacrifice represent the expression of her grief and mark the emergence of a new Clytemnestre, a vengeful Fury aiming to right the wrongdoing she has suffered and to punish the culprits.

The queen's distress is short-lived as in a dramatic turn of events meant to take both her and the audience by surprise, Ulysse informs her that Iphigénie is alive, as the gods have found a more suitable victim in Ériphile, the newly discovered daughter of Hélène and Thésée: 'Non, votre fille vit, et les dieux sont contents' (V.5.1716). As a result, Clytemnestre moves from deep grief and sorrow to joy and gratitude and she praises the gods and Achille, Iphigénie's sole protector, for this favourable outcome. Although Iphigénie's life is saved, her mother is not spared the emotional distress of such a loss as she anticipated the traumatic event. This experience together with Agamemnon's betrayal determine a transformation of Clytemnestre's character and her beliefs. As John Campbell argues, relationships

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<sup>64</sup> Nietzsche quoted by Nussbaum in *The Fragility of Goodness*, p. 417. According to Nietzsche the characteristics of revenge include the wounded party's desire for power and safety.

and identities do not remain as stable as they are in the beginning of the play even with this apparently happy ending.<sup>65</sup> Clytemnestre no longer treats her spouse with openness or trust and focuses on obtaining retribution for her grief and suffering. Divine intervention cannot undo her traumatic experience or restore her faith in Agamemnon. From this perspective Goodkin's argument that Agamemnon, Clytemnestre, Achille and even Ulysse interpret the outcome of the play as 'the end of the beginning of the expedition, the moment of a successful departure, a reaffirmation of heroic representation and heroic virtue' is surprising.<sup>66</sup> If anything, this ending emphasizes the differences between these characters in terms of moral values and beliefs. It also captures Clytemnestre's and Agamemnon's emerging conflict, which will lead to the disintegration of the family through the queen's murder of her spouse, a crime designed to atone for the injustice she has suffered at Aulis.

Racine's *Iphigénie* enabled the exploration of the initial stages of Clytemnestre's moral downfall and foreshadowed the image of the Scylla-like monster, adulterous, murderous wife that is forever attached to her name and reputation.<sup>67</sup> Longepierre takes this image of the queen further in his *Électre*. The play delves into the queen's behaviour, actions and emotions after she murders her spouse and usurps his role. As this crime represents the point of no return in terms of her transformation into a bad woman, the dramatic text enables us to meet Clytemnestre, the monstrous, adulterous wife, and to explore her emotional experience and her view of the situation. The queen's experience alongside her perception of the situation will contribute to an exploration of the motives that lead to her murderous behaviour. Thus, Longepierre's *Électre* is the basis of an

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<sup>65</sup> Campbell, p. 134.

<sup>66</sup> Richard E. Goodkin, *The Tragic Middle: Racine, Aristotle, Euripides* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), p. 135.

<sup>67</sup> Constant Venesoen, *Thématique de la mère dans la tragédie racinienne* (Saint-Denis: Connaissances et savoirs, 2016), p. 131. The critic argues that despite Racine's efforts to accentuate Clytemnestre's maternal traits her image will always be an equivocal one incorporating the anxious mother and the adulterous, murderous wife, because of the Greek tragedians' account of the events that take place after the Trojan War.

exploration of Clytemnestre's experience of having become the perpetrator of a crime condemned by the law and the gods together with the emotions, beliefs and values that enabled and justified this transformation.

This transformed, monstrous Clytemnestre is the first image of the queen incorporated in the play. A gruesome, unflattering depiction of the queen emerges from her daughter's recollection of the traumatic experience of witnessing her mother murdering her father. Électre's memory portrays a ruthless, cruel criminal deriving excited satisfaction from the position of power she acquired as a result of betrayal and deceit:

Sa femme, l'œil farouche et l'œil étincelant,  
Une hache à la main, de cette main cruelle,  
Lui portant sans frémir une atteinte mortelle. (I.2.104-06)

Her courage and composure, essential elements of her character, have become instruments used in this retaliation plot. Moreover, Clytemnestre exploited the intimacy she shared with Agamemnon as his wife, attacking the king in a private moment which rendered him vulnerable (whilst having a bath): 'As-tu [Électre's servant Ismène] donc oublié cette trame infernale, / Ce bain infortuné, cette robe fatale?' (I.2.97-98). The context of this crime and Clytemnestre's behaviour reveal that the queen's virtuous qualities have been taken over by desire for revenge and used for that end. Retaliation transformed her character.

Égisthe's complicity in this criminal act seals Clytemnestre's image as an adulterous wife. Furthermore, by acting like a 'vulgar, tyrannical coward' he drags her further down:<sup>68</sup> 'Le lâche Égisthe armé, mais pâle encor d'effroi, / Foulant aux pieds son maître, assassinant son roi' (I.2.99-100). However, from the young

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<sup>68</sup> A. Maria Van Erp Taalman Kip, 'The Unity of Oresteia' in *Tragedy and the Tragic: Greek Theatre and Beyond*, ed. by M.S. Silk (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 119-138 (p. 126). Électre's description of Égisthe incorporates the traits of Aeschylus's Aegisthus, cowardice, malice and evil.

princess's perspective, Clytemnestre's betrayal of Agamemnon, the abandonment of her duty as a wife and of the maternal responsibility to care and protect her offspring render her crime unnatural:

Sa femme dans son sang osant tremper ses mains,  
Sa femme, ô trahison ! ô complots inhumains! [...]  
Une femme, à mes yeux, a massacré mon père,  
Et pour comble d'horreur, cette femme est ma mère! (I. 2. 106-07, 109-110).

From Électre's perspective Clytemnestre's disregard for the trauma she is inflicting on her offspring represents the main source of her monstrosity. Moreover, Électre's emphasis on this aspect of her mother's behaviour reflects the crux of the queen's moral transformation. The woman that valued blood ties and responsibility of care towards others above all else, has adopted a nihilistic position in which care is focused solely on herself and her survival.<sup>69</sup> The episode at Aulis together with Agamemnon's behaviour might have determined her to consider caring as a weakness and to identify the position of the men present there and implicitly her spouse with strength. The traumatic experience of contemplating the imminent death of her daughter on the orders of her father might have taught her that only the weak care about relationships and the strong do not have to be moral. The strong can obtain glory, power and immortality without having to care for others; the outcome of the Trojan War with Agamemnon returning victorious, displaying shamelessly a new mistress and showing no remorse for the death of his daughter or the loss he has caused his family, reinforces this belief.<sup>70</sup> Thus, this cruelty,

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<sup>69</sup> Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, p.126.

<sup>70</sup> Longepierre's play follows the classical sources (Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* and Euripides's *Iphigenia at Aulis*) when it comes to the sacrifice of Iphigenia at Aulis. As a result, Clytemnestre did lose her daughter in the military camp at Aulis, in the name of the Trojan conflict, and Agamemnon played a crucial part in her death.

coolness and lack of care for blood ties are the consequences of the moral nihilism she adopted as a result of the traumatic episode at Aulis.

The queen's deed can be interpreted as a punishment or as a crime. Whilst Électre clearly perceives it as a crime, Clytemnestre argues in a confrontation with her daughter that her deed represented a rightful punishment for the sacrifice of Iphigénie (580-81). Moreover, the fact that Agamemnon is murdered in a similarly perverted sacrificial act as his daughter reveals that she sought a befitting punishment. However, this similarity between the two crimes might also indicate that she aimed to imitate her spouse's violent behaviour.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, the mimetic nature of this deed might denote a desire to acquire the ethical position of invulnerability and strength that Agamemnon seemed to obtain at Aulis through his daughter's sacrifice.<sup>72</sup> Thus, from Clytemnestre's perspective her spouse's murder becomes rightful punishment as well as a test of her strength, of her ability to exert power with the same disregard for others that her spouse once displayed.

Our first encounter with the queen challenges the image depicted by her daughter. Clytemnestre, the cold-blooded killer, is experiencing a considerable emotional upheaval as a result of a nightmare, which she interprets as an omen from the gods with regard to her imminent downfall:

C'est l'ouvrage des dieux, je sens leur main pressante,

[...] Un songe épouvantable, un songe plein d'horreur ...

[...] Il [le songe] trouble encore mon âme, il frappe encore mes yeux.

(II.4.508, 511, 514)

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<sup>71</sup> Robin N. Mitchell-Boyask, 'Dramatic Scapegoating: On the Uses and Abuses of Girard and Shakespearean Criticism' in *Tragedy and the Tragic: Greek Theatre and Beyond*, ed. By M.S. Silk (Oxford, New York: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 426-37 (pp. 431-32).

<sup>72</sup> The image of Agamemnon invoked by this play is the one presented in the classical myths, and as a result he appears less scrupulous and remorseful about his daughter's death than Racine's counterpart.



Clytemnestre's constant fear for her life accentuates this preoccupation with survival and her disregard for maternal duty. As a result, she finds Égisthe and plans to end Oreste's life in order to remove the source of this anxiety and distress. She has fully embraced the fact that in this context (which she generated), according to both divine and human law her children are her enemies, which has led her to relinquish all responsibility of care towards them. Therefore, although Clytemnestre is less heroic, calm and calculated because of this fear for her life, which manifests itself in her waking hours as well as during sleep, she is focused solely on her survival and has little concern for family bonds.

Clytemnestre's moral downfall is also emphasized by an apparent outburst of motherly affection during her encounter with Électre: 'Malgré vous, malgré moi, je sens que je suis mère' (II.5.573). She feigns maternal feelings in order to manipulate her daughter and pursue her political interests.<sup>73</sup> Beside this display of motherly concern, the queen justifies her behaviour by invoking Iphigénie's death as well as her imminent downfall upon Agamemnon's return as the main motivations for her gruesome crime, in an effort to appease Électre: 'J'ai vengé votre sœur, j'ai prévenu ma perte, / Le sang doit et peut seul laver la trahison'(II.5. 581-82). However, the fact that she needs to justify these actions irritates Clytemnestre and determines her to speak her mind freely. This outburst stems from a belief that this position of authority and power places her above human law and morality: 'Les pères, et les rois, innocents ou coupables, / De leur pouvoir sacré ne sont jamais comptables' (II.5.584-85). Those in positions of authority and power do not have to follow the rules and cannot be held accountable for their actions, a lesson she learned from her spouse at Aulis. Therefore, Clytemnestre believes she is above scrutiny and law. She has completely abandoned the responsibility of care towards her offspring in favour of this position of power and feels no remorse for her crime and the suffering it brings her children. This conviction also enables the queen to

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<sup>73</sup> Barbafieri, p. 727.

relinquish all responsibility for her deeds and behaviour. She is a ruler, and this makes her accountable to no one. As a result, Clytemnestre is unable to show compassion for her daughter's traumatic experience and to rebuild the connection that they once shared. Despite her efforts to feign a maternal stance, she is unable to hide her true feelings once her decisions are questioned. This lack of concern for others, together with these authoritarian beliefs and the inability to take responsibility for her actions define Clytemnestre's tyrannical behaviour and her moral downfall.

The (false) news of Oreste's death, which interrupts the queen's encounter with Électre, reveals another aspect of Clytemnestre's character. The queen experiences a surprising sense of loss: 'Quel murmure plaintif s'élève dans mon cœur! / [...] En faveur d'un ingrat je me sens attendrir' (II.7.671, 676). She is not completely deprived of maternal instincts, as she appears to nurture some affection for her offspring. However, she considers this to be a proof of weakness (since rulers do not have to care about relationships) and seeks to repress it: 'Quelle indigne faiblesse à mon repos contraire' (II.7.677). The queen's new beliefs regarding relationships and morality have determined her to go against natural law. This transformation of her character is the result of a desire to overcome natural instincts and the belief that she is above human law. Clytemnestre's vision of strength and power is a monstrous one as it transgresses both human and natural rules.

Clytemnestre's meeting with the young warrior (Oreste in disguise) who murdered her son provides further insight into the queen's perception of her behaviour and her situation. The queen's gratitude towards this man who helped her hold on to this position of power is enhanced by an instinctual affection (another manifestation of the maternal instincts she seeks to suppress):

Aussi d'auprès de vous je ne puis m'arracher,  
Par des liens secrets, je m'y sens attachée. [...]  
Je dois presque à mon tour vous regarder en fils. (IV.1.1011-12, 1020).

Because of this sympathy and the bond, she now shares with the warrior, she explains her attitude towards her son. The queen confesses that her crime broke the connection between them and forced her to fear Oreste as Agamemnon's sole heir and avenger: 'Le sang déjà versé me forçait à le craindre,' (IV.1.1041). Furthermore, she seems to be aware that duty rather than inclination compels Oreste to seek her downfall: 'Forcé par son devoir à venger un tel père, / Il aurait méconnu Clytemnestre pour mère' (IV.1.1045-46). She also appears to perceive this singular context as the result of necessity rather than choice:

Triste nécessité, dur joug, fatale chaîne. [...]  
Contrainte pour régner à m'affranchir du père,  
Dès lors la mort du fils me devint nécessaire. (IV.1.1057, 1061-62)

Consequently, Clytemnestre adopts the same unwillingness to take responsibility for her actions that Agamemnon displayed at Aulis. The deaths of her husband and son are the necessary consequences of this duty to rule rather than the inevitable effects of her decision to relinquish all responsibility of care for others and focus solely on her self-preservation and her desire. Moreover, the fact that she sees these deeds as necessary acts indicates that she refuses to consider herself a criminal in an attitude similar once more to Agamemnon's stance with regard to their daughter's sacrifice. Thus, Clytemnestre perceives the current context and her behaviour as an inevitable outcome brought about by fate and necessity, because it enables her to avoid acknowledging the criminal nature of her behaviour and her responsibility for this situation.

The queen's response also incorporates further insight into the motives behind Agamemnon's murder. Iphigénie's death, which she invoked as the main reason for this deed during her meeting with Électre, is not mentioned at all during this account of her violent family history. Furthermore, the queen argues that her need to rule made the parricide necessary (1061). Thus, this response transforms

Agamemnon's murder into a matter of personal desire for power rather than an act of rightful punishment for her daughter's sacrifice. This dialogue emphasizes Clytemnestre's immorality, as she appears to have used the justified need to punish her daughter's murderer as a pretext and a means to satisfy her desire for glory and power.

This image of the queen's behaviour and actions is completed by her emotional experience of this situation. Clytemnestre's feelings appear to have had an important influence on her interpretation of these circumstances. Fear for her life prevents her from connecting with her son and justifies her animosity towards him. However, this fear might also serve as a protective mechanism as it is easier to plot the death of an estranged, vengeful son than that of a loving one. Furthermore, this anxiety and these beliefs regarding his character allow her to justify her behaviour and to avoid acknowledging the immoral aspect of her deeds. If Oreste is not as ruthless as she envisages him to be, her attitude becomes persecutory and monstrous. Clytemnestre sees her son as an assassin because her feelings and behaviour towards him need an external justification.

Électre's hostility towards her mother and her lover also provide a justification for Clytemnestre's vengeful behaviour. Her daughter's open display of allegiance to Agamemnon represents a source of anxiety and irritation as well as a constant reminder of her past crimes. As a result, Clytemnestre asks the young warrior (Oreste) to murder her: 'Je dois me rassurer; quelque dieu favorable / Ne pourra-t-il... [...] / M'affranchir de sa sœur [Électre]?' (IV.1.1078-79). Since Électre's conventional morality prevents her from nurturing any matricidal thoughts, this request stems less from a deep-seated fear for her life and more from a distorted idea of justice as an instrument of personal punishment and safety.<sup>74</sup> This view of justice derives from the transformation that her virtues underwent once

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<sup>74</sup> Électre confessed a lack of matricidal intentions during her confrontation with Clytemnestre, v. 630-33.

she abandoned all concern for the community and others.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, the queen is seeking to punish Électre in order to achieve a complete liberation from the effects of her previous deeds and experiences. She seeks the destruction of all those who are hostile to her behaviour, as she symbolically aims to erase all reminders of her past wrongdoing.

Clytemnestre's intimate thoughts regarding her current position are presented in more detail during a discussion with Égisthe. Encouraged by his invitation to speak their minds – 'Madame, ouvrons nos cœurs et nous parlons sans feinte' (IV.3.1098) – Clytemnestre confesses a childhood passion for the throne, which culminated in Agamemnon's assassination as the price she paid to maintain her role as queen:

Du trône, tout mon cœur fut dès l'enfance épris, [...]  
Agamemnon, vainqueur plein d'une folle audace,  
Revenait couronner une esclave en ma place;  
Dans le sang je lavai ma honte et son forfait. (IV.3.1115, 1117-19)

Her crime becomes a gruesome deed performed in the name of a desire for power. Moreover, Clytemnestre herself is a mere slave to this passion for greatness and glory, as the throne is her master and the measure of all things.<sup>76</sup> This confession emphasizes further her moral downfall, as this fascination with power and a desire to hold on to the throne appear to have motivated her crime rather than a need to punish her spouse's wrongdoing. Nonetheless, Clytemnestre believes that Agamemnon's downfall was also the result of his outrageous behaviour. His attempt to remove her from her position of power because of a new love interest endangered

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<sup>75</sup> Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, p.415. Nussbaum's analysis refers to Euripides's *Hecuba* and the transformation that her character undergoes as a result of a decision to avenge her son. Her experience reflects the manner in which she adjusts her beliefs and qualities in order to fit this plan and from this perspective her experience is similar to Clytemnestre's.

<sup>76</sup> Bénichou, p. 29. His analysis refers to Corneille's *Cléopâtre*. Longepierre's Clytemnestre also displays the passion for power and willingness to sacrifice everything for it that characterizes this Cornelian heroine.

the future of their bloodline, affected her honour and consequently required an immediate action: 'Pour conserver mon sang j'aurais encor plus fait' (IV.3.1120). She killed him to protect the future of her household, to avenge her tainted honour and to preserve her position of power. This confession reveals a complex image of the motives that lead her to commit murder, which combines thirst for power, concern for survival, an acute sense of honour and maternal instincts. As a result, this attenuates the immoral nature of the deed because Clytemnestre perceives it as a composite result of selfish desire, fear for her safety, anger at Agamemnon's betrayal and concern for her offspring.

Clytemnestre's monstrosity resides in the desire to repress any trace of this instinctual concern for her offspring and the belief that power, and authority place her above human law. The queen learned this type of behaviour from her spouse, as Agamemnon sowed the seed of mistrust and put her in a vulnerable position (unable to protect her daughter and to fulfil her duty as a good mother), teaching her that the strong do not have to be moral and do not have to care about relationships. These beliefs determine Clytemnestre to abandon her responsibility of care towards others and her concern for maintaining family relationships. Agamemnon's murder and her subsequent plans to murder her offspring indicate this abandonment of her responsibility of care towards others as well as her desire to focus on self-preservation. The queen's need to avoid the vulnerability and betrayal she experienced at Aulis and following Agamemnon's return from Troy has transformed her into a tyrant whose sole concern is personal safety and clinging to power.

Clytemnestre's experience in the aftermath of the Trojan War, which incorporates different beliefs about herself and her family, also reveals a deep fear for her life. This fear for her safety might also stem from the isolation brought about by her position of power, bought at the price of murder and the destruction of family

connections.<sup>77</sup> Although fear for her safety combined with anger towards her children/enemies dominates the queen's emotional experience in the aftermath of Agamemnon's murder, sudden outbursts of maternal affection towards her offspring, and her past adhesion to a selfless mother stance, trouble her. These instincts, which she constantly attempts to repress, denote the fact that she has to adjust her emotions, her beliefs (since according to Nussbaum emotions incorporate not only the perception of the object but also complex beliefs about it) and behaviour to the singular context she finds herself in.<sup>78</sup> She cannot show affection towards her children because in this situation they represent a threat to her safety. Furthermore, she has learned from Agamemnon that the strong do not have to care about relationships and morality, as they are above human law, a belief that influences her behaviour towards her spouse and her offspring after the traumatic experience at Aulis. Clytemnestre's evolution from a selfless mother and devoted wife to a selfish, parricidal tyrant is the composite result of her experience of the dramatic situation which brought about a transformation in her views about morality and goodness as well as a need to avoid the vulnerability and powerlessness she felt at Aulis, a desire for power, a fear for her life and a concern for her bloodline.

### **2.3 Phèdre: a woman caught in the opposition between conscience and passion**

Racine's *Phèdre* aims to teach the spectators a moral lesson in 'a beautiful song of despair in which eternal truths about the forces that possess humankind are uttered by a dominant character riven by an all-consuming passion'.<sup>79</sup> The play incorporates truths about the human condition, uttered and explored through the

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<sup>77</sup> Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, p. 42. According to Gilligan the isolation brought about by competition and standing out is less desirable to women who find this idea of personal achievement and being set apart by success dangerous because it implies separation.

<sup>78</sup> Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, pp. 22, 23, 28. Emotions incorporate our perception of the object and its importance for our own conception of a good life as well as complex beliefs about the object. For instance, anger requires Clytemnestre to believe that someone is willing to cause her significant damage.

<sup>79</sup> Thierry Maulnier quoted by John Campbell, pp. 206-208. See p. 22 for a discussion of Racine's tragic vision.

voice of a female character ‘ni tout à fait coupable, ni tout à fait innocente’.<sup>80</sup> The dramatic text presents the complex context in which Phèdre faces a dilemma brought about by a conflict between passion and conscience. It analyses the relationship of emotion, reason and moral principles in Phèdre’s experience of the tragic context and her process of deliberation. Most critical interpretations focus on this opposition: emotion *versus* reason, virtue *versus* passion. According to Éléonore Zimmermann and Basil Donné, Phèdre is a model of heroism and freedom, an upholder and restorer of the law.<sup>81</sup> According to Thierry Maulnier, Paul Bénichou, Alain Viala, Jean Rohou and Georges Forrestier she is completely irrational so not responsible for her actions or choosing a ‘voluntary enslavement’ to her passion, denying reality in crucial moments whilst being perfectly lucid in others.<sup>82</sup> The critics use the emotion versus reason dichotomy to explain aspects of Phèdre’s behaviour which fall out of line with conventional morality. This approach places some of her decisions and actions in the field of irrationality and even madness because they appear driven by her passion and do not follow the predominant ethical mode. This leads to a devaluation of emotion, particularly in terms of its role in the deliberation process and the fact that it represents an important source of information regarding the character’s idea of leading a good life. Furthermore, these interpretations also devalue decisions and actions which do not fit conventional morality but have the potential to reveal a particular perception of the situation and of goodness determined by the competing claims that the female character has to face and her position within the family and the state. Previous approaches value aspects of Phèdre’s behaviour that fit conventional morality and the mainstream idea of reason and goodness and place the rest of her actions and

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<sup>80</sup> Racine argues in the ‘Préface’ to *Phèdre* that his aim was to imitate the ancients through the moral learning incorporated in the play, p. 833.

<sup>81</sup> Zimmermann, pp. 111-12. Zimmerman alongside Donné argues Phèdre’s rationality and agency. Basil Donné quoted by Campbell, p. 227.

<sup>82</sup> Thierry Maulnier, Paul Bénichou, Alain Viala, Jean Rohou and Georges Forestier argue her irrational, hallucinatory or dream-like state when she confesses her passion to Hippolyte. They are quoted by Campbell, p. 233.



decisions in the category of irrationality and emotion. This analysis will seek to revalorise these aspects of her behaviour which fall out of line with the predominant ethical mode in order to reveal that there is a particular set of values and beliefs which determine these decisions and actions which have been previously labelled as irrational or solely driven by emotion. Passion plays a part in Phèdre's actions and decisions. However, it is but one of the factors that contribute to her moral downfall and it cannot be used as a justification for all aspects of her behaviour which fall out of line with the predominant ethical mode, particularly in the light of new developments regarding emotions and marginalised ethical standpoints. This analysis aims to present an alternative image of Phèdre's actions and decisions in order to recuperate aspects of her behaviour which have been labelled as irrational or passion-driven and to deepen the issue of her guilt and responsibility by presenting other potential factors that have contributed to her moral downfall.

This analysis of Phèdre's emotional responses will be paired with a critical approach inspired by Gilligan's ethics of care perspective in order to explore further her deliberation process and her behaviour. This critical lens provides an alternative view of the world and goodness which enables an assessment of Phèdre's decisions and actions from a viewpoint that departs from traditional morality. Previous analyses used traditional benchmarks for assessing Phèdre's character, adhering to the idea that men's experience is universal and thereby side-lining the expression of women's experience.<sup>83</sup> As a result, Phèdre's behaviour is approached mostly through analytical frameworks inspired by early modern theological doctrine and Aristotelian virtue ethics.<sup>84</sup> Our analysis, in contrast, will provide an alternative

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<sup>83</sup> Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, pp. 20, 26.

<sup>84</sup> Lucien Goldmann in *Le Dieu caché: étude sur la vision tragique dans les Pensées de Pascal et dans le théâtre de Racine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955) as well as Bénichou, Sellier and many others. Zimmermann, pp. 48-49, specifically refers to St. Augustine and Descartes but mentions that other theological milieus of Racine's time promoted this notion that was incorporated into lay philosophy. Goodkin, p. 159-161. He interprets Phèdre's behaviour as a tension between Aristotle's law of the excluded middle and that of the virtuous middle.

interpretation of Phèdre's character which sheds new light on her motives, her guilt and responsibility.

Phèdre's arrival in Trézène triggers a moral crisis: the former attempt to solve her predicament involving the suppression of her feelings towards Hippolyte, has not proved effective, and she is faced once more with the dilemma she attempted to put an end to: 'Par mon époux lui-même à Trézène amenée, [...]. Ma blessure trop vive aussitôt a saigné' (I.3.302, 304). Adhering to a conventional idea of self-sacrifice as proof of female goodness and virtue, she decides that only death can enforce the initial decision to stifle her monstrous sexuality. She exerts her freedom 'to leave a place that is dangerous for [her] moral integrity' through death if there is no other way:<sup>85</sup> 'Noble et brillant auteur d'une triste famille, [...] Soleil, je te viens voir pour la dernière fois' (I.3.169, 172). This reference to her divine ancestor moments before taking her life suggests that Phèdre perceives this dilemma not only as an issue of rights and rules opposing her emotions, but also as a matter of a responsibility to sustain the network of family relationships that defines her identity. Phèdre's attitude here indicates a view of morality that incorporates awareness of connection and of the moral person as one who acts whilst considering the consequences of his/her actions for everybody involved: 'Toi [Soleil], dont ma mère osait se vanter d'être fille, / Qui peut-être rougis du trouble où tu me vois,' (I.3.170-71). Furthermore, Phèdre's belief in the gods, specifically the Sun, as guardians of the social and natural order, able to monitor and judge her actions, gives weight to her duty of care towards this illustrious lineage. Thus, Phèdre adheres to the conventional image of a good woman by sacrificing herself due to a sense of morality, stemming from the responsibility of care towards others combined with shame at her inability to control this passion which transgresses social norms and principles, and threatens the relationships that support and sustain her identity.

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<sup>85</sup> Jacques Scherer quoted by Campbell, p. 233.

Whilst Phèdre attempts to contain this desire by committing suicide, C enone aims to dissuade her by emphasizing the queen’s duty of care towards her husband and children. This suggests that in C enone’s eyes a good woman is a pious mother and wife, and failure to fulfil these duties is a sign of selfishness, betrayal and even sacrilege: ‘Vous trahissez l’ epoux   qui la foi vous lie, / Vous trahissez enfin vos enfants malheureux,’ (I.3.198-99). The servant emphasizes Ph edre’s duty to nurture the connection with her children, a relationship which sustains life, denoting an appeal to a maternal morality which according to Gilligan involves ensuring care for dependants.<sup>86</sup> As a result, the arguments she uses to dissuade Ph edre from suicide have the opposite effect, because she is unaware of the queen’s sexual desire. Consequently, C enone’s speech reinforces Ph edre’s suicidal plan as this decision relied on the same awareness of her responsibility of care towards her spouse, her children and her ancestors. The queen aims not to hurt them by displaying such inappropriate behaviour and to protect them from the social, political, and psychological consequences of her passion. The servant’s plight also invokes the mistress’s responsibility of care towards her by depicting a rather bleak image of her isolation: ‘Mon pays, mes enfants, pour vous j’ai tout quitt . / R eserviez-vous ce prix   ma fid elit ?’ (I.3.235-6). This image of former connections abandoned in favour of Ph edre indicates that the servant’s identity is profoundly related to this relationship, which represents her entire world: the threat of its disruption represents a loss of self. C enone’s identity is defined by her relationship to Ph edre and the mother-like role she has adopted which explains this determination to rescue her mistress at all costs. Nonetheless, Ph edre is reluctant to divulge her secret as speaking out will reveal the ‘fragility of her goodness’, her vulnerability through the inability to control this emotion as well as the selfish and immoral nature of this desire to transgress social norms and thus to hurt others in order to respond to her need: ‘Quand tu sauras mon crime, et le sort qui m’accable, / Je n’en mourrai pas

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

moins, j'en mourrai plus coupable' (I.3.241-2). The queen's resistance to Œnone's plea is determined by an awareness of the consequences of this act of speaking which will bring to light her weakness and immorality.

Despite Phèdre's efforts to keep this passion a secret, Œnone's appeals to her mistress's maternal morality prevail: the queen chooses to sustain her connection with this surrogate mother figure and avoids hurting her by dying without revealing the source of her ailment. Phèdre's speech reveals how much of her identity is defined by the relationship with her mother and sister: 'Dans quels égarements l'amour jeta ma mère! [...] / Ariane, ma sœur! De quel amour blessée' (I.3.250, 253). She does not renounce the attachment to her mother and experiences herself as 'more continuous with and related to the external-object world'.<sup>87</sup> She is Pasiphaé's daughter and Ariane's sister and now has to face the same trials as the other women in her family, and to control the uncontrollable because it is part of her relational sense of self. The memory of her mother and sister serves as a warning against impulses of self-expression and any deviation from convention and morality. As a result, she seeks to emphasize an adhesion to morality and to goodness through her constant struggle to fend off this dangerous erotic longing. She gives Œnone an account of the measures she has taken to suppress it: 'Je l'évitais partout. [...] / J'affectais les chagrins d'une injuste marâtre' (I.3.289,294). However, she acknowledges the fragility of her precautions in the face of unforeseen circumstances: her efforts were undone by Thésée's decision to bring her to Trézène. Consequently, Phèdre reveals once more a complexity of virtue, as she acknowledges the vulnerability of her goodness and the power that chance has had on her, in an attitude that echoes Sophocles' *Antigone*.<sup>88</sup> Phèdre's confession of her passion reveals an adhesion to an idea of female goodness defined through self-sacrifice and responsibility of care towards others, whilst her erotic longing is

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<sup>87</sup> Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, pp. 7-8. Gilligan explains this relationship with the mother and its influence on one's identity.

<sup>88</sup> Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, p. 67.

perceived as a source of immorality, because it incorporates the possibility of hurting others in the name of self-gratification and a shameful lack of control over her body.

This view of morality as responsibility of care towards the unequal and dependant influences Phèdre's decision to abandon her suicidal plans once she hears the news of Thésée's death. C none's speech persuades her to continue living by emphasizing the queen's duty towards her son and the nefarious consequences of her death on his livelihood: 'Sa mort vous laisse un fils   qui vous vous devez, / Esclave, s'il vous perd, et roi, si vous vivez' (I.5.343-44). Moreover, the servant argues that the failure to protect her son would also attract the opprobrium of her ancestors as an undeniable proof of immoral, selfish behaviour: 'Et ses cris innocents port s jusques aux dieux, / Ironent contre sa m re irriter ses a eux' (I.5.347-8). C none's speech renews the appeal to her mistress's ethical code and her responsibility of care towards her son. However, the servant has adapted her plea to this singular context by incorporating a new argument: Ph dre is no longer bound by marriage vows to care for her spouse, Th s e's death has put an end to duty and made her a free woman. This line of reasoning is particularly appealing to the queen as it presents her with a context that incorporates the possibility of asserting herself and satisfying her desire in a relatively safe manner without the danger of hurting her spouse or her child. Moreover, an alliance between the queen and her stepson will contribute to the plan of protecting both herself and her offspring from potential violence from their enemies: 'Vous avez l'un [Hippolyte] et l'autre une juste ennemie. / Unissez-vous tous deux pour combattre Aricie' (I.5.361-2). Thus, C none presents the news of Th s e's death as a unique opportunity to combine responsiveness to others with responsiveness to herself. Furthermore, C none's speech acquires a compelling nature because it depicts an image of danger, in the shape of the isolation the queen and her son might face following the reconfiguration of relationships within the ruling household. Th s e was the centre of the web of connections, which maintained order and specified everyone's duties; his death has

the potential to leave both Phèdre and her son outside this network of relationships and expose them to the danger of losing legitimacy once they are no longer at its nexus. The reconfiguration of connections that C enone proposes appeals to the queen because it comes from a similar view of morality, emphasizes the danger that Phèdre and her son might face, and provides her with an opportunity to solve the tension between duty of care towards others and responsiveness towards herself.

Phèdre is receptive to the servant's arguments and willing to follow her advice. Nonetheless, she is reluctant to take responsibility for this choice and to acknowledge any evidence of self-interest: 'H e bien!   tes conseils je me laisse entra ner' (I.5.363). This reticence to accept responsibility for this decision is related to the fact that 'availability of choice' with its onus of accountability is not a familiar experience to women who were anchored in passivity through the politics of sexual relationships in which their only strategies of self-assertion and control involved suppressing their needs, amounting according to Gilligan, to 'evasion and withholding of judgment in the moral realm'.<sup>89</sup> Hence, Ph eдре follows the servant's suggestion because it provides an opportunity for self-assertion and responsiveness to herself within a safe context that adheres to her concept of goodness and allows her not to take full responsibility for this decision.

This interaction between mistress and servant represents the basis of their dynamic throughout the entire play, as the latter will continue to provide advice which the former will reluctantly follow, thus creating ambiguity regarding Ph eдре's guilt and responsibility. However, Michael Hawcroft argues that although the two women can attempt to persuade and dissuade each other, the queen has the power to command whilst the servant has the responsibility to obey.<sup>90</sup> Consequently, Ph eдре is in a position to accept or refuse C enone's suggestions, as the latter's influence is limited by her inferior social position. C enone is Ph eдре's 'active

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<sup>89</sup> Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, p. 68.

<sup>90</sup> Michael Hawcroft, *Word as Action: Racine, Rhetoric and Theatrical Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 181.

collaborator’, as although the queen might see her as a mother-figure to whom she is bound by a duty of care, she also has an acute awareness of the hierarchical norms that govern social relationships.<sup>91</sup> This situation enables Phèdre to uphold her conventional idea of goodness, as it allows the queen to avoid taking full responsibility for her actions and decisions by having an ally whose behaviour she controls.

The queen meets Hippolyte with the intention of preventing a potential conflict and ensuring her son’s safety by forging an alliance. However, her offspring’s well-being is soon overshadowed by the more tempting need for self-assertion and self-gratification: ‘à la conscience du devoir se substitue la conscience d’aimer’; her responsibility of care towards others is replaced by responsiveness to herself.<sup>92</sup> As a result, Phèdre approaches this encounter with Hippolyte, the object of her desire, as a chance to fulfil her duty towards her son and to use this new freedom to express her needs and wants. Phèdre’s attempt to create an alliance between herself and Hippolyte in order to protect her son’s interests begins with establishing a connection between the two half-brothers and moves towards sustaining it, in order to reconfigure her relationship with the prince. For this purpose, she invokes a secret emotion to justify her past persecutory actions, thus partly revealing her secret: ‘Seigneur. Vous m’avez vue attachée à vous nuire: / Dans le fond de mon cœur vous ne pouviez pas lire’ (II.5.597-98). According to Venesoen, this speech bruises her ego in order to force a confession of an agreeable feeling as she condemns herself in order to obtain a reaction from Hippolyte, a positive or negative indication of his feelings towards her.<sup>93</sup> However, this may also represent an attempt to justify her apparently malevolent attitude and the decision not to fulfil her maternal duty of care. Phèdre defends herself and argues that these past deeds are not a manifestation of her evil nature. Hence, the queen’s deprecatory

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<sup>91</sup> Kenneth Tynan quoted by John Campbell, p. 231.

<sup>92</sup> Venesoen, *Jean Racine et le procès de la culpabilité*, p. 162.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

stance is motivated by a concern to establish a connection with Hippolyte for her and her son's sake and the need to justify a past behaviour denoting a failure of her responsibility of care.

On account of the king's death Phèdre has the opportunity to enter into a marital relationship similar to her old one, as Hippolyte bears Thésée's physical features, status and bloodline. Phèdre seeks a connection with the prince because it also has the potential of continuing her marital relationship with an ideal version of her deceased spouse: 'Je l'aime [...] / [...] tel que je vous voi' (II.5.635, 640). Furthermore, this new connection will enable Phèdre to be a full person with initiative and will power, as she envisions herself as his active collaborator and companion in an imaginative account of Thésée's slaying of the Minotaur:

Ma sœur du fil fatal eût armé votre main.

Mais non, dans ce dessein je l'aurais devancée. [...]

Moi-même devant vous j'aurais voulu marcher,

Et Phèdre au Labyrinthe avec vous descendue,

Se serait avec vous retrouvée, ou perdue. (II.5.652-53, 660-62)

The manner in which she reveals her feelings suggests according to Venesoen, that Phèdre 'travestit la mère en femme, la veuve en amante' as her duty towards her son is undermined by her passion in this attempt to seduce Hippolyte, which tests the limits of decency.<sup>94</sup> This attempt to satisfy her passion and contract a marital relationship with Hippolyte immediately after her spouse's death may not adhere to our norms of decency. However, Phèdre's duty of care towards her son is not incompatible with this endeavour since an alliance with the prince would ensure her offspring's safety. Nonetheless, Venesoen's interpretation grants Phèdre more agency than other critical appraisals, which consider her labyrinth confession 'sleep-

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<sup>94</sup> Venesoen, *Jean Racine et le procès de la culpabilité*, pp. 163-64.



walking’, ‘a dream-like’ state on account of her use of imagination in this recreation of the Minotaur story.<sup>95</sup> If we consider feelings to represent judgements of value which reveal a view of the world from the perspective of one’s own goals, values and projects as Nussbaum argues, then Phèdre’s desire for a new, improved Thésée tells the story of a marriage filled with frustration and betrayal:<sup>96</sup> ‘Je l’aime, non point tel que l’ont vu les Enfers, / Volage adorateur de mille objets divers’ (II.5.635-36). This new connection is thus seen as an opportunity to redefine herself as a full person with a voice and an opinion in a relationship based on love and care – see again verses 653, 655, 659-62. Moreover, this imaginary account incorporates her view of this passion as the driving force behind her behaviour and the need for self-assertion: ‘L’amour m’en eût d’abord inspiré la pensée’ (II.5.654). Phèdre’s imaginary descent into the labyrinth alongside Hippolyte, although a result of her passion, provides us with her view of the situation, the relationship she seeks and the change that her identity will undergo through this new alliance.

Hippolyte views the situation as a matter of rights and rules (which bind him to loyalty towards his father) and his stepmother’s behaviour as a violation of conventional morality, which equates good with maintaining the existing social norms and values. From this perspective Phèdre’s speech amounts to an ‘overthrowing of the father’, a betrayal of Thésée and the law he upholds.<sup>97</sup> Hippolyte’s negative reaction and his adhesion to patriarchal law, brings back to the surface Phèdre’s belief in ‘selfless’ behaviour as proof of goodness, and according to Venesoen, she seeks to gain the sympathy of her prey through the wretchedness of her plight.<sup>98</sup> ‘Objet infortuné des vengeances célestes, / Je m’abhorre encor plus que tu ne me détestes’ (II.5.677-78). In depicting her miserable situation, Phèdre underlines the tension between responsibility of care towards herself and towards others with humility and painful honesty. This suggests that she perceives Hippolyte

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<sup>95</sup> Thierry Maulnier, Harry Barnwell, Jean Rohou, Georges Forestier, quoted by Campbell, p. 230.

<sup>96</sup> Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, pp. 37-49.

<sup>97</sup> Bennett, p. 7.

<sup>98</sup> See Venesoen, *Jean Racine et le procès de la culpabilité*, pp. 168-69.

as a confidant, someone she values, whose love and respect she wants to win with this tale of her struggle and her conflicting beliefs, and not as a prey to be hunted and trapped. This idea is further reinforced by the fact that Phèdre shares with her stepson the intimate experience of this situation, namely, the fact that this need to express her desires has overcome her idea of a good woman, and she perceives this erotic passion as an external energy not connected to her 'current ways of valuing and appraising'.<sup>99</sup> Feelings often stem from 'early object relations' and motivate us in ways that conflict with 'other appraisals and emotions that pertain to our present'.<sup>100</sup> Her relationship with her mother contributed to an intuitive belief that she is like the mother, which might have inspired an equally unnatural passion. So Phèdre perceives this passion as an external force, a curse from the gods determining her to behave against her moral beliefs, as Hippolyte's reaction reawakens her awareness of responsibility towards others and her conventional morality. She experiences an upsurge of guilt and a heightened awareness of immorality, which manifests itself in the resurfacing of her initial desire to die: 'Venge-toi, punis-moi d'un odieux amour. / Voilà mon cœur. C'est là que ta main doit frapper' (II.5.699, 704). For this purpose, she takes his sword in a gesture that reveals a deep despair with regard to the failure to establish a connection with the object of her desire and the transgression of conventional morality, which transforms her into a bad woman, just like her mother Pasiphaé.

Venesoen interpreted this attempted seduction as an act of aggression and entrapment, subconsciously driven by a project of mastery.<sup>101</sup> However, from the perspective of this ethics of care approach it can be interpreted as an attempt to initiate a connection which solves the tension between her duty of care towards her son and her responsiveness to herself. Phèdre's gesture aims to ensure the safety of her son and to provide the opportunity of redefining herself in a relationship based

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<sup>99</sup> Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, p. 79.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>101</sup> Venesoen, *Jean Racine et le procès de la culpabilité*, pp. 167-70.

on love and care. But because it goes beyond social norms, and incorporates a different view of relationships and morality, this deed becomes an act of violence and a source of fear. She strays from the dominant ideology, and this is perceived as a sign of immorality and transgression. By shifting perspective, we are able to see this scene as the result of conflicting ideas and beliefs, and to perceive her behaviour as an attempt to bring a marginal ethical position to the centre.

Phèdre is reluctant to assume full responsibility for this confession and blames Œnone for suggesting this course of action. This emphasizes her pathological need to adhere to a blameless victim stance and her lack of self-confidence derived from this inability to make a choice:<sup>102</sup> ‘Pourquoi détournais-tu mon funeste dessein?’ (III.1.747) She has to perceive herself as a victim (of necessity, bad advice) in order to maintain self-respect, which is connected to this conventional morality. Nonetheless, Phèdre’s adhesion to conventional morality is gradually undermined by the need to satisfy her desire, as her passion seems to subvert her reason, conscience and will. Her conversation with Œnone reveals that she finds rational justification for pursuing this connection and satisfying her passion. Her intellect appears to become a ‘blind instrument of selfism’, denoting an Augustinian view of human nature:<sup>103</sup> ‘Œnone, il peut quitter cet orgueil qui te blesse’ (III.1.781). She seems to abandon morality altogether as she aims to buy Hippolyte’s favour through the promise of power: ‘Va trouver de ma part ce jeune ambitieux, / Œnone. Fais briller la couronne à ses yeux’ (III.1.799-800). The queen detaches herself from conventional morality and makes the decision to pursue her desire. This sign of autonomy and independence is motivated by a passion that aims to control and possess, denoting a responsiveness to herself to the point of denying the other’s human qualities, and a disregard for her responsibility of care towards others. Phèdre’s love reveals itself to be driven by an aggressive impulse towards

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<sup>102</sup> Phèdre’s desire to adhere to a victim stance is explored further in the transactional analysis approach in Chapter 3, p. 292.

<sup>103</sup> Bénichou, p. 106.

its object.<sup>104</sup> It lacks the essential characteristics of a good love, namely, compassion, reciprocity, individuality with separateness and qualitative distinctiveness.<sup>105</sup> Her plan to bend Hippolyte's rigid moral stance denotes disregard for his virtues, values, individuality and agency. Under the influence of this excessive passion, Phèdre has transitioned from responsiveness to others to the point of self-annihilation to responsiveness to herself with disregard for others and their humanity, and this represents a source of her guilt.

When news arrives of Thésée's return, Phèdre quickly renounces this new-found responsiveness to herself and renews her adhesion to selflessness as goodness through an acute sense of guilt for the betrayal of her spouse and the failure to perform her duty of care towards him: 'Mon époux est vivant, Œnone, c'est assez. / J'ai fait l'indigne aveu d'un amour qui l'outrage' (III.3.832-33). Moreover, as her sense of self-respect is directly connected to an adhesion to this moral stance, she is reluctant to take full responsibility for the past choices, which denoted a responsiveness to herself unbecoming this idea of female goodness. As a result, Œnone becomes the main culprit for Phèdre's deviation from the initial suicide plan and her transgression: 'Je te l'ai prédit, mais tu n'as pas voulu. / Sur mes justes remords tes pleurs ont prévalu' (III.3.836-37). This sudden change of circumstance has determined the queen to return to conventional morality and to her decision to commit suicide in order to put an end to this situation whilst simultaneously denouncing her past behaviour supported by Œnone whom she associates with the image of her sinful mother and her all-pervasive influence: 'Je mourais ce matin digne d'être pleurée. / J'ai suivi tes conseils, je meurs déshonorée' (III.3.838-39).

Œnone's connection with the queen is again threatened by the latter's decision to end her life. Aiming to preserve this relationship that defines her identity, Œnone channels Phèdre's responsibility of care towards her children to deter these

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<sup>104</sup> Bénichou, p. 136.

<sup>105</sup> Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, p. 479.

suicidal plans. She uses Phèdre's fear and mistrust to create the monstrous image of a ruthless Hippolyte fuelling her paranoid delusions regarding his behaviour:

Hippolyte est heureux [...].

De son triomphe affreux je le verrai jouir

Et conter votre honte à qui voudra l'ouïr. (III.3.875, 879-80)

In Œnone's imaginary account of the consequences of her mistress's death, both Phèdre and her children are passive victims of Hippolyte's violent discourses. Although responsive to this delusion of persecution, the queen displays the same reluctance to take responsibility for Œnone's suggested pre-emptive calumny and an awareness of the serious and immoral nature of this accusation: 'Moi, que j'ose opprimer et noircir l'innocence!' (III.3.893). The queen's sense of morality is not completely lost even amid this paranoid delusion. As a result, Œnone adjusts her discourse and appeases the queen's fears by taking on the persecutor role and implicitly responsibility for the accusation whilst simultaneously assuring her that the consequences of their plot will be of a minor nature. The servant is willing to bend her morals to preserve this relationship that defines her: 'Puisque je vous perds sans ce triste remède, / Votre vie est pour moi d'un prix à qui tout cède' (III. 3.897-98). Œnone's plan stems from a desire to protect Phèdre and is effective because it draws on the queen's guilt regarding her responsibility of care towards her children.

The queen may not be the active agent of Œnone's plot but she is an accomplice. Her first meeting with Thésée confirms this role as Œnone's partner in crime, as her ambiguous speech about shame and loss of honour prepares the king for the accusation: 'Vous êtes offensé. La fortune jalouse / N'a pas en votre absence épargné votre épouse' (III.3.917-18). Phèdre's actions are not guided solely by concern for her well-being, as she seeks to fulfil her duty of care towards her children and desires to protect her family, but she shares, albeit reluctantly, her servant's guilt.

Thésée's violent reaction makes the queen realize the consequences of her actions. The prospect of having sealed her stepson's death and being involved in the act of spilling innocent blood determines a return to conventional morality and foregrounds her responsibility of care towards others. Phèdre is prepared to clear the prince's name and confess her guilt. This attempt to prevent Hippolyte's death is also incorporated in the duty of care towards her children, as it aims to protect them from the social, political and psychological consequences of being associated with a criminal mother. Nonetheless, the encounter with Thésée has a different outcome altogether, very much like Œnone's calumnious plot, as the king reveals that his stepson invoked his feelings towards Aricie as evidence of his innocence: 'Il soutient qu' Aricie a son cœur, a sa foi, / Qu'il l'aime' (IV.4.1187). The shock of this new information surpasses Thésée's indication of Hippolyte's imminent death, as the queen's passion is reawakened and hinders her moral intentions once more: 'Peut-être si la voix ne m'eût été coupée, / L'affreuse vérité me serait échappée' (IV.5.1201-02). Phèdre's good intentions are overshadowed by her jealousy at the news of Hippolyte's love interest. Her love turns to envy and hatred as she becomes aware that this external object of her desire, the person who has the power to diminish her flourishing has done so by exerting his independence and separateness through finding another lover. This awareness also affects her self-esteem as the belief in the prince's inability to love, which allowed her to overcome the pain of his rejection, has been shattered: 'Hippolyte est sensible, et ne sent rien pour moi!' (IV.5.1203). From Phèdre's perspective Hippolyte has shown no consideration for her feelings and well-being and as a result he deserves her disregard: 'Je suis le seul objet qu'il ne saurait souffrir. / Et je me chargerais du soin de le défendre!' (IV.5.1211-2). A bruised self-esteem and anger at the loss of this person whom she considers important for her flourishing and now treats her with such lack of concern, inform this decision to abandon the plan to save Hippolyte.

Phèdre's anger transforms into a need to control the source of good and to destroy the object of Hippolyte's desire: 'Il faut perdre Aricie' (IV.6.1259). Driven

by an acute sense of being deprived of the external object which has power over her flourishing, she fails to acknowledge Hippolyte as a human being endowed with autonomy or agency. She cannot see him as a free agent, beyond his role within her goals. The intensity of this desire produces a shuddering awareness of her moral decline and engages a conventional moral code: ‘Que fais-je? Où ma raison se va-t-elle égarer?’ (IV.6.1264). Phèdre is overwhelmed by the immoral nature of these thoughts and feels ashamed of having tainted the memory of her ancestors in the name of this passion: ‘Le ciel, tout l’univers est plein de mes aïeux’ (IV.6.1276). Phèdre is determined to end her life as she has compromised all the connections that make up her identity and her actions affect all family members towards whom she has a responsibility of care: spouse, children, stepson and even C enone (surrogate mother). Since functioning outside this web of connections that support and define her identity is impossible, the only solution is suicide. After having explored the depths of her decline corresponding to an excessive responsiveness to herself driven by a passion with the features of the child’s early object relations and having attained an awareness of the consequences of her actions, Phèdre returns to conventional morality and decides to commit suicide.

As C enone assisted and supported the decisions that lead to this moral decline by presenting her with the possibility of fulfilling this passion and the plan to accuse Hippolyte, Phèdre harshly reprimands the servant for her nefarious influence. She turns against this loyal servant who only aimed to protect her and the bond that they share at all costs, by blaming her for encouraging this act of transgression:

[...] Va-t’en, monstre ex ecrable.

Va, laisse-moi le soin de mon sort d eplorable.

Puisse le juste ciel dignement te payer. (IV.6.1317-19)

As this relationship with the servant enabled the part of her identity that caused this moral downfall, Ph edre decides to put an end to it. Moreover, since C enone was the

only one to encourage Phèdre's responsiveness to herself, it could be argued that by cutting herself off from the servant's influence she is suppressing her needs and desires. Thus, this gesture of severing all ties with this mother-like figure and repressing her desires in favour of a selfless stance represents Phèdre's adhesion to the conventional, patriarchal norms of morality supported and upheld by her male ancestors, her spouse and Hippolyte.

If for Phèdre this relationship represents part of her identity, in Œnone's case this connection defines her personality and represents her entire world since she has dedicated her life to the queen: 'Mon pays, mes enfants, pour vous j'ai tout quitté' (I.3.235). As a result, the servant views this separation as the loss of her sense of self.<sup>106</sup> With no connection left to sustain her, isolated and under the influence of a feeling of loss of self, Œnone commits suicide. By depriving Œnone of the only meaningful relationship, which largely defined her social status and her personality, Phèdre causes her death. Ironically the servant becomes a victim of the relationship she aimed to protect and sustain.

After violently severing her ties with Œnone, the queen takes control of her destiny and decides to confess her transgression and commit suicide. According to Zimmermann, this gesture marks her heroism, as she overcomes the temptation to give up the fight against evil, leaves the mitigating circumstances aside and rises above common human weakness in this decision to punish herself.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, the queen is determined to reveal her guilt and clear her stepson's name in an act of bravery and selflessness: 'C'est moi qui sur ce fils chaste et respectueux / Osai jeter un œil profane, incestueux' (V.7.1623-24) However, this confession incorporates a half-truthful account of her behaviour as it emphasizes Œnone's involvement in her decision-making process:

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<sup>106</sup> Jean Baker Miller quoted by Gilligan (p. 169) in *In a Different Voice*. Baker argued that women's sense of self is dependent upon making and maintaining relationships. As a result, the threat of disruption of an affiliation is perceived as closer to a total loss of self.

<sup>107</sup> Zimmermann, pp. 110-111.



Le ciel mit dans mon sein une flamme funeste.  
La détestable C enone a conduit tout le reste.  
[...]  
La perfide abusant de ma faiblesse extr eme.  
S'est h at ee   vos yeux de l'accuser lui-m eme. (V.7.1625-6, 1629-30)

Hippolyte's rehabilitation is achieved through an incrimination of C enone and the gods, indicating a reluctance to take full responsibility for her actions and deeds, which undermines the heroic, selfless nature of the speech. Thus, the moral stance of Ph edre's confession is weakened by an attempt to redeem herself whilst clearing Hippolyte's name. Nonetheless, the suicide and the confession emphasize Ph edre's role as upholder of the law and of the established order of the universe: 'Et la mort   mes yeux d erobant la clart e / Rend au jour, qu'ils souillaient, toute sa puret e' (V.7.1643-44). According to Ivan Barko, Ph edre appears to be sacrificing herself to 'save the world' and this too contributes to her heroic image.<sup>108</sup> Only by adhering to this morality stemming from the maintenance of existing social norms and values and displaying remorse and guilt for showing responsiveness to her needs and desires, is Ph edre able to rehabilitate her character. According to Zimmermann, the suicide is a heroic act, as she acquires will power and freedom by acting within the boundaries defined by notions of order and moral value, which she has internalized and personalized in her relations with the gods and her ancestors. In other words, her death is an act of freedom because it restores patriarchal order together with the morality, social norms and values that it supports. Zimmermann defines freedom within the Racinian universe as an act of will, which inserts itself between events or passions determined by destiny.<sup>109</sup> Following this analytical framework, Ph edre's confession to Hippolyte can also be interpreted as an act of freedom since she adopted an active stance in following the path that fate (in the form of her passion

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<sup>108</sup> Ivan Barko quoted in Campbell, p. 242.

<sup>109</sup> Zimmermann, p. 111.

and the false news of Thésée's death) seemed to guide her towards (whether the queen is willing to acknowledge this or not). However, this gesture acquires a dangerous quality because it transgresses social norms and values and threatens the established order, as it incorporates a responsiveness to oneself and an autonomy that good women were not allowed to contemplate. Consequently, Phèdre's will power and heroism are acknowledged as long as they reflect a deep connection to the ruling order. From an ethics of care perspective this gesture represents a repression of her desires and a denunciation of her responsiveness to herself in order to uphold a discourse that ties women to their responsibility of care towards others and denies them the opportunity to acquire a voice. She denounces and detaches herself from her desires and needs in order to uphold the established order and conventional morality.

Phèdre seizes the opportunity to satisfy her desire and to become an autonomous being which contravenes the traditional image of a 'good woman' because good women have to be selfless and focused on their responsibility of care towards others (particularly their spouse and children). Nonetheless, this decision to follow her desire is also informed by a need to create and maintain connections in order to protect herself and her offspring from potential violence from their enemies. Thésée's death is perceived as an opportunity to combine responsiveness to herself with responsiveness to others. The queen's passion does determine a need to possess the object of her desire which is responsible for the anger and jealousy that undermine her attempt to save Hippolyte. However, Phèdre's care for her son and her duty towards Thésée constantly influence her decisions and actions, including the confession of her passion to Hippolyte. This gesture alongside the decision to follow C enone's advice are instances in which she combines a need for self-assertion and the satisfaction of her desire with a responsibility of care towards her offspring. These actions do not stem simply from the irrational, violent nature of her passion as Venesoen, Maulnier and Rohou argue. They reflect a specific perspective of herself, the world and her moral dilemma.

### 3.1 Conclusion

This analysis provides an alternative reading of Médée's, Clytemnestre's and Phèdre's behaviour which indicates that their decisions are not simply the result of disregard for others but rather a complex process which involves their experience of their situation, their beliefs about what it represents to lead a good life, and their emotions. Médée decides to assert her desire, abandon the safety of family ties and transgress norms in pursuit of her passion for Jason which becomes an essential element for her wellbeing. Médée places desire above duty, and she considers this a sign of courage as she exposes herself to isolation and social opprobrium on account of this disregard for authority, social participation and acceptance. In this context, Jason's betrayal and his attempt to deprive her of the two remaining relationships of care which are now part of her identity and represent the main source of her flourishing produces a moral crisis. Médée is in a position of vulnerability and isolation as she has no family or friends to rely on and she seeks to escape it by abandoning all concern for others and asserting her autonomy. This leads to a heroic attitude, aiming to reflect her invulnerability and omnipotence by putting an end to the family ties which ensured her safety and wellbeing. She is above humans as she does not need the support of this web of connections. Furthermore, her actions also put Jason in a position of isolation and vulnerability as she deprives him of his bloodline and the connections which ensure his safety in Corinth, namely, his marriage to Créuse. This aims to expose him to the same dire situation she found herself in on account of his betrayal and disregard for her wellbeing. Médée's behaviour is driven by pride, a need for revenge for the mistreatment she has suffered as well as an interpretation of relationships as a source of safety and an idea of strength and power which stems from the ability to abandon these ties in favour of self-reliance. She acknowledges the importance of connection for humans as she chooses to assert her superhuman nature by putting an end to all relationships of care. Médée's behaviour and decisions do not stem merely from jealousy but also from these specific beliefs regarding wellbeing, power and justice

and the emotional responses to this dramatic context.

Clytemnestre also abandons her responsibility of care towards others as a result of Agamemnon's betrayal and her traumatic experience at Aulis. Her desire for revenge stems from a need to avoid the position of vulnerability and powerless she is exposed to when she contemplates her daughter's sacrifice. This causes the disintegration of her marital relationship and influences her decision to abandon these relationships of care that have rendered her vulnerable. She learns from her spouse that the strong do not have to care about connections and that power and authority place her above human law and morality. Clytemnestre's character is transformed by the dramatic context as her main concern becomes survival and responsiveness to herself and justice is an instrument of personal punishment and safety. She finds herself in a position of isolation as she destroys the family connections that ensure her safety and she is in constant fear for her life. This anxiety informs Clytemnestre's attitude towards her children as she perceives them as threats to her safety, enemies to be eliminated. This stance justifies Clytemnestre's ethical standpoint as her offspring become partly responsible for the abandonment of her maternal duty of care. She does not seek to murder her children in order to assert her superhuman abilities like Médée, but to justify her moral stance. The queen of Argos's dramatic moral transformation is not merely the result of an unquenched desire for power and revenge, it is a consequence of the moral lesson she learned at Aulis regarding power and relationships and of the anxiety brought about by her position of isolation.

Phèdre's behaviour is also the complex result of emotions and beliefs and values. Unlike Médée and Clytemnestre, Phèdre does not completely relinquish her responsibility of care towards others. The decision to confess her passion and pursue it is determined by the possibility of combining her duty of care with a responsiveness to herself: redefine her identity in a new relationship with an ideal version of her spouse and ensure her son's safety and wellbeing. Phèdre's attempt to save Hippolyte is also partially determined by a desire to protect her offspring

from the social, political and psychological consequences of her transgressive behaviour. Her actions combine a need for self-assertion, a desire to control the object of her passion with a responsibility of care for others. However, similarly to Médée's love for Jason, her passion for Hippolyte is a need to possess at all costs this object of desire which determines aggressive impulses and prevents her from saving the prince's life. Phèdre tries to combine her duty of care towards others with a responsiveness towards herself. Her actions are not either a manifestation of desire or moral principles, but an attempt to combine the two in order to find self-fulfilment without abandoning her duty of care towards her son.

This chapter has provided an analysis of Médée's, Clytemnestre's and Phèdre's behaviour and deliberation which brings to the forefront aspects of their experience which have been overlooked, devalued or misinterpreted in order to provide a complex image of the factors involved. This aims to challenge the idea that the characters' actions stem from an irrational and selfish pursuit of their needs and desires in order to render the issue of their guilt and responsibility more complex. Médée's, Clytemnestre's and Phèdre's deeds become the result of a specific experience and a particular view of goodness and morality and this enables us to view them as tragic heroines struggling to meet the standards of a system which does not acknowledge or value their experience and their view of goodness and relationships. The next chapter will provide an alternative interpretation of the characters' actions and behaviour by delving into their unconscious beliefs and desires. This aims to provide further insight into their actions and decisions and to reveal other factors that have unconsciously contributed to their criminal deeds. These two approaches provide alternative readings of the characters' behaviour and challenge previous interpretations which focus on the moral and the psychoanalytical dimension of the characters' actions in order to enable a more comprehensive image of their decision-making and to deepen the issue of their guilt and responsibility.

## **Exploring the Mindset of Médée, Clytemnestre and Phèdre: A Transactional Analysis Reading**

### **1.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter reveals the manner in which the characters' beliefs about goodness and care inform their actions and their decisions. This section of the thesis aims to continue the analysis of Médée's, Clytemnestre's and Phèdre's behaviour by focusing on the characters' unconscious beliefs (about themselves and the world), desires and needs and the role they play in the decision-making process as well as the unfolding of the tragic plot. This analysis will look at the characters' strategies of interaction in order to provide insight into what they are looking for beyond ethics of care. This reading will reveal that there is a psychoanalytical dimension underlying their actions. They may not consciously desire certain events to occur, but they will unconsciously work towards them by adopting specific tactics in their social interactions. The manner in which these unconscious factors inform the tragic heroines' behaviour will provide a reading which goes beyond the moral and psychological aspects discussed in the previous chapter. This endeavour will provide alternative motives for the tragic heroine's decisions and actions, which enrich our understanding of their behaviour and the tragic conflict. This contributes to the overall aim of this thesis to open these dramatic texts to new readings and to find different ways of connecting to them.

### **1.2 Methodology**

As mentioned in the Introduction, this chapter uses transactional analysis and game theory to explore the unconscious factors which inform the characters' behaviour and interactions. In order to explain the basic concepts of these theories developed by Eric Berne in the late 1950's, I will analyse an excerpt from *Phèdre* using this psychoanalytical critical lens. This excerpt captures Phèdre's emotional turmoil and the way she switches from one mindset to another, as she plots Aricie's demise. It presents the dramatic change of behaviour that the queen undergoes as

the plot unfolds. An analysis of this section will enable a better understanding of the way in which these theories function and are applicable to the exploration of these dramatic texts and the tragic characters' behaviour and actions.

Prends pitié de ma jalouse rage.  
Il faut perdre Aricie. Il faut de mon époux  
Contre un sang odieux réveiller le courroux [...].  
Que fais-je? Où ma raison se va-t-elle égarer?  
Moi jalouse! Et Thésée est celui que j'implore!  
Mon époux est vivant, et moi je brûle encore!  
Pour qui? Quel est le cœur où prétendent mes vœux?  
Chaque mot sur mon front fait dresser mes cheveux.  
Mes crimes désormais ont comblé la mesure. (IV.6.1258-60, 1264-69)

In this monologue Phèdre moves from one extreme stance to the other, as she becomes both the criminal and the judge (1259, 1269). This is representative of the inner struggle that permeates her decisions and actions throughout the development of the plot. The antithetical nature that she has inherited as daughter of Minos and Pasiphaé manifests itself consciously at crucial moments, as passion-driven Phèdre meets moral Phèdre, and the two opposing mindsets compete to assert themselves in the queen's actions and behaviour: 'Il faut [...]/ Il faut [...] / Que fais-je?'<sup>1</sup> The surprise expressed by the queen's moral side (1259-60) reflects a lack of identification with the ruthless, passion-driven side. In less than 10 lines she oscillates between a jealous stepmother and an overly scrupulous moral authority that condemns her previous behaviour: 'Il faut perdre Aricie [...]/ Mes crimes désormais ont comblé la mesure.' This is may be interpreted as a sign of mental

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<sup>1</sup> Thierry Maulnier, *Lecture de Phèdre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), p. 82.

fragility, a neurotic episode, but not necessarily a sign of madness.<sup>2</sup> By applying transactional analysis to this excerpt, I will argue that this phenomenon is not unusual and reflects the influence of unconscious beliefs about oneself and the world passed down from one's ancestors.

Transactional analysis argues that people change attitude, posture and voice from time to time and this corresponds to a change in their feelings. Each 'system of feelings' is accompanied by a behavioural pattern called an 'ego state', a term which is inspired by Freudian psychoanalysis.<sup>3</sup> Some of these ego states reflect the influence that early-life experiences have on adult behaviour: the Child ego state thinks, responds and reacts as when a person was a child typically between the ages of two and five; the Parent ego state represents the behaviour, thoughts and language of one's own parents when one was little. These states are remnants of those experiences incorporated in the Self. This theory emphasizes the importance of parental influence in relation to one's beliefs, values and decisions about the life one wishes to lead, and the effect it has on one's social interactions.

Transactional analysis is a psychoanalytic theory and method of therapy developed by Eric Berne in the 1950s. This theory is based on Wilder Penfield's research on mental states and emotions, and psychosocial theories drawn from Erik Eriksson. The latter altered Freud's developmental model by moving from a psychosexual focus (libidinal energy or cathexis) to a psychosocial dimension which incorporates societal and interpersonal factors in human development.<sup>4</sup> Berne combined the data from Penfield's studies about the fluctuation of mental states and emotions with Erikson's ideas regarding the influence of factors stemming from social interactions on human behaviour when developing the ego states and game

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<sup>2</sup> According to Carl Jung, the sensitiveness of neurotics is 'a symptom of the struggle between two divergent tendencies.' In Phèdre's case the quoted fragment strongly suggests such a struggle. Carl Gustav Jung, *Jung Contra Freud: The 1912 New York Lectures on the Theory of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by R.F.C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 94.

<sup>3</sup> Eric Berne, *Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Berne, *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy*, p. 17.



theory another part of transactional analysis which focuses on problematic transactions (social interactions). Berne's theories are also inspired by Freud's ideas, particularly in terms of the structure of the Self (Child, Parent, Adult). But whilst Freudian psychoanalysis focuses on the personality of the patient, Berne analyses their social interactions (transactions) as he considers them sources of insight into one's personality and unconscious. Also, Berne's ego states represent behaviours that one observed or displayed which manifest consciously in our gestures, emotional responses, words and actions and this separates them from Freud's concepts.

Berne's work was well received by the psychiatric community and his book *Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships* in which he discusses the main concepts of transactional analysis and game theory was a bestseller. The International Transactional Analysis Association which Berne founded is active in advancing the theories, methods and principles of transactional analysis and publishes new research in the field in the *Transactional Analysis Journal*, which had its first issue in 1971. Some of Berne's followers brought significant developments to his theories and one example is Stephen B. Karpman who created a social model for human interaction that occurs between people in conflict which is used worldwide in psychiatry and counselling.<sup>5</sup> There has been some controversy regarding the way Berne dealt with conditions like homosexuality. As Graham Barnes argues, Berne considered homosexuality a condition, which can be cured through heterosexual relationships.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the psychological conditions determined by having this sexual orientation in a heteronormative, conservative society are incorporated by Berne in the psychopathology of games without

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<sup>5</sup> See Stephen B. Karpman, 'Fairy tales and script drama analysis', *Transactional Analysis Bulletin*, 7 (1968), 39-43.

<sup>6</sup> Graham Barnes, 'Homosexuality in the first three decades of transactional analysis: A study of theory in the practice of transactional analysis psychotherapy', *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 34 (2004), 126-55 (p. 127). Barnes uses a series of unpublished notes dictated or written by Berne immediately after group therapy sessions in 1952.

considering the influence of social oppression and hostile cultural environment.<sup>7</sup> These normative ideas showed little sensitivity and openness to the struggles of lesbians, homosexuals and bisexuals. As Barnes acknowledges, Berne was not the only psychiatrist who considered heterosexuality as the norm in the early 1950's, since the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from the list of psychopathologies in 1973.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the claim that homosexuality is a psychopathology was challenged by other transactional analysis specialists in the 1970's.<sup>9</sup> In spite of this controversy, these theories are still used worldwide in counselling and psychiatry, and the International Transactional Analysis Association continues to develop the concepts inherited from Berne in the light of new ideas regarding human development and social interactions.

Transactional analysis focuses on aspects of human behaviour that have not been approached by Freudian psychoanalysis, namely social interactions and has a psychosocial dimension. For this reason, this methodology is able to explore the way the characters' dynamic and their relationships reveal inherited unconscious beliefs and early life experiences. It also allows us to incorporate other factors related to the social dimension, besides libidinal cathexis. This is important because it enables us to move beyond the nature versus culture paradigm and the Oedipal framework promoted by Freudian psychoanalysis and to consider other factors that inform human behaviour which are not related to these androcentric concepts and paradigms. As a result, an application of this methodology will facilitate an exploration of the unconscious factors that influence Phèdre's behaviour stemming from her inherited beliefs about herself, the world and her early life experiences, outside the Freudian framework, doing away with her image as monstrous, archetypal mother put forward by Charles Mauron.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See Berne, *Games People Play*, pp. 54, 55.

<sup>8</sup> Barnes, p. 137.

<sup>9</sup> See Douglas Beattie and Richard Erskine, 'Permissions: A Cure for Sexual Problems', *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 6 (1976), 413-15.

<sup>10</sup> Mauron, *L'Inconscient dans l'œuvre et la vie de Racine*, p. 140.

According to the theory of transactional analysis as defined by Eric Berne, at a structural level the Self incorporates three ego states: 'Child', the 'Adult' and the 'Parent'. The 'Child' state and the 'Parent' ego are remnants of early life experiences and replicate behaviour observed or performed at a certain age during childhood.<sup>11</sup> The 'Adult' state of one's personality deals with data processing, reality testing, analysing the environment and calculating possibilities and probabilities based on past experience in a manner similar to a computer. Each of these ego states generally manifests itself in specific contexts: the 'Adult' is active in a professional environment due to its abilities to evaluate a situation objectively and autonomously, the 'Parent' can be observed in rituals determined by tradition, in one's behaviour towards one's children and in routine situations that require automatic decisions or responses whilst the 'Child' is 'protected by the Parent and the Adult, until each social situation has been tested' and manifests itself generally in privacy and intimacy.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, Phèdre's two opposite attitudes represent two different ego states (parts of her Self) both reflecting her heredity and reacting in a specific manner to different sets of stimuli.

Phèdre behaves under the influence of both her parents, initially displaying the irrational passion of her mother Pasiphaé and afterwards the acute morality of her father the Judge of the Underworld. Her 'Adult' (her reality testing function) is suspended, as she states that she has temporarily lost the ability to analyse the situation rationally (1264). The 'Parent' or the 'Child' ego state is in control. The delirious episode in which she imagines the happiness of the two lovers (Hippolyte and Aricie) as well as the murder of her rival (1253-56) represents a manifestation of the 'Child' due to its creative characteristic, 'pre-logical thinking and poorly differentiated or distorted perceptions'.<sup>13</sup> The exacerbation of feelings and thoughts: 'jalouse rage', 'courroux', 'sang odieux', and the instinctual need for immediate

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<sup>11</sup> Berne, *What Do You Say After You Say Hello*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>12</sup> Berne, *Games People Play*, pp. 8-14.

<sup>13</sup> Berne, *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy*, pp. 37, 62-3.

gratification emphasized by the anaphora: ‘Il faut .../Il faut ...’ also indicate that the ‘Child’ is in control. Moreover, it appears that this ego state focusing on the satisfaction of her desire is entirely under the influence of her mother, which means that Phèdre’s ‘Child’ is an ‘Adapted’ one dominated by Pasiphaé’s ‘Parental’ influence. However, at one point in her monologue a switch occurs, and the same passion that she invests in imagining her revenge turns against her own behaviour. Harsh accusations of incest, imposture, homicidal intentions and lost virtue and morality are uttered by the same character who a few lines before demanded death in order to satisfy her jealousy and displayed an appetite for revenge, in a manifestation that Alain Lipietz interprets as Phèdre’s ‘penchant for self-denigration’.<sup>14</sup> The critic is right, the tone changes, this no longer represents a ‘Child’-like behaviour but rather a ‘Parent’ scolding a naughty ‘Child’ or a judge passing verdict in an imaginary trial: Phèdre’s actions are being assessed by the most severe authority in the universe, her inner ‘Parent’ (Minos).<sup>15</sup> This sudden outburst of guilt, together with the harsh accusations, reveals that a ‘Parent’ ego state now holds the executive power. Moreover, this ‘Parent’ ego state is a ‘controlling, prejudiced one’, ‘judgmental in an imitative way’, prohibitive, dogmatic, prescriptive, displaying an arbitrary non-rational attitude, unafraid to use strong words: ‘inceste’, ‘imposture’, ‘homicide’, and to lay down ‘the deadly injunction’: ‘You are guilty hence you deserve a punishment’.<sup>16</sup> This ego state is difficult to appease because of its rigid moral stance, deeply rooted in the local culture and the contemporary system of values.<sup>17</sup> Hence, Phèdre’s surprise and indignation at her previous behaviour which deviated from these strict principles is justified: ‘Et je vis ? Et je soutiens la vue / De ce sacré soleil dont je suis descendue?’ (IV.6.1273-74) Consequently, it becomes apparent that here, Phèdre’s ‘Prejudiced

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<sup>14</sup> Lipietz, p. 121.

<sup>15</sup> Berne, *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy*, p. 72. The phrase ‘Child’-like will be used throughout this chapter with the meaning of pertaining to the ‘Child’ ego state.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37-8, 62,76, 94.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37, 76, 94.

Parent' lays down the law and replaces the 'Adapted Child' that gave in to her instinctual urges.

Phèdre's atrocious desire to commit murder in order to satisfy her jealousy and to stain her hands with innocent blood has stimulated her 'Parental' ego stance. This switch influences Phèdre's attitude not only towards her own actions but also towards C enone, as the queen adopts a disdainful and righteous stance that indicates to the servant her own crimes and the punishment she must endure: 'Je ne t' ecoute plus. Va-t'en, monstre ex ecrable. [...] / Puisse le juste ciel dignement te payer' (IV.6.1317, 1319). Ph edre's 'Prejudiced Parent' reprimands her servant's 'Adult' on the way she has performed her duties. Hence, during the dialogue with C enone, the queen's 'Prejudiced Parent' expresses outrage and disdain for the previous actions of her 'Adapted Child', which caused her downfall, and makes the servant an accomplice to this part of her personality. This teaches us that Ph edre has internalized these inherited beliefs and values; they are part of her personality; they manifest as abrupt changes of mindset (ego states) and inform her actions and decisions.

This parental influence expands beyond the 'Parent' and 'Adapted Child' ego states and has a decisive role in the way an adult lives his/her life. Transactional analysis argues that everyone has a life script. This life script is passed down from one generation to the other at an early age, when children are susceptible and even desirous of parental programming, as it provides a purpose to life, it represents an acceptable manner to structure time, and they learn how to do things from their parents. The script incorporates important choices and decisions, which are already made: what kind of person will one marry, how many children will one have. Some of the recurrent scripts described by Berne will be used in this analysis of the characters behaviour: the 'Always' script in which people find themselves in the position of the outcast on account of the sins and deeds their parents prompted them to do (M ed ee, Ph edre), the 'Until' script in which one believes that they can achieve success or power only after fulfilling certain tasks or being tested in some way

(Jason), the ‘After’ script in which one inherits the belief that periods of calm and happiness are followed by times of trouble (Clytemnestre) and the ‘Never’ script in which one holds the belief that they are forbidden to do the things they want to do the most and are constantly tantalized (Agamemnon). These inherited beliefs and life plans exert an unconscious influence over peoples’ behaviour, decisions and actions. These life scripts reflect the manner in which the parental influence plays a decisive part in the life of an adult and identifying them in the behaviour of the tragic characters will help me uncover the unconscious beliefs and desires that inform their decisions and actions.

According to Berne, parents are willing to provide a life script for their children because of their evolutionary need to nurture, protect and teach.<sup>18</sup> Their role is essential in the creation of the script, as they provide directives or injunctions which establish the outcome of their child’s life and reveal to him/her types of behaviour that ensure this desired result. Parents also pass down to their offspring methods of structuring time (games) for obtaining a much-needed satisfaction whilst waiting for the ultimate reward incorporated in the life plan. Phèdre’s behaviour represents an example of the way these parental injunctions function within the script apparatus: the main pay-off of her script is represented by the confirmation of an inherent monstrosity, belief which she inherited in the form of the injunction: ‘You’ll End Up Like Your Mother!’ alongside a prescription on how to structure time until this final pay-off: ‘Try Hard Not to Become Her!’ – but when you do become her you can still claim that you tried.<sup>19</sup> This belief inherited from Minos informs her behaviour as she constantly tries to suppress her passion and when she eventually gives in, she is able to claim she has tried to fight it. At times these Parental injunctions can be uttered by other people who aim to manipulate their interlocutors’ weaknesses. One example which will be used in this analysis is Jason’s Parental promise of conditional love which aims to stimulate Médée’s

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<sup>18</sup> Berne, *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy*, pp. 31, 291.

<sup>19</sup> Berne, *What Do You Say*, pp. 107-8. See pp. 303-304 for a discussion of this injunction.

Child, who desires affection, and to manipulate her behaviour, as the price to pay for this affection is obedience: ‘If you do as I tell you, I will love and protect you, and without me you are nothing’.<sup>20</sup> This is the great comedy/tragedy of life: it is planned by a small child who has limited knowledge of the world and whose soul is filled with things and concepts inherited from or taught by their parents.<sup>21</sup> I will discuss later in this section the fact that this life script is similar to the tragic concept of fate and enables me to overcome some of the limitations of this methodology. Hence, from a transactional analysis perspective Phèdre’s life-plan including who she will become, whom she will marry and whom she will love, was established under the influence of her parents Minos and Pasiphaé whose behaviour stimulated her daughter’s inclination for monstrous love. This represents a new perspective on her behaviour, as it enables us to consider the role of these parental influences in Phèdre’s interactions throughout the play and to uncover the unconscious beliefs that inform her actions and decisions. It also enables us to consider the fact that Minos and Pasiphaé have equal influence over their daughter and they both contribute to her downfall the former with the Parental injunction discussed above and the latter with this penchant for monstrous love which captivated the imagination of Phèdre’s Child.

The life script apparatus has been used by Valentini Papadopoulou Brady to put forward a new interpretation of Mlle de Chartres’ decision to refuse the man she loves in Madame de La Fayette’s *La Princesse de Clèves*. Papadopoulou Brady moves away from previous approaches that interpreted the character’s behaviour as an inability to love or as a gesture of willpower and puts forward an original reading in which the heroine’s decision is influenced by a series of injunctions passed down from her mother. According to the critic, Mlle de Chartres becomes a victim of these inner forces (injunctions and beliefs) that she cannot control. I will not argue that Médée, Clytemnestre and Phèdre are victims of injunctions and beliefs inherited

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<sup>20</sup> Berne, *What Do You Say*, p. 152.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

from their parents, as I do not believe that Berne envisaged the process of parental programming as being governed by a victim and perpetrator dynamic. However, I will use script analysis to reveal that these unconscious factors alongside the inadvertent collaboration of the other characters, have an important part to play in the heroine's behaviour and decision-making processes, make the issue of their responsibility a complex matter and provide a new perspective on their actions.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, this theory represents a useful tool for exploring the unconscious of these characters in order to provide original interpretations.

There may seem to be little convergence between theatre and transactional analysis, but the overarching concept of life-script has a direct and interdependent relationship with fiction and myth. According to Berne, there are similarities between life scripts and theatrical scripts which can be observed by psychoanalysts as well as literary and theatre critics: they are both based on a 'limited number of themes' (the outcome is clear once you know the plot and the character), the script is 'rehearsed and rewritten' before being ready for the dramatic performance (the life script is flexible and is influenced by environment, the action might differ but the outcome remains the same), they provide methods of structuring time and influence social interaction (through rituals, activities, games), the scenes have been 'set up and motivated ahead of time' (some life scripts always have a looming danger, a 'pre-planned scene').<sup>23</sup> Moreover, some life scripts are inspired by mythology, as Berne exemplifies with the 'Never' script, inspired by Tantalus, in which children are forbidden by their parents to do the things they most want and spend their entire lifetime 'being tantalized and surrounded by temptation'.<sup>24</sup> The relationship between psychoanalysis and tragedy is also well established as the widely used concepts of Oedipus and Electra complex can attest. Sigmund Freud himself associated the 'gradual build-up' and the 'cunning delays' of Sophocles'

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<sup>22</sup> Valentini Papadopoulou Brady, 'La Princesse de Clèves and the Refusal of Love: Heroic Denial or Pathetic Submission?', *Neophilologus*, 84, (October 2000), 517–530.

<sup>23</sup> Berne, *What Do You Say*, p. 38.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.



*Oedipus Rex* to the work of psychoanalysis.<sup>25</sup> In both cases the action dealt with is supposed to take place in a single day, the actors, similarly to the therapist, play roles in a specific situation different from their 'real lives', they involve a higher level of emotion whilst excluding real actions (words and emotions take precedence over action) and words have significant, palpable effects as they can change the meaning of past actions and experiences. Berne's method has the characteristics of a talking therapy as the therapist analyses the language and the tone of voice of his patients in order to identify influences coming from specific ego states or unconscious beliefs stemming from early life experiences. The therapist uses the patients' discourse in their interactions with him/her or in group therapy to uncover the beliefs which underlie their behaviour, to change the meaning of their past actions and to liberate them from these unconscious influences. Given the manner in which tragedy resembles a therapy session, the characters' discourse will be analysed through this approach in order to delve into unconscious motivations, which influence decisions and behaviour as 'a true psychological understanding of acts of murder can be obtained only through a detailed consideration of the decisive unconscious motives and the special nature and arrangement of the drives that underlie them'.<sup>26</sup>

Parallels between life scripts and theatrical ones, particularly in terms of the dynamic of the characters and preconscious life plans, enable transactional analysis to provide a complex insight into the workings of the tragic characters' mindset through an investigation of social interactions (methods for structuring time), behaviour and heredity, and the influence of external factors or other characters on their decisions and actions. A structural analysis of the personality: 'Child', 'Parent' and 'Adult' is helpful in revealing the extent to which ancestry (parental programming) is involved in decision-making and the outcome of the story. A

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<sup>25</sup> Rachel Bowlby, *Freudian Mythologies: Greek Tragedy and Modern Identities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 22.

<sup>26</sup> Otto Rank, *The Incest Theme in Literature and Legend*, trans. by Gregory C. Richter (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 164.

transactional analysis of intimate and social interactions will uncover the manipulating actions that the characters resort to in order to achieve immediate satisfaction and to direct the action towards the desired outcome. This approach continues with game analysis. This represents a part of transactional analysis which identifies and discusses problematic and counterproductive social interactions and their implications. Game analysis focuses on certain types of transactions that the characters engage in whilst having an ulterior motive and aiming to obtain maximum satisfaction from each social interaction (the 'pay-off').<sup>27</sup> Games are a way of structuring time and consist of a set of transactions with a concealed motivation. They are dishonest and have a dramatic outcome. The exploration of games will uncover the beneficial or detrimental role that these interactions have in the characters' decision-making processes, the gradual development of the action towards the final outcome and the input of each character into the development of the plot. The study of the life script will provide a map for the interpretation of the characters' behaviour and their unconscious beliefs and desires. This approach provides interpretations for the characters' mental state and behaviour by focusing on unconscious influences and motivations to create a complex image of the tragic character.

Because of this pairing of psychoanalytic theories with transactional analysis it is necessary for methodological accuracy to distinguish between Berne's ego states and the concepts of id, ego and superego. The main difference between these notions is that the ego states are 'phenomena based on reality': they represent 'real people who now exist or once existed, who have legal names and civic identities'.<sup>28</sup> They do not represent abstractions but behaviours that one observed or displayed, and in this way these concepts help us trace these unconscious influences on one's behaviour. The early life experiences and the observation of those closest to us (parents, grandparents) are transformed into these ego states which become manifest

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<sup>27</sup> Berne, *Games People Play*, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> Berne, *Transactional Analysis*, pp. 24, 32.

in our gestures, emotional responses, words and actions and inform our behaviour and decisions. Behaviours and beliefs are passed down to us through these ego states and this emphasizes the deterministic nature of our life. These ego states differ from the Freudian concepts as they incorporate this deterministic approach to ones' behaviour as well as the particular circumstances of one's experience. This is helpful as we are able to explore the characters' behaviour from the perspective of their family history and the particular conditions of their experience in order to obtain a specific image of their unconscious needs and desires. There are some points of convergence between the two sets of concepts as the Parent has some of the traits of superego in terms of influences from the past: heredity and other people (parents especially), whilst the Adult resembles the ego in the sense that it represents the reality testing aspect of the Self. However, the fact that these ego states represent 'phenomenological realities' rather than abstractions, benefit from a behavioural pattern and a corresponding system of feelings, and manifest themselves consciously, not only in dreams or hallucinations, sets them apart from Freud's terms.<sup>29</sup> Another important difference is that this theory is free of the androcentrism that affects methodologies influenced by Freudian psychoanalysis. Berne recognized that the mother and the father have equal influence over their offspring, doing away with the mother's image as a castrating figure.<sup>30</sup> This enables us to detach from the nature versus culture dichotomy and to analyse the behaviour of these characters from the perspective of the different influences stemming from their ancestry and particularly their parents' actions and decisions. This enables a more complex and specific analysis of the factors contributing to personality and behaviour.

Berne's theories are free of androcentrism, but they are normative. The concept of life script is based on the traditional structure of family and does not consider situations outside this framework. Furthermore, as Marco Mazetti

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<sup>29</sup> Berne, *Transactional Analysis*, pp. 24, 244

<sup>30</sup> Berne, *What Do You Say*, p. 13.

observes, Berne does not acknowledge the role of culture and social environment in the moulding of the life script and focuses solely on parental influence.<sup>31</sup> This theory, that claims to be universal, is not open to the experience of people who do not fit the traditional family structure or come from different social or cultural backgrounds. This does not promote a cross-cultural approach, able to acknowledge and be open to the experiences of people coming from diverse cultural and social backgrounds and different family structures. However, the concept of the life script can help me overcome this limitation because it functions similarly to the extraordinary concept of fate. It has the same deterministic quality, as the life script is inherited from one's ancestors and is passed down from one generation to the next. It also acknowledges the characters' places in their genealogy and incorporates the extraordinary behaviour of these families, as for instance in Phèdre's case the influence of her grandfather the Sun whose actions determine the wrath of the gods is placed alongside Pasiphaé's monstrous passion and Minos' spiteful injunction, in the analysis of her life script.<sup>32</sup> Phèdre's script incorporates the influences coming from her exceptional genealogy, and this enables me to observe the way these factors inform the character's behaviour and lead to the tragic outcome. Therefore, the concept of the life script enables me to deal with this aspect of the characters' behaviour and to consider and incorporate the influences coming from their exceptional family situations and their ancestry.

Incidentally, the analysis of the contemporary performances incorporated in the fourth chapter of this thesis enables me to overcome some of the limitations of this theory stemming from its heteronormative quality. Whilst this textual analysis does not go beyond this heteronormative framework, the contemporary stagings of these plays and their reception put forward interpretations, which are inclusive and open to different human experiences and behaviours. An eloquent example is the

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<sup>31</sup> Marco Mazetti, 'Eric Berne and Cultural Script', *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 40 (2010), 187-195 (p. 188).

<sup>32</sup> See p. 289 for a discussion of Phèdre's grandfather the Sun and his influence on her behaviour.

interpretation of Œnone's loyalty and devotion to Phèdre as a sign of her desire for her mistress in Michel Marmarinos's and Christophe Rauck's stagings.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the analysis of contemporary performances incorporated in chapter 4 will put forward interpretations that this normative framework does not incorporate or is not open to in order to reveal new potential factors and motives that inform the characters' behaviours and actions.

The application of Berne's model will be controversial for theorists who resist altogether the drawing of parallels between theatrical representations and reality. However, this type of approach follows the tradition initiated by Charles Mauron and Mitchell Greenberg who use psychoanalytical methods and concepts in the analysis of the tragic characters' behaviour and interpret the family relationships in the plays in the light of similar configurations of relations in real life. I do not share their reliance on Freudian concepts and theories, but I draw my methodology from the field of psychoanalysis, and I use a theory stemming from the analysis of human behaviour. Furthermore, the careful application of this methodology will help us see more clearly the unconscious desires, needs and beliefs that inform the characters' behaviour and mindset, and may not be readily grasped by the literary or theatre historian, as for example the satisfaction that Médée and Clytemnestre derive from repeated betrayals. Although controversial, this treatment of the characters follows the tradition of psychocritique and is able to reveal new and original aspects of the characters' behaviour and mindset.

Berne's theories are drawn from the analysis of human behaviour and experiences and are not able to account for the divine nature of these characters and their ancestors. Médée, Clytemnestre and Phèdre have divine ancestors (the Sun in the case of Médée and Phèdre, Zeus is potentially Clytemnestre's father) and this may play a part in their behaviour and their decision-making processes. The life script incorporates the influences coming from the ancestors' exceptional

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<sup>33</sup> See p. 374 for a discussion of this interpretation of the relationship between Phèdre and Œnone.

behaviour. However, the methodology does not incorporate and discuss the impact of divine origin on the characters' behaviour and decisions. The characters' ancestors are not mere mortals, regular mothers and fathers, but divine beings and their influence must go beyond what Berne envisioned in terms of parental programming. This becomes apparent when Phèdre becomes aware of her moral downfall and is overcome by remorse and fear: 'J'ai pour aïeul le père et le maître des dieux. / Le ciel, tout l'univers est plein de mes aïeux' (IV.6.1275-76). They are more than parents and grandparents, they are gods to be respected, obeyed and feared. Furthermore, the characters consider themselves descendants of divine lineages, exceptional beings, and this brings a series of influences which the methodology cannot account for. Nonetheless, this methodology represents a useful tool for the exploration of the characters' behaviour and interactions because Médée, Clytemnestre and Phèdre have qualities that correspond to human nature and behave in a way similar to humans. Aristotle in *Poetics* presents this idea as he argues that a tragic character needs to be 'like ourselves' within the range of our moral understanding and endowed with human vulnerability in order to stimulate pity and fear.<sup>34</sup> Corneille follows Aristotle's idea regarding the characters' likeness to human behaviour and vulnerability by arguing that although the characters are superior 'ces rois sont hommes comme les auditeurs et tombent dans ces malheurs par l'emportement des passions dont les auditeurs sont capables'.<sup>35</sup> These exceptional characters have a human dimension and this part of their image as tragic characters needs to be investigated, as their actions will be generally judged by norms relating to this quality. I am not overlooking the divine ancestry; I am aware that this may represent a part of the source of their behaviour. However, the methodology enables me to analyse what they share in common with human nature

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<sup>34</sup> Aristotle, p. 57. Other translations of the Greek expression use the same words 'like ourselves'. See the discussion on p. 40.

<sup>35</sup> Corneille, 'Discours de la tragédie et des moyens de la traiter selon le vraisemblable et le nécessaire', p. 831. See p. 40 for a discussion of Corneille's ideas regarding the construction of the tragic characters.

and this also represents an important source of insight regarding the factors, which contribute to the characters' decisions and actions.

In relation to this methodology and its application I would like to specify that the terms used for the ego states, the games, the life scripts and the various unconscious beliefs have been coined by Berne. I will use them throughout this analysis to identify and discuss behaviours and actions which correspond to Berne's definition of these concepts in order to emphasize the role of these specific factors on the characters' behaviour. I acknowledge that these terms are colloquial on account of the author's intention to present and explain these concepts to a wide, non-specialised audience. Berne wanted to make his theory as practical and as accessible as possible in order to reach psychiatrists, counsellors as well as the general public and doing away with specialised terms in favour of a more informal language was one method of achieving this.

Previous psychoanalytical readings of the characters and their interactions are based on Freudian concepts and theories and use an Oedipal or post-Oedipal framework to analyse the plays. This produces interpretations largely based on the male versus female, nature versus culture paradigm. Mauron argued that *Phèdre* is a reversed Oedipus in which an aggressive, incestuous mother threatens the child whilst the father represents the monarch and the regulator.<sup>36</sup> According to the critic, Clytemnestre is also caught in a conflict with the father figure of the play, Agamemnon, as she seeks control over the child.<sup>37</sup> Mitchell Greenberg continues this idea of an opposition between masculinity and femininity as he argues that *Médée* represents the triumph of 'the chaotic forces of nature metaphorized as both woman and mother' over the representatives of the polis and the Law.<sup>38</sup> According to him, Iphigénie also incorporates a tension between the feminine support for family and the masculine devotion to politics and the law.<sup>39</sup> As a result, these female

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<sup>36</sup> Mauron, *L'Inconscient dans l'œuvre et la vie de Racine*, p. 140.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>38</sup> Greenberg, *Subjectivity and Subjugation in Seventeenth-century Drama and Prose*, pp. 142, 143.

<sup>39</sup> Greenberg, *Racine From Ancient Myth to Tragic Modernity*, p. 168.

tragic characters become figures of disorder, chaos and unregulated desire. My analysis seeks to move away from this interpretation and to consider the characters' relationships and interactions from the perspective of unconscious beliefs, needs and desires beyond the Oedipal situation. This approach argues that all characters are guided by specific unconscious beliefs about themselves and the world, passed down to them, and their social interactions are influenced by the need to obtain satisfaction in the form of a confirmation of these beliefs accompanied by an emotional pay-off. In this context, characters behave differently because they follow specific precepts and life scripts and pursue different types of satisfaction, not necessarily connected to their maternal or paternal role, a power struggle for control over the offspring or a mindset dominated by chaotic desires, values and needs. Furthermore, this analysis will also reveal that other characters unconsciously become accomplices to the tragic heroine's criminal deeds and inadvertently contribute to their downfall through this pursuit of satisfaction from social interactions which represents another factor to be considered when dealing with the issue of their guilt and responsibility.

Overall, this chapter will delve into the psychological mechanisms of Médée's, Clytemnestre's and Phèdre's behaviour to uncover the instances in which their 'Adult' ego state was involved in decision-making as well as the ones in which their 'Child' or 'Parent' manipulated or were manipulated by other characters through the games they initiated. Additionally, the analysis also follows the influence of an inherited script on the character's decision-making and behaviour. The role played by these unconscious influences and game-driven interactions on the characters' actions, decisions and motivations will provide a comprehensive insight into their psychology and will bring forward a complex image of their mindset and behaviour.



## 2.1 Médée and the ‘Always’ script

As I argue in chapter 1, Pierre Corneille combines Euripidean and Senecan elements with his innovative additions in terms of characters and story in order to create a play that aims to follow the classical examples whilst also adapting them to the taste of seventeenth-century French theatregoers.<sup>40</sup> This rebalancing of classical myths in order to meet the expectations and taste of the audience produced a complex tragic heroine with an emotional, human side. According to Schweitzer, his treatment of the story, particularly the infanticide, aims to emphasize the multifaceted nature of her behaviour and actions: ‘il n’affadit pas le crime, mais ne disculpe pas non plus Médée, ni ne la rend monstrueuse’.<sup>41</sup> The dramatist maintains the abhorrent nature of Médée’s crime without transforming her into a monster. This was achieved because he combined Médée’s transgressive actions with an emphasis on her experience of the dramatic context, her vulnerability as well as the nefarious influence of other characters. This particular treatment of Médée and her story brings to the forefront her emotional experience of the tragic context and the potential factors which determine her violent and criminal deeds. The playwright presents Médée’s mindset and emotions. As a result, the character acquires a multifaceted dimension. This represents a rich source for the exploration of issues of guilt and responsibility and uncovering the potential motives and factors which have influenced Médée’s transgressive behaviour.

Our transactional analysis approach will focus precisely on the psychological dimension of Corneille’s Médée in order to reveal the inner workings of her decision-making processes and her mindset. This analysis will provide insight into the unconscious factors that influence her behaviour, particularly the involuntary complicity of the other characters in the unfolding of the action determined by their desire to engage in games and to pursue their own life scripts. Hence, the analysis

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<sup>40</sup> Corneille, ‘Examen’ *Médée*, p. 337. Corneille, ‘Discours de la tragédie et des moyens de la traiter selon le vraisemblable et le nécessaire’, p. 835.

<sup>41</sup> Schweitzer, *Une “héroïne exécration aux yeux des spectateurs”*, p. 138.

of Corneille's *Médée* aims to reveal that the characters and in particular the heroine's behaviour, decisions and actions are informed by unconscious motivations deriving from parental programming and game playing.

Corneille's innovative interpretation of the story becomes apparent from the very first scene of the play, which explores Jason's perspective on his wife's deeds and his decision-making process. This scene was created by the playwright in order to meet the practical necessity of creating more episodes, as the role of the choir is suppressed: 'Le retranchement que nous avons fait des chœurs nous oblige à remplir nos poèmes de plus d'épisodes qu'ils [les Grecs] ne faisaient.'<sup>42</sup> Corneille also creates a new character: Pollux, (one of the Argonauts), who by listening to Jason's story introduces the audience to the previous events related to the action about to be presented on stage: 'il [Térence] a introduit une nouvelle sorte de personnages qu'on a appelés protatiques, parce qu'ils ne paraissent que dans la protase,[...].Pollux dans Médée est de cette nature.'<sup>43</sup> This scene, which responds to the practical need for more episodes and for a summary of the *Médée*'s story up to the Corinthian episode, also incorporates Jason's views on his current situation, his actions and decisions. The warrior's thoughts are able to reveal the unconscious factors that inform his behaviour towards *Médée* and contribute to the dynamic of this tragic couple.

This new episode presents an apparently superficial and silly side to Jason, not dwelling on the past, whose heroism is supported by his amorous life and his cynical use of women: 'Aussi je ne suis pas de ces amants vulgaires: / J'accommode ma flamme au bien de mes affaires' (I.1.29-30). According to Greenberg, his prowess lies in his ability to inspire female desire in order to satisfy his own thirst for power.<sup>44</sup> This use of women in order to attain certain objectives, (mostly kingship) also indicates the presence of an 'Until' script in which the hero's

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<sup>42</sup> Corneille, 'Discours de l'utilité et des parties du poème dramatique', p. 822.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 828.

<sup>44</sup> Greenberg, *Corneille, Classicism and the Ruses of Symmetry*, p. 28.

happiness is dependent upon performing a series of tasks, or in Jason's case upon seducing a series of women who would ensure his success in performing the tasks. Jason's love is a means of acceding to what he truly desires and pursues through his script, namely, kingship and power. Jason's cheerful mood and his treatment of women is connected to this life plan and his 'Child's' eagerness to obtain the pay-off of his 'Until' script, namely, a position of power by seducing and marrying the young princess. Therefore, Jason's behaviour towards Médée is informed by his desire to continue this life script in order to obtain a position of power.

The ethics of care analysis discusses Jason's use of women for the satisfaction of his desire and his inability to treat them as agents with their own aims and objectives. This transactional analysis provides an explanation for this in a behavioural pattern incorporated in the 'Until' script and driven by the belief that he can attain happiness and success only through seducing and manipulating women. The inadvertent belief that this is the only means through which he can obtain what he desires and live happily informs his treatment of women and his behaviour towards Médée.

The only character threatening Jason's prospects of happiness is Médée. Corneille's tragic heroine appears as a force of nature conjuring the spirits of the Underworld and thus reinforcing her image as a sorceress and a primal force able to both empower and destroy men:<sup>45</sup>

Médée: Et vous, troupe savante en noires barbaries,

Filles de l'Achéron, pestes, larves, furies,

Fières sœurs ...

(I.4.209-12)

Moreover, her violent reaction to her spouse's betrayal suggests an uncontrollable passion and an overestimation of love which according to Simon Bennett may be

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<sup>45</sup> Greenberg, *Corneille and the Ruses of Symmetry*, p. 24.

attributed to her barbarian origin.<sup>46</sup> Although it emphasizes Médée's otherness and her unnatural attributes, this monologue also reveals her perspective on Jason's betrayal and the current situation. She has paid a dear price for his love as she had to murder her brother, abandon her father and her law in order to become his wife and she is unwilling to renounce this status:

Jason me répudie ! Et qui l'aurait pu croire?  
S'il a manqué d'amour, manque-t-il de mémoire?  
Me peut-il bien quitter après tant de bienfaits? (I.4.229-31)

Furthermore, she is enraged by Jason's apparent presumption that either she has now left her vengeful nature behind her by sacrificing her power and difference to be part of this society, or she is completely under his control and has become an instrument to be used according to his will and desire:

Lui font-ils [her crimes] présumer mon audace épuisée?  
Lui font-ils [her crimes] présumer qu'à mon tour méprisée,  
Ma rage contre lui n'ait par où s'assouvir,  
Et que tout mon pouvoir se borne à le servir?  
Tu t'abuses, Jason, je suis encore moi-même. (I.4.237-41)

Jason's 'Child' seems unaware that Médée's murderous 'Child', who was stimulated and manipulated by his 'Parental' promise of conditional love ('If you do as I tell you, I will love and protect you, and without me you are nothing'), can turn against him once this promise is broken in order to preserve her illusion of immortality, omnipotence and irresistibility.<sup>47</sup> 'Sachant ce que je puis, ayant vu ce que j'ose, / Croit-il que m'offenser ce soit si peu de chose?' (I.4.233-34) According

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<sup>46</sup> Bennett, p. 88.

<sup>47</sup> Berne, *What Do You Say*, p. 152.

to Berne, this version of the 'Child' that displays a rebellious or self-indulgent behaviour and is likely to go against Parental figures and to liberate himself/herself from their influence is a 'Natural Child'.<sup>48</sup> Médée's rebellious behaviour and the fact that she turns against a figure she loved and served denotes the fact that her 'Natural Child' has been stimulated. Thus, from Médée's perspective Jason's main flaw lies in having underestimated her 'Natural Child's' potential to rebel against patriarchal authority figures once they mistreat her, oppose her will or threaten her beliefs.

The loss of her spouse's promise of love must be marked by grievous deeds:

Qu'un forfait nous sépare, ainsi qu'il nous a joints;  
Que mon sanglant divorce, en meurtres, en carnage,  
S'égale aux premiers jours de notre mariage. (I.4.244-46)

Her revenge must become a masterpiece as it signifies a new beginning, the re-birth of the old Médée. This revenge plot aiming to destroy the ruling family of Corinth and undermine the established order of this patriarchal society represents an attack on a system that was never able to accept her fully. She constantly had to repress a part of herself, namely, her power and otherness manifested through her 'Natural Child's' behaviour, to obtain social inclusion and acceptance. This rebellious side of her personality, incompatible with social order and seeking to undermine the established law through gruesome deeds, also indicates the presence of an 'Always' script in which Médée has chosen to play the role of the outcast. This life plan is exemplified by young people being chased out of their home for sins that their parents prompted them to.<sup>49</sup> Although Médée's parents did not send her away, her unbridled passion for Jason was incompatible with her family's wishes (because of

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<sup>48</sup> Berne, *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy*, p. 77.

<sup>49</sup> Berne, *What Do You Say*, p. 207.

his expedition's main goal, to deprive them of the Golden Fleece), thus making it impossible for her to marry Jason and remain in her homeland. Moreover, according to Berne, the 'Always' script produces 'Don Juans, who spend their lives continually chasing after the promise of an orgasm'.<sup>50</sup> Thus, Médée undermines patriarchal authority (her 'Parent's' influence) and dismisses her 'Adult's' reasonable decision-making to satisfy her 'Natural Child's' desire (in Colchos) or avenge her frustration (in Corinth). Médée is again prepared to become the other and to adhere to this script, and the role of outcast because it allows her to maintain her illusion of omnipotence and irresistibility and to satisfy her desire for revenge.

In the ethics of care analysis of these verses I argue that Médée perceives Jason's behaviour as an affront to her honour, and this belief determines her to abandon the duty of care towards him and to consider a revenge which will prove her superior nature. The paragraphs above provide an alternative interpretation of Médée's actions and decisions, as they become the result of an inadvertent need to maintain certain beliefs about herself and to play the part of the outcast which enables her to manifest a repressed dimension of her personality. Besides punishing Jason and asserting her exceptional nature, Médée may seek the fulfilment of these unconscious desires and needs.

Médée's encounter with her faithful servant Nérine reveals her 'Natural Child's' anxiety regarding Jason's movements, as well as the beginning of an interaction that will influence the two characters' behaviour. The servant responds to her mistress's state of distress from a 'Parental' position, encouraging her to conceal her true feelings in order to ensure the fulfilment of the plan.<sup>51</sup> The servant believes that her mistress will retain the upper hand if she is cautious and keeps her 'Natural Child's' impulses under control. She treats Médée as a daughter rather than the witch from Colchis and provides cautious advice: 'Fuyez, qu'à ses soupçons il

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>51</sup> Sharon Harwood-Gordon, *The Poetic Style of Corneille's Tragedies: An Aesthetic Interpretation* (Lewiston, NY and Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), p. 6.

[Créon] ne vous sacrifie' (I.5.330). The Colchian princess's 'Natural Child' adopts an active stance in the satisfaction of her desire and uses the servant for the purposes of her revenge: 'Sois seulement fidèle, et, sans te mettre en peine, / Laisse agir pleinement mon savoir et ma haine' (I.5.341-42). Nérine is willing to assist her mistress regardless of the consequences: 'Bien qu'un péril certain suive votre entreprise, / Assurez-vous sur moi, je vous suis toute acquise' (II.1.349-50). Furthermore, she adopts a selfless 'Parental' stance, as she seems mainly preoccupied with keeping her mistress alive even when she is pleading for Jason's life:

Je ne refuse rien; mais épargnez Jason.  
Votre aveugle vengeance une fois assouvie,  
Le regret de sa mort vous coûterait la vie. (II.1.352-54)

The relationship between the two women follows the dynamic of an 'I'm Only Trying to Help You' game. Nérine adopts a 'Parental' stance because it incorporates the internal psychological advantage of martyrdom whilst Médée is happy to have found a trusted ally that will enable her to put the plan into motion and to fulfil her life script.

The conversation also reveals that Médée still believes in Jason's promise of love and considers his current actions a result of Créon's pressure. This represents a dramatic change considering that in the previous two scenes she laments his betrayal, issues gruesome threats and summons the gods in support of her revenge against him:

Je crois qu'il m'aime encore, et qu'il nourrit en l'âme  
Quelques restes secrets d'une si belle flamme;  
Qu'il ne fait qu'obéir aux volontés d'un roi. (II.1.361-63)

This inconsistency in Médée's attitude towards Jason, suggesting a discrepancy between her intentions and her statements, indicates the presence of a 'You Can't Trust Anybody' game. Médée's willingness to give her spouse the benefit of the doubt and continue to trust him stems from her 'Child's' desire to prove that even the closest family members are untrustworthy.<sup>52</sup> The 'You Can't Trust Anybody' player rejoices when his belief is confirmed, and one could argue that Médée's 'Natural Child' might derive some satisfaction from her spouse's betrayal. Hence, Médée will continue her revenge plan and will pursue an 'Always' script and an 'You Can't Trust Anybody' game motivated by the pay-off provided by these actions, namely, challenging the established order in pursuit of her desire and seeking confirmation of her belief in people's untrustworthiness. The fulfilment of these endeavours will be supported by her servant, Nérine, who becomes her ally on account of an 'I'm Only Trying to Help' game.

In the analysis of this scene in chapter 2, I discuss the way this interaction with Nérine reveals Médée's heroism and the fact that she begins to perceive this position of isolation and vulnerability as an opportunity to proudly assert her independence and self-reliance. The transactional analysis of this scene reveals that there are other factors that inform the Colchian's actions and decisions which are related to the psychoanalytic dimension of this interaction. Médée is no longer alone, as Nérine adopts a selfless stance and becomes her trusted ally on account of a desire to obtain a psychological advantage. Nérine's complicity brings Médée closer to the pay-off provided by the revenge plot and implicitly her life script. Furthermore, Médée's actions are also determined by the need to continue the 'You Can't Trust Anybody' game which will provide the satisfaction of punishing the people who have betrayed her and having her belief in people's untrustworthiness reinforced. Therefore, Médée's attitude can alternatively be interpreted as stemming from a desire to continue her game and life-script in order to collect a psychological

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<sup>52</sup> Berne, *What Do You Say*, p. 179.



and emotional pay-off as well as the awareness that she now has an ally who is able to support her in this endeavour.

Médée's interaction with Créon, the figure of authority that has the power to decide her fate, also contributes to the unfolding of her revenge plot. The king's first reaction is to reinforce an image of Médée as monstrous Fury to justify his current behaviour: 'Voyez comme elle s'enfle et d'orgueil et d'audace! / Ses yeux ne sont que feu; ses regards, que menace' (II.2.377-79). This attitude denotes his desire to see her as an inhuman threat in order to diminish his responsibility and justify his decision. This attitude indicates the presence of a 'See What You/They Made Me Do' game. Moreover, the fact that he treats her request for clarification with irony and refers to her past and to current political affairs, whilst failing to mention his personal interest in the matter, reinforces the idea that he is using external factors to justify his behaviour in a 'See What You/They Made Me Do' manoeuvre. Consequently, Créon's constant references to past crimes and his refusal to dialogue with a Médée whose attitude belies her reputation as an irrational monster, indicates a desire to avoid assuming full responsibility for this unjust behaviour. This stance seals the king's image as a tyrannical ruler, justifying partially Médée's gruesome revenge.

The Colchian, on the other hand, seeks justice and does not engage in Créon's 'See What You/They Made Me Do' game. Her assessment of Créon's behaviour is not influenced by his excuses, and she is able to identify the unjust and biased nature of his decision:

Vous faites différence entre deux criminels!

Vous voulez qu'on l'honore, et que de deux complices

L'un ait votre couronne, et l'autre des supplices! (II.2.456-58)

Furthermore, the king's attitude provides Médée with the opportunity to emphasize his untrustworthiness much to the delight of her 'Child' desirous to continue the

‘You Can’t Trust Anybody’ game:

Mais vous les saviez tous quand vous m’avez reçue,  
Votre simplicité n’a point été déçue,  
En ignoriez-vous un, quand vous m’avez promis  
Un rempart assuré contre mes ennemis? (II.2.477-80)

This manoeuvre aims to support her claims whilst also providing her with some satisfaction from the interaction. Nonetheless, Médée’s arguments and her plea fall on deaf ears as Créon is more concerned with concealing his personal motives and his guilt than with fair treatment. The king is not above the conflict; he takes sides in order to protect the male hero and show his own strength whilst simultaneously concealing his guilt and responsibility.<sup>53</sup>

The analysis of this dialogue in chapter two argues that the Colchian sees her crimes as an act of courage, which she performed in the name of her love for Jason. She abandoned the responsibility of care towards her parents and siblings and chose a responsiveness to herself and the warrior which exposed her to social opprobrium and isolation. On account of this feat she believes she is entitled to Jason’s love. The transactional analysis interpretation above reveals that this interaction also provides Médée with the satisfaction of exposing Créon’s bias and proving his untrustworthiness. This occurs because the king resorts to a game in order to justify his behaviour and diminish his responsibility. Therefore, we can consider Médée’s behaviour as stemming from a desire to continue the ‘You Can’t Trust Anybody’ game enabled by Créon’s unwillingness to take responsibility for his unfair treatment of the Colchian.

Besides seeking to deprive Médée of her spouse, Créon also asks her to leave the children behind. This final request appears too harsh even to the king and as a

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<sup>53</sup> Verhoeff, pp. 70-72.

result he grants her an extra day in a gesture meant to atone for his cruelty.<sup>54</sup> The Colchian's reaction emphasizes the scope of the violence they are inflicting upon her and provides a first clue regarding her future actions as she seems determined not to leave the children (a part of her) in Jason's and Créuse's custody: 'Barbare humanité, qui m'arrache à moi-même, / Et feint de la douceur pour m'ôter ce que j'aime!' (II.2.497-98) It becomes clear during this confrontation that Médée cannot accept this unjust treatment because of her heroic nature and a sense that her revenge is 'justified by these repeated betrayals'.<sup>55</sup> Créon's biased judgement and his untrustworthiness provide her with a justification for the gruesome revenge plan and reinforce her belief in people's unreliability.

In the ethics of care analysis of this passage I argue that Médée feels powerless and torn apart as she is forced to contemplate the loss of the connections that define a significant part of her personality and of the persons who are important for her idea of a good life. The transactional analysis above provides an alternative interpretation, as this request becomes another proof of the cruelty and betrayal, she suffers at the hands of Créon and Jason and provides a justification for Médée's revenge. The king has confirmed Médée's belief in people's unreliability, and she has collected enough betrayals to feel entitled to the pay-off of her 'You Can't Trust Anybody' game, namely a gruesome retaliation. Créon inadvertently provides Médée with the opportunity to pursue the pay-off of her game, and this need for satisfaction informs the Colchian's behaviour and actions.

A similarly tyrannical attitude marked by egoism and lack of scruples on the part of Créuse will bring about her death. Créon's daughter demands the Colchian's sole treasure, the only memory of her homeland and illustrious bloodline, her dress, in exchange for sparing Médée's children from exile:

La robe de Médée a donné dans mes yeux.

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<sup>54</sup> Corneille, 'Examen' *Médée*, p. 338.

<sup>55</sup> Berne, *What Do You Say*, p. 179.

Mon caprice, à son lustre attachant mon envie, [...]  
Pour le prix des enfants que je vous ai sauvés. (II.4.568-69, 572)

Although mercantile, cruel, selfish and fetishistic, Créuse's request is by no means proof of the superficiality typical of a 'petite bourgeoise' as John Lyons argues.<sup>56</sup> This represents another step in the process of creating her image as a representative of power and rendering it visible, which according to Schweitzer, accompanies her desire to marry Jason.<sup>57</sup> She seeks to replace Médée by usurping her role at both a domestic and historical level:

La gloire m'en demeure; et les races futures  
Comptant notre hyménée entre vos aventures,  
Vanteront à jamais mon amour généreux,  
Qui d'un si grand héros rompt le sort malheureux. (II.4.561-64)

The lines above also reveal that she envisions herself as the one who will save Jason from Médée's nefarious influence. This attitude, together with the fact that she is willing to marry him despite his tumultuous past, his betrayal of Médée and the danger represented by both the Colchian and Égée, her disenchanted suitor, indicate the presence of a 'You Can't Scare Me' script. This life plan is determined by a belief in her ability to help him achieve great things despite any obstacles.<sup>58</sup> As a result, whilst Jason's charm, good looks and past glory might represent a source of attraction for the young princess, his rather ambiguous and dangerous situation together with Médée's reputation make him appealing to Créuse, as they enable her to become the one to redeem him and restore his former glory.

Créuse's request for Médée's dress determines Jason to meet Nérine, his only

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<sup>56</sup> John D. Lyons, 'Tragedy Comes to Arcadia: Corneille's Médée', p. 199.

<sup>57</sup> Schweitzer, *Une "héroïne exécration aux yeux des spectateurs"*, p. 301.

<sup>58</sup> Berne, *What Do You Say*, p. 220.

ally and mediator in the relationship with his wife. Out of fear, guilt or convenience he entrusts the servant with the means to put into effect his wife's revenge plan against Créuse by asking her help in procuring the dress. Jason is reluctant to face Médée, just as Agamemnon was at Aulis, because he has the same awareness that in front of her, he will have to justify his betrayal and he will be unable to sustain a selfless, blameless stance. However, this strategy does not save him from this dreaded encounter, as Médée's arrival interrupts his dialogue with Nérine. His fears regarding this meeting are proved correct: Médée wastes no time in placing him at the crux of her plight by reminding him of all the sacrifices she has made for his promise of love, the blood ties she has severed and the crimes she has committed for it. Moreover, she simultaneously exposes the strategy of his 'Until' script, namely his treatment of women as instruments to be used for his purposes and disregarded when no longer needed, all within the first fifty lines of the scene:

Aussi cruelle sœur que déloyale fille,  
Ces titres glorieux plaisaient à mes amours;  
Je les pris sans horreur pour conserver tes jours. [...]  
Quand à ton père usé je rendis la vigueur,  
J'avais encore tes vœux. (III.3.802-4, 807-08)

This tirade against her husband's lack of loyalty and scruples and his fickle nature determines Jason to defend himself and to protect his blameless stance. He invokes a selfless 'Parental' concern towards his children as the main reason for his treacherous behaviour, whilst emphasizing his role in persuading Créon to save Médée's life:

Les tendres sentiments d'un amour paternel  
Pour sauver mes enfants me rendent criminel, [...]  
Toi-même, furieuse, ai-je peu fait pour toi

D'arracher ton trépas aux vengeances d'un roi? (III.3.823-24, 827-28).

Nonetheless, Médée rejects his 'Child's' attempt to play the responsible parent and spouse. This denotes a 'You Can't Trust Anybody' attitude on her part indicating that the couple's bond of confidence has been severed: 'À travers tes conseils je vois assez ta ruse: / Ce n'est là m'en donner qu'en faveur de Créuse' (III.3.845-46). Communication gradually breaks down as the two spouses no longer trust each other's words and intentions, refuse to sympathize with each other's plights and continue to pursue their own desires through the unfolding of their scripts and games. Médée is listening in order to uncover the full extent of Jason's betrayal and to prepare the revenge she is entitled to, whilst her spouse holds on to a blameless stance which should enable him to conceal (from others and himself) the selfish pursuit of power, happiness and glory through his 'Until' life plan.

Jason's acknowledgement of his betrayal and his claim of moral superiority transform Médée into a ruthless avenger as she initiates a 'You Got Me Into This' game in order to obtain vindication and to emphasize his involvement in her past crimes: 'Tu présumes en vain de t'en mettre à couvert: / Celui-là fait le crime à qui le crime sert' (III.3.859-60). Furthermore, provoked by his lack of faith in her abilities (which according to Greenberg is the main source of his weakness) as well as her pride, Médée emphasizes the full extent of her powers:<sup>59</sup>

Misérable! Je puis adoucir des taureaux,  
La flamme m'obéit, et je commande aux eaux,  
L'enfer tremble, et les cieux, sitôt que je les nomme. (III.3.907-09)

Nonetheless, Jason's 'Child' in pursuit of his script and pay-off, impaired by the previous success of his cyclical practice of using women to his own advantage, and

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<sup>59</sup> Greenberg, *Corneille and the Ruses of Symmetry*, p. 23.

his privileged position as the sole object of her desire, projects onto Médée the behaviour that is required by his life-plan, namely resignation and willingness to facilitate his happiness and accession to power. As a result, it becomes apparent that he has not lost faith in his wife's powers but rather his 'Child' cannot abandon his script or see beyond his personal experience as a seducer of women and Médée's lover and husband.

As Jason is unwilling to abandon Créuse and Corinth, Médée wants to take the children into exile: 'Je n'ai plus qu'une grâce à demander ensuite: / Souffre que mes enfants accompagnent ma fuite' (III.3.917-18). To make her request more appealing she feeds Jason's narcissism by claiming that their offspring are his image and will act as his substitute and as a reminder of her desire for him:<sup>60</sup> 'Que je t'admire encore en chacun de leurs traits, / Que je t'aime et te baise en ces petits portraits' (III.3.919-20). This demand that apparently stems from her love of Jason and maternal instincts may also represent an unconscious desire to pursue her 'You Can't Trust Anybody' game and the 'Always' script. Her offspring might inherit their father's values and could in due course provide their mother with the betrayal she is eager to experience, reinforcing her belief in the untrustworthiness of people. However, Jason is unable to grant his wife's wish as this would involve depriving himself of the proof of political power and immortality as well as of his value within the patriarchal social system as Greenberg argues.<sup>61</sup> Despite Médée's apparent outrage and distress at Jason's betrayal, her 'Natural Child' is satisfied by this confirmation of her 'You Can't Trust Anybody' belief. Moreover, Jason's attitude entitles Médée to a gruesome reprisal, which will enable her to unleash the full force of her powers, acknowledge this part of her 'Natural Child', punish her spouse for his behaviour and undermine the patriarchal system that supported and encouraged his actions. Hence, Jason's reactions and attitude throughout the conversation contribute to his downfall.

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<sup>60</sup> Greenberg, *Corneille and the Ruses of Symmetry*, p. 32.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

This represents an alternative interpretation to the analysis of the scene in chapter two which argues that Médée's behaviour is informed by a sense of pride and the fact that she perceives Jason's actions as an abandonment of his duty of care towards his family and a lack of gratitude. The reading incorporated in the paragraphs above indicates that Médée uses this encounter to obtain the confirmation of Jason's betrayal in order to justify her retaliation whilst simultaneously deriving some satisfaction from this interaction through a 'You Got Me Into This' game. As a result, Jason's unwillingness to abandon his desire for power and glory incorporated in his 'Until' script becomes proof of his betrayal and the warrior inadvertently contributes to his downfall. Furthermore, Médée's request for the custody of the children becomes another means to prove Jason's betrayal and an attempt to potentially continue her 'You Can't Trust Anybody' game with different players. Médée derives satisfaction from Jason's repeated betrayals as they confirm her beliefs about others and justify the display of her power during the gruesome retaliation. This represents a new and original interpretation of the Colchian's behaviour as she unconsciously sets up these situations by entering into agreements with unreliable or unpredictable characters who promise to deliver a betrayal as for instance Jason or Égée.

After the discussion with Jason, Médée feels excited to have discovered his weakness and is eager to share this with her accomplice: 'Il aime ses enfants, ce courage inflexible: / Son faible est découvert' (III.3.945-46). The fear inspired by Médée's intention to sacrifice the children stimulates the servant's 'Parental' stance, determines her to adopt an 'I'm Only Trying to Help' attitude and to redirect her mistress's criminal plans towards Créuse by making use of the information received from Jason:

Contre un sang innocent pourquoi vous irriter,  
Si Créuse en vos lacs se vient précipiter?  
Elle-même s'y jette. (III.4.951-53)



Consequently, Nérine becomes Médée's accomplice and actively participates in the revenge plot against Créuse stimulated by a protective attitude towards her mistress's children and a desire to adopt the selfless, martyr-like stance supported by her game. This analysis presents Nérine's role in the unfolding of the tragic plot and Médée's revenge plan as well as the factors that inform the servant's actions and decisions. This is an aspect which is not discussed in the ethics of care reading, as this approach does not focus on the way characters collaborate and inadvertently contribute to the tragic outcome on account of their unconscious beliefs, desire and needs. Therefore, Nérine emerges as Médée's helper, and her collaboration is determined by unconscious beliefs and desires as well as by a preoccupation with protecting her mistress's children.

Whilst the servant's behaviour is influenced by a concern for the children's welfare, the Colchian is preoccupied only with the success of her plan and uses her offspring as instruments of revenge by arranging for them to present the poisoned dress to Créuse:<sup>62</sup> 'Mène-lui mes enfants, et fais-les, si tu peux, / Présenter par leur père à l'objet de ses vœux' (IV.1.1047-48). There is no trace of parental concern for the children as she exposes them to the dangers presented by this endeavour. This denotes that her 'Natural Child' is in full control, as the pay-off of her 'You Can't Trust Anybody' game is in sight. Consequently, the appeal of the impending pay-off determines Médée to perceive her children as a means of ensuring her triumph over her enemies.

In the chapter two analysis of Médée's behaviour towards her children I argue that she suffers a character transformation and abandons maternal care in favour of a sole concern for retaliation on account of pride and anger towards those who have mistreated her. The reading above indicates that an unconscious desire to obtain the pay-off incorporated in her game informs the way Médée perceives the children. She needs satisfaction and triumph, and she is willing to use whatever

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<sup>62</sup> Bennett, p. 20.

means are necessary to obtain it. The children become pawns in and eventually victims of this deadly game that their parents are playing. Médée's and Jason's unconscious beliefs and desires have a direct effect on their offspring.

Créon's, Créuse's and even Jason's inadvertent contributions to their downfall soon become even more significant, as Égée's failed attempt to abduct the young princess in response to her broken promise of marriage provides Médée with the opportunity to gain an ally once her revenge is accomplished. Furthermore, the young princess contributes to her demise involuntarily as both Égée's retaliation and Médée's revenge are direct consequences of Créuse's decision to marry Jason and her 'You Can't Scare Me' script. As a result, Médée obtains a safe exile in Athens and forges an alliance with Égée, Créuse's humiliated suitor, by using her magic to free the king from prison. Guided by mutual interest, the two strike an alliance and Égée leaves Corinth whilst Médée remains to ensure the unfolding of the revenge plot and to reap the fruits of her labour by taking delight in the spectacle of her enemies' downfall:

Ma vengeance n'aurait qu'un succès imparfait:

Je ne me venge pas, si je n'en vois l'effet;

Je dois à mon courroux l'heur d'un si doux spectacle. (IV.5.1275-77)

Although Égée is the only character in the play to treat Médée with respect, his behaviour is not particularly dignified or wise since he is in prison because of his failed attempt to abduct Créuse, his much younger love interest. As a result, Médée's decision to enter into an agreement with him, fully aware of his failure to exercise prudence in critical situations, appears motivated by lack of alternatives and rash judgement according to Florence de Caigny.<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, this type of reckless, unreliable behaviour makes him a suitable player for her 'You Can't Trust

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<sup>63</sup> de Caigny, p. 536.

Anybody Nowadays' game. Égée's actions contain the promise of further reckless behaviour and potentially a betrayal. This represents a source of attraction for Médée because he may reinforce her belief in people's untrustworthiness and provide her with the satisfaction she desires. Hence, Médée becomes Égée's ally because of the need for a haven as well as the prospect of being able to continue her 'You Can't Trust Anybody' game.

The ethics of care analysis of this scene indicates that Médée pursues and forges an alliance with Égée because it ensures her safety and provides her with the opportunity to initiate a marital connection based on mutual interest and respect. The preceding paragraphs alternatively argue that Médée's decision was informed by a desire to continue the 'You Can't Trust Anybody' game with a player whose reckless behaviour promises to provide the desired satisfaction. This reading reveals the way Médée's unconsciously sets up the context which will ensure a potential betrayal and will reinforce her belief in people's untrustworthiness. In this case her decision is not based on mutual interest and respect but rather an unconscious need for the type of satisfaction she might derive from Égée's behaviour. Given Médée's history with Jason and the way she behaves in Corinth, I would argue that this unconscious desire drives her actions and will continue to inform her decisions, particularly since both her spouse and Créon reinforce this belief in people's untrustworthiness and provide her with the satisfaction she desires.

Once Médée's safety and future are secured, she obtains information regarding the effects of the poisoned dress on Créuse and Créon. Despite the success of this plan, Médée deliberates on the degree of satisfaction provided by the double regicide. Her 'Natural Child' who has now tasted blood and is enticed by the prospect of the game's pay-off, finds it hard to resist the appeal of the infanticide which promises to provide a more effective revenge than the deaths of Créuse and Créon:

Est-ce assez, ma vengeance, est-ce assez de deux morts? [...]

Que n'a-t-elle déjà des enfants de Jason,  
Sur qui plus pleinement venger sa trahison!  
Suppléons-y des miens; immolons avec joie  
Ceux qu'à me dire adieu Créuse me renvoie. (V.2.1327, 1331-34)

The 'Natural Child' is in full control and consequently Médée sees her offspring as Jason's allies: 'Nature, je le puis sans violer ta loi: / Ils viennent de sa part, et ne sont plus à moi' (V.2.1335-36). Nonetheless, these musings have stimulated a 'Parental' influence which attempts to prevent her from making a decision:

Mais ils sont innocents; aussi l'était mon frère:  
Ils sont trop criminels d'avoir Jason pour père [...].  
Mais quoi! J'ai beau contre eux animer mon audace,  
La pitié la combat, et se met en sa place. (V.2.1337-8, 1341-42)

This struggle between the two ego states indicates that there is a trace of love and humanity within her behaviour. This also emphasizes the exceptional nature of this crime, which proves to be quite troubling even for the Colchian witch who has previously murdered her brother. However, the 'Natural Child's' claim over the children is strengthened by the fact that the death of her offspring will destroy Jason as man, father and potentially future king.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, the serious nature of this crime befits her 'Always' script marked by gruesome deeds that undermine the established order and the 'You Can't Trust Anybody' game according to which Jason's betrayal entitles her to murder as pay-off. All these aspects enable the 'Natural Child' to prevail and to add to the double regicide an infanticide:

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<sup>64</sup> Médée's behaviour towards her children is similar to the deficit in the capacity for 'person perception' observed by Glenn Carruthers in perpetrators of spousal revenge filicide. According to him, they experience the child as an object of significant emotional value to 'the other parent' and fail to 'represent their child as a moral subject with a mind of their own'. Glenn Carruthers, 'Making sense of spousal revenge filicide', *Aggression and Violent Behaviour*, 29 (2016), 30-35 (p. 31).

N'en délibérons plus, mon bras en résoudra.  
Je vous perds, mes enfants; mais Jason vous perdra;  
Il ne vous verra plus. (V.2.1355-57)

Once she has made a decision Médée wastes no time and transforms Jason into a spectator to the infanticide as she shows him the bloodied knife:

Lève les yeux, perfide, et reconnais ce bras  
Qui t'a déjà vengé de ces petits ingrats:  
Ce poignard que tu vois vient de chasser leurs âmes. (V.6.1539-41)

He becomes a powerless witness of Médée's triumphant revenge.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, the chariot that enables her to escape Jason's wrath renders her immortal, beyond the reach of humans and their rules.<sup>66</sup> This also reinforces Jason's helplessness and inferiority. The infanticide enables Médée's 'Natural Child' to collect the pay-off of her 'You Can't Trust Anybody' game by exacting upon her spouse a gruesome revenge justified by his betrayal.

In the ethics of care analysis of this scene I argue that Médée murders the children because she seeks to place Jason in the same position of isolation and vulnerability she has experienced because of his disloyal behaviour. She also perceives the act as a test of her strength, as she has to sacrifice a part of herself (the maternal aspect of her personality) for this purpose. The transactional analysis interpretation indicates that Jason's repeated betrayals have enabled Médée's

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<sup>65</sup> Zoé Schweitzer, 'Médée, le spectateur de la violence', intervention pour la journée d'étude 'Modalités et enjeux de l'inscription du spectateur dans les textes dramatiques (XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle-XX<sup>e</sup> siècle)' (Centre de recherches sur l'histoire du théâtre (CRHT): Université Paris IV-Sorbonne, 22 June 2004).

<[http://www.paris-sorbonne.fr/IMG/pdf/CRHT\\_Zoe\\_Schweitzer\\_Medee\\_le\\_spectateur\\_de\\_la\\_violence.pdf](http://www.paris-sorbonne.fr/IMG/pdf/CRHT_Zoe_Schweitzer_Medee_le_spectateur_de_la_violence.pdf)> [Accessed 11 April 2019]

<sup>66</sup> Bennett, p. 82.

retaliation and the warrior inadvertently contributed to the demise of his offspring. The infanticide also becomes a means to satisfy Médée's desire, reinforce her beliefs and continue the 'Always' script she has inherited. This is an interpretation, which presents Médée's behaviour as the result of the other characters' inadvertent influences as well as her own unconscious beliefs desires and goes beyond the idea of pride and strength incorporated in chapter 2.

This crime, which emphasizes Médée's rejection of patriarchy and human law, has a devastating effect on Jason as representative of authority and upholder of this male-governed system. His hold on law and politics is irremediably destroyed with the death of his children and his future bride, as these relationships ensured his position in the polis.<sup>67</sup> This means that the cyclical period of happiness and fulfilment incorporated by his 'Until' script has now come to an end and he needs to avenge these deaths in order to be able to contemplate another period of happiness. However, without family, friends or allies Jason is faced with his own powerlessness: 'Créuse, enfants, Médée, amour, haine, vengeance, / Où dois-je désormais chercher quelque allégeance?' (V.6.1585-86) As a result, he commits suicide in an act of self-punishment for his inability to avenge these deaths, and as a gesture of surrender to Médée.<sup>68</sup> The warrior cannot bear to face his helplessness and puts an end to his life.

Despite Médée's direct implication in these tragic and gruesome deaths, she is not solely responsible for them. Our analysis has shown that none of her victims or accomplices, except the children themselves, was innocent or selfless and they all inadvertently contributed to her revenge plot and their downfall. Créon and Créuse's demise was brought about by their tyrannical behaviour together with the king's pursuit of a 'See What You Made Me Do' game and his daughter's adhesion to a 'You Can't Scare Me' script. A similar desire for power, glory and kingship determined Jason to commit the betrayal that enabled Médée to pursue the pay-off

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<sup>67</sup> Greenberg, *Corneille and the Ruses of Symmetry*, pp. 34, 35.

<sup>68</sup> Id.

of her ‘You Can’t Trust Anybody’ game and to feel entitled to perform the crimes which caused his demise. The only character that actively participated in Médée’s revenge plot without being driven by a desire for power, glory or kingship was Nérine. However, her contribution was far from selfless since her plan to divert Médée’s criminal intentions away from the children and towards Créuse allowed her to perform the helper role. The failure of this role also provided Nérine with the opportunity to collect the pay-off of the ‘I’m Only Trying to Help’ stance by reinforcing her belief that ‘All People Are Ungrateful’. I also argue that Médée’s crimes were motivated by a desire to avenge her honour, to reinforce her belief in the untrustworthiness of patriarchy as a system and men as its representatives and upholders, as well as by the other characters’ pursuit of their games and scripts. Greenberg argues that the source of the tragic outcome lies in the opposition between Médée, who represents ‘the illogical mode of the magical and the sacred’ or ‘the chaotic forces of nature’, and Jason and Créon as representatives of the polis and the Law of the Father.<sup>69</sup> This analysis moves away from this polarising view of relationships and considers the tragic outcome the result of the complementary nature of the characters’ needs and desires. It is no longer a matter of female desire in conflict with male rationality and law. It is about the way the unconscious needs, beliefs and desires of all characters both male and female contribute to the unfolding of the plot. It is also about the satisfaction that Médée derives from Jason’s betrayal and the way she sets up a new situation which promises to deliver a similar outcome when she reaches an agreement with Égée. She is pursuing this desire and one can argue that she is the unconscious artisan of her misery and her status as an outcast. In this respect, this represents a new interpretation of the characters’ psychodynamic and provides an original reading of their behaviour. All in all, this analysis revealed that Médée’s decisions, actions and crimes were the result of her desire to uphold her honour and reinforce her beliefs whilst re-asserting the barbarian/‘Natural

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<sup>69</sup> Greenberg, *Subjectivity and Subjugation in Seventeenth-century Drama and Prose*, pp. 51, 56.

Child' side of her personality stimulated and enabled by the other characters and their pursuit of satisfaction, power, glory and happiness.

## 2.2 Clytemnestre and the 'After' Script

Clytemnestre is a female character with a strong sense of justice and similarly intriguing decision-making processes that lead to transgressive behaviour. The queen of Argos murders her spouse and usurps his role to punish his 'ambitious pride' and the killing of their child whilst satisfying her desire for power in the process.<sup>70</sup> Her story as re-interpreted by both Racine in *Iphigénie* and Longepierre in *Électre* reveals her criminal behaviour as well as the direct impact that it has on her children, their development and actions. Racine's *Iphigénie* depicts the first matrimonial crisis of the royal couple which marks a turning point in the dynamic of the two spouses and foreshadows the tragic events to follow. Longepierre's *Électre* presents the final episode of the story in which Clytemnestre has become a tyrannical ruler after murdering Agamemnon and usurping his throne. These two dramatic texts represent the basis of this analysis, as they provide the story of Clytemnestre's evolution from mother, to murderer and ruler, and the manner in which these transformations influence her relationship with Agamemnon and her children.

From a transactional analysis perspective, Racine's text indicates the manner in which the communication between Agamemnon and Clytemnestre gradually breaks down, a process that is essential to the interpretation of the murders to come and the characters' actions and behaviour. The analysis of Racine's play explores the dynamic of the royal couple and links it with their children's beliefs and deeds presented in Longepierre's *Électre*, which continues the re-interpretation of the classical story with the final episode of the myth. The inextricable bond between the behaviour of the parents and that of their offspring is emphasized by Berne through

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<sup>70</sup> Edward Forman, 'The Provoked Wife: The Defence of Clytemnestra in 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Drama', *Essays in French Literature*, 44 (2004), 85-109 (p. 93).



the concept of parental programming.<sup>71</sup> This chapter will use this concept to analyse the effect of Agamemnon's and Clytemnestre's actions and decisions on the behaviour of their children. Hence, this approach will provide an image of the manner in which behaviour reveals specific psychological motivations (in Agamemnon's and Clytemnestre's case) and inherited beliefs materialize and express themselves through certain actions (in Électre's and Oreste's case), presenting the unconscious factors that inform the characters' behaviour.

The first scene of Racine's play presents Agamemnon, the leader of the Greek army and king of Argos, paying a secret visit to his loyal servant Arcas. During this encounter the king reveals the ethical dilemma that will haunt him throughout the entire play: the gods demand the life of his daughter, Iphigénie, in exchange for winning the Trojan War:

Vous armez contre Troie une puissance vaine,  
Si dans un sacrifice auguste et solennel  
Une fille du sang d'Hélène  
De Diane en ces lieux n'ensanglante l'autel.  
Pour obtenir les vents que le ciel vous dénie,  
Sacrifiez Iphigénie. (I.1.57-62)

This dilemma represents the main source of his psychological turmoil as it makes his role as a father incompatible with his position of power. In Berne's terms, as king and co-ordinator of the expedition he should of course act as an 'Adult' but the oracle stimulates an influence from his 'Child', as it brings the promise of omnipotence. His initial decision reflects this influence of the power-hungry, glory-driven, 'Child' of 'une famille maudite', stimulated by Ulysse's manipulative

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<sup>71</sup> Berne, *What Do You Say*, p. 39.

actions.<sup>72</sup> The warrior flattered him with ‘Ce nom de roi des rois, et de chef de la Grèce’ (I.1.81) which had the effect of awakening Agamemnon’s desire for power and greatness and reminding him of his duty towards his subjects. Ulysse presented the sacrifice as a prerequisite of Agamemnon’s position of omnipotence and glory and reiterated a precept handed down from parents to their children: ‘The world will be a better place if you kill certain people, and in that way you will attain immortality, become omnipotent, and acquire irresistible power’.<sup>73</sup> Agamemnon’s ‘Child’ agreed to sacrifice his daughter as he takes delight in this idea of greatness and power: ‘Charmé de mon pouvoir, et plein de ma grandeur’ (I.1.80). This account reveals Ulysse’s decisive role in Agamemnon’s decision-making process and reinforces his position as manipulator of the king’s ambitions.

Agamemnon contemplated the consequences of his decision and this has stimulated his ‘Parent’ ego state and his concern for his daughter’s life. Under the influence of this ego state, he attempts to rescue Iphigénie with the help of his servant. However, this ‘Parental’ ego state, together with his emphasis on victimhood indicate the presence of a ‘Wooden Leg’ game aimed to elicit sympathy from Arcas and find excuses for his deviant behaviour. Agamemnon’s speech, which acknowledges a certain amount of guilt on his part, emphasizes the role of the external factors involved in his decision-making process: his duty, the gods and Ulysse’s influence. The entire conversation revolves around the main thesis of this psychological game: ‘What do you expect of a man with (this social status, this amount of power and responsibility, this ultimatum from the gods and these allies)?’ The base formula of ‘Wooden Leg’ game as explained in Berne, is here adapted to Agamemnon’s situation. Commoner versions of ‘Wooden Leg’ include ‘What do you expect of a man who comes from a broken home?’ or ‘What do you expect of a woman who had a father like that?’<sup>74</sup> These represent positions which aim to

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<sup>72</sup> Dominique Rabaud-Gouillart, ‘Première approche’ in Jean Racine, *Iphigénie* (France: Larousse, 1991), pp. 4-32 (p. 22).

<sup>73</sup> Berne, *What Do You Say*, p. 152.

<sup>74</sup> Berne, *Games People Play*, p. 72

justify deviant or inappropriate behaviour and to obtain sympathy for one's interlocutor. They also represent a defence mechanism as the individual does not have to take full responsibility for his/her actions. As mentioned in the Introduction, transactional analysis does not discuss the role of divinity in games and life scripts, as it focuses mainly on human actions and beliefs. However, the text indicates that Agamemnon sees himself as a victim of his position of power and the gods, and this represents a part of his mindset and beliefs which cannot be ignored. The king perceives himself as a victim of his duty whilst the gods and Ulysse are clearly identified as the main external sources of his mental distress.

Towards the end of scene 1, two other characters emerge as sources of psychological pressure: Calchas the priest who, empowered by his prediction, will seek to fulfil it more ardently and actively than the gods themselves and Clytemnestre, Agamemnon's wife, whom he deliberately attempts to avoid: 'D'une mère en fureur épargne-moi les cris' (I.1.147). As mentioned in the analysis performed in chapter two, Agamemnon perceives his wife as a powerful opponent and fears her. However, by the end of the scene, there is a complex image of the main factors involved in the king's decision-making process: his political and military role, the oracle's prediction, Ulysse's influence, his own desire for greatness and glory, the fear of taking responsibility for his actions and a desire for sympathy. These elements will influence his interactions with the other characters, particularly Clytemnestre, throughout the play and will have an important part in the unfolding of the action.

Agamemnon's inability to make a decision in the first act of the play (he decides to sacrifice Iphigénie then he changes his mind) denotes the presence of another unconscious influence, a 'Never' script. This idea is reinforced by the fact that this life script is represented by none other than Tantalus, the founder of his illustrious family.<sup>75</sup> Agamemnon's life plan, which has been passed down from his

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<sup>75</sup> Berne, *What Do You Say*, p. 206.

ancestors, incorporates a parental curse derived from the myth of Tantalus and related to ‘articulated desire and its frustration’.<sup>76</sup> This curse forbids him to do the things he desires the most and determines him to spend his life being surrounded by temptation. Agamemnon obeys the script and the parental curse because his ‘Child’ is afraid of the things he wants most, so he is really tantalizing himself.<sup>77</sup> He wants to hold on to his position of power, but he is afraid to face the consequences of his decisions, and this fear derived from his life plan will inform his behaviour towards Clytemnestre and the dynamic of the royal couple once he agrees to the sacrifice.

Clytemnestre fits the king’s ‘Never’ script as she augments his fears regarding the consequences of his decision to sacrifice Iphigénie in the name of the war. The first encounter between the two spouses in Act III, Scene 1 represents the starting point of a power struggle between them which will end with the breakdown of their relationship. Agamemnon, in a cautious but authoritarian ‘Adult’ ego state, behaves as a king, treats Clytemnestre as a subject rather than a wife, and asks her to leave Aulis: ‘Je le veux, et je vous le commande’ (III.1.818). The queen came to talk to Iphigénie’s father about the wedding, and this unusual order alongside her spouse’s enigmatic behaviour takes her by surprise. The fact that Agamemnon uses his authority to impose his will and force his wife into obeying his wishes will affect the dynamic of the royal couple. Moreover, the fact that he did not use his ‘Wooden Leg’ game to elicit sympathy and justify his behaviour denotes an awareness of Clytemnestre’s strong ‘Parental’ stance and her unwillingness to acknowledge or accept his blameless position. Agamemnon’s fear of Clytemnestre and his unwillingness to face the consequences of his decision lead to a communication breakdown, which will inform the conflict between the two spouses, once the truth about Iphigénie’s sacrifice is revealed.

Despite the king’s attempt to conceal the truth, the queen finds out moments before the ceremony that her husband summoned their daughter to Aulis to be

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<sup>76</sup> Bennett, p. 214.

<sup>77</sup> Berne, *What Do You Say*, p. 206.

sacrificed. This information stimulates her maternal instincts and her 'Parental' ego state. As a result she puts Iphigénie under the authority and protection of her promised husband Achille. This represents an undermining of Agamemnon's parental rights and of his status as both father and king: 'Elle n'a que vous seul. Vous êtes en ces lieux / Son père, son époux, son asile, ses dieux.' (III.5.939-40). This decision, although instinctual (belonging to her 'Parent'), proves to be wise, as it exploits existing tensions between the two men. Achille is the only Greek leader who has no sense of collective interest, he is his own master, acts according to his likes and desires which puts him in direct conflict with Agamemnon who stands in the way of these desires.<sup>78</sup> Clytemnestre's request for protection in return for Iphigénie's hand in marriage reveals that she perceives Agamemnon as an enemy rather than a husband and father, and she is able to exploit this tension between Achille and the king in order to ensure her daughter's safety.

Greenberg argues that Iphigénie 'successfully turns Achille against Agamemnon, as she represents the object of desire of both these men'.<sup>79</sup> However, in the light of Clytemnestre's request for protection, I would argue that the queen initiates this conflict, which is supported by existing tensions between the two men (their narcissistic impulses and Achille's apolitical stance), while Iphigénie aims to calm spirits and show love to both her father and her lover. The instinctual reaction of the queen's 'Parent' represents the initiation of a 'Let's You and Him Fight' ritual in which Achille and Agamemnon fight over Iphigénie.<sup>80</sup> This interaction is candid and represents a means through which Clytemnestre's 'Parent' uses tradition in the form of entrusting the future husband with ensuring the safety and well-being of his future wife in order to protect Iphigénie. Moreover, the ritual is initiated even though Iphigénie does not desire the conflict and she might have already made a choice, as Clytemnestre takes all agency from her. The queen has adopted a parental

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<sup>78</sup> Barthes, p. 107.

<sup>79</sup> Greenberg, *Racine From Ancient Myth to Tragic Modernity*, p. 190.

<sup>80</sup> Berne, *Games People Play*, p.54.

role and exerts her authority over Iphigénie and her behaviour. Hence, Clytemnestre's parental stance together with the 'Let's You and Him Fight' ritual reveal that queen adopts a protective and possessive role, which becomes the main reason for her conflict with Agamemnon, the gradual deterioration of their relationship and her future criminal behaviour. In the analysis of this scene in chapter 2, I argue that Clytemnestre chose responsibility of care towards her daughter over duty of care toward her spouse by putting Iphigénie under Achille's protection. This analysis reveals that Clytemnestre's gesture involves more than abandonment of duty of care towards Agamemnon, as she initiates a conflict between him and Achille exploiting the existing tensions between the two men. Furthermore, the queen has little consideration for Iphigénie's wishes and takes all agency from her, in order to satisfy her maternal instincts. Therefore, Clytemnestre is devoted to saving her daughter and this involves aggressive manoeuvres as well as adopting a possessive stance, which is at the basis of her conflict with Agamemnon.

In this tense situation, Iphigénie's requests for respect and tenderness towards her father, become a source of aggravation for Clytemnestre, as the queen has a game plan of her own when it comes to dealing with her spouse. She aims to use his deceitful plan against him by pretending to still be in the dark about his true intentions. She even tests Agamemnon's willingness to carry on his deceit with subtle, enigmatic questions: 'S'il faut partir, ma fille est toute prête. / Mais vous, n'avez-vous rien, Seigneur, qui vous arrête?' (IV.3.1157-58) continued by a reference to Iphigénie as a victim. This increases Agamemnon's confusion until the sight of mother and daughter in tears brings about the dramatic realization that his true intentions have been discovered. Clytemnestre's strategy provides both mother and daughter with the advantage of taking the king by surprise, as Agamemnon is unprepared for the rhetorical assault to follow.

By administering to Agamemnon, a taste of his own medicine, Clytemnestre initiates a 'Now I've Got You, You Son of a Bitch' game in which her 'Prejudiced

Parent' aims to stimulate Agamemnon's 'Child' and an acute sense of guilt stemming from the awareness that he has been caught out. This type of game provides her 'Prejudiced Parent' with the pay-off of being able to express the full force of her fury now that the culprit has been caught.<sup>81</sup> Iphigénie's imminent sacrifice represents an appropriate context for this type of behaviour, whilst the king's deceitful attitude justifies further its extreme nature by adding insult to the injury. Additionally, this game indicates that the player aiming to catch out his victim has been waiting, watching and hoping for the latter to make a slip to be able to express his anger.<sup>82</sup> This suggests that Clytemnestre's rage stems from her past and seeks opportunities to manifest itself in the present situation. Consequently, Clytemnestre's vicious diatribe against Agamemnon, which is part of her 'Now I've Got You, You Son of a Bitch' game, is determined not only by the immediate trigger of Iphigénie's imminent death, but also by her desire to express the rage that has been accumulating over time.

Clytemnestre's personal history marked by the loss of a husband and a child, together with the current situation which forces her to contemplate the potential loss of another child at the hands of Agamemnon, mark the presence of an 'After' life script. The motto of this preconscious life plan is 'You can enjoy yourself for a while, but after that your troubles begin' which corresponds to the cyclicity of the dramatic events that mark the queen's life.<sup>83</sup> In this type of script, the 'Parental' influence and the main threat is 'After you get married and have children your troubles will begin' which is certainly true of Clytemnestre and her sister Héléne whose matrimonial infidelity lead to the Trojan war.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, in their case this proclivity to misfortune through parental influence acquires a mythical dimension in the shape of a family curse. Tyndare's two daughters have been cursed by Aphrodite to be unfaithful once they get married. Hence, one way or another,

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<sup>81</sup> Berne, *Games People Play*, p. 36.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>83</sup> Berne, *What Do You Say*, p. 206.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

Clytemnestre's 'Child' is aware that periods of peace are followed by catastrophes and there is a 'sword of Damocles' hanging over her head. The game she initiated on account of Iphigénie's imminent sacrifice provides her with the psychological pay-off of not having to confront her own deficiencies, namely the proclivity for infidelity which runs in her family, and has led to this situation, whilst being able to express her anger in a context that justifies it. This interaction helps Clytemnestre avoid the sense of guilt related to her heredity. Hence, this game she initiated and the verbal abuse she is ready to inflict upon her husband are as much about her frustrations and shortcomings as about her daughter's life.

In chapter 2 I argue that Clytemnestre's behaviour in this scene represents a loss of openness and marks the beginning of the transformation of character she undergoes as a result of Agamemnon's betrayal. The analysis above presents an interpretation of the queen's behaviour, which focuses on the psychological pay-off she obtains from this interaction. She resorts to cunningness, to save Iphigénie whilst being able to express her accumulated anger and avoid dealing with her shortcomings. This gesture may be interpreted as a means to obtain satisfaction from this interaction as well as a sign of the gradual transformation of Clytemnestre's behaviour as a result of Agamemnon's mistreatment.

The assault by Clytemnestre's 'Prejudiced Parent' reflects the influence of these psychological factors on her behaviour as she spares no punches in this diatribe deemed the 'rhetorical climax' of the play:<sup>85</sup>

Vous ne démentez point une race funeste.

Oui, vous êtes le sang d'Atrée et de Thyeste.

Bourreau de votre fille, il ne vous reste enfin

Que d'en faire à sa mère un horrible festin.

(IV.4.1245-48)

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<sup>85</sup> Greenberg, *Racine From Ancient Myth to Tragic Modernity*, p. 179.



Clytemnestre is Agamemnon's double, because their violent past and her 'Prejudiced Parent' mindset enable the queen to reveal what he tried to conceal through his 'Wooden Leg' game, namely, that his hereditary desire for power is at the heart of their current misfortune, and that he is a victim of his ambition.<sup>86</sup> As I argue in chapter 2 Clytemnestre connects Agamemnon's decision to sacrifice his daughter to his ancestors' willingness to relinquish family relations in the pursuit of power and glory in order to emphasize the fact that he is a bad parent. However, it can also be interpreted as a means to force Agamemnon's 'Parent' to acknowledge the existence of 'Atrée's Child' with all his sins and to take responsibility for the decision to sacrifice their daughter. This is at the heart of Clytemnestre's claim that he did nothing to save his daughter, and his excuses and sadness (manoeuvres of his 'Wooden Leg' game) are not adequate proofs. The queen attacks Agamemnon's 'Parent' stance seeking an acknowledgement of his guilt which may make him put an end to the game and his victim stance in order to focus on saving Iphigénie.

Clytemnestre's verbal assault reveals her courage and enables her to acquire the monumental stance required by the crime she will commit at the end of the Trojan campaign. The queen's discourse reveals the truth with regard to her husband's inherent flaw as a father and a king and his attempt to atone for it. Clytemnestre argues that this inclination towards sacrificing family members in the name of power and glory has been passed down from Agamemnon's ancestors, and the king displays a behaviour similar to Tantalus the founder of the House of Atreus. In spite of her speech's rhetorical value, Clytemnestre fails, because according to Greenberg, Agamemnon 'turns away from what he always knew but did not want to acknowledge'.<sup>87</sup> However, one could also argue that her verbal assault failed, because instead of putting an end to the king's game, it managed to perpetuate it in a slightly different form. Clytemnestre's harsh 'Parent' approach to Agamemnon's

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<sup>86</sup> John Campbell, 'Racine's Iphigénie: A "Happy Tragedy"?' in *Theatrum Mundi, Studies in Honor of Ronald W. Tobin*, ed. by Claire L. Carlin and Kathleen Wine (Rookwood Press, Charlottesville, 2003), pp. 214-221 (p. 216).

<sup>87</sup> Greenberg, *Racine From Ancient Myth to Tragic Modernity*, p. 182.

victim stance is a manoeuvre familiar to a 'Wooden Leg' player that transforms the transactions into a 'contest of wills' from which he is still able to derive satisfaction.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, by making Iphigénie witness the entire scene in which Agamemnon is transformed into a victim of his wife's anger, the queen inadvertently reinforces his argument that this dilemma is as taxing on him as it is on his daughter and her sacrifice will be detrimental to him as much as it is to her (a prediction that will find its fulfilment at the end of the Trojan expedition). This enables Agamemnon to obtain the sympathy of his daughter, which brings about the pay-off for his game. Consequently, Clytemnestre's attempt to influence the king is unsuccessful because she has adopted a 'Prejudiced Parent' stance, which enabled Agamemnon to pursue further his game, albeit in a transformed state and to claim his victim position in order to elicit sympathy from his daughter.

Clytemnestre's speech is not completely ineffective, as it persuades Agamemnon to initiate a second attempt at saving his daughter's life. The king's new plan revives the hopes of his wife and daughter. However, Clytemnestre is forced to contemplate Iphigénie's imminent death once more, following Ériphile's betrayal. Unlike Agamemnon, who has given up on saving Iphigénie, Clytemnestre fights to the end and displays a self-sacrificial stance. She engages in this life-and-death battle by positioning herself as a human barrier between her daughter and the disgruntled army: 'Mon corps sera plutôt séparé de mon âme, / [...] Ah! ma fille!' (V.3.1633-34). She is deeply angered by Agamemnon's betrayal: 'Par quelle trahison le cruel m'a déçue!' (V.3.1653) which sums up the traumatic experiences of her spousal relationship and foreshadows a dark future in which the queen will be the one to inflict the same type of violence, betrayal and murder, upon her husband. After Aulis, Clytemnestre's 'After' script will continue with a repetition of the cycle of violence she experienced, inflicted or inspired: the murder of her husband and child followed by betrayal and the (attempted) murder of her daughter

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<sup>88</sup> Berne, *Games People Play*, p 72.

(all inflicted by Agamemnon) is continued with another betrayal and murder (this time she is the perpetrator and her spouse the victim) and one final betrayal and murder (that her children inflict upon her). Her life consists of periods of calm followed by violence.

These details of Clytemnestre's script are not familiar to her 'Parent' ego state who can only suggest through this attitude her future behaviour toward Agamemnon. This life plan represents the 'Child's' choice, an ego state that remains decathected throughout the play. However, the consternation of Clytemnestre's 'Parent' regarding Agamemnon's betrayal might not be as genuine as it appears. Clytemnestre argued that his behaviour is a mere reflection of his heredity. The outrage at his betrayal is less justified, as she experienced his violence previously in an uncannily similar context. Therefore, the aim of her exclamation goes beyond a genuine expression of frustration in a moment of dramatic tension. This clear expression of mistrust appears to be a confirmation of an already existing belief that 'You Can't Trust Anybody Nowadays'. This attitude is part of the game with the same name in which players derive satisfaction from being able to obtain confirmation of this belief. This sceptical mindset is not reflected in their behaviour, as they continue to trust people, and this usually turns out badly. The players of this game pick untrustworthy people, make ambiguous agreements with them and when things go wrong, they are more than happy to reassert their belief.<sup>89</sup> This reflects Clytemnestre's situation: Agamemnon's willingness to betray her and murder their daughter seems to take her by complete surprise despite the couple's violent past. Clytemnestre derives satisfaction from Agamemnon's betrayal as it provides an opportunity to express her accumulated rage and to reinforce her beliefs in people's untrustworthiness. Consequently, the queen's outraged exclamation might represent her satisfaction at having this belief reinforced. Furthermore, the mental world of a 'You Can't Trust Anybody Nowadays' player 'is a self-righteous one in which he

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<sup>89</sup> Berne, *What Do You Say*, pp. 178-79.

is entitled to do all sorts of shady things, provided the aim is to uncover the untrustworthiness of others'.<sup>90</sup> In this light Clytemnestre's betrayal of Agamemnon by appointing Achille as Iphigénie's protector without waiting for confirmation of the information, and her majestic verbal assault on the king, acquire a new meaning. These actions fit the noble purpose of saving her daughter as well as the plan to denounce Agamemnon's betrayal whilst emphasizing her outrage and her righteous behaviour. Moreover, this game incorporates the violence present in Clytemnestre's story as in some 'extreme cases' players who suffer repeated betrayals may resort to homicide and end up being killed by someone they trust so that they can reassert this slogan even with their dying breath.<sup>91</sup> The queen follows the behavioural pattern of the game, as she will murder Agamemnon upon his return from Troy and will suffer the same fate at the hands of her son. This outcome required by the script of this game also corresponds to the queen's preconscious life plan, as it reinforces the belief that troubles begin after you marry and have children. Therefore, Clytemnestre's nurturing 'Parent' stance is neither entirely selfless nor completely different from Agamemnon's, since it provides the queen with the opportunity to reassert her beliefs, to justify the murder she will commit and to fulfil her life plan.

In the ethics of care analysis, I argue that the queen has been rendered vulnerable and powerless by the traumatic experience at Aulis and this determines the need for the closure and self-sufficiency provided by revenge. However, in the light of the analysis above this reaction may also be part of a psychological game meant to reinforce her belief in people's untrustworthiness by continuing the cycle of violence, which began before Aulis. This decision is part of a behavioural pattern incorporated in her 'After' script and indicates the satisfaction the queen derives from repeated betrayals. This represents an alternative interpretation of her behaviour at Aulis as well as after the Trojan expedition.

Ulysse's arrival, which the queen interprets as a sign that her daughter is no

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<sup>90</sup> Berne, *What Do You Say*, p. 180.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 179-80.

longer alive, increases the dramatic tension. However, in a fortunate turn of events, this former enemy becomes the bearer of good news. The queen is informed that her daughter is alive due to divine intervention and Achille and Agamemnon have reached an agreement. Clytemnestre's gratitude turns to the gods and Achille whilst Agamemnon is not mentioned, indicating that her feelings towards him remain unchanged. The queen focuses solely on his shortcomings because they ensure the continuation of her 'You Can't Trust Anybody' game by justifying her anger and her future betrayal. Consequently, the final lines of the play belong to the queen and indicate the disintegration of her relationship with Agamemnon as well as the continuation of her deadly game.

The transactional analysis of this play has revealed that Clytemnestre's behaviour towards Agamemnon is influenced by unconscious beliefs and desires stemming from an 'You Can't Trust Anybody' game and an 'After' script. The queen does not shy away from blaming Agamemnon and his allies and unmasking the latent desires underlying this sacrifice. This stance befits her 'Nurturing Parent' state as well as the purpose of the 'You Can't Trust Anybody' game, as it emphasizes her righteous behaviour as well as her husband's betrayal. The satisfaction she derives from uncovering and denouncing Agamemnon's deceitful plan influences her ruthless behaviour towards him and the active role that she adopts in the attempt to save her daughter's life, since it reinforces the belief that most people are untrustworthy. Moreover, the cyclical perpetration of violence revealed by her past and her current situation marks the influence of an 'After' script which incorporates the looming presence of misfortune and indicates perpetual anxiety regarding it as well as an unconscious desire for its fulfilment. This preconscious script alongside the 'You Can't Trust Anybody' game inform Clytemnestre's interaction with Agamemnon and her children, since Électre and Oreste will repeat the violence their mother inflicts upon their father in order to fulfil her script as well as theirs.

Racine's *Iphigénie* contains important clues regarding Clytemnestre's

actions and behaviour after the Trojan War and suggests that Agamemnon's decisive role in his daughter's sacrifice becomes a turning point in the queen's evolution as a character. However, an analysis of the family dynamic after the Trojan War will enable an exploration of the queen's transformation into a ruthless criminal, the games she engages in and the manner in which her actions influence her offspring through parental programming. Longepierre's *Électre*, set twelve years after Agamemnon's murder, presents a Clytemnestre preparing for her children's imminent revenge. This play reveals the all-pervasive influence that the past has on the entire family by emphasizing the effect of the king's murder on the characters' actions and behaviour, as all family members are haunted by this event. Moreover, the confrontations between Clytemnestre and her daughter Électre reveal the queen's dramatic evolution from a nurturing, protective mother stance, in Racine's play, to a transgressive woman, as well as the influence that her behaviour has on her daughter's actions and life plan. Consequently, whilst *Iphigénie* presents the event that triggered the disintegration of Clytemnestre's marriage, Longepierre's *Électre* deals with the effects of the queen's criminal behaviour which shape her children's actions and behaviours whilst providing her with the desired pay-off: an end to the cycle of violence which will reinforce her belief in people's untrustworthiness.

The first scene reveals that Clytemnestre's crime has left Électre with a vivid memory of the traumatic event, shaping her attitude towards her father's assassins, namely, her mother and Égisthe, Clytemnestre's lover. From the opening lines, it becomes apparent that witnessing her father's murder has transformed Électre into Agamemnon's 'Obedient Child', which according to Berne behaves as the father would have liked, and implicitly Clytemnestre's enemy.<sup>92</sup> The king's murder represented a turning point in Électre's life since she is living and waiting for a revenge that will allow her to resume her existence. This attitude of complete

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<sup>92</sup> Berne, *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy*, p. 42.

dedication to avenging her father also indicates that Clytemnestre's crime has stimulated a strong 'Parental' influence which takes the form of a command inherited as part of the Atreides' legacy: 'You can't live your life until you avenge me, restore the honour of my name and the glory of my house!'<sup>93</sup> This also reveals the presence of an 'Until' life plan which makes obtaining a pay-off dependent upon fulfilling a certain task.<sup>94</sup> In this case it becomes apparent that Électre's 'Parent' will allow her to resume her life only after she avenges Agamemnon. The instrument of this revenge is Oreste. Since Oreste's social status and happiness also depend upon performing this task, his life plan is an 'Until' one as well. Given that Clytemnestre's 'After' script incorporates periods of domestic tranquillity ending in misfortune, and her 'You Can't Trust Anybody' game requires as pay-off to be betrayed by someone she trusts, these two scripts (Clytemnestre's and her offspring's) are complementary. Moreover, Agamemnon's murder represented a manoeuvre which perpetuated the queen's game and the unfolding of her script, since it had a direct influence on Électre's and Oreste's choice of preconscious life plan. The presence of the 'Until' life-script in the case of both siblings was determined by a strong 'Parental' influence from their father through the Atreides' inherited code of honour and by their mother's crime, which stimulated this component of their personality. Électre's hostility towards Clytemnestre and her lover is a result of parental programming and her mother's gruesome crime.

Électre's vivid account of her father's murder at the hands of her mother reveals the direct influence that this event had on her choice of life script and provides the first depiction of Clytemnestre and her behaviour after the Trojan War. We can observe the queen's transformation from 'Nurturing Parent' to vengeful Fury through her daughter's traumatic recollections. According to Électre, her mother – unlike her lover Égisthe who is hesitant and frightened of the crime – adopts a cruel attitude and does not falter. Clytemnestre's ruthless stance is

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<sup>93</sup> Berne, *What Do You Say*, p. 208.

<sup>94</sup> Id.

emphasized by the use of the axe as a murder weapon and her gaze: ‘l’œil farouche, l’œil étincelant’ (I.2.104) which denotes the excitement and pleasure she derives from this violent act. Moreover, the antithetical attitudes of the two lovers and accomplices shed light on the power dynamic of this couple: Clytemnestre, although barbaric, shows courage and determination, as her hand does not hesitate to strike the fatal blow, whilst Égisthe tramples on the body of the king in a cowardly and petty display of his sadistic impulses. Consequently, this scene presents not only the transformation that the queen underwent from Iphigénie’s ‘Nurturing Parent’ to Agamemnon’s ruthless murderess but also her choice of spouse: a feminized and cowardly character. Égisthe lacks the attributes of a great leader or warrior and Clytemnestre’s choice seems rather intriguing. However, one can argue that Clytemnestre’s ‘Parent’ finds this type of behaviour particularly irresistible. Égisthe’s spiteful and spineless attitude fits the logic of the ‘You Can’t Trust Anybody’ game and promises to provide her with the satisfaction of being outraged at his betrayal. Hence their relationship is motivated by Agamemnon’s absence, their common goal and her ‘Parent’s’ desire to continue the game with a player that promises to provide the desired pay-off.

This scene can be interpreted as a manoeuvre intended to perpetuate Clytemnestre’s game, and the unfolding of her life script, not only a representation of her moral downfall, and the abandonment of the duty of care towards her offspring and her spouse, as I argue in chapter 2. The queen’s motives go beyond this moral dimension and incorporate the need to have the belief in people’s untrustworthiness reinforced by a potential betrayal either from Égisthe, her cowardly lover, or her children, who are bound by a duty of honour to avenge their father’s death. Therefore, Clytemnestre’s murder represents a means to inadvertently pursue her game in order to obtain the satisfaction she desires and to fulfil her life script.

Despite this dramatic transformation Clytemnestre has not lost her intuition: she is the only one to foresee her son’s return in the form of a nightmare that she



interprets as an omen from the gods. The effect of this nightmare is so great that even the queen has trouble recognizing her courageous self in the persona of this woman shaken to the point of irrationality: 'Un si pressant effroi de tous mes sens est maître, / Qu'étouffant ma raison, j'ai peine à me connaître' (II.4.496-97). This extraordinary change becomes proof that the gods themselves are against her: 'C'est l'ouvrage des dieux, je sens leur main pressante' (II.4.508), since she interprets the dream as an omen of Agamemnon's imminent revenge. Clytemnestre's guilty conscience, stemming from conventional beliefs regarding the gods and their implacable justice, has stimulated an intrusion from her 'Child' who announced the pay-off of her 'After' script in this nightmarish form. Égisthe, adopting an 'Adult' stance by claiming that dreams are only vain threats, uses Clytemnestre's fear to manipulate her into agreeing to his plan to appease Électre's vengeful desires. This practical attitude stimulates her 'Adult's' self-preservation instincts and the warrior queen willing to fight for survival re-emerges. This interaction indicates the presence of another type of dynamic within the royal couple (different from the one described by Électre in the murder scene) marked by Égisthe's ability to reassure the queen (appease her 'Parent') and to stimulate her 'Adult', the ego state necessary for their survival. As a result, Égisthe appears as an able manipulator and enabler of the queen's subsequent actions, not only a player in her 'You Can't Trust Anybody' game.

This interpretation is an alternative to the idea that Clytemnestre has abandoned all responsibility of care towards her children and is solely preoccupied with her survival, an interpretation which emerges from the ethics of care analysis. As I argue above, the queen's behaviour may be determined by a guilty conscience, an intrusion from her 'Child' announcing the imminent pay-off of her game and Égisthe's manipulative actions. These may also be the factors that inform her actions and decisions as alongside her preoccupation with survival.

Clytemnestre's 'Adult' agrees to this plan, as it represents an active, practical step towards protecting herself and Égisthe from her offspring's revenge. As a

result, she emphatically adopts a ‘Nurturing Parent’ role, aiming to stimulate Électre’s ‘Child’. By displaying this maternal behaviour, she tries to satisfy her daughter’s need for a protective, comforting parent figure. However, Électre’s ‘Obedient Child’ recognizes a single figure of ‘Parental’ authority: Agamemnon. As a result, she refuses to be moved by the queen’s sudden outburst of maternal tenderness. Électre maintains an offensive position: ‘En des malheurs si grands... Mais vous les connaissez, / Vous en faites partie et les avez causés’ (II.5.578-79). This accusation compels Clytemnestre’s ‘Adult’ to manifest itself and defend her actions in an outburst that reveals her reasons for murdering Agamemnon:

L’entreprise était juste et le ciel l’a soufferte:  
 J’ai vengé votre sœur, j’ai prévenu ma perte,  
 Le sang doit et peut seul laver la trahison.           (II.5.580-82)

The queen claims her deed to be a just one meant to avenge Iphigénie and to prevent the inevitable consequence of her adulterous behaviour, namely, her death. Nonetheless, she resents having to explain her actions as she has an absolutist view of authority and considers that fathers and kings should not be held accountable for their deeds: ‘Les pères, et les rois, innocents ou coupables, / De leur pouvoir sacré ne sont jamais comptables’ (II.5.584-85). This reveals the manner in which Clytemnestre’s belief that the powerful are above human law, a lesson that she learned from Agamemnon at Aulis, informs her behaviour towards her offspring.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, this outburst denotes a self-protecting stance, which she adopts regarding her past behaviour, as did Agamemnon (through his ‘Wooden Leg’ game) throughout Racine’s *Iphigénie*. Like her spouse, Clytemnestre is unwilling to face up to her past behaviour and to acknowledge the active role she has played in her children’s miserable situation. This attitude makes it impossible for her to relate to

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<sup>95</sup> For discussion of Agamemnon’s influence over Clytemnestre’s beliefs about goodness and relationships see pp. 190-91, 198.

Électre, for whom the past has not been put to rest. These opposing attitudes to the past determine the breakdown of communication between mother and daughter. Despite this setback, Clytemnestre holds on to her 'Nurturing Mother' role in order to make one last attempt to tone down Électre's hostility towards Égisthe in the form of an 'I'm Only Trying to Help You' stance: 'Je veux vous rendre heureuse et finir vos tourments. / Pour Égisthe, ma fille, un peu de complaisance' (II.5.592-93). However, the queen's efforts bear no fruit as her daughter refuses to abandon her script and to disobey her 'Parental' injunction. Consequently, Clytemnestre fails to stimulate Électre's 'Child', because she is unable to abandon her self-protective stance as 'blameless', to interact with her daughter from 'a listening in order to understand' 'Parental' position and to display genuine maternal instincts. Électre's 'Obedient Child' holds on to the 'Parental' influence stimulated by her father's murder and continues her script in the hope of receiving the pay-off: seeing Agamemnon's murderers punished and resuming her life triumphantly.

Clytemnestre abandons the 'Nurturing Parent' role on account of Électre's reproachful attitude. Instead the queen initiates a 'See What You Made Me/Us Do' game, which enables her to reveal the plan to end her daughter's life in a manner which allows her to avoid assuming responsibility for it: 'Tremblez donc, c'en est fait et vous allez périr, / Vous-même le voulez et j'y dois consentir' (II.5.602-03). However, the princess is in a playful mood herself, she pulls a switch on her mother and responds to this threat by reminding the queen of her premonitory dream and its meaning, in a 'I've Got You, You Son of a Bitch' move.<sup>96</sup> This game provides Électre with an opportunity to express her anger at the injustice she has suffered and to rejoice at the prospect of Égisthe's imminent downfall. Clytemnestre's response is aggressive and personal which signifies that her daughter's threat was effective: 'Monstre que m'ont donné les dieux dans leur fureur, / Pour me punir un jour et troubler mon bonheur!' (II.5.622-23). However, this emotional outburst is short-

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<sup>96</sup> Berne, *Games People Play*, p. 35.

lived. and Clytemnestre returns to her ‘See What You Made Me Do’ game because Électre’ provided a response which justifies her desire to punish this insolent behaviour whilst maintaining a blameless stance: ‘Et je dois, prévenant vos attentats perfides, / Dans ton sang étouffer tes souhaits parricides’ (II.5.628-29). Consequently, as there is no possibility of open, truthful dialogue mother and daughter engage in games to derive satisfaction from the interaction. Clytemnestre justifies her cruel, ruthless behaviour through a ‘See What You Made Me Do’ game whilst Électre seizes the opportunity to express her anger and to become the voice of doom in an attempt to exacerbate her mother’s fears.

The analysis of this scene in chapter two argues that Clytemnestre’s authoritarian beliefs, her inability to show sympathy to Électre and take responsibility for her actions lead to this conflict between the characters. However, the analysis above indicates that there may be other factors involved related to the queen’s self-protective stance, her daughter’s life script and a strong ‘Parental’ influence as well as the two women’s desire to obtain some emotional or psychological satisfaction from this interaction. Therefore, opposing beliefs as well as the need to justify her ruthless behaviour in the case of Clytemnestre and the desire to express anger and punish her mother in the case of Électre are factors that inform the characters’ behaviour during this interaction.

A messenger bringing the (false) news of Oreste’s death interrupts the encounter. The effect of this information is immediate. The princess is in a state of shock whilst the queen has a sudden outburst of pathos that takes her by surprise: ‘Quel murmure plaintif s’élève dans mon cœur!’ (II.7.671) As I argue in chapter 2, a semblance of maternal instinct seems to have overtaken Clytemnestre:

Que la nature est forte!

Sur ses droits tout puissants il n’est rien qui l’emporte,

En faveur d’un ingrat je me sens attendrir. (II.7.672-74)

Nonetheless, this outburst represents a momentary intrusion of the ‘Nurturing Parent’ who is quickly decathected by her ‘Prejudiced Parent’ and the fear of Oreste’s retaliation:

Il n’était plus mon fils, dois-je être encore sa mère?  
L’ingrat foulant aux pieds la nature et l’amour  
N’aspirait qu’à m’ôter la couronne et le jour. (II.7.678-80)

The queen does not miss the opportunity to turn the tables on her daughter and obtain more satisfaction from this position of safety. She mocks Électre’s previous threat: ‘Eh bien! reviendra-t-il ce frère vous venger? / Le ciel juste doit-il toujours vous protéger?’ (II.7.683-84) The news leaves Clytemnestre rejoicing in her newfound safety and Électre mourning the loss of her father’s avenger.

The queen is eager to meet the warrior who ensured her safety and reign. As a result, she has a warm and welcoming attitude towards the young man (Oreste in disguise) whom she believes to be her son’s murderer. This interaction provides insight into the queen’s beliefs and values, as Oreste is keen to explore his mother’s character in order to settle his doubts about this revenge whilst Clytemnestre is happy to indulge her saviour’s curiosity about her past actions and behaviour. The queen’s responses reflect a ‘You Can’t Trust Anybody’ attitude as well as the fact that she views the maternal bond as inferior to the compelling social and political demands: ‘Forcé par son devoir à venger un tel père, / Il aurait méconnu Clytemnestre pour mère’ (IV.1.1045-46). Racine’s Clytemnestre, who proclaimed the prevalence of family ties over political interests, is forgotten and has been replaced by a version of this character that emulates to perfection Agamemnon’s behaviour at Aulis. To the disappointment of Oreste’s ‘Child’, she declares that she has suppressed her maternal instincts for the sake of survival:

Je le sais comme vous, mais quand dans la balance,

Un intérêt si grand force à la surmonter [la nature],  
Qui ne saurait l'étendre, au moins doit l'étouffer [le sang]. (IV.1.1054-56)

This interpretation of her son's potential behaviour also derives from the 'You Can't Trust Anybody' game, in which the main pay-off is being able to prove that people, particularly those you expect the least, are generally untrustworthy. Clytemnestre reveals to the young man whom she believes to be her son's assassin that her fear of retaliation has sealed Oreste's fate. This suggests a continuous influence of the 'Child' who reminds her of the script and the pay-off to come, whispering in the ear of the queen's 'Adult' the motto of the 'You Can't Trust Anybody' game and thus filling Clytemnestre with doubt and fear: 'Tout semblait m'annoncer que par un coup funeste, / Sa mère de sa main, devait un jour périr' (IV.1.1070-71). Moreover, the 'Child's' desire for power has also influenced Clytemnestre's behaviour towards her spouse: she declares that she murdered Agamemnon to satisfy a need to reign. The motives she had previously invoked to her daughter, avenging Iphigénie and saving her life, are only part of the story. This indicates the influence that her 'Child' has over her 'Adult' either in the form of a desire for power and glory at all costs or as a psychological stress exerted obsessively with the aim of contributing to the unfolding of the script and the game. Hence, this interaction reveals the power-hungry side of the queen as well as her terror-driven side, marked by the influence of the 'Child' who brings into awareness the inevitable outcome of the game and life script through dreams, intuitions and feelings.

In the ethics of care analysis of this scene, I argue that this fear for her life justifies the queen's abandonment of the responsibility of care, and functions as a protective mechanism which helps her avoid acknowledging the immoral aspect of her deeds. The paragraphs above provide an interpretation of her behaviour in which the need to hold on to the belief that people are untrustworthy and to obtain satisfaction by proving it informs her actions and decisions. Clytemnestre's mistrust stems from this unconscious belief and the need to obtain the satisfaction of having

it reinforced.

Clytemnestre inadvertently influences Oreste's attitude towards her by revealing the gruesome desire to end Électre's life, dictated by the 'You Can't Trust Anybody' game. The queen believes she has suffered enough betrayal, reproach and mental stress to justify this murder:

Oui, sa vie agite encore mon cœur;  
Et sa douleur, ses cris, ses reproches, ses plaintes  
Me portent malgré moi de trop vives atteintes. (IV.1.1080-82)

Clytemnestre's murderous attitude represents a blow to Oreste's 'Child', who realizes that the 'Nurturing Parent' he desired and longed for does not exist. This murderous request stems from the queen's desire for absolute power and safety, together with her 'You Can't Trust Anybody' game. This situation in which she attempts to make an ambiguous contract with someone she barely knows, is representative of this game, as it sets up a possible betrayal that would reinforce her belief in people's untrustworthiness:<sup>97</sup> 'L'[Électre] accablant d'un tel coup déjà, cher étranger, / Vous avez commencé vous-même à me venger;' (IV.1.1087-88). Thus, this first mother and son encounter is marked by the latter's 'Child'-like desire to experience a 'Nurturing Parent's' love and tenderness, which remains unfulfilled, as Clytemnestre has repressed her maternal instincts in the name of duty and power. Furthermore, the queen's parricidal intentions deriving from her 'Child's' desire for power and the 'You Can't Trust Anybody' game influence Oreste's decision to seek his father's revenge. Thus, Clytemnestre's behaviour and her game inadvertently contribute to the dramatic outcome, which will fulfil her 'After' script.

The analysis of this scene in chapter 2 argued that this request represents the queen's desire to punish Électre and erase all reminders of past wrongdoings. The

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<sup>97</sup> Berne, *What Do You Say*, p. 179.

paragraphs above indicate that this decision is part of Clytemnestre's 'You Can't Trust Anybody' game, as she believes that her daughter's betrayal and hostility justify this course of action. Furthermore, this request is also an attempt to continue this game with the warrior as an ambiguous contract with a stranger, promises to bring the satisfaction of confirming this belief in people's untrustworthiness. Therefore, Clytemnestre's actions can be interpreted as manoeuvres in her game, which aim to reinforce her beliefs and contribute to the unfolding of her script whilst inadvertently informing the other characters' behaviour and leading to the tragic outcome.

Whilst Clytemnestre is the first to meet Oreste, Électre is the first to receive the news of Égisthe's death. Her brother is eager to collect the promised pay-off from his sister in the form of an acknowledgement of his role as Agamemnon's rightful heir:

Enfin, j'ai satisfait les mânes de mon père,  
Je viens, digne de lui, d'assouvir ma colère:  
Connaissez-moi, ma sœur, à ce sang odieux. (V.5.1605-07)

The prince is also eager to find his mother, reassure her with regard to her safety and declare his filial devotion as his revenge only involved Égisthe: 'Oui, mais auparavant voyons la reine, ami, / Rassurons pleinement son cœur mal affermi' (V.7.1659-60). Pamène has to inform him that he accidentally murdered Clytemnestre:

Quoi, seigneur! avez-vous oublié que la reine,  
Vous voyant au tyran porter un coup certain,  
S'est jetée entre deux, l'a reçu dans son sein? (V.7.1674-76)

This account of the queen's death shocks Oreste and provokes an outburst of his



moral conscience: ‘Tout mon sang se glace d’épouvante: / La reine est morte, ô ciel! et je suis le bourreau!’ (V.7.1678-79) Oreste, like Électre, had viewed Égisthe as the prime target and did not consider murdering his mother. This treatment of the queen’s murder indicates the author’s concern with retaining the audience’s sympathy for this character despite his gruesome deed. Making the crime unintentional reduces its transgressive nature and enables the audience to sympathize with the character. As a result, although unintentional, Oreste’s actions end the cycle of violence incorporated in Clytemnestre’s ‘After’ script and ensure the pay-off of the queen’s ‘You Can’t Trust Anybody’ game in the form of her offspring’s betrayal.

All in all, this analysis revealed that Clytemnestre inadvertently influenced her children’s choice of life script in order to continue her game and life script. She may not have consciously desired this outcome but unconsciously she worked towards this end. Parental programming, life scripts and games influence the characters’ behaviours and decision-making.

Longepierre’s *Électre* focused on the behavioural transformation undergone by the queen, which Racine’s *Iphigénie* was only able to suggest in certain scenes. Although denoting an ‘Adult’s’ concern with the inevitable consequences of her deed, Clytemnestre’s actions and decisions throughout this text are governed by her ‘Child’s’ desire to pursue her life script and to receive the pay-off of the ‘You Can’t trust Anybody’ game she initiated in Racine’s play. She has also lost her ‘Nurturing Parent’ who has been overtaken by the power-hungry ‘Child’ from the moment she began plotting her spouse’s death. Moreover, this behavioural pattern, which allows the ‘Child’ to influence her decision-making, resembles uncannily Agamemnon’s stance at Aulis. Hence, Clytemnestre’s actions and decisions are influenced by her beliefs, her desire for power and a reluctance to take responsibility for her behaviour as well as her spouse’s and her children’s deeds.

### 2.3 Phèdre's 'See What You Made Me Do' game

The analysis performed in the introductory section of this chapter revealed a conflict between Phèdre's 'Adapted Child' and her 'Prejudiced Parent'. This tension between these two ego states is present throughout the text and is responsible for Phèdre's decision to commit suicide at the beginning of the play. This represents her initial solution to this ethical dilemma, which pits her 'Adapted Child' against her 'Prejudiced Parent' in both Euripides' *Hippolytos* and Racine's re-interpretation of the myth. Her suicide was determined by her 'Prejudiced Parent's' rigid moral code. Phèdre's strong verbal and physical response to what has been said or might be said, together with the decision to conceal her passion at the cost of her life, indicates a second injunction coming from this ego state in the shape of a family motto: 'Keep Your Mouth Shut!'<sup>98</sup> There is a connection between this and the inherited curse from Venus as the goddess's wrath was stirred by Phèdre's grandfather the Sun who surprised Venus in the arms of Mars and denounced the adultery.<sup>99</sup> The entire family line is subjected to this punishment because of his failure to keep silent. Pasiphaé's monstrous passion and this curse might remind Phèdre of the consequences of both loose morals and a loose tongue. This parental injunction and the curse itself bring with them a struggle between revealing and concealing forbidden desire in the light of awareness that speaking out has disastrous consequences.

The nurse's reaction elicits from Phèdre a response that both justifies and advances the action. By displaying a motherly attitude and stimulating the queen's 'Adapted Child', the servant persuades Phèdre to confess her passion and break this family precept. According to Barthes, this scene reveals that Œnone is the one who extracts the confession from the inner depths of Phèdre, acting almost like a midwife.<sup>100</sup> On the other hand, Forestier argues that an undermining of Phèdre's

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<sup>98</sup> Berne, *What Do You Say*, p. 160.

<sup>99</sup> Zimmermann, p. 97.

<sup>100</sup> Barthes, p. 112.

ethos by her pathos is responsible for this disclosure.<sup>101</sup> She is overcome by emotion and is no longer able to uphold her rigid moral principles. However, from a transactional analysis perspective both characters are equally responsible for the confession. C enone’s devotion to saving her mistress’s life is admirable, as she implores the queen to accept help from a ‘Parent’ ego state: ‘Par vos faibles genoux que je tiens embrass es, / D elivrez mon esprit de ce funeste doute’ (I.3.244-45). This represents the initiation of a game in which she adopts an ‘I’m Only Trying to Help You’ stance. Ph edre’s ‘Child’ responds to this stimulation by revealing her passion and initiating a ‘See What You Made Me Do’ game that will unfold as the action develops. The two women choose to collaborate because the game suits their interests and provides them with some satisfaction. For Ph edre, this game is a protective mechanism, which allows her to maintain an ‘I Am Blameless’ existential position and provides the ‘external psychological gain of avoidance of responsibility’ by delegating all decisions to the servant and afterwards blaming her by adopting a ‘You Got Me Into This’ stance. This set of transactions with an ulterior motive allows Ph edre to express her illegitimate passion and manifest her ‘Adapted Child’ whilst retaining the moral stance required by the strict ethical ‘Parental’ precepts.<sup>102</sup>

In C enone’s case, the pay-off of her ‘I’m Only Trying to Help You’ game derives from the reinforcement of an existential position, ‘All People Are Ungrateful’. This is combined with the internal and external psychological advantages of martyrdom and an avoidance to acknowledge her inadequacy to deal with the situation, or the fact that she cannot be more than the ‘gardienne de l’honneur apparent de Ph edre et non point de son honneur profond’, hence her servant and not her mother.<sup>103</sup> From an emotional perspective this psychological pay-off is translated into a feeling of bewilderment regarding the failure of her

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<sup>101</sup> Forestier, pp. 271-2.

<sup>102</sup> Otto Rank also refers to Ph edre’s defensive position during her confession in *The Incest Theme*, p. 125

<sup>103</sup> Charles D ed eyan, *Racine et sa Ph edre* (Paris: Soci et e d’ dition d’Enseignement Sup erieur, 1978), p. 161.

advice and the ingratitude expressed by her mistress. C enone’s repeated attempts to save Ph edre are motivated by the need to reinforce the belief that her mistress will never appreciate the devotion she has shown her. As a result, the confession of this incestuous passion sets the stage for the game that will advance the action, will serve the interests of Ph edre and C enone, and will influence their behaviour throughout the development of the plot.

This interpretation of the scene argues that the behaviour of these two women may not be motivated solely by the desire to maintain the relationships of care which sustain them and define them as we discussed in the ethics of care analysis of this scene. Their actions and decisions may be determined by the psychological and emotional pay-offs mentioned above and the pursuit of this ‘I Am Trying to Help You’ game. This provides an image of their interactions and behaviour that goes beyond their beliefs regarding goodness and focuses on their unconscious needs and desires and the part they play in the unfolding of the plot. Ph edre’s and C enone’s unconscious needs and existential positions provide insight into their mindset and reveal other psychological motivations, which inform their behaviour and actions. It may not be solely about goodness, it may also be about deep-rooted beliefs about themselves and the world, which demand confirmation and emotional needs that have to be satisfied.

The announcement of Th es e’s death represents the first critical moment of the play, which provides C enone with the opportunity to develop her ‘I’m Only Trying to Help’ game by taking control of the situation. As a result, she focuses on stimulating the queen’s ‘Adapted Child’ by arguing that the taboo of adultery is lifted and she is able to indulge her passion:<sup>104</sup> ‘Vivez, vous n’avez plus de reproche   vous faire. / Votre flamme devient une flamme ordinaire’ (I.5.349-50). The response of Ph edre’s ‘Adapted Child’ has the characteristics of the defensive, reticent position required for this game since she relinquishes any responsibility

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<sup>104</sup> Mauron, *L’Inconscient dans l’œuvre et la vie de Racine*, p. 153.

deriving from this decision to continue living and to pursue her passion: 'Hé bien! À tes conseils je me laisse entraîner' (I.1.364). The game is on and the two players have reinforced their positions: Phèdre has transferred all decision-making power to C enone, who embarks on the mission to preserve her mistress's life. Moreover, this course of action satisfies her 'Prejudiced Parent' as the survival of the bloodline (Ph edre's son) depends upon an alliance with Hippolyte. The decision to continue living belongs to Ph edre. However, the influences involved in making it are complex: the allure and the psychological pay-off of the game which enables her to relinquish responsibility for the outcome of this endeavour, the nurse's stimulation of her 'Adapted Child', the sacred duty towards her son which appeases her 'Prejudiced Parent' and the exciting prospect of allowing the 'Adapted Child' to fulfil this passion.

This interpretation of the scene allows us to observe the psychoanalytical dimension of the dynamic between Ph edre and C enone. This may be seen as driven by responsibility of care, with the servant determined to preserve the relationships with her mistress at all costs and the queen reluctant to take responsibility for the pursuit of her desire. However, there is also the psychoanalytical aspect of it, as C enone in a 'Parental' role appeases Ph edre's fears and stimulates the adequate responses from the queen's 'Adapted' Child in order to enable the continuation of the game which will ensure her psychological pay-off. Equally Ph edre continues this interaction because it provides the prospect of the fulfilment of her desire whilst enabling her to hold on to an 'I Am Blameless' stance when things go wrong. The two women work together in order to ensure the unfolding of this game, which provides both of them with the satisfaction of obtaining a psychological and emotional pay-off.

The next step in the game between the mistress and the servant is a meeting with Hippolyte which is part of the plan to consolidate Ph edre's position by gaining her stepson's support. Ph edre begins the dialogue from the mindset of the 'Adult' under the influence of the 'Parent', by probing into her stepson's feelings towards

her son to ensure that the animosity she has previously shown him does not affect the prospects of an alliance: ‘Je crains d’avoir fermé votre oreille à ses cris’ (II.5.592). However, her ‘Adapted Child’ gradually takes over and the focus shifts from present to past and from her son’s best interest to the relationship between stepmother and stepson:

Quand vous me haïriez je ne m’en plaindrais pas,  
Seigneur. Vous m’avez vue attachée à vous nuire:  
Dans le fond de mon cœur vous ne pouviez pas lire. (II.5.596-98)

As the queen probes into Hippolyte’s feelings towards her, her ‘Adult’ ego state becomes increasingly contaminated and consumed by the ‘Adapted Child’s’ passion. This transformation leads Phèdre to interpret Hippolyte’s politeness — ‘Madame, je n’ai point des sentiments si bas’ (II. 5. 595) — as an opportunity to change the tone and direction of the discussion. As a result, she initiates a game and stimulates Hippolyte’s ‘Child’ by engaging his admiration and affection for his father in referring to him as Thésée’s living legacy:

Que dis-je? Il n’est point mort, puisqu’il respire en vous.  
Toujours devant mes yeux je crois voir mon époux;  
Je le vois, je lui parle, et mon cœur... (II.5.627-29)

The prince’s reaction reveals a ‘Child’ that idealized his father. Although he was uncomfortable with Thésée’s philandering, he is now happy and excited at the prospect of having this heroic, loving image of his father reinforced by his stepmother: ‘Je vois de votre amour l’effet prodigieux. / Tout mort qu’il est, Thésée est présent à vos yeux’ (II.5.631-32). Phèdre’s ‘Adapted Child’ cunningly continues this account of Thésée’s heroic deeds and gradually begins to incorporate her stepson into the story. In this imaginary account of the slaying of the Minotaur she

takes the place of her sister Ariane and Hippolyte becomes a younger, purer version of his father, as they replace the two lovers united by a common goal: ‘Ma sœur du fil fatal eût armé votre main. / Mais non, dans ce dessein je l’aurais devancée’ (II.5.652-53). According to Florence de Caigny, this confession represents a moment of alienation when Phèdre’s pathos subordinated her ethos and the queen became unaware of the transition she has made from Thésée to Hippolyte as a result of a delusion.<sup>105</sup> Phèdre has been overcome by her passion and is no longer able to think rationally. Patrick Dandrey also argues that it is an involuntary act, determined by the fact that the queen confuses Hippolyte’s face with Thésée’s.<sup>106</sup> From a transactional analysis perspective both remarks have some truth, since delusions and this type of confusions belong to the ‘Child’ ego state. Furthermore, her ‘Adult’ and ‘Parent’ may have not been conscious of this confession on account of a defect of awareness which occurs when a certain ego state is fully active. The moment a specific ego state is experienced as the real Self, whatever was experienced when the other ego states were perceived as the real Self is overlooked or forgotten.<sup>107</sup> Hence, her other ego states may not have been fully aware of this. Nonetheless, Phèdre’s ‘Adapted Child’ was aware of what she was doing. She actively and deliberately initiated a labyrinthine game in which she guided Hippolyte towards this confession through a series of intricate narratives. She moved from her son’s political interests to Thésée’s heroic deeds and finally to her unlawful passion. She is aware of who Hippolyte is and what she would like him to become. This opportunity to express and potentially satisfy her passion represents part of the payoff of the ‘See What You Made Me Do’ game.

The queen’s speech is imbued with self-loathing, guilt, remorse and suicidal manifestations, as this confession has triggered her stepson’s dismay:

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<sup>105</sup> de Caigny, p. 980.

<sup>106</sup> Patrick Dandrey, “‘Ravi d’une si belle vue’: Le ravissement amoureux dans le théâtre de Racine”, in *Theatrum Mundi, Studies in Honor of Ronald W. Tobin*, ed. by Claire L. Carlin and Kathleen Wine (Charlottesville, VA: Rookwood Press, 2003), pp. 72-81.

<sup>107</sup> Berne, *What Do You Say*, pp. 248-50.

Venge-toi, punis-moi d'un odieux amour.  
Digne fils du héros qui t'a donné le jour,  
Délivre l'univers d'un monstre qui t'irrite. (II.5.699-701)

This behaviour, combined with her previous decision to commit suicide, suggests a 'Prejudiced Parent' ego state supported by a depressive position based on a childhood conviction about oneself and others, which translates into an 'I Am Not OK, You Are OK' stance. This belief, internalized during childhood, influences one's perception of the world and the people in it, and represents the basis for future life decisions.<sup>108</sup> In Phèdre's case this personal conviction might stem from heredity: her grandfather's rigid ethical stance brought upon the family the prophecy of a curse, whilst her mother through the birth of the Minotaur became the embodiment of this prediction. As a result, this self-deprecatory stance, as well as the illicit desire, might stem from a belief in an inherent monstrosity passed down from her ancestors. Her dialogue with Hippolyte also reflects this depressive position, as she begins her speech by claiming she deserves to be hated: 'Quand vous me haïriez je ne m'en plaindrais pas' (II.4.596). Hippolyte shares a similar belief about his stepmother's character. He does not consider her a friend and hence has an 'I Am OK, You Are Not OK' (She Is Not Ok in this case) stance:<sup>109</sup>

Je me tais. Cependant Phèdre sort d'une mère,  
Phèdre est d'un sang, Seigneur, vous le savez trop bien  
De toutes ces horreurs plus rempli que le mien. (IV.4.1150-52)

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<sup>108</sup> Berne, *What Do You Say*, pp. 84-5. The branch of Transactional analysis that uses the 'OK/Not OK' paradigm was further developed from Berne's ideas by Thomas Anthony Harris, *I'm OK – You're OK* (London: Harper, 1967).

<sup>109</sup> Id. According to Berne, this represents another existential position which informs one's actions and behaviour.



As they both share this view of Phèdre's character, the game can continue. The pay-off will reinforce the core beliefs of both players. Furthermore, from a game analysis perspective, Hippolyte is the best candidate for Phèdre's illegitimate passion because he is Thésée's son as well as the most virtuous character in the play. This moral rigour makes him liable to reject her advances, and reinforce the belief that this passion is monstrous, and she is 'Not OK'. Therefore, the queen's reaction focuses on reinforcing this depressive position which corresponds to Hippolyte's beliefs, so that at the end of the game both players receive their pay-off in the form of a confirmation of their convictions about themselves and the world around them.

This represents an alternative interpretation to the ethics of care reading of the scene in chapter 2, which argues that the characters' different ethical stances inform their behaviour. In this interpretation, I am considering the manner in which Phèdre and Hippolyte's unconscious need for reinforcement of their core beliefs influences their actions and behaviour. This analysis indicates that besides different ethical standpoints the characters' actions may also be influenced by internalized beliefs ('I Am OK You Are Not OK' or 'I Am Not OK') and the need to obtain external confirmation of their validity. There is a complementarity between the unconscious beliefs of these two characters (Hippolyte and Phèdre share this belief in the queen's inherent monstrosity). This informs their behaviour during their encounter (Hippolyte's reaction as well as Phèdre's change of attitude) and enables them to derive some form of satisfaction from their interactions. It is not only beliefs about goodness and morality that influence the characters' behaviour, there are also unconscious desires and core beliefs at play.

Hippolyte hesitates to lay down the law and reinforce Phèdre's depressive stance, which revives her 'Adapted Child's' hope for the satisfaction of this passion. As a result, the queen continues to pursue her stepson in order to obtain the final pay-off comprised in the script (either fulfilment of her desire or confirmation of its monstrous nature) whilst reinforcing her position within the 'See What You Made Me Do' game with C enone. As a result, Phèdre stimulates the servant's 'Parent',

making her responsible for her behaviour and actions and asking her to participate in this plan to seduce Hippolyte: ‘Par tes conseils flatteurs tu m’as su ranimer. / [...] Sers ma fureur, Œnone, et non point ma raison.’ (III.1.771,792). This final verse has prompted de Caigny to argue that Œnone takes control of Phèdre’s passion after her confession and Mauron to state that the servant presses the queen into acting.<sup>110</sup> However, both statements imply a degree of determination that the old nurse does not display. Whilst Œnone’s energy is focused on rescuing her mistress and continuing to stimulate the ‘Adapted Child’ to continue this game, the perseverance towards satisfying this illegitimate passion belongs to the queen. There is a desire on both sides to continue their interaction. Moreover, Phèdre’s ‘Adapted Child’ guides Œnone towards the appropriate response: ‘Enfin, tous tes conseils ne sont plus de saison!’ (III.1.791) and gives precise details about the manipulative strategies she should resort to: ‘Œnone. Fais briller la couronne à ses yeux’ (III.1.800), reinforcing the idea that the queen is an active accomplice in this attempt to seduce her stepson. The queen actively stimulates Œnone’s ‘Parent’ and appeals to her maternal instincts in order to transform her into the instrument and active agent of this passion. The only element Œnone pursues is obtaining the pay-off from this ‘I Am Only Trying To Help’ game in the form of bewilderment at her mistress’s ingratitude. Phèdre and the servant follow their final psychological pay-off and play their games but are driven by different motivations.

The result of this endeavour to win over Hippolyte remains a mystery, as the nurse returns precipitately and announces a dramatic change of circumstances: Thésée is alive and has returned. The queen relinquishes all responsibility for the previous actions and blames the nurse for her loss of honour. Moreover, she claims she has predicted this disastrous result and has followed Œnone’s advice against her better judgment: ‘Je te l’ai prédit, mais tu n’as pas voulu. / Sur mes justes remords tes pleurs ont prévalu’ (III.3 836-37). This attitude was enabled by their game, as

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<sup>110</sup> de Caigny, p. 963. Mauron, *L’Inconscient dans l’œuvre et la vie de Racine*, p. 307.

Phèdre was aware that this behaviour involved the exposure of her sin, and by delegating the decisions to the servant she ensured the right to adopt a ‘You Got Me Into This’ blameless stance.<sup>111</sup>

The previous chapter argues that Phèdre blames C enone because an acknowledgement of guilt would affect her self-esteem, which is connected with morality and goodness as selflessness. This interpretation takes this further and argues that Phèdre’s interaction with C enone provided a protective mechanism used by the queen to maintain an ‘I Am Blameless’ existential position, which represents the basis of her life decisions and beliefs. Therefore, Phèdre’s interaction with C enone is informed by the need to maintain this existential position, which represents a core belief.

This dramatic change of context also stimulates the queen’s ‘Prejudiced Parent’, since this interpretation of the situation is full of remorse; she expresses bewilderment at the behaviour displayed by her ‘Adapted Child’: ‘Juste ciel! Qu’ai-je fait aujourd’hui!’ (III.3.839). This analysis of the situation reveals an intriguing line of reasoning as she is dreading her conscience (the voice of Minos, her ‘Parent’) more than the potential accusation coming from her stepson: ‘Il [Hippolyte] se tairait en vain. Je sais mes perfidies’ (III.3.849). Moreover, this stance reinforces the idea that the queen has an internalized judge in the form of Minos’s teaching and his ‘Parental’ influence that does not require Hippolyte’s testimony to give its verdict.<sup>112</sup> As a result, Phèdre’s ‘Prejudiced Parent’ with its rigid ethical stance, decides that suicide is the best solution now that her ‘Adapted Child’s’ actions have compromised her honour. The return to conventional morality, which I identify in chapter 2 as the source of Phèdre’s decision to commit suicide, is interpreted here as a manifestation of Phèdre’s ‘Prejudiced Parent’, a mindset informed by Minos’s teachings and displaying his ruthless attitude. This emphasizes the role that ancestry

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<sup>111</sup> Berne, *Games People Play*, p. 36.

<sup>112</sup> Charles Mauron, *Phèdre* (Paris : Librairie Jos e Corti, 1988), p. 99.

plays in Phèdre's decisions and actions, revealing that although absent, Minos has a significant influence over his daughter.

Cenone's response becomes essential for the unfolding of the action and the interpretation of the queen's deeds. The nurse grotesquely overstates the pleasure that the prince will derive from revealing the minute details of Phèdre's downfall: 'De son triomphe affreux je le verrai jouir, / Et conter votre honte à qui voudra l'ouïr' (III.3.879-80). This strategy aims to remind the queen that by committing suicide she will lose her 'I Am Blameless' stance, the psychological pay-off of their game. Cenone is stimulating the queen's 'Adapted Child' to continue the game and to enable her once more to adopt a maternal, self-sacrificial position. As Phèdre is not willing to renounce this blameless position, Cenone reveals a plan to safeguard her mistress's honour and to continue their game. The plan to accuse Hippolyte of attempted rape is presented by the servant as beneficial, since it will maintain the queen's blameless position whilst convincing Thésée to satisfy her initial request to send the prince into exile: 'Je parlerai. Thésée aigri par mes avis, / Bornera sa vengeance à l'exil de son fils' (III.3.899-900). Cenone adopts a 'Parent' stance and reassures the queen, firstly by indicating that Phèdre's involvement will be minimal, her silence will suffice, and secondly by appeasing her conscience with the idea that Hippolyte's punishment will be a lenient one: 'Mon zèle n'a besoin que de votre silence. [...] Un père en punissant, Madame, est toujours père' (III.3.894, 901). The nurse's speech persuades Phèdre to approve the plan whilst relinquishing any responsibility for this outcome: 'Fais ce que tu voudras, je m'abandonne à toi' (III.3.911). This dialogue, together with Cenone's accusation of Hippolyte, seems to indicate that the servant is the main perpetrator, leading her mistress into further downfall, and inadvertently causing Hippolyte's death. This appears to reinforce Mauron's interpretation that she is the devil.<sup>113</sup> However, the transactional analysis of this interaction reveals that the nurse's actions were supported throughout the

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<sup>113</sup> de Caigny, p. 936. Mauron, *L'Inconscient dans l'œuvre et la vie de Racine*, p. 158.

play by Phèdre's constant approval and complicity. Whilst C enone might be contributing to Hippolyte's demise, her actions are motivated by Phèdre's 'Adapted Child'. Furthermore, Phèdre's ambiguous response at the sight of father and son emphasizes her role as accomplice to C enone's plan. The queen indicates that her honour has been compromised by cryptically blaming fate and adopting a self-deprecatory attitude: 'Vous  etes offens e. La fortune jalouse / N'a pas en votre absence  epargn e votre  epouse' (III.4.916-17). Her willingness to name the crime rather than the perpetrator establishes a guiltless position before Th es ee and Hippolyte and enables the nurse to execute her plan. C enone takes charge of the situation and Phèdre becomes her accomplice.

In chapter 2 I argue that the servant devises this plan in order to maintain a relationship of care essential to her sense of identity whilst Phèdre agrees to it because she has a responsibility of care towards her children and wants to protect them from the shame of having an immoral mother. This interpretation provides an alternative reading that focuses on the manner in which the characters work together in order to continue the game and obtain their emotional and psychological pay-offs. Phèdre continues the game because it allows her to hold to an 'I Am Blameless' existential position whilst avoiding responsibility for the calumny. C enone devises the plan and bends her moral precepts because it offers the psychological advantage of martyrdom; she can claim she has sacrificed herself for Phèdre and be bewildered at her mistress's ingratitude. Therefore, this interaction is driven by Phèdre's desire to avoid taking responsibility for the plan to seduce Hippolyte and the calumny that leads to his demise whilst in C enone's case because it provides the satisfaction of being able to claim a selfless stance.

As the conflict between father and son reaches its climax, the queen attempts to plead for her stepson's life because a strong sense of justice stimulates her 'Prejudiced Parent'. However, Th es ee's response puts an end to Phèdre's remorseful attitude with the disturbing news of Hippolyte's confessed love for Aricie. This new information triggers a strong emotional reaction and a switch of

ego states: jealousy has stimulated her 'Adapted Child': 'Je suis le seul objet qu'il ne saurait souffrir' (IV.5.1212). This attempt to take charge of the situation, clear her stepson's name and potentially save his life has been inadvertently undermined by her spouse.

The next scene supports the idea that the queen has switched back into the mindset of the 'Adapted Child' as her sole focus becomes Hippolyte's new love interest. Moreover, the expression of her 'Adapted Child' ego state reaches its climax in a persecution fantasy that opposes the young couple's happiness to her previous suffering, despair and loneliness:

Ils suivaient sans remords leur penchant amoureux;  
Tous les jours se levaient clairs et sereins pour eux!  
Et moi, triste rebut de la nature entière,  
Je me cachais au jour, je fuyais la lumière. (IV.6.1239-42)

However, this urge to spill innocent blood, as was seen at the start of this chapter, stimulates her 'Prejudiced Parent'. In this ego state the queen gives her harsh verdict on Cœnone's behaviour whilst the servant utters the pay-off deriving from the 'See What You Made Me Do' game: 'People Are Ungrateful and Disappointing':<sup>114</sup> 'Ah, dieux! Pour la servir, j'ai tout fait, tout quitté. / Et j'en reçois ce prix ?' (IV.6.1327-28) This dialogue between mistress and servant indicates the outcome of this relationship, since the nurse has received her pay-off and has become aware that any communication with Phèdre is no longer possible. As a result, Cœnone will commit suicide whilst the queen will act according to her conscience (her 'Prejudiced Parent') and will obtain the pay-off of her script in the form of reinforcement of the belief in her inherent monstrosity ('I'm Not OK').

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<sup>114</sup> Berne, *Games People Play*, p. 64.

The analysis of this scene in chapter two connected C enone’s suicide to a loss of sense of self determined by Ph edre’s decision to sever all ties with the servant. This interpretation considers the suicide as part of the pay-off she inadvertently pursued through her ‘See What You Made Me Do’ game and emphasizes C enone’s involvement in this tragic outcome. She may not have consciously desired it but unconsciously she worked towards this end.

Ph edre’s final action takes the form of a deathbed confession, which aims to clear Hippolyte’s name. Barthes interpreted it as a correction, ‘purifi ee de tout th eatre’, a literal account of facts.<sup>115</sup> Given Ph edre’s behaviour throughout the play I would be more sceptical and argue that this final confession has all the features of a rehearsal. The queen is practising her defence before meeting her father/the judge of the Underworld. This speech reveals her direct implication in Hippolyte’s accusation and death in only two lines which focus on her incestuous passion: ‘C’est moi qui sur ce fils chaste et respectueux / Osai jeter un  eil profane, incestueux’ (V.7.1623-24), whilst the bulk of it focuses on diminishing her responsibility by openly blaming C enone and Venus and emphasizing her suffering in order to gain the sympathy of her audience (Th es ee, the gods, her father, the spectators). Moreover, Ph edre portrays the nurse as the main culprit who exploited this inherited ‘faiblesse extr eme’ (1629), imposing her interpretation on the events that determined this tragic outcome. The servant’s death provides the pay-off of the ‘See What You Made Me Do’ game as the queen can reassert and maintain an ‘I Am Not To Blame’ stance. Hence, Ph edre’s final confession is marked by a desire to clear her stepson’s name, to collect the pay-off of the ‘See What You Made Me Do’ game, which enables her to redeem herself and to fulfil her script by reinforcing the belief in her inherited and inherent monstrosity.

This d enouement, incorporating Ph edre’s unwavering attitude towards the crime prompted by her mother’s influence, reflects Berne’s ‘Always’ life script in

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<sup>115</sup> Barthes, p. 110.

which spiteful parents punish their children for the deeds that they have inspired.<sup>116</sup> Pasiphaé's monstrous passion, which produced the Minotaur and became the subject of legends (including Thésée's), fascinated Minos's daughter and exerted an attraction that the harsh moral precepts instilled by her father could not counteract. The presence of this script and the punishment incorporated within it is emphasized by the fact that she becomes the wife of the Minotaur/monster slayer. Phèdre is married to someone who is able to harshly punish any transgressive behaviour and is familiar with this inclination towards monstrosity which affects her lineage. Who better to confirm her inherent and inherited monstrosity than Thésée, the one who was face to face with the product of Pasiphaé's abnormal desire and implicitly of this family curse. Phèdre's main decisions and actions were prompted by her adhesion to this particular life script.

The 'Always' script pursued by the queen throughout the play is also reflected in her interactions with the other characters. Enone contributes to the development of the script by supporting the 'Adapted Child's' desire to indulge in pursuit of an illegitimate passion and by assuming some of the responsibility for this deviant behaviour through her 'I'm Only Trying to Help' stance. According to Berne, the contribution of the parents to the child's script involves a division of labour and whilst 'the parent of the opposite sex tells the child what to do', 'the parent of the same sex shows him how to do it.'<sup>117</sup> Given the nurse's surrogate-mother stance and her willingness to support Phèdre in the pursuit of Hippolyte, it can be argued that she symbolically plays the role of Pasiphaé in the queen's life plan. This idea of a collaboration between the two parents in the elaboration of the child's script and the process of passing down a system of values and beliefs reveals that Minos also contributed to the queen's life plan as well as her decisions and actions. In his case the influence might have been in the form of the injunction: 'You'll End Up Like Your Mother!' accompanied by a prescription on how to

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<sup>116</sup> Berne, *What Do You Say*, p. 206.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 279.



structure time until this final pay-off: ‘Try Hard Not to Become Her!’ – but when you do become her you can still claim that you tried.<sup>118</sup> This indicates that Phèdre’s constant attempt to maintain her virtue was a means of structuring time until the inevitable happened which ensured that she could claim extenuating circumstances for her transgressive actions. Moreover, if within Phèdre’s adapted life plan Œnone fulfils at a symbolic level Pasiphaé’s role, Minos is also represented by at least one of the male characters within the play. Hippolyte’s rigid stance and his reinforcement of Phèdre’s monstrosity through the rejection of her passion reflect an intransigent attitude worthy of the Judge of the Underworld. However, his performance is an incomplete one as he fails to accuse Phèdre, to confirm her monstrosity and reinforce her beliefs. Since at a social and political level, the king represents law and order and is responsible for delivering acts of justice, Thésée could also be a candidate for this role. However, he is unable to see beyond what is said, as his constant pursuit of illicit desire determines his suspicion of Hippolyte’s virtue and the haste with which he adopted a spiteful ‘Parent’ stance.<sup>119</sup> The king’s inability to act as an impartial judge together with Hippolyte’s incomplete performance of Minos stimulated Phèdre’s ‘Parent’ and determined her to perform her father’s role by confessing her crime and resorting to self-punishment. All characters had a part to play in the development of the queen’s script through their stimuli and responses. Their interactions provided Phèdre with the reassurance of the desired final pay-off and the confirmation of her beliefs whilst enabling the unfolding of the plot and leading to this tragic outcome.

The transactional analysis of this play reveals that critical decisions are determined by the character’s agenda as well as the interlocutors’ unconscious plan. The behaviour of each character follows a script or game motivated by psychological and emotional pay-offs and there is no impartial advice and selfless motivation. They pursue the development of the plot because it suits their desires.

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<sup>118</sup> Berne, *What Do You Say*, pp. 107-8.

<sup>119</sup> de Caigny, p. 916.

Moreover, Phèdre's 'Always' script confirms that her decisions and her social interactions were influenced by a commitment to the final pay-off and the values and beliefs she inherited, whilst the other characters' behaviour was motivated by other sources of gratification: Œnone's 'I'm Only Trying to Help' game, Hippolyte's belief in his virtue and his stepmother's negative influence. The queen can pursue her parentally programmed final pay-off because of its complementarity with the other characters' core beliefs. Besides Minos's and Pasiphaé's decisive roles, the other significant influences in her decision-making come from the interactions with the other characters. From this perspective the matter of responsibility and guilt becomes a complex one. Phèdre's transgressive behaviour is the composite result of a series of external factors, inherited beliefs as well as unconscious influences and motivations.

### **3.1 Conclusion**

The actions of these tragic characters are influenced by the pursuit of scripts and games as well as by the reinforcement of their beliefs and the satisfaction of their desires. Moreover, their behaviour is stimulated and sustained by their interactions with the other characters, both family members and servants. This transactional analysis approach has revealed that the issue of these tragic heroines' guilt and responsibility involves these unconscious influences and factors. In all three cases the analysis has shown that the family dynamic has an essential influence on these women's decision and behaviours: Thésée's pursuit of forbidden desire caused an estrangement from his family which contributed to the demise of his son and Phèdre's suicide; Agamemnon's 'Never' script determined him to pursue power at any price (even the life of his child), enabling Clytemnestre's 'You Can't Trust Anybody' game according to which she was entitled to the parricide in exchange for his betrayal; Jason's life plan in which he used women in order to fulfil his desires for power and glory stimulated his wife's 'You Can't Trust Anybody' game with its gruesome revenge plot. Children also influence their mothers' actions.

Électre, Oreste and even Iphigénie, through their devotion to the House of Atreus and the preservation of their father's honour, enabled Clytemnestre's 'You Can't Trust Anybody' game and the pursuit of its pay-off in the form of the satisfaction she derived from their betrayal because it reinforced her belief in people's untrustworthiness. Furthermore, we observed the influence that parents have on their children's behavioural patterns either in the form of 'Parental' influences or choice of life plan. We discovered Phèdre's fascination with her mother Pasiphaé and with forbidden desire, and the inner tension and inconsistencies created by the oscillation between her father's rigid moral code and this obsession which materialized with her choice of life script and her passion for Hippolyte. Médée's 'Parental' influences also manifested in her choice of life script which marked the cyclical adhesion to the role of Other and incorporated taking revenge on a figure of authority (Jason, Créon and her father) who breaks his promise. Longepierre's *Électre* reveals the decisive role Clytemnestre plays in Électre's and Oreste's choice of life script as the two must actively participate in their mother's 'You Can't Trust Anybody' game in order to fulfil their life plans. However, not all the characters that influence the actions of these tragic female heroines are family members, some of them are servants or confidants: Cénone becomes actively involved in Phèdre's decisions and actions as does Nérine in Médée's and Arcas in Agamemnon's, all three characters pursuing the selfless helper role and the appeal of having their beliefs reinforced by their ungrateful and terrifying masters.

This analysis of the tragic heroines' interactions with their family members and servants has presented the former's perspective on their behaviour, their decisions and their actions. We were able to observe Phèdre struggling to reconcile the reluctance to assume responsibility for her behaviour with the belief in the monstrous nature of her passion as well as the tragic effects of this tension. Clytemnestre's complex experience also revealed that she dreaded her children's revenge, which she considered an act of ingratitude and defiance whilst also inadvertently pursuing her life plan in order to receive the pay-off of the 'You Can't

Trust Anybody' stance. This represents a new interpretation, which delves into the unconscious aspects of Clytemnestre's behaviour revealing the fact that she derives some satisfaction from this particular outcome and because of this, she inadvertently contributes to her demise. Similarly, Médée's outrage at her spouse's betrayal and the unjust treatment received from Créon and Créuse is accompanied by the 'Natural Child's' delight at the prospect of re-asserting her otherness whilst simultaneously punishing her unfaithful spouse. However, as the analysis has revealed, the question of their precise responsibility and guilt has to go beyond their perception and has to incorporate the various factors that influenced their behaviour be it in the form of 'Parental' influences or other characters' direct actions. Hence, we can argue that inadvertently the spouses, children, parents and servants of these female tragic characters act as accomplices to their crimes because they directly influence their actions and behaviours in order to satisfy their desires, fulfil their scripts or reinforce their beliefs.

This analysis represents an alternative to the ethics of care interpretation incorporated in chapter 2 of this thesis. It goes beyond the characters' idea of goodness and morality and provides an image of the unconscious beliefs and factors which inform Médée's, Clytemnestre's and Phèdre's actions. It also considers the way the other characters influence the behaviour of these tragic heroines and inadvertently contribute to their downfall and the unfolding of the tragic plot. The readings incorporated in this chapter as well as the previous one will be considered as potential responses to the performances analysed in the next chapter in order to reinforce the arguments presented in these sections of the thesis.

## Médée, Clytemnestre and Phèdre on the Contemporary Stage

### 1.1 Introduction

The psychoanalytical and psychological studies by Charles Mauron and Roland Barthes which are used in the analysis of the plays in the previous chapters and spearheaded the application of this analytical framework for classical tragedy have a significant influence on the performative aspect of these text as well.<sup>1</sup> The psychocritique systematized by Mauron and continued by Barthes and Serge Doubrovsky inspired the staging directors' approaches to these plays since the publication of these studies in 1960.<sup>2</sup> However, performance may also represent a source of new perspective on these dramatic texts and can open up new interpretative possibilities. As Alain Viala argues, new points of view emerge when performers rediscover these texts through intuitive, pragmatic, sensible responses without the firm guidance of critical works in which the plays are elements of a system, pieces of a puzzle that is the œuvre of a classical author. According to the critic, contemporary performances move away from the interpretative systems pioneered by Mauron, Lucien Goldmann, Barthes and Jean Rohou, and find different ways of engaging with the plays which put forward new standpoints and a more nuanced image of the work.<sup>3</sup> Viala may overstate the case when he argues that contemporary performances disengage with the critical studies mentioned above, as Daniel Jeanneteau's staging of *Iphigénie* (2001), Patrice Chéreau's mise en scène of *Phèdre* (2003) and Sterenn Guirriec's production of *Phèdre* (2016) adopt a psychoanalytical reading of the classical text and the tragic characters inspired by these critical studies. However, I do agree that contemporary performances are able

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Mauron, *L'Inconscient dans l'œuvre et la vie de Racine* (Aix-en-Provence: Éditions Ophrys, 1957), *Des Métaphores obsédantes au mythe personnel: Introduction à la psychocritique* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1964), Roland Barthes, *Sur Racine* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1963).

<sup>2</sup> Prost, pp. 78-9. Peacock, p. 180. Both critics argue that Mauron's works which systematized the use of this analytical framework to literary texts, particularly classical tragedy in the 1960's, inspired staging directors' approach to classical tragedy throughout the twentieth century (Roger Planchon, Michel Hermon, Jean Gillibert just to name a few).

<sup>3</sup> Viala, p. 31.

to provide alternative interpretative possibilities through the new ways in which they engage with the classical text and can enrich our understanding of these plays and the tragic characters. As Daniel Mesguich argues the *mise en scène* is ‘une lecture qui se donne à lire’, an interpretation of a dramatic work presented on stage, and the variety of staging techniques enriches the meaning of the text, and emphasizes the fact that its relationship with contemporaneity evolves.<sup>4</sup> We find new ways of connecting to the text and new meanings in it as society evolves.<sup>5</sup>

Since previous chapters have used textual analysis as a means of producing alternative interpretations of the characters’ behaviour and actions in the light of new developments in the field of moral psychology and psychoanalysis, this section will focus on the performative aspect of these texts in order to explore the different meanings that emerge from contemporary productions. Furthermore, the readings emerging from the analysis of these productions will be related to the interpretations incorporated in the previous chapters of the thesis in order to observe the manner in which performance may reinforce these ideas or may put forward new perspectives. Therefore, this chapter explores the manner in which contemporary approaches to the staging of the classical plays are able to convey different perspectives on the characters’ interactions and the story, enrich the meaning of the text and strengthen the arguments incorporated in the previous chapters of the thesis. As a result, this endeavour contributes to the overall aim of the thesis which is to provide alternative readings of the characters’ experience, behaviour and decisions. It also represents an original contribution to the field of seventeenth-century French studies since Brigitte Prost and Noël Peacock are among the few scholars who deal with the twentieth and twenty-first century productions of the classical plays, and they focus on a historical account of these performances and the evolution of the techniques of adaptation.

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<sup>4</sup> Daniel Mesguich, ‘L’Ecriture et la lecture’, *Le Débat*, 113 (2001), 81-85 (p. 83).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

This approach is informed by an awareness of the difference between the textual and the performative aspect of these dramatic texts and the fact that their reception as literary texts differs significantly from the reception of a performance. Whilst reading a text is a solitary affair in which meaning is mediated by the written word, watching a theatrical performance involves participating in an event which encourages a communion between the spectators, and represents a series of signs made up of two ensembles, the text and the performance, which enter into a dialogue in order to create a message using visual, audio, sensorial, socio-cultural as well as theatrical codes.<sup>6</sup> This specific aspect of the theatrical performance and its use of various elements and codes to convey meaning and construct its message enable new interpretative visions to emerge.

## **1.2 Approaches to staging classical tragedy: Methodology**

Molière, Racine and Corneille are the dramatists with the highest number of performances at the Comédie-Française.<sup>7</sup> This prolific and constant adaptation of these playwrights has not slowed down throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as Brigitte Prost remarks that from 1970 onwards there has been an increase in the staging of their plays. According to the critic, this is due to their ‘discours transcendant’, which makes them a benchmark for other dramatic texts, the fact that they incorporate universally acknowledged human values, which makes them suitable for various interpretations, and they are part of the literary heritage, a common set of values connecting the members of a nation that every staging director has the obligation to preserve.<sup>8</sup> Jean-Marie Villégier, the prolific opera and theatre staging director and the founder of the Illustre Théâtre theatre company, similarly argues that the classical repertoire is performed because it is essential for

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<sup>6</sup> Ubersfeld, p. 40.

<sup>7</sup> Frédérique Brunner, Mélanie Petetin, Marjorie Saclier ‘Statistiques du répertoire de la Comédie-Française’ in *La Comédie-Française* (Paris: *L’Avant-scène théâtre*, novembre 2009), 56-57, p. 57. The data covers the period 1680-2008.

<sup>8</sup> Prost, p. 17.

understanding the past and the present, French history and mentalities and represents the heart of the French theatre and the centre of the dramatic art.<sup>9</sup> These dramatic texts on one hand incorporate universal values which lend them adaptive to various historical periods whilst at the same time they evoke a sense of history and a theatrical tradition. This tension between these two aspects of these dramatic texts is very productive when discussing the approaches to the staging of the classical plays.

Brigitte Prost identifies in her study *Le Répertoire classique sur la scène contemporaine* the main approaches to the staging of the classical plays from 1960 until 2003. The author divides these approaches into two main orientations: the focus on the comprehension and interpretation of the text; and the awareness of the distance between the classical text and the audience which considers the relationship with the past and the relation between the work and the audience. Prost's classification moves from work on the play-script which involves modifying the dramatic text, for example by repeating or displacing fragments of it, to influences from literary criticism (psychoanalytical approaches) and other theatrical traditions (circus, puppets, music hall), to historicization, in the form of historical realism or Marxist treatment of the past, and actualization which focuses on bringing the past in a contemporary context. To these approaches Prost adds the focus on the theatricality of the play meant to do away with the idea of theatre as a real world and to create a distancing effect. These approaches take the form of a focus on theatre conventions (exaggerating the bienséance and the mannerisms and gestures of the characters) or an incorporation of ceremonial elements in order to give the performance the aspect of a ritual. This work to emphasize the distance between the audience and the play script is taken further by approaches, which focus on a deconstruction of the play through various methods: direct audience address or a character being performed by various actors. This effect can also be achieved

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<sup>9</sup> Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), Fonds Illustré théâtre-Compagnie Jean-Marie Villégier, 'Pourquoi Corneille ?' in 'Médée : Textes et programmes,' (January 1995) 4-COL-189 (14) JMV6.



through a fragmentation of the text which may involve either modification of the enunciation (verse by verse or syllable by syllable) or of the rhythm (changing the stress). Prost's classification is comprehensive and captures in detail the various approaches to the staging of Racine, Corneille and Molière. However, this detailed classification leaves little room for the analysis of the performances. Furthermore, most performances analysed incorporate elements pertaining to various approaches, which Prost discusses separately and in relation to each relevant category. This makes the analysis appear repetitive and does not provide a sense of how these different elements work together to create meaning in performance. This creates a fragmented image of the performances discussed in Prost's work. As her endeavour is of a historical nature and focuses on rendering an account of the different trends in the adaptation of these classical authors, it is understandable that the analysis of the performances is of secondary importance. However, the use of such a detailed classification in this section which focuses on the analysis of the performances and the way they are able to put forward new interpretations of the characters' interactions and the story, may detract from this overall aim and may transform the representations into an accumulation of various elements stemming from different specific readings of the play-script. Furthermore, the corpus that Prost uses to illustrate these approaches ranges from 1960 to 2003, whilst the plays I will analyse in this chapter are more recent. The only productions that correspond to the period analysed by Prost are Yannis Kokkos's *Iphigénie* (1991), Daniel Jeanneteau's *Iphigénie* (2001) and Patrice Chéreau's *Phèdre* (2003). Nonetheless, Prost's detailed treatment of deconstruction and theatricality as means to stimulate a critical engagement with the play has informed the performance analysis incorporated in this chapter, particularly, the discussion of Michel Marmarinos's staging of *Phèdre* (2013). The analysis will develop these elements and discuss the way they work together in order to produce new meaning.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, Prost's study has provided

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<sup>10</sup> For the analysis of this performance see pp. 363-70.

a series of concepts and elements which inspired and supported my approach to the analysis of the contemporary productions of these plays.

Noël Peacock adopts a similar historical approach to the staging of Molière's plays in his study.<sup>11</sup> The critic analyses twentieth- and twenty-first century productions of Molière and identifies three main orientations in the staging of these plays: approaches informed by realism or theatricality, approaches inspired by ideas from literary criticism and sociology and approaches defined as 'post-théâtrales' in which theatricality is central. Within these orientations Peacock identifies specific categories: naturalist approaches which aim to evoke the real world (André Antoine), anti-realist approaches which reject the naturalist trend, adopt a simplified staging with minimal elements of décor in order to place the focus on the text (Jacques Coupeau) and approaches which are placed between these two positions (Jean Vilar's Théâtre national populaire and productions that use celebrity actors, like *Tartuffe* with Gérard Depardieu). The approaches informed by ideas from literary criticism and sociology are: Marxist interpretations focusing on a Brechtian representation of conflict and behaviour as products of historically determined relations; psychological and psychoanalytical readings influenced by the psychocritique; feminist interpretations which engage with aspects of the feminine condition and explore issues connected with patriarchy and gender equality; and post-colonial interpretations that place the story in different cultures in order to provide new readings of the dramatic text. In the case of the productions that focus on theatricality Peacock discusses metatheatrical approaches which subvert traditional theatrical practices and emphasize experimentation (in *Tartuffe* staged by Dirk Opstaele mixed media is combined with a free adaptation of the text), approaches that exploit intertextuality with references to other texts and productions (Jacques Lassalle proposed a reading of *Sganarelle* in two productions *Sganarelle ou le Cocu Imaginaire* and *Le Mariage forcé*) and hyperrealist productions which

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<sup>11</sup> Noël Peacock, *Molière sous les feux de la rampe* (Paris: Hermann, 2012).

deconstruct earlier realist readings by using an excess of realism (Jean-Luc Boutté's productions).

Peacock's classification captures the main orientations in this field. Some of his categories correspond to the ones identified by Prost in the staging of classical plays, namely the psychoanalytical approach, the focus on theatricality and the Marxist reading which can be found in what she defines as a historicizing approach. However, there are elements that correspond specifically to the practice of staging Molière's plays, as for instance the hyperrealist productions and the conscious exploitation of intertextuality. Peacock's study incorporates the main trends in the staging of these comedies and does not consider specific elements or readings that are more developed in the practice of staging classical tragedy, as for instance the work on the enunciation of the alexandrine (verse by verse, syllable by syllable, changing the rhythm and the stress), the extensive influence of psychocriticism and psychoanalysis, the use of ceremonial elements in order to emphasize the idea of theatre as a ritual. The critic acknowledges in his discussion of the psychological and psychoanalytical approaches to staging that Mauron's psychocritique had more influence on the interpretation of Racine's work whilst in the case of Molière there is a limited number of productions which adopt this reading. Peacock's study is comprehensive and commendable, but it focuses on adaptations of Molière's plays (as it should) and does not incorporate specific elements which are used and developed in the practice of staging classical tragedy.

According to Alain Viala, the overall meaning of any interpretation will be fundamentally affected by an initial decision to emphasize, attenuate or efface the distance between the time of the performance and the past in which the work was created. The manner in which this historical distance is mediated in performance determines, according to the critic, three main approaches to the staging of the classical plays: actualization, historicization and symbolization. These approaches correspond to the three possible temporal dimensions of the performance, namely, the time of the representation in the case of actualization, the time when the plays

were written in the case of historicization and the time of the fiction for symbolization.<sup>12</sup> Actualization connects the plot to twentieth-century issues and contexts and corresponds to the same category identified by Prost. Historicization places the action in its historical context either through the reconstruction of baroque declamation and performance techniques or through costumes, décor and temporal underpinning of the action. This category corresponds to what Prost defines as historical realism.<sup>13</sup> Symbolization effaces the temporal context, focuses on the universal, human aspects of the story and the permanence of the characters' passions and corresponds to stagings that are informed by critical studies of the plays. This category has been identified by both Prost and Peacock and represents performances based on psychoanalytical, feminist or post-colonial interpretations which have either no connection to temporality or a purely conventional one. Viala argues that these modern readings represent a reference to contemporaneity, but the performance does not explicitly engage with this aspect.

The critic also argues that actualisation and historicization are affected by pitfalls which symbolization is able to overcome. According to him, actualization incorporates an anachronism between the visual and the textual, which affects the tragic quality of the play, particularly the feeling that it is a tragic ceremony. Historicization also incorporates an anachronism between the style of the performance and the sensibilities of the contemporary audience, which affects the responses to the production. Symbolization may be able to avoid these shortcomings, as it focuses on the timeless aspect of the play and the tragic characters, does not explicitly create connections with different temporalities, and effaces the distance between the time of the performance and the time of the text's

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<sup>12</sup> Viala, p. 24. The critic argues that this classification is not specific to Racine and can be applied to the contemporary stagings of classical plays.

<sup>13</sup> Eugene Green's stagings of classical plays with the theatre company he founded in 1977 the Paris-based, *Théâtre de la Sapience*, focused on the recreation of baroque gestures and declamation. His theories on baroque performance and declamation techniques can be found in *La Parole Baroque*, Collection: Texte et Voix (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2001).

creation.<sup>14</sup> Whilst I agree with Viala that the spectators may have a more acute perception of the distance between the dramatic text and actuality, when directors adopt an actualization or historicization approach to the *mise en scène*, this gap does not represent a pitfall. It is a space, which invites a critical engagement with the performance, and is able to generate new meanings and alternative ways of interpreting the dramatic text, the characters and the plot. It is a means of going beyond the traditional emotional engagement determined by cathartic identification in order to stimulate a critical standpoint.

This distance between the dramatic text and actuality which Viala considers a pitfall of actualization and historicization could be compared to the ‘space’ generated by the Brechtian alienation effect. Bertold Brecht pioneered this type of engagement with performance. According to him, this technique involves ‘taking the human social incidents to be portrayed and labelling them as something striking, something that calls for explanation and is not to be taken for granted, not just natural’.<sup>15</sup> The characters also contribute to maintaining this distance, as the actors are not wholly transformed into the persons demonstrated, there is a certain reserve and detachment in the performance of their roles. This stimulates the audience’s active and critical engagement with the characters, their behaviour, their emotions and the situation and produces new meaning.<sup>16</sup> In the case of actualization, this distance between the visual and the textual elements of the performance may represent an opportunity to consider the atemporal nature of the story and the quality of the language. The distance between the style of the performance and the taste of the audience, in the case of historicization, may represent an invitation to consider the plays as the product of a specific historical moment, a particular theatre tradition or to observe the new meanings that emerge from this specific interpretation.

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<sup>14</sup> Viala, p. 24.

<sup>15</sup> Bertold Brecht, ‘The Street Scene’ in *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. by Marc Silberman, Steve Giles and Tom Kuhn, trans. by Jack Davis, Romy Fursland, Steve Giles, Victoria Hill, Kristopher Imbrigotta, Marc Silberman and John Willett (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), pp. 176-84 (p. 180).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

Therefore, this distance between the dramatic text, performance and contemporaneity, which Viala considers a shortcoming, has value as it promotes a Brechtian way of engaging with the characters and the play that contributes to the emergence of new and original readings.

Viala limits his discussion to these three main orientations and does not engage with other aspects of the relationship between text and *mise en scène* related to the treatment of the text in performance (the fragmentation of the text, displacement of fragments identified by Prost) and theatrical practices (theatricality, hyperrealist theatre mentioned by Peacock) which emerge in contemporary performances. This general classification of trends in the contemporary staging of the classical plays incorporates only a part of the approaches used in the modern productions based on a specific type of relationship between performance and the dramatic text. Nonetheless, this idea of a distancing effect, which occurs when directors set these plays in their historical context or bring them closer to contemporaneity, inspired by Viala's discussion of these approaches will be used and developed in the analysis of contemporary performances. I will observe and discuss the way the use of performance techniques inspired by classical paintings and postures (Yannis Kokkos's staging of *Iphigénie*, 1991) or placing the action in a context closer to contemporaneity (Marmarinos' production) stimulates the audience's critical engagement with the plays and the characters and generates new meanings.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, Viala's discussion of approaches to the stagings was a fertile ground for developing this idea, which will contribute to my analysis of contemporary performances.

Whilst Viala's classification of contemporary stagings focuses on the manner in which performance mediates the relationship with the past in which the plays were created, Patrice Pavis creates a typology based on the concept that the *mise en scène* 'stems explicitly or implicitly from the dramatic text'.<sup>18</sup> The critic's

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<sup>17</sup> For the analysis of these productions, see pp. 340-48, 363-70.

<sup>18</sup> Pavis, *Analyzing Performance*, p. 212.

classification also incorporates this tension between a strong tendency towards universality and adapting these stories to specific period. As a result, Pavis identifies a wide range of contemporary approaches to the staging of these classical plays: archaeological reconstruction, historicization, recuperation, the signifying practice, the play in pieces, the return to the myth, denial, the re-emergence of the body, the reappropriation of classical language, reconstitution in baroque declamation and recontextualization of the *mise en scène*. Not all these approaches will be discussed in our analysis because the focus is the performance, what is presented on stage and the meaning it conveys, and not the illustration of these theoretical concepts. Our performance analysis will focus on archaeological reconstruction, the play in pieces, the return to the myth, the re-emergence of the body and recontextualization. Each of these approaches has a specific treatment of the dramatic text in performance and reflects either the idea of timelessness or a strong tendency towards making the plays specific to a certain historical period and its social realities.

Archaeological reconstruction, historicization and recontextualization are approaches which place the performance in a specific period. Archaeological reconstruction attaches itself to the dramatic text as a product of a specific historical period and attempts to reconstruct the past and the acting style of the baroque period. This approach corresponds to Viala's definition of historicization as it focuses on placing the play in its historical context. It also represents what Prost defines as historical realism. The dramatic text becomes a vision of the classical past which aims to attract the audience through the unfamiliar nature of the performance. This use of classical performance techniques also stimulates a critical engagement with the story and the characters and may put forward new meanings, as in the case of Kokkos's production, which will be discussed in the performance analysis section. Historicization is the opposite of archaeological reconstruction and corresponds to both Prost's and Viala's definition of actualization whilst also incorporating a Marxist treatment of the dramatic text. This approach brings the text closer to the present and creates associations between the play and contemporaneity. The plays

become a means to reflect on contemporary issues through explicit connections with events from the present, and characters, situations and conflicts are adapted to suit this purpose. This approach brings the dramatic text closer to the experience of the audience and enables the spectators to gain a new understanding of the play as we will discuss in the analysis of Nicolas Candoni's staging of *Médée* (2016) in which the story is transformed into a contemporary divorce and custody battle between two spouses. Recontextualization places the action in a different spatial and temporal context. Past and present are brought together, and the action takes place in an 'environment familiar to the contemporary audience'.<sup>19</sup> The past I am referring to may be a classical past or a composite past combining element from Classical Greece and the early modern French theatrical tradition. It is different from historicization as it does not aim to create a story reflecting contemporary political issues. It is similar to actualization as defined by Prost and Viala as it brings the dramatic text closer to contemporaneity. This approach may be used to redefine the text within a specific context which is close to contemporaneity but not familiar to the audience, so that the play acquires new meaning whilst maintaining the focus on the plot and stimulating a critical engagement with the action and the characters. For example, *Phèdre*, becomes the story of a bourgeois family in the 1930s in Marmarinos's staging of the play, in order to emphasize the concrete dimension of the story, to invite the audience to consider the human aspect of this drama whilst simultaneously stimulating a critical engagement with the heroine's transgressive behaviour.

The play in pieces, the return to the myth and the re-emergence of the body are approaches which have a strong tendency towards universality. The play in pieces adopts a deconstructive approach to the staging of the classical plays, which involves a reworking of the text. In this case the *mise en scène* focuses on a fragmentation of the dramatic text and the reconstruction of the play from these

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 221.



pieces, which may or may not produce new meanings. This corresponds to the approaches that modify the dramatic text in order to create new meaning identified by Prost. This reworking of the text can take many forms from minor changes as for instance removing or modifying a few lines to replacing a series of characters with a single performer who recites all the lines, as we will see in Daniel Jeanneteau's production.<sup>20</sup> This approach puts forward the timeless aspect of the text that can be reconfigured and reworked in order to convey new meanings or to experiment with its poetic quality. The return to the myth moves away from the text and focuses on the myth or the root indicated in the story. It takes the form of linking this core to the individual and collective unconscious, emphasizing the universal quality of the themes incorporated in the play. This corresponds to Viala's symbolization, which also focuses on the universal, human aspect of the story and the permanence of passions, and the psychological and psychoanalytical approaches identified by both Prost and Peacock. The play becomes a mirror of the psyche and the audience is able to learn about its functioning and the human condition overall. The re-emergence of the body is an approach that focuses on the movements of the body to convey meaning. This represents a technique inspired by dance and ritual, which transforms the actor's body into a source of meaning. Declamation is connected to the expressions and movements of the body and this allows the impulses and passions of the characters to be immediately conveyed to the audience. The dramatic text inhabited by gestures and impulses comes alive. The performance conveys the psychological depth of the characters the fact that they are driven by timeless impulses and desires stemming from the unconscious. The atemporal, psychological dimension of the characters and the tragic conflict takes center stage, as we will observe in Patrice Chèreau's staging of *Phèdre* (2003). This typology reflects the evolving relationship between the text and *mise en scène* and considers the way the particular qualities of the classical texts are treated in performance. Although I have

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<sup>20</sup> For the analysis of the production see pp. 348-52.

discussed these categories based on the concepts of timelessness and a focus on placing the story within a specific historical period, there is an interplay between these two main types of approaches. One example is Kokkos' archeological reconstruction approach to the staging of *Iphigénie* which enabled Chantal Aubry to connect the story to contemporary conflicts (the Gulf War) and the timeless nature of the issues it raises in terms of sacrificing young lives in the name of conflict and politics.<sup>21</sup> The meaning that the performance conveys or acquires in reception may often go beyond the one incorporated in the approach that the director adopts to the staging of the play. As a result, the interpretations stemming from these approaches to the staging of the classical texts will be paired with the meanings that emerge from what is performed on stage and the critical responses to the plays in order to provide a complex, overall analysis of these contemporary performances.

Pavis's classification will serve as a guideline for the performance analysis incorporated in this section. The reason for this choice is that he incorporates trends identified by both Prost and Peacock whilst focusing on more recent productions than the former and considering approaches to tragedy as well as comedy, unlike the latter. Also, Pavis does not focus solely on one aspect of the relationship between text and the performance, namely, the mediation between the present of the performance and the past in which the play was created as Viala's does. His classification is more comprehensive, as it incorporates this aspect in approaches like historicization, archaeological reconstruction, recontextualization whilst including other ways in which the dramatic text is treated in performance, for instance in recuperation, the signifying practice or the re-emergence of the body. This allows us to consider the different aspects of the production. It also opens up the analysis of the performance, as we do not have to commit to an overall approach to the staging of the play. What is performed on stage becomes the source of meaning and this allows us to consider various interpretative possibilities.

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<sup>21</sup> Chantal Aubry, 'Racine à l'heure du Golf', *La Croix*, 29 October 1991.

Therefore, Pavis's classification will serve as a guideline for the analysis of contemporary performances of *Médée*, *Iphigénie* and *Phèdre* in order to uncover the manner in which various approaches to the plays produce new readings in terms of the characters' interactions and the guilt and responsibility of the tragic heroines.

Patrice Pavis is one of the most important theatre theoreticians with works ranging from theatre semiology (*Languages of the Stage: Essays in the Semiology of Theatre*), performance analysis (*Analyzing Performance: Theatre, Dance and Film*) and intercultural theatre practices (*Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*).<sup>22</sup> He has developed a model of dramaturgical analysis, which integrates production and reception in the process of interpretation in order to obtain a better understanding of the relationship between text and performance. His theories particularly the model of dramaturgical analysis and his pedagogical questionnaires, which aim to produce a holistic examination of the performance, are widely used in theatre studies and in other fields.<sup>23</sup> One example of the use of Pavis's work in the field of theatre semiology is Colin Counsell's study of twentieth-century theatre: *Signs of Performance: An Introduction to Twentieth-Century Theatre* (London, New York: Routledge, 1996). The author uses Pavis's model of analysis to produce a semiotic-based analysis of the theatrical practice of key figures like Stanislavski, Brecht, Beckett, Brook and Wilson. Pavis's work on the *mise en scène* is used by Andy Lavender as a starting point in the analysis of the changes that occur in theatre and performance after post-modernism.<sup>24</sup> The critic's work on intercultural theatre practices is applied by Paul Johnson to explore the types of interaction that take place in performances which work across the cultural divide between science and

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<sup>22</sup> These are a few representative examples from Patrice Pavis's extensive list of works in the field of theatre. *Languages of the stage: essays in the semiology of the theatre* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), *Analyzing Performance: Theatre, Dance and Film* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2003), *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>23</sup> For Pavis's questionnaire see *Analyzing performance*, pp. 37-40.

<sup>24</sup> Andy Lavender, *Performance in the Twenty-First Century: Theatres of Engagement* (Oxon, New York: Routledge, 2016).

art.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Pavis's performance analysis framework has also been applied to the field of marketing to provide a complementary approach to the existing service performance evaluation.<sup>26</sup> Pavis's theories have been widely used in the field of theatre and performance analysis and beyond.

Jozefina Komporalý uses some categories from Pavis's classification, namely, historicization, recuperation and the play in pieces (the fragmentation of the text in order to be reconstructed in performance) to analyse radical interpretations of plays considered masterpieces of theatre history in twentieth- and twenty-first century productions.<sup>27</sup> Komporalý incorporates in her analysis contemporary approaches to a few early modern tragedies in order to show the way in which these interpretations make use of various techniques to engage in new and innovative ways with these classical texts whilst also incorporating references to contemporary issues. Alexandru Tocilescu's staging of *Hamlet* (Bulandra Theatre, Bucharest, Romania, 1985), Thomas Ostermeier's production of the same play at the Schaubühne (Berlin, 2008), Silviu Purcãrete's staging of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (Hungarian Theatre of Cluj, Romania, 2015) and Frantic Assembly's staging of *Othello* (a co-production with Theatre Royal Plymouth and Royal Theatre & Derngate Theatre Northampton 2008), are amongst the performances of classical texts analysed by Komporalý. The author observes the way these productions combine a historicizing approach with fragmentation of the text (Tocilescu, Purcãrete), postdramatic theatre elements and mixed media (Ostermeier) and elements from dance and design (Frantic Assembly) to make a commentary about society either in the form of emphasizing the absurdity of communism (Tocilescu), the excess of capitalism (Ostermeier), to explore issues of race and social status

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<sup>25</sup> Paul Johnson, 'Science, Performance and Transformation: Performance for a 'Scientific' Age?', *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media*, 2, 2014, 130-142.

<sup>26</sup> Kim Harris, Richard Harris, Dominic Elliott, Steve Baron, 'A Theatrical Perspective on Service Performance Evaluation: The Customer-critic Approach', *Journal of Marketing Management*, 5-6 (May 2011), 477-502.

<sup>27</sup> Jozefina Komporalý, *Radical Revival as Adaptation: Theatre, Politics, Society* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

(Frantic Assembly) or to question social norms and conventions (Purcārete). Overall, Komporaly's study argues that these cutting-edge productions of the classical plays combine Pavis's approaches to staging with various techniques (mixed media, dance, post-dramatic theatre elements) in order to breathe new life into these masterpieces, to produce new readings of these dramatic texts in the light of the contemporary social and political context and to invite the audience to contemplate on present day issues and to question society's norms and values.

My analysis of the contemporary performances of *Médée*, *Iphigénie* and *Phèdre* has an aim similar to Komporaly's, as I seek to explore the way these approaches to staging are combined in order to produce new readings of the classical plays, particularly in relation to the dynamic between the characters and the issue of the heroines' guilt and responsibility. Although, I would not place (all) the productions analysed in this chapter in the same category as Komporaly's radical and cutting-edge performances, these plays also seek new ways of engaging with the classical texts, use specific approaches and techniques to achieve this aim, and should benefit from a similar methodological approach. Therefore, Komporaly's use of Pavis's methodology to analyse contemporary stagings of early modern tragedies reinforces the idea that this is a useful guideline for my endeavour.

The basis of this critical endeavour is Pavis's acknowledgement that a strict typology is problematic, as productions often make use of several of these approaches whilst a performance that focuses on only one of the categories mentioned above is a rare occurrence.<sup>28</sup> And indeed as Prost and Komporaly also observe, contemporary stagings often combine approaches and elements in order to breathe new life into these classical texts. This performance analysis will start from this premise and will focus on the way elements belonging to the different approaches to staging identified by Pavis are incorporated in contemporary

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<sup>28</sup> Pavis, *Analyzing Performance*, p. 212.

productions of *Médée*, *Iphigénie* and *Phèdre* and contribute to producing new readings of these stories.

Staging directors often combine elements belonging to different approaches in order to convey meaning as we will observe in the analysis of the performances. This may stem from the fact that these plays have been performed constantly, which creates a more acute need to innovate through the use of various techniques, or because our relationship with these texts evolves as society develops, as I have argued in the previous section. For example, Yannis Kokkos's staging of *Iphigénie* (1991) combines elements belonging to archaeological reconstruction, namely, poses inspired by classical paintings and a static acting style in the case of male characters with a return to the body inspired by dance and voodoo rituals in the case of Clytemnestre. These techniques are meant to emphasize the difference between the queen's ethical standpoint and the stance of the male characters as well as the conflict between these two sides, to bring to the forefront her plight and to invite the spectators to critically engage with Agamemnon's stance. Nicolas Candoni's staging of *Médée* (2016) also combines elements pertaining to two different approaches in order to put forward a specific reading of the story. In this case, we are dealing with a historicizing approach combined with a deconstruction of the text corresponding to the play in pieces, which transforms the story into a bitter divorce and custody battle and changes the dynamic between the two spouses in order to bring the dramatic text closer to the audience and to engage with the human dimension of *Médée*. It is precisely the way this combination of elements, belonging to the various approaches identified by Pavis, emerges in the performance of these plays and contributes to a new reading of the story and the characters, I shall examine in this chapter.

Pavis's classification has some limitations. It does not engage with intercultural approaches to the staging of these classical plays. The fact that the performances may incorporate elements from different cultures and theatre

traditions as Prost argues, is not discussed by Pavis.<sup>29</sup> Incorporating in the performance of these classical plays elements pertaining to different cultures, as for instance references to India in the staging of *Suréna* by Anne Delbée (Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier, 1998), can represent a source of new and original meaning. This limitation stems from the fact that Pavis draws his conclusions from a series of recent performances which do not incorporate this type of interpretation. The productions that will be the subject of this analysis do not claim to incorporate elements from other cultures or other theatrical traditions. Nonetheless, I am aware that such elements may emerge in the performance or the reception of the play and I will mention them as and when the occasion arises in relation to the way they may contribute to a new interpretation of the relationships between the characters or the issue of the heroes' guilt and responsibility. I will use the critical responses to these productions in order to overcome this limitation of the methodology.

The effects of these approaches to staging on reception also represent a source of alternative readings and potentially new meanings. Be it an emotional engagement with the characters through cathartic identification or a Brechtian critical standpoint to the characters' actions, and situation, these responses inform the interpretation of the story and the tragic heroines' behaviour. Whilst these responses are difficult to pin down, as they depend on a variety of factors related to the age, gender, education and social status of the spectators, data difficult to compile, for the purposes of this analysis I will use my experience as a spectator and the reviews of the plays as a means to engage with the potential responses to the performance. Furthermore, the analysis of the plays incorporated in the previous two chapters will also be considered as a potential response since reception theory acknowledges multiple ways of engaging with performance, and this endeavour will strengthen my argument.

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<sup>29</sup> Prost, p. 239.

The basis of this performance analysis is represented by recent productions of *Médée* (Paulo Correia 2014, Nicolas Candoni 2016), *Iphigénie* (Yannis Kokkos 1991, Daniel Jeanneteau 2002) and *Phèdre* (Patrice Chéreau 2002, Michel Marmarinos 2013, Christophe Rauck 2014).<sup>30</sup> I acknowledge that the list of contemporary performances of these plays is longer and each subsection of this chapter provides an overview of recent productions, which gives a sense of the various approaches used in the staging of these texts. The plays above were chosen on account of the availability of material suitable for performance analysis. I have consulted the productions, theatre reviews, creation documents and scripts, journal articles, interviews and performance photographs from the Bibliothèque Musée de la Comédie-Française, the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Arts du spectacle), the Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine and the Médiathèque et archives - Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe and the availability of this archival material was an essential factor in determining the corpus of this chapter.

## 2.1 Contemporary performances

### 2.1.1. *Médée*

The recent performances of Corneille's *Médée* include those by Jean-Marie Villégier at the Auditorium du Louvre (1995), Damiane Goudet at the Théâtre du Nord-Ouest (2001), Paulo Correia at the Théâtre National de Nice (2012) and Nicolas Candoni at the Studio Théâtre d'Asnières (2016). Jean-Marie Villégier's staging combines the heroic side of Médée with her human side and transforms the infanticide into an act of self-assertion.<sup>31</sup> Damiane Goudet's production focuses on the dynamic of the characters, particularly the relation between Médée and her enemies, which emphasizes the brave nature of the Colchian, her exceptional

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<sup>30</sup> Longepierre's *Électre* has not been performed in France beyond the nineteenth century.

<sup>31</sup> Jean-Marie Villégier, 'Médée', *l'illustre théâtre*, March 1995 <<http://www.illustretheatre-jmvillegier.fr/theatre.php?idspec=93>> [accessed 14 December 2017].



determination and willpower.<sup>32</sup> Correia's production frames the play in the heroic fantasy genre in order to recreate the superhuman and present a metaphysical humanity, whilst Candoni's staging places the story in a contemporary context and focuses on the dynamic between the two spouses and their relationship with their children.<sup>33</sup> All these performances have been analysed in order to evaluate their reception and productions values. However, very limited information was available in the case of Villégier's and Goudet's stagings.<sup>34</sup> As a result, this section will focus on analysing Correia's and Candoni's productions. Also, this endeavour is not meant to be exhaustive or of a historical nature. The performances selected are intended to reflect approaches to the characters and the dramatic text rather than provide a comprehensive historical account of the contemporary stagings of these classical plays.

Correia's production combines a recontextualising approach to the text with elements belonging to deconstruction and return to the myth in order to emphasize Médée's exceptional nature, the violence of the world she inhabits as well as her experience of the tragic situation. This treatment of the story plunges the spectator into a mythical world in which Médée embodies an archetypal witch or goddess who faces the violence of her enemies and is forced to react. This interpretation of the story determines the audience's admiration and sympathy for the character and invites them to consider the issue of guilt and responsibility.

The framing of the performance in the heroic fantasy genre by reconstructing a supernatural world through video projections, of dragons, ravens and apocalyptic images (inspired by Gustave Doré's illustrations for Dante's *Inferno*) reflects the

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<sup>32</sup> Théâtre on line, *Médée* (Damiane Goudet, 2001)

<<https://www.theatreonline.com/Spectacle/Medee/2820>> [accessed 14 December 2017].

<sup>33</sup> Théâtre de la Tempête, *Programme – Médée de Pierre Corneille mise en scène Paulo Correia*, 2013

<[https://www.la-tempete.fr/public\\_data/download/event/1507296404/medee\\_dp.pdf](https://www.la-tempete.fr/public_data/download/event/1507296404/medee_dp.pdf)> [accessed 14 December 2017].

<sup>34</sup> Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), Fonds Illustre théâtre-Compagnie Jean-Marie Villégier, have been consulted and there are no documents for an analysis of the performance. I contacted via email Damiane Goudet and the Théâtre du Nord-Ouest and the only available material was an article on the performance.

character's extraordinary nature as well as her isolation, since she is the only one inhabiting this universe. Furthermore, the sliding panels on stage, which mark the boundary between Médée's fantasy world and the human universe, physically separate these two dimensions throughout the play. This spatial division marks according to Correia the difference between Médée's values and beliefs which revolve around her divinity and universal law, and the patriarchal mindset of the other characters, guided by laws created by and for men.<sup>35</sup> This physical separation represents an ideological gap between Médée and the other characters. The Colchian inhabits a world, which is separate from the universe of the other characters both in terms of values and beliefs as well as abilities. She is endowed with magical abilities, but this quality makes her an outcast in the patriarchal world of Jason and Créon. This approach to the character puts forward the isolation and loneliness, which comes with having these superhuman powers and holding different ideological beliefs. The play emphasizes the fact that there is a downside to Médée's supernatural dimension, and this treatment may stimulate a dual response from the audience: on one hand awe for her supernatural abilities which stem from a mythical past and sympathy for her position as an outcast.

This physical separation from the other characters can also be interpreted in relation to the transactional analysis of the dramatic text, which argues that Médée chose to play the role of an outcast in her 'Always' life plan.<sup>36</sup> She inhabits a world of her own because she transgresses the rules and the established order in the name of desire. Médée is prepared to become the other and to play to the role of outcast because this involves no restriction on self-expression and desire. She follows only her wishes and needs, and this is a position that she is unwilling and unable to give up. Thus, this separation can be interpreted as a symbol of Médée's need to satisfy her desire at all costs, which involves this commitment to the role of the outcast.

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<sup>35</sup> Visioscène - La chaîne, *Interview de Paulo Correia*, Youtube, 3 April 2013 <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CiZzfwl9H\\_Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CiZzfwl9H_Y)> [published 3 April 2013, accessed 18 December 2018].

<sup>36</sup> See pp. 244-45 for a discussion of Médée's 'Always' script.

This interpretation may reduce the amount of sympathy the audience feels for the character, but it could invite a critical response regarding the way Créon, and Jason use rules and social conventions to their advantage and profit from Médée's disregard for them, particularly Jason.

The use of projected images inspired by Gustave Doré and dramatic music create a mythical world populated by dragons, ravens and apocalyptic violence whilst simultaneously conveying the characters' mental landscape and their experience in a return to the myth approach to several scenes. Sounds, images and light reflect Médée's mindset and emotional experience, in her confrontation with Jason in Act III, Scene 3. The reiteration of her supernatural abilities is accompanied by projections of twisted, tormented bodies in hell and suspenseful music, which come to an end the moment her wrath is exhausted in a scream of frustration. Once she expresses the full force of her anger and frustration which reaches the climax with a scream, the stage is plunged into semi-obscurity and silence, Gaële Boghossian's tone changes marking a transition from a powerful witch to a hurt wife reproaching her unfaithful husband. Médée's anger is symbolically represented by images of destruction and hell, whilst the music creates a crescendo as she expresses her fury and then leaves the heroine in silence and darkness, an apt metaphor for her dire situation.<sup>37</sup> Jason's emotional turmoil regarding his conflicting duties towards Créuse and Médée in Act I, Scene 2 is also emphasized with the help of sounds of a storm and projected images of male bodies, grotesquely deformed and metamorphosed into trees. This treatment of the scene brings out the dramatic aspect of his situation and presents another facet of his personality, as he is no longer the carefree, confident, happy character of the first scene of the play, and his decision was a tough one to make, in spite of him appearing to take it lightly during his discussion with Pollux. These images and sounds convey symbolically

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<sup>37</sup>*Médée* dir. by Paulo Correia, Nouvelle Création du Théâtre Tnn / Collectif 8  
<[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x\\_trOLYw4i4&list=PLE59D08EA4EA42FDB&index=14](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_trOLYw4i4&list=PLE59D08EA4EA42FDB&index=14)>  
[published 29 January 2012, accessed 18 December 2018].

the experience of the characters, emphasize aspects of their behaviour which are not developed in the play script, namely Jason's moment of crisis when contemplating his conflicting duties, and aim to stimulate the audience's sympathy for each of these characters.

These images also convey the idea that the characters are the products of a mythical world of violence and destruction in which Médée rules as an ancient goddess, ruthless as well as vulnerable. The seventeenth-century images of hell and human suffering, which reflect the mental landscape of the characters, echo an undifferentiated mythical time when witches and goddesses controlled space, and violence was widespread. Furthermore, the fact that the production emphasizes the ideological conflict between patriarchy (the world of Jason and Créon) and a separate dimension subjected to a natural and universal law represented by Médée, gives the story the aspect of a foundational myth. This treatment of the text invites the audience to critically engage with both sides of the conflict and to consider the laws and values they represent. Nonetheless, the fact that Médée embodies an ancient divinity endowed with supernatural powers from a different universe may captivate the audience's interest whilst her actions may be regarded with a sense of awe. This may contribute to justifying and reducing the violent and transgressive nature of her behaviour, as her actions become the result of an exceptional nature and the mythical, deeply violent world she inhabits. Therefore, this treatment of the dramatic text reveals two worlds at odds and transforms Médée into an archetypal hero from the beginning of civilisation whose violence stimulates a sense of wonder and admiration.

In some instances, the use of these devices guides the audience too firmly towards a specific interpretation of these scenes and there is not enough space for the spectators to decode the message presented on stage. They acquire an overly didactic role, which is repetitive and tiresome. For instance, Médée's incantations, the assertion of her supernatural abilities and the depiction of her revenge plan are accompanied by dramatic music, images of dragons, ravens and Gustave Doré's

visions of hell all throughout the play. The use of this audio-visual technology creates a mesmerizing universe, which enables the spectators' full immersion in the illusory world of the performance. According to Boghossian, who was in charge of the dramaturgy of the play, this treatment of the scenes allows the unconscious to emerge, liberated from the constraints of the intellect creating a heightened emotional response.<sup>38</sup> However, having the same meanings and ideas reinforced over and over again by image and sound can have a stifling effect, which weighs down the performance and frustrates spectators. Most unfavourable reviews of the play are informed by this reaction to the constant use of media throughout the play.<sup>39</sup> As a result, the music and the projected images help underline specific aspects of the characters' experience, produce a certain atmosphere and stimulate the audience's sense of awe, when they are used sparingly whilst overuse creates a repetitive atmosphere and stifles the performance.

The use of characters as witnesses to scenes they do not directly participate in, is another means through which the production emphasizes certain aspects of the characters' behaviour, which are not developed in the play text. This modification of the scenes and the plot stems from a deconstructive approach to the dramatic text and works well, particularly in Act I, Scene 4 when Médée expresses her anger at Jason's betrayal whilst caressing the body of the warrior.<sup>40</sup> Jason is on stage from verse 241 until verse 252, but he is silent, static, in a trance state, and unaware of Médée's caresses. She appears to have stopped time in order to bring the warrior to a standstill. Once this desire to see and touch him is satisfied, she exits Jason's world by commanding the two sliding panels, which separate the stage. This scene gives

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<sup>38</sup> Nicolas Fabiani, *Médée* de Paulo Correia, *Culture on Stage*, no. 12 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmtdT0DO5b4>> [published 9 November 2012, accessed 18 December 2018].

<sup>39</sup> See Dominika Waszkiewicz, 'Médée de Corneille, mise en scène par Paulo Correia au Théâtre de la Tempête', *Un Fauteuil pour L'Orchestre*, 22 March 2013 <<http://unfauteuilpoulorchestre.com/critique-medee-de-corneille-mis-en-scene-pas-paulo-correia-au-theatre-de-la-tempete/>> [accessed 18 December 2018]; Manuel Piolat, Soleymat, 'Médée', *La Terrasse*, 208, 30 March 2013 <<http://www.journal-laterrasse.fr/medee-8-theatre-de-la-tempete-pierre-corneille-paulo-correia-2/>> [accessed 18 December 2018].

<sup>40</sup> *Médée* dir. by Paulo Correia, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-cgjQpIFi4&list=PLE59D08EA4EA42FDB&index=11>> [accessed 04 February 2019]

an erotic connotation to the Colchian's behaviour, as this desire for her lover's body informs her anger at his betrayal and abandonment.

This image of the unconscious Jason caressed by his spouse may also be interpreted in relation to the idea already explored in chapter 2, that Médée perceives Jason as an object to be possessed, controlled and used for her satisfaction. This would convey the lack of reciprocity and compassion which affects her love for Jason.<sup>41</sup> Sexual desire and its frustration become part of the factors that inform her actions in an echo of Euripides' version of the play. This treatment of the scene reveals a facet of the tragic character that Corneille does not develop in his version of the play and may stimulate an unsympathetic reaction from the audience, as Médée pursues the satisfaction of her desire showing no regard or respect for Jason's wishes and autonomy.

Médée's confrontation with Créon in Act II, Scene 2 also benefits from the presence of Jason and Créuse as witnesses, and this puts forward the image of the Colchian as a victim of the other characters' violence. The two lovers look on impassively as Créon (interpreted by Laurent Chouteau) grabs Médée by the neck, orders her to leave Corinth and pushes her away. Furthermore, they become complicit to the violence inflicted upon the Colchian, as they burst into laughter as the Colchian demands an explanation for her punishment, verses 382-83.<sup>42</sup> The sound of their obscene, contemptuous laughs is amplified and engulfs the entire scene emphasizing the fact that Médée is in a position of vulnerability, subjected to the derision and disdain of her enemies: a victim of oppression and injustice. This treatment of the scene also reveals Jason and Créuse's ruthless attitude towards Médée. They are merciless and complicit in the violence inflicted upon her by Créon. Their behaviour provides justification for Médée's revenge.

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<sup>41</sup> See p. 171 for the discussion of this idea.

<sup>42</sup> *Médée* dir. by Paulo Correia,

<[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_SkyaZY8Zkc&index=10&list=PLE59D08EA4EA42FDB](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_SkyaZY8Zkc&index=10&list=PLE59D08EA4EA42FDB)>  
[published 29 January 2012, accessed 18 December 2018].

As I argue in chapter 3, they all mistreat the Colchian for different motives, desire for glory and power in the case of Jason, the need to secure the bloodline for Créon and the wish to redeem the warrior and restore his former glory in the case of Créuse, and this leads to Médée's gruesome revenge and their downfall.<sup>43</sup> Correia's performance makes this aspect visible on stage and this puts forward Médée's vulnerability, justifies her crimes and emphasizes the role played by Jason, Créon and Créuse in their own demise. This treatment of the scene is able to stimulate the audience's sympathy for Médée and to make the spectators consider the role played by the other characters in the unfolding of the plot and the tragic outcome.

Correia's production presents the violent aspect of Médée's behaviour. However, the Colchian's violent deeds become the result of a moral transformation through pain and suffering which is accompanied by a change of costume. This transformation is conveyed through a return to the body approach to the scene incorporating Médée's painful decision to murder her children. Boghossian's body is bent and twisted throughout the deliberation process in order to convey her torment, and onomatopoeic 'ahs' mark her suffering.<sup>44</sup> The decision becomes definitive the moment she plunges the sword into the stage, a gesture signifying that she cuts herself off from all maternal feelings. This moral transformation is also conveyed through physical appearance, as Médée changes her outfit before performing the revenge. She sheds her old dress (which bears the symbol of the failed relationship in the form of a brooch in the shape of a heart stabbed by four swords on each side) and becomes a new Médée who avenges herself through bloodshed.

This moral transformation may be interpreted as abandonment of connection and of relationships of care as I argue in chapter 2. Médée abandons these connections, which have caused her suffering, in favour of a position of power and

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<sup>43</sup> See pp. 257, 261-62 for the transactional analysis of Créon's and Créuse's behaviour.

<sup>44</sup> *Médée* dir. by Paulo Correia

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJm7O3ZH4kE&index=2&list=PLE59D08EA4EA42FDB>>  
[published 29 January 2012, accessed 18 December 2018].

invulnerability. She severs the maternal bond, a part of her identity defined by these relationships of care, in order to become this reborn version of herself. The tragic heroine must undergo a character transformation in order to perform her revenge, which indicates that this violent behaviour is a reaction to her dramatic situation, and the mistreatment she has suffered at the hands of Jason, Créon and Créuse. This treatment of the character and the scene has the potential to reduce the transgressive nature of her actions by inviting the audience to consider the way this singular context and the other characters' violence influence Médée's mindset and behaviour.

Overall, Correia's production combines elements of recontextualization, return to the body and a return to myth in order to present a story in which Médée is an archetypal witch who can control space and time, is subjected to the violence of Créon, Créuse and Jason and undergoes a moral transformation. Médée emerges as a mythical superhero with a human dimension as her violent acts become a reaction to the mistreatment she suffers at the hand of the other characters. As audience we are in awe of her power and we sympathize with her plight as we consider Créon's, Créuse's and Jason's involvement in the tragic outcome. The originality of Correia's production lies in the fact that it emphasizes this aspect of the story, uses media to convey the supernatural dimension of the character and the mythical and violent nature of the world she inhabits, and presents Médée as a being who is forever transformed through pain and suffering.

One of the most recent stagings of Corneille's play is Nicolas Candoni's *Médée*, at the Studio Théâtre d'Asnières in 2016. This production is at the other end of the spectrum in terms of its approach to the character and the story. Whilst Correia frames his production in the heroic fantasy genre, Candoni places his *Médée* in a contemporary context and focuses on the human dimension of the story and the intimate, family aspect of the situation. The performance distances itself from the fantastic and the 'merveilleux' elements of this baroque tragedy in favour of a focus on conveying the experience of the characters in a similar contemporary context in



order to draw attention to the drama, which underlies mundane situations. The performance aims to present a human, desperate, transgressive Médée, by exploring her behaviour and emotional experience during a bitter custody and divorce battle.<sup>45</sup> The production aims to create direct connections with actuality and to focus on Médée's experience as a betrayed wife and loving mother and combines historicization with a deconstruction of the text. This represents an original interpretation of the play, which brings the text closer to the audience and invites them to engage emotionally with the character and her plight, in order to gain a new understanding of this transgressive behaviour.

The historicizing approach to the story emerges in the design of the stage which conveys the tension between two opposing spaces: Médée's precarious apartment and Créon's (soon to be Jason's) luxurious palace, and the critical difference between the experience of the two spouses. A wall made up of white balloons with a gap in the shape of a heart represents the residence of the Corinthian king, which is also a metaphor for Jason's ephemeral and unsubstantial relationship with Créuse. This alongside a white table with four chairs separates the palace from the modest furnishings of Médée's apartment: an old television set placed on the floor and a grey couch. These two spaces reveal the two very different sides of Médée's story and emphasize the dire aspect of her situation as well as Jason's cynical and selfish behaviour.<sup>46</sup> Médée emerges as an abandoned wife who is penniless whilst Jason is the unfaithful husband who has moved on to bigger and better things in the form of a more luxurious house and a younger wife. This

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<sup>45</sup> Studio Théâtre d'Asnières, *Dossier de Médée de Pierre Corneille mise en scène Nicolas Candoni* (Asnières-sur-Seine: 2016).

<sup>46</sup> Photos of the staging can be found in Sonia Bos-Jucquin, 'Médée: drame familial sur fond de trahison', *ThéâtreToile*, 19 February 2016 <<https://theatoile.wordpress.com/2016/02/19/medee-drame-familial-sur-fond-de-trahison/>> [accessed 13 December 2018]. Fabien H., 'Premières photos de Médée par Nicolas Candoni, à voir jusqu'à dimanche au Studio Théâtre d'Asnières !' <[https://twitter.com/Fabien\\_\\_H/status/700613520988237824](https://twitter.com/Fabien__H/status/700613520988237824)> [accessed 20 December 2018]. Mathilde Sotiras, 'Médée mise en scène Nicolas Candoni', *la négrette à voir* <<http://mathildesotiras.wixsite.com/lanegretteavoir/untitled-cee5>> [accessed 20 December 2018].

transforms the dynamic between the two spouses in a victim and perpetrator one which aims to stimulate sympathy for the tragic character and animosity for Jason.

This victim and perpetrator dynamic is further emphasized by a deconstructive approach to the text, as Médée is no longer endowed with supernatural powers and Jason uses his financial resources to gain custody of the children. Jason seeks to buy his children's affection for his new love interest as part of an attempt to tilt the balance in his favour in the custody trial and to deprive Médée of them. Meanwhile, the Colchian lives in precarity and resorts to alcohol in order to cope with her dire situation.<sup>47</sup> There is little trace of the self-confidence and display of power, which according to Corneille is able to stimulate the audience's awe.<sup>48</sup> Médée appears powerless and struggles to deal with Jason's betrayal. The performance reveals a stark difference between the two spouses' experience of this particular context, which emphasizes Médée's vulnerability, as well as the perfidious nature of Jason's behaviour towards her. This represents a new reading of the story, which reduces Médée's responsibility by transforming her into an alcoholic abandoned wife, a vulnerable and unstable character, betrayed and mistreated by a cynical and egocentric ex-husband.

The staging of Médée's flat with the grey couch and television set as well as Catherine Hirsch's poses, curled up on the couch with a blanket and a bottle of alcohol gives a mundane and dramatic quality to the story. This atmosphere of mystery and darkness which can be found in daily activities and ordinary spaces was inspired by Gregory Crewdson's photographs, particularly the *Twilight* series that puts together complex settings in everyday spaces (bathroom, living room, kitchen) and uses sunset light to evoke the existential darkness and the personal

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<sup>47</sup> Solange Jambon, 'Médée de Corneille revisitée aujourd'hui', *Overblog*, 22 February 2016 <<http://autreenjeu2016.over-blog.com/2016/02/medee-de-corneille-revisitee-aujourd-hui.html>> [accessed 13 December 2018].

<sup>48</sup> See pp. 78 for the quotation and the discussion regarding the way Médée's behaviour may stimulate the audience's admiration.

crises which are hidden underneath a calm, suburban landscape.<sup>49</sup> Candoni tries to reproduce this atmosphere, and to add this dramatic element to the staging in order to emphasize the dark, sombre dimension of the story. This grave atmosphere acquires an element of despair as Médée lies on her couch drinking in order to cope with the situation. It is a tense atmosphere in which the décor as well as Médée's performance provide a sense of the bleakness and the danger that lies beneath this mundane setting and the heroine's desperate and vulnerable stance. This may stimulate the audience's sympathy for the character whilst inviting them to consider the emotional experience and the dire situation, which is at the heart of this transgressive behaviour.

This performance conveys Médée's isolation and powerlessness, which as I have argued in chapter 2 is at the centre of her experience of the situation and informs the decision to put Jason in a similar position alone and deprived of all relationships of care.<sup>50</sup> This human dimension of her behaviour is brought to the forefront in order to stimulate the audience's sympathy and to encourage them to think about human vulnerability to such misfortune. Therefore, this focus on the dire experience of the character is a means to enable the audience to engage more deeply with the human dimension of Médée's violent behaviour.

Médée is no longer a source of admiration and the spectators are not in awe of her supernatural powers as in the case of Correia's production. This treatment of the dramatic text risks transforming the tragedy into a banal story. However, I believe that this approach to the staging of the play is deeply unsettling because it presents Médée's criminal behaviour as a product of situations, which occur in everyday life. This exceptional violence is the making of a human being not a mythical witch, endowed with supernatural powers. This is an original and

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<sup>49</sup> Studio Théâtre d'Asnières, *Dossier*. The photos from Gregory Crewdson's *Twilight* series can be found at Alexandra Mateescu, 'The American City at Twilight: Gregory Crewdson Photography', *Inhale* <<http://inhalemag.com/the-american-city-at-twilight-gregory-crewdson-photography/>> [accessed 20 December 2018]. These photographs were incorporated in the creation documents of the play.

<sup>50</sup> See pp. 167-68 for a discussion of this idea.

disturbing interpretation of the story, which invites the spectators to consider the human dimension of these acts of violence and the fact that individuals (and potentially themselves) may resort to such behaviour in testing situations. This treatment stimulates the audience's sympathy and potentially fear regarding extreme human behaviour during difficult circumstances. Candoni's staging may have undermined some of the tragic qualities of the story, but it goes a long way in terms of recuperating Médée's humanity.<sup>51</sup> This association with present day dramatic situations redeems the heroine and breathes new life into the story.

In this section we have analysed two productions of Médée that have adopted different approaches to the staging of the play in order to put forward new interpretations of the story. Correia's Médée is a goddess or a witch from a mythical world who resorts to violence as a reaction of the mistreatment she suffers at the hands of the other characters. The story acquires the dimension of a foundational myth and Médée's revenge is part of the excessive violence, which defines the beginning of humanity and civilisation. Candoni's production emphasizes the human dimension of the story and Médée emerges as an alcoholic abandoned wife driven to despair by Jason's betrayal. Both performances reconsider the tragic heroine's guilt and responsibility and invite us to consider the factors that contribute to her transgressive actions, namely, Médée's exceptional nature and the world she inhabits (Correia), the other characters' role in the tragic outcome and the dire situation she finds herself in (Candoni's production in particular). Overall, this analysis has revealed that these productions put forward new interpretations of the play that engage with and reconsider the issue of the heroine's guilt and responsibility and may acquire in reception the interpretations incorporated in the previous chapters of this thesis.

### **2.1.2 *Iphigénie***

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<sup>51</sup> Jambon, 'Médée de Corneille revisitée aujourd'hui'.

Recent productions of *Iphigénie* include those by Florence Tosi at the Théâtre du Nord Ouest (2017), Allyson Glado at the Comédie Nation (2012), Ophélia Teillaud at the Théâtre 13 (2003), Daniel Jeanneteau at the Théâtre de Lorient (2001), Yannis Kokkos at the Comédie-Française (1991) and Silvia Monfort at the Carré Silvia Monfort (Théâtre Monfort, 1987). Tosi's production is underpinned by the idea, borrowed from Alessandro Baricco's *An Iliad: a Story of War*, that war is an obsession of old men and young men are sacrificed in its name.<sup>52</sup> Glado adopts a pure realist approach to the performance and focuses on the passions of the characters.<sup>53</sup> Teillaud's staging connects declamation to bodily expression in order to enable the emotions of the characters to emerge on stage in an interpretation inspired by the re-emergence of the body. Jeanneteau's staging focuses on the human situations, which are the object of representation, namely the relation between father and daughter, and the experience of the individual facing death.<sup>54</sup> Kokkos's and Monfort's productions connect the classical text with the distant past in which the play was performed reconstructing the acting style of the baroque period. I will focus on Jeanneteau's and Kokkos's productions because these stagings are better supported by archival material.<sup>55</sup>

Yannis Kokkos made his directorial debut with the *mise en scène* of *Iphigénie*. The production focuses on Clytemnestre's moral transformation and the changes that occur in the dynamic between the two spouses in order to put forward a reading in which the queen's plight takes centre stage. Clytemnestre emerges as a tragic heroine in conflict with the representatives of the patriarchal order lead by

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<sup>52</sup> Florence Tosi, *Une mise en scène: Iphigénie* <<http://florencetosi.com/images/florence/2017/Iphigenie-racine.pdf>> [accessed 12 December 2017]. The novel by Baricco (in fact a series of 21 dramatic monologues, but seldom performed) was published as *Omero, Iliade* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2004); Tosi used the French translation by Françoise Brun (Paris: Albin Michel, 2006). An English translation by Ann Goldstein is available under the title *An Iliad* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2007).

<sup>53</sup> Allyson Glado, 'Iphigénie', *Parisbouge.com*, 8 June 2012 <<https://www.parisbouge.com/event/73475>> [accessed 12 December 2017].

<sup>54</sup> Daniel Jeanneteau, 'Note d'intention', in *Iphigénie, Théâtre de Lorient, 6-10 March 2001* (Lorient: Centre Dramatique de Bretagne, 2001).

<sup>55</sup> Théâtre 13, Comédie Nation, Théâtre du Nord-Ouest do not have an archive. The directors did not respond to my attempts to contact them.

Agamemnon, her spouse. The performance combines elements of archaeological reconstitution with the re-emergence of the body in order to convey this interpretation of the story and to represent the fact that this moral dilemma determines a conflict between two ethical standpoints: Clytemnestre's moral stance and the patriarchal law represented by her spouse. Unlike Jeanneteau's, Tosi's and Glado's stagings which focus on the experience of Iphigénie and Agamemnon and the father-daughter dynamic, this production transforms Clytemnestre into the main hero whilst conveying the moral dimensions of this tragic situation. This new interpretation of the dramatic text invites the audience to consider the characters' different ethical positions and to engage critically with the way patriarchy promotes and supports the law (of the gods in this case).

The re-emergence of the body approach to the text conveys Clytemnestra's experience and indicates the moral transformation she undergoes at Aulis, which is accompanied by a change in the dynamic between the two spouses. Kokkos incorporates in the 'Relevé de mise en scène' a depiction of the queen's mental state before her meeting with Agamemnon (Act 3, Scene 1) in which he indicates that she has not forgotten that her first child and spouse were murdered by Agamemnon.<sup>56</sup> This is reflected in Martine Chevallier's performance, as she observes her spouse from a distance, as if to devise a strategy for this interaction, before approaching him sensually to caress his shoulder. There is a forced intimacy here, as she plays the seductress rather than the affectionate wife, seeking a connection with Agamemnon through contact with his body, before initiating a conversation. She touches him and stands behind him, her head supported by his shoulders denoting apprehension when dealing with her spouse as well as a specific power dynamic within the couple which affects her behaviour. She is fearful, and she conveys this through body movements, which reveal an attempt to appease him. This reveals the authority that Agamemnon has over his wife and may make the

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<sup>56</sup> Paris, Bibliothèque Musée de la Comédie-Française (BMCF) 'Relevé de mise en scène : Iphigénie de Racine' by Catherine Rousset, Yannis Kokkos (1991), RMS.IPH. 1991 (1), p. 41.

audience wonder if Clytemnestre's display of affection is genuine or stems from a fear of her spouse's character and his position of power.

Clytemnestre's memory of Agamemnon's violence towards her family is connected to an accumulated rage, which seeks opportunities to manifest itself in the present situation, in the transactional analysis incorporated in chapter 3. It is also part of the reason Clytemnestre mistrusts her spouse and feels entitled to exact revenge upon him once he proves his untrustworthiness again at Aulis.<sup>57</sup> Although I have considered anger and violence as mechanisms of dealing with this mistrust in Agamemnon, I have not thought of the way in which it affects this relationship in periods of relative calm. This emerges in Kokkos' performance, as the queen uses her sexuality as a mechanism of protection in order to maintain Agamemnon's favour, potentially out of fear of displeasing him. Kokkos's production also provides another interpretation for Clytemnestre's decision to follow her husband's order and leave Aulis, as it may stem from fear of the consequences of such disobedience. In this new reading of the story fear becomes another factor that informs Clytemnestre's relation with Agamemnon at Aulis.

The initial power dynamic between the two spouses and Agamemnon's authority over his wife is also emphasized in the treatment of their first encounter. Clytemnestre kneels before her spouse, hands stretched out imploring to be allowed to attend their daughter's wedding. The king does not concede and pushes away his wife whilst shouting out his order: 'Obéissez!' (III. 1. 818) The king has spoken in a full display of his power, and Clytemnestre loses her balance and falls to the ground, defeated. She is puzzled and powerless. This treatment of the scene stimulates the audience's sympathy for the queen and invites the spectators to engage critically with Agamemnon's behaviour, particularly the reasons he invokes to justify his decision and the way he uses his authority in this marital relationship.

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<sup>57</sup> See pp. 271-76 for a transactional analysis of Clytemnestre's attitude towards Agamemnon.

In terms of the power dynamic within this relationship, the performance reflects the shift that occurs as the action develops whilst emphasizing Clytemnestre's behavioural transformation through a re-emergence of the body approach to the text. Once she finds out that Agamemnon intends to sacrifice their daughter and the wedding was a pretext to get her to Aulis, Clytemnestre is no longer able to contain her rage and the power dynamic of her relationship with Agamemnon shifts. A darker side of the queen emerges as Kokkos suggests that she is now 'la louve de Rome, on sent la tigresse furieuse'.<sup>58</sup> The performance emphasizes this change of behaviour as the queen's diatribe against her spouse (Act IV, Scene 4) acquires a menacing dimension. Clytemnestre says her lines whilst moving in a circle around a static Agamemnon, weighed down by guilt, as a witch in a voodoo ritual or a predator circling her prey in an approach to performance informed by dance and ritual elements. This reflects Kokkos's aim to make his characters occupy the space and move in accordance with their frustration, anger and impulses.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, Clytemnestre shouts reproaches in Agamemnon's ear, gets on her hands and knees as she speaks her anger and hurt looking directly at him. The rhythm of her intonation also reflects rage and aggressiveness, as it speeds up and slows down towards the end of the line becoming an incantation or in this case a curse. The king is powerless whilst the queen becomes a force of nature, as she unleashes her fury. As critics have remarked, Chevallier gives 'chaleur et âme à ce qui aurait pu rester de glace' and embodies a human Clytemnestre who is able to convey anger and pain.<sup>60</sup> Her behaviour may be interpreted as a declaration of war or a revenge spell she casts on Agamemnon. This focus on the body and its movements and gestures aiming to render the psychology of the character instils life into the performance and indicates that Clytemnestre has suffered a dramatic moral transformation on account of her spouse's betrayal and the imminent death of her

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<sup>58</sup> Rousset, Kokkos, p. 44.

<sup>59</sup> Marion Thébaud, 'Iphigénie' sous l'œil de Kokkos', *Le Figaroscope*, 15 October 1991.

<sup>60</sup> L'Information Dentaire, 'Iphigénie de Racine', *L'Information Dentaire*, 28 November 1991. A. H., 'Iphigénie', *Le Quotidien de Paris*, 23 October 1991.



daughter. Clytemnestre is like a volcano ready to erupt, and the audience is able to feel the tension in this expression of anger and aggressiveness. This approach to the character stimulates the spectators' sympathy (as Clytemnestre appears empowered by her love for Iphigénie) as well as their apprehension, since they are able to observe the violent side of her character.

Clytemnestre's violent and menacing behaviour can also be interpreted in the light of the transactional analysis of this scene in chapter 3. According to this interpretation, the queen perceives Agamemnon as the main culprit and uses the fact that he has been caught out as a means of emphasizing the king's guilt and expressing her repressed anger. Iphigénie's imminent sacrifice provides the appropriate context for the queen to express her accumulated rage at Agamemnon's betrayal and past violence. It is also a means to avoid dealing with the guilt stemming from an awareness of the role of her family curse in this tragic situation since both Clytemnestre and her sister have a proclivity to misfortune. This diatribe functions as a protective mechanism and an opportunity to express the full force of her fury, and as a result takes the form of a ruthless judgemental stance and menacing behaviour. Clytemnestre refuses to accept Agamemnon's excuses and sadness as proofs of his intention to save Iphigénie, and treats him as the main culprit, an enemy seeking to harm them for his dreams of glory.<sup>61</sup> This interpretation may affect the sympathy that the audience feels for Clytemnestre, as this situation becomes an opportunity to express her repressed anger and to avoid any feelings of guilt. This may also invite the spectators to consider the fact that human behaviour stems from a combination of various psychological factors in order to approach both Agamemnon's and Clytemnestre's stance more critically.

Chevallier's vibrant and energetic Clytemnestre driven by passion is in antithesis with the male characters on stage who adopt a series of static poses and postures. Kokkos uses gestures and scenes inspired by Nicolas Poussin's paintings

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<sup>61</sup> See pp. 271-76 for a discussion of Clytemnestre's behaviour towards Agamemnon.

(1594 –1665), particularly *L'Enlèvement des Sabines*. According to the director, these elements belonging to archaeological reconstitution, aim to convey a sense of Jansenist rigour and to remind the audience of this particular period and its theatrical tradition.<sup>62</sup> This focus on the aesthetic and visual dimension of the play stemming from Kokkos's extensive experience as scenographer (he worked with Antoine Vitez as set designer from 1960 to 1990) informs the performance directly as stage directions incorporate detailed sketches of the scenes, the characters' movements and the poses and images they need to reproduce.<sup>63</sup> This is reflected particularly in the performances of the male characters: Agamemnon (Michel Favory), Achille (Jean-Yves Dubois) and Ulysse (Dominique Rozan). This focus on reproducing these postures and poses often inhibits the flow of their movements as well as the instinctual reactions to the tragic situation and gives a self-conscious quality to their acting. They appear rigid, cold and calculated which determined Jacques Fortier to name them collectively 'soldats de plomb'.<sup>64</sup> Potentially Kokkos's use of these postures and gestures to weigh down and give a calculated dimension to their performance aims to emphasize the fact that they are physically stuck at Aulis, and mentally caught in the power system they uphold. Alongside a Clytemnestre who is alive and full of heart, these men seem unable to connect to their emotions and use self-conscious gestures and postures in an attempt to deal with this situation.

These two approaches to the performance of the characters put forward an interpretation of the story in which Clytemnestre's dilemma and her experience take centre stage. As Pierre Marcabru remarked, the beautifully composed images involving the male characters are lifeless and cold, unable to convey psychological depth or emotion, and to stimulate the audience's identification with the characters.<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile, Clytemnestre uses gestures and movements to convey her

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<sup>62</sup> Rousset, Kokkos, *Relevé de mise en scène*, p. 2.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 63-4. Detailed sketches of Agamemnon and Iphigénie's gestures and postures in Act IV, Scene 4. The scenes are discussed in more detail in this paragraph.

<sup>64</sup> Jacques Fortier, 'Iphigénie: Le chant des mots', *Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace*, 17 March 1991.

<sup>65</sup> Pierre Marcabru, 'Une beauté froide', *Le Figaro*, 23 October 1991.

emotions and mental states throughout the performance. She shares her experience with the spectators, and they are able to become part of it. This stimulates the audience's sympathy and brings the queen's experience to the forefront of the story whilst Agamemnon and his plight take a secondary role. In the light of this effect, the classical play becomes the story of Clytemnestre's attempt to save her daughter rather than Agamemnon's approach to a tragic dilemma. Unlike previous stagings (Tosi, Glado, Jeanneteau), this production shifts the focus of the action and transforms Clytemnestre into the main tragic heroine in a new interpretation of the story.

This opposition between Clytemnestre and the male characters on stage, which is emphasized in performance, may also be interpreted as a means of conveying the two different moral approaches to this dilemma, which I identified in chapter 2.<sup>66</sup> On one hand there is Clytemnestre's maternal stance, focused on fulfilling her duty of care towards Iphigénie at all costs, and denouncing the injustice of this system, which claims an innocent victim in the name of the established order. On the other, there is this group of men (particularly Ulysse and Agamemnon), representatives of the patriarchal order, who appear willing to sacrifice people for the law and the truth spoken by the gods. This idea is reinforced by a Pieta-like pose in which the king holds his daughter (the sacrificial victim in his arms) in Act IV, Scene 4. According to Fortier, this composition reminds the audience of the Christian myths.<sup>67</sup> In this interpretation the king symbolically represents Abraham, the man whose allegiance to the word of god makes him willing to sacrifice his offspring. These two different approaches to the performance of the characters emphasize this conflict between moral values and beliefs and may stimulate the audience's outrage or at least their critical engagement with the stance of the male characters on stage.

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<sup>66</sup> See pp. 185-86 for a discussion of Clytemnestre's moral stance.

<sup>67</sup> Fortier, '*Iphigénie: Le chant des mots*'.

This concept of human sacrifice is also received by Chantal Aubry who connects this scene to contemporary conflicts. The rehearsals for the play took place against the backdrop of the Gulf War (2 August 1990 – 28 February 1991), and this conflict informed the critic's reading of the performance. As a result, she sees the relationship between Agamemnon and Iphigénie as a metaphor for the human sacrifice required by war as 'les enfants partent mourrir à la guerre des adultes'.<sup>68</sup> The classical play becomes a means of contemplating the waste of life and the human suffering caused by armed conflict.

This Pieta-like pose also emphasizes the innocence of Iphigénie and the fact that she is sacrificed for the sins of her father, and in the name of the Greek leaders' desire for glory. This reading is reinforced by the fact that a rock (the only prop on stage) becomes a symbolic sacrificial altar when father and daughter sit on it, and the former asks the latter to sacrifice herself for family honour and Greece.<sup>69</sup> This treatment of the scene conveys the fact Iphigénie has to die for Agamemnon's sins, which take the form of the pride that determined Artemis's wrath (as indicated in Aeschylus's version of the myth), and in the name of the Greeks' desire for power and glory.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, in the light of this interpretation of the altar, this pose acquires a violent connotation as we see the executioner holding his victim. Overall, this treatment of the scene, which emphasizes the way youth and innocence, is sacrificed in the name of pride, glory and desire for power has the potential to stimulate the audience's antipathy and even outrage towards Agamemnon and the other Greek leaders (Ulysse) who support this decision.

Overall, Kokkos's production puts forward a reading focused on Clytemnestre's behavioural transformation, the dynamic of the characters and the two different ethical standpoints that emerge in relation to this dilemma. This emphasis on conveying the queen's experience and the way it informs her

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<sup>68</sup> Chantal Aubry, 'Racine à l'heure du Golf', *La Croix*, 29 October 1991.

<sup>69</sup> Rousset, Kokkos, *Relevé de mise en scène*, p. 63.

<sup>70</sup> In Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, the king kills a sacred deer, and this determines the wrath of the goddess Artemis who stops the winds at Aulis.

relationship with Agamemnon through a re-emergence of the body approach to the dramatic text, shifts the focus of the plot as Clytemnestre becomes the main heroine. This is a new interpretation of the story which allows more room for the representation of the conflict between the ethical standpoint of the male leaders and the queen's stance in order to stimulate the audience's engagement with the troubling aspects of the patriarchal order which Agamemnon's upholds. Clytemnestre also displays a dark side, and the spectators get a sense of her potential for violence and aggression. However, she is fighting an unjust system which seeks to sacrifice her daughter in the name of power and glory, and this stimulates the audience's sympathy for her plight. Therefore, Kokkos's production presents a new reading of the story, which invites a deeper reflection on morality and war.

Daniel Jeanneteau is another scenographer who makes his directorial debut with the *mise en scène* of Racine's *Iphigénie* in 2001 at CDDB-Théâtre de Lorient. His interest in the text was determined by the playwright's ability to create complex personalities which allows the audience to perceive the humanity of the characters.<sup>71</sup> This focus on psychology and on conveying the human dimension of the characters emerges in the two main themes of the performance: the isolation of the characters facing the dramatic situation and the way their responses represent a negotiation between various dimensions of their mind. The play becomes an exploration of the human psyche, as the mental processes that inform the characters' behaviour and their experience of the tragic situation take centre stage. Jeanneteau's interpretation is an innovative one, as it engages with the psychical processes that underlie behaviour and lead to the tragic outcome. This treatment of the play script may stimulate the audience's sympathy through an identification with the characters' experience on account of this focus on mental processes and the functioning of the psyche, whilst the Racinian text framed in this context takes on new meaning.

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<sup>71</sup> Daniel Jeanneteau's statement in, 'Daniel Jeanneteau prend Racine au CDDB', *Le Télégramme*, 23 February 2001  
<<https://www.letelegramme.fr/ar/viewarticle1024.php?aaaammjj=20010223&article=2353853&type=ar>> [accessed 04 January 2019].

One of the methods through which Jeanneteau aims to convey the experience of the characters, is represented by a deconstructive approach to the play through a redistribution of the characters, namely, casting the same actress (Raphaëlle Gitlis) in the roles of the confidants and servants. She is always placed on the side of the stage; she is not directly involved in the interactions between the characters and she looks towards the public.<sup>72</sup> She acts as a double of the main characters and gives the dialogue an internal monologue quality. As Jeanneteau argues, the characters in the loneliness of their dreamlike state have ‘une ombre commune’.<sup>73</sup> This technique evokes Daniel Mesguich’s approach to the confidant roles in his staging of *Andromaque* at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier (1999) and Comédie-Française (2001). The director considered these characters as doubles, ‘machines à rêver’, and as a result Cléone becomes Hermione’s reflection, one of her voices, her shadow, her conscience, as well as her unconscious and their dialogues become ‘monologues dialogués’.<sup>74</sup> Jeanneteau seeks to obtain a similar effect by erasing the identity of the servants and the confidants and placing this communal double on the sidelines. Gitlis becomes an extension of the main characters representing their mental processes and reflecting their experience of the tragic situation. Her lines become the characters’ thoughts and reflect the way they approach and process the situation. This emphasizes the image of the characters’ isolation as they have to face the tragic situation without the help and support of a trusted confidant or servant, and they have to rely on their mental processes to make decisions and find comfort in this moment of crisis.

As the transactional analysis in chapter 3 revealed, Agamemnon’s interaction with Arcas was driven by the king’s need to obtain sympathy for his difficult

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<sup>72</sup> Maïa Bouteillet, ‘La Modernité prend Racine’, *Libération*, 9 March 2001  
<[http://next.liberation.fr/culture/2001/03/09/la-modernite-prend-racine\\_357240](http://next.liberation.fr/culture/2001/03/09/la-modernite-prend-racine_357240)> [accessed 04 January 2019].

<sup>73</sup> Daniel Jeanneteau, ‘Présentation *Iphigénie en Aulide*’, *Éric Vigner Création*  
<<http://www.ericvigner.com/archives/spectacles/121/iphigenie-en-aulide.html#presentation>> [accessed 04 January 2019].

<sup>74</sup> Daniel Mesguich, ‘*Andromaque* présentée par Daniel Mesguich’ in *Andromaque*, lecture accompagnée par Danielle et Daniel Mesguich by Jean Racine (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), pp. 2-150, (p. 97).

situation and to alleviate the guilt regarding the decision to sacrifice his daughter.<sup>75</sup> In Jeanneteau's production the king has to look inwards for this support and release from guilt, he does not have the sympathy and understanding of another to rely on and to find comfort in. This conveys the fact that the tragic hero acts alone and deals with the consequences of his decisions.

This treatment of the play script may also be interpreted as a broader comment on the human condition, as the individual is alone in crucial moments of one's life (birth and death), and the experience of existence is at times a solitary one. This may stimulate the audience's sympathy for these characters and may determine an identification with their experience alongside a contemplation of this aspect of the human condition. This deconstruction of the text in order to endow the characters behaviour with new meaning may bring the play closer to the audience whilst inviting the spectators to think about their experience of life.

These monologues dialogués also convey the idea that Jeanneteau's characters inhabit a dreamlike space, moving constantly between the conscious and the preconscious in their attempt to navigate this tragic situation. This aspect is emphasized further by the design of the stage, which represents the structure of the human psyche: a parallelepipedal space divided by light into a dark area (in the shape of a black hole at the back of the stage; the unconscious), a semi obscure one (the preconscious) and a fully lighted section (the conscious). The stage becomes a dreamlike world in which the border between conscious and unconscious, real and unreal is interrogated.<sup>76</sup> The characters' movements, expressions and gestures, which have a reserved and contained quality, also convey the fact that they are immersed in their mental processes. They become as Jean-Louis Perrier remarks 'une chair assez soumise au verbe pour tenter de suggérer le théâtre comme cosa

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<sup>75</sup> See p. 265 for the interaction between Arcas and Agamemnon.

<sup>76</sup> Daniel Jeanneteau, Alice Carré et Aurélie Coulon, 'Le plateau comme seuil', *Agôn*, 5 (2012), 1-9 (p. 4) <<https://journals.openedition.org/agon/2348>> [accessed 04 January 2019].

mentale'.<sup>77</sup> The fact that the servant and confidante character who becomes an extension of the main characters' personality and thoughts remains in the shadow throughout the performance, further emphasizes this idea of the stage as a mental landscape, a place in which thoughts, desires and ideas stemming from the unconscious and the preconscious interact with the appraisal of reality performed by the conscious. This return to the myth approach to the text, which emphasizes the universal quality of the story and links it to the individual and collective unconscious, conveys to the spectators the inner workings of the psyche and plunges them into the characters mental landscape.

This treatment of the text conveys the idea of the characters' behaviour as a constant movement between these aspects of the psyche, which is similar to the transactional analysis reading incorporated in chapter 3. The transactional analysis focuses on the manner in which influences from unconscious values and beliefs as well as the preconscious life plan inform the conscious behaviour of the characters, their decisions and their actions.<sup>78</sup> The performance makes visible the manner in which behaviour and actions are informed by this interaction between the different parts of the psyche. This aspect alongside the absence of props and the atemporal costumes creates the atmosphere of a dreamlike world onto which the characters emerge armed with their desires, wishes and beliefs and move back and forth between them and the tragic situation. Their behaviour and decisions become a conscious manifestation of these preconscious and unconscious impulses and beliefs. This treatment of the dramatic text reduces the characters' responsibility as their actions are determined by their ability to negotiate and contain unconscious impulses, an endeavour which is part of the overall human experience. This brings the play and the characters closer to the experience of the audience and may

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<sup>77</sup> Jean-Louis Perrier, '*Iphigénie en Aulide* et la musique intérieure de Racine', *Le Monde*, 30 March 2001 <[http://abonnes.lemonde.fr/archives/article/2001/03/30/iphigenie-en-aulide-et-la-musique-interieure-de-racine\\_167785\\_1819218.html?xtmc=jeanneteau&xtr=62](http://abonnes.lemonde.fr/archives/article/2001/03/30/iphigenie-en-aulide-et-la-musique-interieure-de-racine_167785_1819218.html?xtmc=jeanneteau&xtr=62)> [accessed 12 December 2017].

<sup>78</sup> See pp. 270-71 for Clytemnestre's life plan.



stimulate their sympathy whilst promoting a deeper understanding of the factors that inform human behaviour.

This does not apply to all the characters, as this deeper knowledge of the impulses that inform Agamemnon's behaviour may stimulate a different response from the audience. The king's gesture of tenderness towards his daughter in front of the sacrificial altar, is perceived by Maïa Bouteillet as an indication of his incestuous desire.<sup>79</sup> It is the only time two characters in the play touch, and this momentary display of affection reflects Jeanneteau's idea that the violence at Aulis is accompanied by 'une étrange sexualité guerrière, exaltée par le massacre'.<sup>80</sup> This primal act of violence stimulates other repressed impulses of a primeval, sexual nature. The sacrifice and the upcoming war heighten Agamemnon's desire and corrupt his feelings towards Iphigénie, allowing his repressed, incestuous impulses to manifest themselves in this gesture. This treatment of the king's behaviour may stimulate the audience's antipathy and even revulsion as they observe primal human instincts which civilised society has repressed and forbidden.

Jeanneteau's production presents a new reading of the story which focuses on the inner workings of the characters' psyche and their experience of the situation. He combines a deconstructive approach to the text with a return to the myth in order to convey this interpretation, and to bring the play and the characters closer to the audience. This treatment of the text invites the audience to engage with the experience of the characters and stimulates either sympathy for their loneliness and the human dimension of their behaviour (the negotiation between different aspects of the psyche) or antipathy and revulsion for the inability to control primal impulses (Agamemnon). Overall, this production prompts the audience towards a deeper understanding of the characters and their actions and a contemplation of the human condition.

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<sup>79</sup> Maïa Bouteillet, Fabienne Pascaud, 'Iphigénie en Aulide', *Télérama*, 2677, 2 May 2001.

<sup>80</sup> Jeanneteau, 'Présentation *Iphigénie en Aulide*'

<<http://www.ericvigner.com/archives/spectacles/121/iphigenie-en-aulide.html#presentation>> [accessed 04 January 2019].

Jeanneteau's and Kokkos's readings of the play indicate that our relationship with this dramatic text evolves and there are new meanings to be found as society develops. Kokkos's production transforms Clytemnestre into the main heroine of the story and invites the audience to engage with the two ethical standpoints that emerge in relation to Iphigénie's sacrifice, enabling a meditation on contemporary conflicts (Gulf War). The performance approaches the issue of responsibility by emphasizing the problematic aspects of the patriarchal order upheld by Agamemnon, and stimulating the audience's sympathy for Clytemnestre's plight, which takes centre stage. Jeanneteau's staging adopts a different approach, as it focuses on the psychic processes of the characters and their experience in order to convey the human dimension of the story. The tragic heroes are deprived of support and comfort throughout the play whilst their behaviour is a product of a constant movement between different aspects of their psyche. This brings their experience closer to the audience and stimulates the spectators' sympathy whilst promoting a deeper understanding of the characters' behaviour. The issue of responsibility becomes related to the characters' ability to control their impulses, which may diminish the guilt of the characters with the exception of Agamemnon whose incestuous impulses may stimulate antipathy and even revulsion. Overall, the characters' actions take on new meanings and stimulate the audience's engagement with wider social issues.

### **2.1.3 *Phèdre***

Recent productions of *Phèdre* include those by Sterenn Guirriec at La Scène Watteau (Nogent-sur-Marne, 2016), Marion Poli and Canelle Petit at the El Duende Théâtre (Ivry-sur-Seine, 2016), Jean-Luc Ollivier at the Théâtre national de Bordeaux (Aquitaine, 2016), Christophe Rauck at the Théâtre du Nord Lille (November 2014), Michael Marmarinos at the Comédie-Française (2013) and Patrice Chéreau at the Odéon (2003). Guirriec adopted a psychoanalytical approach to the play and placed it in a dreamlike world reflecting the structure of the

unconscious. Poli's and Petit's staging incorporated an eclectic mix of dance, music and performance and focused on the image of Phèdre as cursed and pitiable as well as terrifying. Ollivier's production focused on the beauty of the gesture and the poetry of the text in a 'quête de sa beauté, qui ne peut se révéler pleinement que sur la scène'.<sup>81</sup> Rauck's staging adopts a historicizing approach to the text and frames the action in a contemporary context in order to emphasize the play's connection to the present. Marmarinos's production transposes the classical story in a twenty-first century context, an environment familiar to the audience. Chéreau's approach to the staging of the play combines a return to the myth which focuses on the psychoanalytical dimension of the characters and the conflict with a re-emergence of the body as the locus of impulses, desires and internal turmoil. This analysis will focus on Chéreau's, Marmarinos's and Rauck's productions of *Phèdre* because these stagings are better supported by archival material.<sup>82</sup>

Patrice Chéreau explores the psychological and psychoanalytical dimension of the dramatic text in the 2003 production of the play at the Odéon.<sup>83</sup> Excerpts from Barthes's and Mauron's critical texts are incorporated in his *Notes de travail*, and reveal his interest in the dynamic of the characters and the manner in which their behaviour is informed by impulses and desires, particularly in the case of Phèdre and Thésée.<sup>84</sup> This return to the myth approach to the dramatic text is combined with a re-emergence of the body in order to convey the way these unconscious factors manifest themselves in behaviour through body movements, gestures and

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<sup>81</sup> Marianne Carabin, 'Phèdre ou le cauchemar d'Hippolyte', *Marianne Carabin: Théâtre et Psychanalyse*, 19 February 2016 <<https://mariannecarabinpsychanalyste.com/phedre-ou-le-cauchemar-d-hippolyte/>> [accessed 8 December 2017], *Ben Brothers, Dossier de presse: Phèdre* <[http://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/178f76\\_53e21bf3548b41f0a1fae49e33fba818.pdf](http://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/178f76_53e21bf3548b41f0a1fae49e33fba818.pdf)> [accessed 11 December 2017], Jean-Luc Ollivier, Note d'intention', *Théâtre-contemporain.net*, February-May 2016 <<http://www.theatre-contemporain.net/spectacles/Phedre-15952/ensavoirplus/idcontent/61596>> [accessed 12 December 2017].

<sup>82</sup> I received no response to my request for information from La Scène Watteau, El Duende Théâtre and Théâtre national de Bordeaux.

<sup>83</sup> Jean Racine, *Phèdre*, dir. by Patrice Chéreau (Arte France Développement, 2004), [on DVD].

<sup>84</sup> Caen, L'Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine (IMEC), 'Notes de travail' by Patrice Chéreau, Fonds Patrice Chéreau, CH.10.7,138480, CHR. 10.8, 138.481. Chéreau's 'Notes de travail' incorporate excerpts from Charles Mauron *Phèdre* (Paris : Jose Corti, 1978), pp. 14-55 and Roland Barthes, *Sur Racine* (Paris: Points Seuil, 1979), p. 110-116.

facial expressions. The characters emerge as being under a constant influence of these unconscious drives whilst struggling to negotiate this dramatic situation. This approach to the play reveals the way unconscious influences become manifest in behaviour, invites the audience to consider human vulnerability to such impulses and casts a new light on the issue of responsibility.

The design of the stage and the costumes plunges the audience into a dreamlike world, which suggests the timeless nature of the story, and its permanence. A façade inspired by the stone monuments at Petra, a cement painted floor and metal folding chairs construct a world at the convergence of myth and modernity, dream and reality. This atemporality is also emphasized by the sombre costumes, which produce the effect of height and length through their vertical lines and give the characters the allure of godlike beings from a lost world. This is a dreamlike setting populated by mythical beings in which time does not exist, only the progression of the action. This surreal, self-contained universe with its own temporal progression suggests a connection with the primeval state of our mental life during sleep, which allows the surfacing of the timeless desires and instincts of our unconscious.<sup>85</sup> The stage is an atemporal setting in which psychoanalytical conflicts are acted out by godlike characters who evoke the archetypal nature of this struggle. *Phèdre* becomes a mythical story about the inner workings of the human behaviour, and this may stimulate the audience's critical engagement with the actions of the characters, as they seek to apprehend their underlying motives, as well as fascination with this surreal world and its inhabitants.

The body becomes the locus of the characters' struggle with their impulses and desires, revealing their experience and psychological turmoil throughout the performance. Dominique Blanc approaches the role of Phèdre from the perspective of a re-emergence of the body. She follows the rhetoric of the line and ties it to bodily expression in order to convey the emotions and the impulses of the character.

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<sup>85</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Essentials of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 510.

She is bent by guilt, desire and the will of the gods and struggles to maintain some form of verticality. Blanc's body in constant tension and movement conveys the intensity of her emotional turmoil throughout the entire play. She bends and falls to the ground in guilt and dishonour, as she reveals her passion to C enone, crawls on the cement stage in remorse and shame, as she confesses her guilt to Th es ee and exposes her bare breast to Hippolyte in order to put an end to her ordeal. Even when she imagines the fulfilment of passion during the confession to Hippolyte and her face brightens up with a smile at the prospect of such happiness, her tensed up hands rub against each other emphasizing that she is never free from anxiety and guilt. As Fabienne Pascaud observes, Ph edre's tormented body, offered for sacrifice, conveys the internal conflict between desire and guilt, strict moral principles (superego) and desire (id).<sup>86</sup> It is the locus of this emotional and psychic tension, which emphasizes Ph edre's turmoil and her neurotic state. Blanc conveys an experience of physical and emotional torment, and this stimulates the audience's sympathy and reinforces her image as a victim of fate and the gods.

This constant tension that Blanc conveys through her body may also be interpreted in the light of our transactional analysis reading as a physical manifestation of an unconscious belief in her monstrosity. As the analysis argues, Ph edre's behaviour (particularly in her interactions with C enone and Hippolyte) reveals a childhood conviction about herself and other people around her which translates into an 'I am not OK, You are OK' stance. Ph edre believes in an inherent monstrosity, which has been passed down from her ancestors (through Venus's curse) and seeks external confirmation of it from the other characters.<sup>87</sup> The tension in Blanc's body may be interpreted as a physical manifestation of Ph edre's unconscious belief in her innate monstrosity, which is present even in moments of relative calm and happiness, and awaits confirmation in order to enter her

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<sup>86</sup> Fabienne Pascaud, 'Ph edre au ras du d esir', *T el rama*, 29 January 2003.

<sup>87</sup> See pp. 295-96 for a discussion of this belief.

consciousness. Blanc's performance reinforces this idea that Phèdre is constantly haunted by the thought of this inherent monstrosity.

Movements, gestures and attitudes are also used to emphasize the nature of the relationship between Phèdre and Œnone, and to put forward the cruel and violent side of the queen. The servant holds the queen in her arms to alleviate the suffering, embraces her and provides comfort and support. She adopts a maternal stance and is preoccupied solely with helping her ailing mistress as Chéreau envisions a character who is willing to sacrifice everything on account of her sincere love for Phèdre.<sup>88</sup> There is no duplicity in Œnone's feelings for Phèdre. This is further emphasized by her reactions to the queen's confession, as she begins to tremble and struggles to stay upright on account of the shock but tries to regain her composure in order to provide advice and support. The servant is a mother figure seeking to alleviate Phèdre's suffering and providing unconditional love, and this is reflected in her gestures and her attitude towards Phèdre. She no longer represents evil temptation and bad luck as Mauron argued.<sup>89</sup> There is no ill will on Œnone's part, only a desire to save her mistress, and this stimulates the audience's sympathy for the character and diminishes her responsibility for the tragic outcome.

This treatment of Œnone's interaction with the queen alongside the approach to Act IV, Scene 6, focused on body movements, gestures and facial expressions, challenge the Machiavellian image of the servant put forward by Phèdre in the final scene of the play and reinforced by Mauron's critical analysis of the text. Christiane Cohendy (Œnone) is stunned by the queen's reaction and she is unable to move. She listens to the harsh speech with an expression of desolation. She reaches out her arms to Phèdre as a mother who is ready to forget a daughter's momentary outburst of anger, but the queen is not willing to continue this relationship. Phèdre enters her quarters and Œnone who is left outside, makes her way in the opposite direction

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<sup>88</sup> Caen, IMEC 'Notes filage du 4/01/2003' by Patrice Chéreau, Fonds Patrice Chéreau, CHR.11.3, 138486, p. 2.

<sup>89</sup> Mauron, *L'Inconscient dans l'œuvre et la vie de Racine*, p. 158.

with tears in her eyes. She appears shocked and defeated as she shuffles slowly towards her demise. Phèdre is no longer a victim she is now an aggressor. This treatment of the scene emphasizes the cruel nature of Phèdre's behaviour, stimulates the audience's sympathy for the servant and makes spectators wonder if C enone is not a mere victim of the queen's violent impulses. This production encourages a deeper understanding of Phèdre's behaviour as a combination of contradictory impulses and a constant switch between the roles of victim and aggressor, which has dramatic consequences for herself and those around her.

The servant's reaction to Phèdre's behaviour may also be an indication of the defining role that this relationship of care has in terms of C enone's sense of identity and well-being as I argue in chapter 2.<sup>90</sup> C enone's status and personality are largely defined by her connection with Phèdre, and the fact that she adopts a maternal stance towards the queen throughout the play further emphasizes this aspect. The servant is in a state of shock because she is unable to rely on this relationship, which defines her and represents a source of security. She cries and adopts a resigned attitude, as she slowly moves away with her hands alongside her body and a doomed gaze. The fact that C enone is unable to follow Phèdre into the palace and needs to make her way in the opposite direction may also be interpreted as a sign of her isolation. She has no connection left to sustain her. C enone appears vulnerable and defeated once her connection with Phèdre disintegrates, and this strengthens the argument put forward in the ethics of care analysis that this relationship is essential for the servant's identity and her safety, and its loss contributes to her demise.

Phèdre's interaction with Hippolyte in Act II, Scene 5, which focuses on body movement, also puts forward the queen's aggressive impulses stemming from excessive guilt and desire. Blanc's performance majestically combines sensuality, aggression and shame in order to convey the emotional experience of the character as well as the impulses, which underlie her actions. She embodies feminine desire

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<sup>90</sup> See p. 215 on the analysis of this relationship from an ethics of care perspective.

and seduction, as she slowly approaches the young prince, caresses him, rests her head on his chest in an attempt to embrace him, as she confesses her passion. This sensual attitude is replaced by an acute feeling of guilt once Hippolyte rejects her advances. Phèdre kneels in front of the young prince asking to be punished for this transgression. She bares her chest awaiting the fatal blow. Nonetheless, as Hippolyte hesitates, her guilt transforms into hostility and aggression. The queen takes Hippolyte's sword and lifts it towards him in a menacing gesture. Blanc captures Phèdre's paradoxical nature and the emotions involved in this internal struggle as well as the ambivalent nature of her passion incorporated in Barthes's and Mauron's analyses.<sup>91</sup> Phèdre moves once more from victim to aggressor, and the sympathy that the audience may feel for her sense of remorse is accompanied by fear or apprehension regarding the lengths she is willing to go in order to quench her desire or to appease her guilty conscience. The scene conveys the potential for destruction, which lies in these excessive emotions, and may also invite the spectators to contemplate human vulnerability to such impulses.

Phèdre's son (who is only referred to in the play) appears on stage for the duration of this entire scene and his presence also influences the interpretation of the queen's behaviour. This deconstructive approach to the scene represents an innovation, which is able to determine a different interpretation of the queen's behaviour. Christian Biet argues that the presence of Phèdre's young son on stage during the second act conveys the way this passion for Hippolyte affects her feelings towards her offspring: 'l'amour pur est contaminé par l'amour maudit' and reinforces the transgressive nature of her behaviour.<sup>92</sup> I consider that the presence of the young prince on stage puts forward two different interpretations of Phèdre's

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<sup>91</sup> Blanc read Roland Barthes's *Sur Racine* in preparation for the role. Laetitia Cénac, 'Phèdre chauffée à Blanc', *Madame Le Figaro*, 1 February 2003. Mauron's *Phèdre* and Barthes's *Sur Racine* are part of Chéreau's 'Notes de travail', on the play. Mauron discusses Phèdre's hostility towards Hippolyte and the ambivalent nature of her desire, p. 14. Barthes discussed the character's paradoxical nature as a result of her ancestry, p. 114.

<sup>92</sup> Christian Biet, 'Phèdre poursuite et désir' in *Patrice Chéreau à l'œuvre*, ed. by Marie-Françoise Lévy, Myriam Tsikounas (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes 2016), pp. 308-309 (p. 309).



behaviour in Act II, Scene 5. On one hand, this may be a means to suggest the queen's abandonment of her responsibility towards her son and the immoral nature of this behaviour, as Biet suggests. Despite the fact that she is reminded of her duty as a mother, she seeks the satisfaction of her passion with Œnone and the young prince as witnesses. Phèdre overcome by desire forgets her responsibility towards her son. However, the queen's behaviour throughout this scene can also be interpreted as an attempt to ensure the safety of her offspring as well as the satisfaction of desire. A relationship with Hippolyte will protect Phèdre and her son from potential enemies and will ensure their position of power and safety. The presence of Phèdre's son for the duration of the entire scene may suggest that even when she seeks the fulfilment of her desire, the queen does not forget her responsibility of care towards her offspring. As I have argued in chapter 2, Phèdre may pursue her desire because it incorporates the possibility of combining a maternal duty of care with responsiveness to herself.<sup>93</sup> In this context Phèdre's guilt as well as the transgressive nature of her confession is reduced. Therefore, the presence of Phèdre's son on stage, may be interpreted either as proof of the selfish nature of her passion and a disregard of maternal responsibility, which emphasizes her guilt, or as an indication that she is considering her son's safety and well-being even when she is pursuing her desire which diminishes the immoral nature of the deed. Whilst the audience's response may vary, it is certain that this deconstructive approach to the scene brings to the forefront another aspect of the story as well as a different dimension of the character, which has not been explored, and has the potential to generate new interpretations of and responses to the tragic heroine's behaviour.

This deconstructive approach is used once again in the final scene of the play in order to emphasize Thésée's inability to acknowledge his guilt and his ruthless stance. The final four verses of the play are removed, and the king does not atone

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<sup>93</sup> See pp. 206, 209-10 for the ethics of care analysis of Phèdre's behaviour.

for his deed by adopting Aricie. Brigitte Méra argues that this modification is difficult to accept as Racine is a Christian playwright and, this doctrine as well as the play incorporate this opportunity for redemption.<sup>94</sup> The performance modifies the text and defies the audience's expectations in order to put forward the king's harshness. Thésée does not seek to make amends for his deed, because he is not capable of acknowledging his guilt. The king emerges as the ego ideal, the ruthless, unrepentant and aggressive representative and upholder of the law. This image is reinforced by his dispassionate reaction to Phèdre's final confession as well as her mental and physical torment. Thésée appears cold and unmoved by suffering. He embodies the inflexibility and rigidity of the law he is keen to represent and uphold. Thésée's ruthless stance and the inability to acknowledge his guilt emphasize his responsibility for the tragic outcome and may stimulate the audience antipathy whilst simultaneously inviting the spectators to consider how just is the system and the law he upholds. Thésée's behaviour emerges as inhuman in this final scene in which Phèdre confesses her illegitimate passion. This may suggest that we are dealing with two characters displaying a penchant for excess, which has destructive consequences for those around them. This treatment of the scene provides a new interpretation of the issue of responsibility as the performance puts forward two main culprits: Phèdre and Thésée. One displays a human vulnerability which stimulates the audience's sympathy and fear whilst another invites the spectators to critically engage with the rigid and inflexible laws, he is keen to uphold. This treatment of the scene and the characters may also determine the spectators to consider issues related to this clash between human desire and the norm.

Chéreau breaks the classical rule of bienséance and brings Hippolyte's bloodied body on stage during the final scene. According to Mathilde la Bardonnie he symbolizes 'le corps mort de l'amour', the death of the forbidden love between Hippolyte and Aricie.<sup>95</sup> However, I argue that this reworking of the scene reinforces

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<sup>94</sup> Brigitte Méra, 'Racine et Shakespeare', *Revue des Deux Mondes*, March 2003.

<sup>95</sup> Mathilde la Bardonnie, 'Ce Phèdre sidère', *Libération*, 24 janvier 2003.

the idea that Phèdre's and Thésée's behaviour has had destructive consequences for those around them whilst simultaneously undermining the queen's attempt to redeem herself by blaming the gods and Œnone. Despite the queen's tormented conscience, Hippolyte's body reminds us that her actions and decisions contributed to this loss of life. Unlike Thésée, Phèdre may be haunted by a guilty conscience but this does not change the fact that the aggressive impulses of her desire for Hippolyte have led to the latter's demise. This treatment of the scene represents an innovation on Chéreau's part and aims to emphasize the idea that Phèdre may be regretful, but her actions have led to loss of life. The performance does not allow the audience to lose sight of the queen's dangerous, aggressive side. Even though the spectators may feel sympathy for her torment and plight, they must combine this with an awareness of her guilt and responsibility. This may invite the audience to consider human susceptibility to such impulses and to wonder if Phèdre's guilty conscience and her suicide are able to redeem her.

Chéreau's production inspired by psychoanalysis puts forward an interpretation of the story in which Phèdre's and Thésée's ambivalent impulses and desires lead to the tragic outcome. Phèdre emerges as a neurotic character, whose tensed up, tormented body conveys her suffering. Nonetheless, there is also a selfish, aggressive side to the queen, which is conveyed in her interactions with Œnone and Hippolyte, and particularly the final confession when her stepson's bleeding body is brought on stage. Thésée's ruthless, aggressive behaviour also has an essential role in the unfolding of the plot. The king's unwillingness to make amends for Hippolyte's death and acknowledge his wrongdoing, together with his lack of sympathy for Phèdre's torment, gives his character an inhuman dimension. Whilst Phèdre denounces the monstrous nature of her behaviour time and time again, Thésée is merciless and seems blind to the consequences of his actions. Therefore, the performance puts forward the manner in which Phèdre's and Thésée's ambivalent impulses destroy those around them (Œnone and Hippolyte) as their interactions become contaminated by aggression and desire. This invites the

audience to consider the unconscious factors that inform human behaviour and the human susceptibility to such deeds whilst simultaneously presenting a new reading of the story.

Marmarinos's staging of *Phèdre* at the Comédie-Française in 2013 places the action in a concrete spatial and temporal context: the home of a bourgeois family in the 1930s. This approach, which Pavis defines as recontextualisation, strengthens the play's connection to reality, and reflects Marmarinos's interpretation of *Phèdre* as a story that 'parle d'êtres humains, de personnes concrètes, de la vie réelle'.<sup>96</sup> We are not dealing with godlike beings from a lost world, but a bourgeois family facing a tragic situation. This approach to the text is combined with elements of metatheatre and a deconstruction of the rhetoric in order to convey the physical and moral transformation that Phèdre undergoes as the plot unfolds, the way her relationship with Œnone develops and acquires new meanings and the immoral aspect of the queen's desire for her stepson. This treatment of the story casts a new light on the issue of guilt and responsibility and puts forward different aspects of Phèdre's, Œnone's and Hippolyte's behaviour. The analysis of the performance will explore the way this approach to the staging and the characters adds different meanings to the story and the actions of the tragic heroes.

Phèdre's experience of this dramatic context is conveyed through a physical and moral transformation which emphasizes the overwhelming nature of her misery as well as the enthusiasm with which she pursues her desire once the opportunity arises. In Act 1, Scene 5 Lepoivre emerges on stage as a sleepwalker, hands stretched out to Œnone, worn out by her suffering with no energy left to lament her misfortune.<sup>97</sup> Even the confession of her incestuous passion denotes a physical and mental exhaustion. Phèdre recounts her struggle in a calm and deeply sad voice whilst sitting at the kitchen table. The treatment of this scene connects this

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<sup>96</sup> Paris, Bibliothèque Musée de la Comédie-Française (BMCF), 'Relevé de mise en scène' by Michel Marmarinos, RMS. PHE 2013, DI, 13.44, p. 4.

<sup>97</sup> BMCF, Jean Racine, 'Phèdre', dir. by Michel Marmarinos (Recording from 14 April 2013), DVD. 0350, DI. 13.079.

experience to real life, as she becomes a depressed wife revealing her secrets in the space where women's dramas are traditionally played out, the kitchen. However, there is nothing mundane about the performance, as Lepoivre is human, warm and conveys the depressed state of someone who exhausted all possibilities and has only one option. She does not scream her hopelessness like Blanc. She becomes the embodiment of it, as she looks straight ahead, immersed in this suffering, which appears to be stifling and draining her. Lepoivre's Phèdre is engulfed by depression, and her despair takes the new form of the calm and lucidity of someone who has decided to stop fighting and to end her misery. The fact that the character displays the signs of this contemporary ailment brings her experience closer to the audience and stimulates their sympathy. This alongside the modern context in which the action is placed may also invite the spectators to consider the human aspect of this situation and to perceive the story as a bourgeois family drama, one of those tales one hears about or talks about at the kitchen table.

The news of Thésée's death and Œnone's advice influence dramatically Phèdre's behaviour and actions. The queen's behaviour undergoes a transformation, which emphasizes a moral relativism and invites the audience's critical engagement with her actions. She appears to be liberated and recovers her energy. Phèdre's movements and her use of the space denote a revival of hope. This becomes apparent particularly during her encounter with Hippolyte (II. 5) when Phèdre appears to take charge of the situation and control her behaviour, as she confesses her love to the young prince. In a new reading of the scene she takes the initiative of this confession, as she approaches Hippolyte, takes his hand and lifts it in an attempt to create an intimate connection. This transformation informs her performance throughout the rest of the play, as she becomes more dynamic. She exits onto the terrace (in the upstage area), enters back into the room, leans on the bed, leaves again, returns and climbs into the bed, as she discusses with Œnone the best course of action after her confession to Hippolyte. This treatment of the character's behaviour emphasizes her guilt and responsibility, as her confession to Hippolyte

becomes intentional and potentially premeditated. In the light of this interpretation Phèdre's behaviour becomes a swansong, the final effort to fulfil her desire in which she invests a great deal of emotion and energy. This transformation also puts forward Phèdre's moral relativism, as the enthusiasm and energy with which she embraces this new course of action, suggested by C enone, makes the audience wonder if her commitment to upholding moral norms was determined by her situation (as a married woman) rather than a personal conviction in the illegitimate nature of this passion.

Marmarinos's treatment of Phèdre's confession to Hippolyte conveys an intentionality which reinforces my transactional analysis of this scene incorporated in the previous chapter. I argue that Phèdre actively and deliberately pursues her desire during this encounter by initiating a labyrinthine game in which she guides Hippolyte towards her confession through a series of intricate narratives. This new interpretation of Phèdre's behaviour, which emphasizes the queen's moral downfall and contradicts previous analyses, is reinforced by the treatment of this scene in Marmarinos's production.<sup>98</sup>

Marmarinos's treatment of Hippolyte represents another element, which emphasizes the immoral nature of Phèdre's passion and enables an interpretation of their relationship as a victim and aggressor dynamic. Whilst in Ch ereau's production the characters speak of the incestuous and immoral aspect of Phèdre's passion, Marmarinos's play shows the audience 'une Ph edre vivante, attirante tandis qu'Hippolyte est   l' age de l'innocence' in order to give a concrete dimension to these ideas.<sup>99</sup> As a result, the object of the queen's passion is a very young Hippolyte (24 year-old Pierre Niney) dressed in a trench coat with the allure of a student preparing to leave home. This character is a far cry from the warrior prince embodied by a more mature Eric Ruf, whose pectoral muscles (undoubtedly

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<sup>98</sup> See pp. 292-96 for the transactional analysis of this dynamic.

<sup>99</sup> Michel Marmarinos quoted in 'Hippolyte H eros trop discret' by Laurance Liban, *L'Express*, 10/15 April 2013.

symbols of the character's athleticism) emerge from underneath a black suit to give a masculine as well as erotic dimension to the hero.<sup>100</sup> This idea to emphasize Phèdre's immorality by casting her alongside a younger looking Hippolyte might have been inspired by Pierre Jourdan's film adaptation of the play in which a senior Marie Bell attempts to seduce a much younger prince.<sup>101</sup>

Marmarinos's Hippolyte embodies as well as displays inexperience in dealing with difficult emotions and situations. His confession to Aricie is imbued with guilt, shyness and hesitation. Hippolyte avoids eye contact with the princess and looks ahead to the audience as he describes his feelings. Furthermore, his declaration of love takes the form of a whispered secret, which is amplified by a microphone. This approach to the character conveys a lack of intentionality, and creates a distancing effect, which stimulates the audience's critical engagement. The spectators may interpret this behaviour as a lack of confidence related to his inexperience, as evidence of the fact that that he struggles to find his own voice because he lives in the shadow of his father, the hero, or as a sign of his victim status. Hippolyte's use of the device reflects this reluctance to speak out as well as his inexperience and his youth, and I disagree with the critics that consider it useless and even detrimental.<sup>102</sup> This clumsy, shameful declaration of love emphasizes Hippolyte's immaturity alongside his deep sense of guilt, and transforms Phèdre's behaviour into a violent and slightly perverse attempt to corrupt him. This treatment of the characters may stimulate sympathy for the inexperienced young prince and outrage at Phèdre's intentional attempt to seduce him, emphasizing the transgressive side of the queen's behaviour.

Marmarinos' treatment of the relationship between Phèdre and Œnone, also determines a different interpretation of this dynamic. In Act 1, Scene 5, Phèdre

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<sup>100</sup> Eric Ruf was 34 years old when he performed in Chéreau's production of the play.

<sup>101</sup> *Phèdre*, dir, Pierre Jourdan (Les Films du Valois - Galba Films – ORTF, 1968). Claude Giraud was 32 years old and Marie Bell was 68 years old.

<sup>102</sup> Armelle Héliot, 'C'est Phèdre qu'on assassine', *Le Figaro*, 8 March 2013. Phillipe Chevilly, 'Phèdre en villégiature', *Les Échos*, 7 March 2013.

unburdens herself to Œnone at the kitchen table, as if she is talking about her troubles to a close friend. The rhythm of her lines, which imitates daily conversation and her low voice, emphasize the intimate nature of this gesture and their connection. This interpretation is also supported by the fact that the two characters appear to be close in age, as Clotilde de Bayser (Œnone) has an elegant hairdo, no trace of white hair and wears a dress with a cut and a colour similar to Phèdre's. Furthermore, as soon as Phèdre finishes her confession, she joins Œnone in the bedroom area of the stage, and the two women sit on the floor by the bed like two school friends trying to untangle a difficult situation. Therefore, this moment transforms the relationship between servant and mistress, as they become two friends united by this secret, which they now share. Œnone is no longer a devoted mother figure as in Chéreau's production, but a friend who provides support and comfort.

This scene also represents the beginning of an alliance which will be concluded the moment Phèdre decides to follow the servant's advice, and to abandon her plan to commit suicide. Fate has a part to play in Phèdre's decision, as Thésée's death brings about the possibility of fulfilling her passion. However, the role of destiny is downplayed, as Panope's announcement becomes a mundane piece of news that the servant delivers whilst eating a dessert at the kitchen table. This treatment of the scene gives a more significant role to Œnone's influence over Phèdre. The servant turns towards her mistress after Panope's announcement, implores Phèdre to continue living and helps her stand up. The queen, who was sitting on the floor next to the bed looking emotionally and physically exhausted during Panope's announcement, is now back on her feet with the help of Œnone's persuasive discourse. Furthermore, after Phèdre expresses her intention to follow the servant's advice the two women stand face to face for several seconds. This suggests that a pact has been concluded. Œnone has become an indispensable adviser and accomplice who helps the queen see and seize the possibilities offered by this unexpected turn of events. This interpretation of the scene puts forward



Cenone's essential influence on Phèdre's behaviour and implicitly emphasizes her guilt regarding the tragic outcome. Cenone emerges as the initiator of Phèdre's plan to pursue her passion and implicitly seduce Hippolyte, and this may stimulate the audience's antipathy for the character whilst simultaneously reducing the queen's responsibility.

This intimacy that Cenone and Phèdre share also gives another dimension to their relationship. Guy Cherqui observes that they are more than close friends and accomplices on account of the close age of the actresses and their mutual affection.<sup>103</sup> Cenone's gestures towards Phèdre have an intimate nature: the servant and the mistress stand face to face or she touches Phèdre's hand to feel the warmth of her body the moment she adopts a self-sacrificial stance: 'Votre vie est pour moi d'un prix à qui tout cède' (III.3.898). Furthermore, the servant's anger at Phèdre's decision to continue to pursue Hippolyte and to lure him with the promise of power also suggests that love and potentially jealousy influences her behaviour: 'Que son farouche orgueil le rendait odieux! / Que Phèdre en ce moment n'avait-elle mes yeux' (III.1.779-780). Cherqui also observes that Cenone plots the false accusation of Hippolyte almost like a jealous lover seeking revenge.<sup>104</sup> The fact that that she shouts in anger her aversion towards Hippolyte reinforces this interpretation: 'De son triomphe affreux je le verrai jouir, [...] / Ah! que plutôt du ciel la flamme me dévore!' (III.3.879, 881). The performance puts forward a new interpretation of Cenone's behaviour. The servant's pursuit of her mistress' well-being acquires a transgressive dimension as it stems from forbidden desire. This treatment of Cenone's actions and behaviour also emphasizes her responsibility for the tragic outcome, as the denunciation of Hippolyte may be interpreted as the act of a frustrated lover. She appears guiltier than Phèdre, as she has a significant influence over the queen's behaviour and her actions may be guided by a secret desire for her

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<sup>103</sup> Guy Cherqui, 'Phèdre, de Jean RACINE le 20 March 2013 (Mise en scène: Michael Marmarinos)', *Le Blog du Wanderer*, 22 March 2013 <<http://wanderer.blog.lemonde.fr/?s=Marmarinos>> [accessed 15 January 2019].

<sup>104</sup> Cherqui, 'Phèdre, de Jean RACINE le 20 March 2013 (Mise en scène: Michael Marmarinos)'.

mistress, which transforms the denunciation of the prince into an act of ill will. This C enone is closer to Mauron’s interpretation of the character as the devil. Although the audience may have some sympathy for the servant’s unrequited love, the fact that she plots the demise of the young and inexperienced Hippolyte out of jealousy reinforces her image as a main culprit, and stimulates a sense of outrage, which outweighs this initial response.

The transactional analysis of the interaction between servant and mistress revealed that C enone becomes Ph edre’s accomplice because it involves an emotional and psychological pay-off. However, the servant’s reward took the form of the reinforcement of an existential position, ‘All People Are Ungrateful’ and a sense of martyrdom which helped her overcome her feelings of inadequacy, not a secret desire for Ph edre.<sup>105</sup> The presence of love was not considered, and this may be on account of transactional analysis’s normative quality. This performance analysis enables me to overcome the shortcomings of this theoretical approach, and to consider the meanings that emerge from this new interpretation of the relationship between Ph edre and C enone.

This treatment of the characters and their interactions is combined with a deconstructive approach to the text which aims to stimulate the audience’s critical engagement. In Marmarinos’ reworking of the text, characters add ‘Je dis’ before their lines or say the lines of the other characters on stage. For instance, the (false) news of the king’s death is delivered by Panope who says the lines of both Ph edre and C enone: ‘C enone dit: Panope que dis-tu?’ / ‘Ph edre dit: Ciel!’ (I.4.321). This treatment of the text aims to make the audience think about these reactions and what they convey, whether it is shock or relief or maybe the excitement of a new possibility. It is an interesting means of inviting the audience to explore the various meanings of the character’s behaviour. However, Marmarinos uses this approach repeatedly throughout the play. This becomes irritating and weighs down the

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<sup>105</sup> See pp. 290, 297, 299, for a discussion of the dynamic between C enone and Ph edre.

performance, as Héliot, Monique Le Roux and Brigitte Enguerrand also argue.<sup>106</sup> Therefore, this technique although interesting, as it invites the audience to critically engage with the characters' behaviour may also become a source of annoyance and may prevent at times the spectators' engagement with the performance and the characters.

According to the critics mentioned above, the main flaw of this production is that it uses too many different props and techniques to convey various meanings, which affects the coherence of the overall interpretation. There are devices and props that emphasize the mindset of the characters, as the kitchen table in Phèdre's case and the microphone during Hippolyte's confession. However, they are used consistently throughout the play alongside the deconstruction of the text and this creates a disconcerting effect and overloads the performance. Marmarinos aims to innovate and this is to be commended, particularly in his treatment of the characters (Phèdre, C enone, Hippolyte) and their dynamic, as the production puts forward new interpretations. However, the play lacks an overall strong, coherent meaning. Nonetheless, it is worth considering, particularly in the case of this classical text, which is constantly performed, if this lack of a strong, interpretative direction is not a price worth paying in order to open the text to a variety of meanings and engage with it in an innovative manner.

Overall, Marmarinos's staging puts forward a new reading of the story in which C enone's and Phèdre share the responsibility of the tragic outcome and reveal their dark side. The queen becomes the mature and experienced woman aggressively seeking to seduce and corrupt her juvenile stepson, and this conveys the violent and immoral nature of her desire. However, the emphasis on C enone's influence on her behaviour, and the queen's depressive state at the beginning of the play, reduce Phèdre's responsibility and are able to stimulate the audience's sympathy. C enone

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<sup>106</sup> Monique Le Roux, 'Retour à la salle Richelieu', *La Quinzaine Littéraire*, 01/15 April 2013. Armelle Héliot, 'C'est Phèdre qu'on assassine', Christophe Candoni, 'À la Com edie-Fran aise, une *Ph edre* m editerran ee par le grec Michael Marmarinos'.

emerges as the driving force behind Phèdre's behaviour and actions, and hence more responsible for the tragic outcome. This is reinforced by the servant's essential role in Phèdre's transformation, and the unfolding of the plot as well as the ill will, which may accompany her denunciation of Hippolyte. The production puts forward a troubling interpretation of Phèdre's relationships with Œnone and Hippolyte, which casts a new light on the issue of blame and responsibility. Furthermore, this treatment of the queen's moral transformation, and the way she regains and loses hope may also determine a broader contemplation of the way external events inform behaviour, and fate or life can bring us back from the brink of the abyss in order to plunge us into it once more. Marmarinos's *Phèdre* invites the audience to reconsider and reinterpret the characters' behaviour and actions and to reflect on human vulnerability to fate or chance.

Christophe Rauck's mise en scène at the Théâtre du Nord Lille (November 2014) a co-production with Théâtre Gérard Philipe (Saint-Denis, 2014) focuses on the text's connections with contemporaneity particularly in terms of human relationships, and the emotional experience of the individual facing a moral dilemma.<sup>107</sup> Unlike Marmarinos's production, which has an internalized and subtle approach to emotion, Rauck's production uses excess to convey the emotional turmoil of the characters and the brutal, violent dimension of the tragedy.<sup>108</sup> The director who sees Racine as 'un chirurgien de l'âme humaine', confronts the immoderate emotions that the play unleashes, using the word 'démésure' to convey its power.<sup>109</sup> Rauck combines a historicizing approach to the text with a focus on the psychology of the characters in order to convey the experience of the tragic heroes whilst aiming to bring the story closer to a contemporary audience. These approaches to the dramatic text are used to convey the way the excessive nature of

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<sup>107</sup> Christophe Rauck quoted by Benoît Lagarrigue in 'La tragédie grecque est sauvage', *Le Journal de Saint-Denis*, 5 March 2014 < <https://www.lejsd.com/content/«-la-tragédie-grecque-est-sauvage-»>> [accessed 17 January 2019].

<sup>108</sup> Rauck quoted by Lagarrigue in 'La tragédie grecque est sauvage'.

<sup>109</sup> Christophe Rauck quoted by Lagarrigue in 'La tragédie grecque est sauvage' and by Fabienne Arvers in 'Phèdre disjointée' in *Les Inrockuptibles*, 26 March/01 avril 2014.

impulses and desires informs the behaviour of the characters and their interactions, particularly in the case of Phèdre, Œnone and Thésée, and leads to the tragic outcome. The way the production connects the immoderate nature of the characters' behaviour and their relationships to contemporaneity gives new meaning to the actions of these tragic heroes.

In Rauck's production, Phèdre is the embodiment of excess, as she has the allure of a star well past her heyday. The character tries to channel the glamour of her glory days in a fur coat and dark sunglasses and struggles to cope with her passion. She is dealing with a nervous breakdown and her constant mood swings from anger to deep sadness and depression reflect a struggle between impulses and morality. Phèdre uses alcohol and sedatives to numb her emotions and find a respite from this suffering.<sup>110</sup> The queen's frailty reduces her responsibility for the tragic outcome. She appears a victim of her passion and this reference to mental illness may bring the character closer to the audience and stimulate the sympathy of the spectators.

Œnone's behaviour is at the other end of the spectrum, and this creates ambiguity regarding her influence over the queen's decisions and actions. The servant is reserved in her reactions and appears more preoccupied with political strategy and saving the life of her mistress.<sup>111</sup> She has a discreet presence, which is overshadowed by Phèdre excessive behaviour. This determined the Theothea critic to argue that Œnone uses 'l'effacement comme arme suprême de défense' for her involvement in Phèdre's behaviour.<sup>112</sup> Claire Montanari interprets the interaction between the queen and the servant as an invitation to interrogate Œnone's involvement in the queen's decision-making process and her image as a

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<sup>110</sup> Stéphane, Capron, 'Cécile Garcia Fogel, *Phèdre* shootée', *sceneweb.fr*, 8 March 2014. <<https://www.sceneweb.fr/cecile-garcia-fogel-phedre-shootee/>> [accessed 9 April 2018].

<sup>111</sup> J.P. Thibaudat, 'Cécile Garcia Fogel et Nada Strancar aiment Phèdre à mort', *Le nouvel observateur* <<https://www.nouvelobs.com/rue89/rue89-theatre-et-balagan/20140323.RUE9807/cecile-garcia-fogel-et-nada-strancar-aiment-phedre-a-mort.html>> [accessed 17 January 2019].

<sup>112</sup> Theothea, 'Phèdre de Jean Racine', *En Coulisse Theothea.com: La Chronique Critique du Théâtre à Paris*, 15 March 2014, <<http://theothea.com.free.fr/forum.htm>> [accessed 01 March 2019].

Machiavellian character. This suggests that Œnone's discreet and reserved presence has the potential to reduce her responsibility regarding Phèdre's behaviour and the tragic outcome.<sup>113</sup> Nonetheless, Didier Méreuze interprets Œnone's stance as a sign of determination, and the fact that she is Phèdre's dark conscience.<sup>114</sup> My response to the performance is similar to Méreuze's, because a rational Œnone opposite a mentally and emotionally unstable Phèdre is likely to be perceived as the mastermind behind the queen's behaviour. I agree that the spectators may have some sympathy for the patience with which Œnone tends to Phèdre's needs. Nonetheless, the servant's influence over the queen's behaviour carries more weight, as there is a clear indication that Phèdre is ill and unable to make a rational decision. This treatment of the character invites the audience to consider whether the servant is an evil plotter or an instrument of Phèdre's desire to be discarded when no longer needed. She may be an evil mastermind or a victim of the queen's desire. Nonetheless, I think the former response outweighs the latter on account of the performance's emphasis on Phèdre's mental and emotional instability. Œnone becomes the cold and calculated mastermind behind her mistress's behaviour, which emphasizes her responsibility for the tragic outcome.

Œnone's willingness to sacrifice her life for the queen's wellbeing and her disillusion at Phèdre's ingratitude acquire in this production an erotic dimension. This gives new meaning to Œnone's behaviour and reinforces her responsibility for the tragic outcome. There is a sense of repressed desire that informs the servant's attitude towards Phèdre, as she holds the queen in her arms, eyes closed to feel the warmth of her body and touches and smells her mistress's fur coat cherishing it, as its contact with her lover's body has made it priceless.<sup>115</sup> According to J.P. Thibaudat, Œnone's dark, stern suit with the blazer buttoned up and the conservative

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<sup>113</sup> Claire Montanari, 'Phèdre de Christophe Rauck: Une belle lecture de Racine', *À l'Interieur de la maison en verre* < <https://lamaisonenverre.com/2014/03/10/phedre-de-christophe-rauck-une-belle-lecture-de-racine/> > [accessed 17 January 2019].

<sup>114</sup> Didier Méreuze, 'Phèdre furiosa', *La Croix*, 25 March 2014.

<sup>115</sup> Lagarrigue, 'La tragédie grecque est sauvage'. The captions from the rehearsal of the play, which are incorporated in this article, have been used as a source of information.

cut of the trousers also reinforces the idea of repressed desire.<sup>116</sup> However, Jérémy Engler interprets Œnone's behaviour as a display of maternal love.<sup>117</sup> This is also plausible since mothers hug and embrace their daughters, and are devoted to them to the point of self-sacrifice. But in the context of Rauck's interpretation of Racinian tragedy as demanding excess particularly in relation to emotions, Nada Strancar's (Œnone) performance may be interpreted as a type of maternal affection taken to its extreme form, namely incestuous desire. A mother's excess of love towards her surrogate daughter may drive Œnone's devotion, loyalty and attachment to Phèdre. This may transform Œnone into a dark mother figure, who leads her mistress to downfall on account of a repressed desire for her. This new reading puts forward a dangerous side of Œnone, which may stimulate the audience's fear and antipathy, reinforcing her responsibility for the tragic outcome.

It appears that in both Rauck's and Marmarinos's productions the relationship between Phèdre and Œnone may have an erotic dimension, which the textual analysis incorporated in the previous chapters has not considered. This is a new and interesting perspective on the interaction between the two characters that emerges from these recent performances and is not rooted in previous critical analyses of the text. This is an indication of the manner in which performance analysis is able to provide new readings and new ways of engaging with this classical text.

Thésée also embodies excess and conveys Rauck's idea of a patriarchy that crushes everything and everyone who stands in its way.<sup>118</sup> This represents an interpretation of the character, which increases the responsibility of the king regarding the tragic outcome. Violence defines this Athenian king, and the

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<sup>116</sup> Thibaudat, 'Cécile Garcia Fogel et Nada Strancar aiment Phèdre à mort'.

<sup>117</sup> Jérémy Engler, 'Phèdre aux Célestins, une mise en scène en dents de scie', *l'envolée culturelle*, 9 October 2014 <<http://www.lenvoleeculturelle.fr/phedre-aux-celestins-une-piece-en-dents-de-scie/>> [accessed 17 January 2019].

<sup>118</sup> Günay, Idil, 'Entretien avec Christophe Rauck, directeur du Théâtre du Nord', 18 November 2014 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vz2KEkV03JY>> [published on 18 November 2014, accessed 8 December 2017].

performance emphasizes this aspect as Olivier Werner emerges from below the stage (the underworld) wearing a helmet in the shape of the Minotaur and armour. His presence destabilizes the already fragile balance of the play.<sup>119</sup> According to Elisabeth Naud, Thésée acquires a caricatural dimension, which affects the tragic quality of his role and the Racinian language.<sup>120</sup> However, I think that it represents an interesting means to convey the idea that Thésée is the warrior king wearing the symbols of his power. The singularity of his appearance and his clumsy movements in the heavy armour suggest that he is not in his natural environment. The scene puts forward a brutal character whose place is on a battlefield. As a result, violence is the means through which he solves conflicts and deals with difficult situations. This is further emphasized by the fact that he manhandles Aricie and Œnone in an attempt to find out the truth regarding the events, which occurred in his absence. Even his desire for Phèdre is expressed violently, as he grabs her breasts and kisses her neck whilst she is on the floor, eyes closed, trying to move away from him. This behaviour alongside his costume has determined René Solis to argue that he and not Phèdre is the monster of the house.<sup>121</sup> Rauck's play conveys quite poignantly an image of the king blinded by his aggressive and erotic impulses, trampling on anyone who dares to stand in his way. Thésée's brute violence increases his responsibility regarding the tragic outcome and may invite the audience to think about the cruelty of the patriarchal system he represents and upholds. This may represent a means through which the production connects the classical text to contemporary issues and concerns opening it to new readings and interpretations.

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<sup>119</sup> *Phèdre* (Racine) dir. by Christophe Rauck, Production Théâtre du Nord, coproduction TGP-CDN de Saint-Denis, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3DT-fc1fk6w>> [published 7 July 2014, accessed 28 February 2019]. Théâtre Gérard-Philipe provided several photos of the performance that I consulted for this analysis.

<sup>120</sup> Elisabeth Naud, '*Phèdre*', *Théâtre du blog*, 18 March 2014, <<http://theatredublog.unblog.fr/2014/03/18/phedre-4/>> [accessed 28 February 2019].

<sup>121</sup> René Solis, '*Phèdre*, les nerfs de la guerre', *Libération*, 14 March 2014, <[http://next.liberation.fr/theatre/2014/03/14/phedre-les-nerfs-de-la-guerre\\_987272](http://next.liberation.fr/theatre/2014/03/14/phedre-les-nerfs-de-la-guerre_987272)> [accessed 18 January 2019].



This approach to Thésée's character, alongside Phèdre's frail state, emphasized by the use of medication and alcohol, and her displays of emotional turmoil, reduce the queen's responsibility and guilt. She is a woman trapped in a loveless marriage to a violent authoritarian figure, tormented by her incestuous passion for her stepson and dealing with a mental breakdown. She may have a manipulative side, but this is overshadowed by Thésée's authoritarian and violent behaviour, her illness and Œnone's influence. Phèdre appears crushed by the weight of her passion, the aggressive impulses of her spouse and Œnone's repressed desire, which manifests itself in her ill advice.

All in all, Rauck's staging of the play, which focused on conveying passions and their excess puts forward a new reading of the story which reduces significantly Phèdre's responsibility for the tragic outcome and transforms Thésée and Œnone into the main culprits. Phèdre's becomes a victim of the servant's influence, her spouse's violent behaviour as well as her incestuous desire. She is anxious and frail to the point of mental breakdown, and resorts to sedatives and alcohol to cope. This treatment of the character stimulates the audience's sympathy for Phèdre's plight. Thésée on the other hand tramples everything and everyone in a clumsy attempt to solve the situation and assert his authority, and emerges as the main culprit, the monster of the house. He is a tyrant ruling his household and kingdom with an iron fist, and this emphasizes the role he plays in his son's demise and his wife's mental strain. Œnone also emerges as a nefarious character, as her reserved behaviour and repressed desire transform the servant into the queen's dark conscience, a corrupted mother figure that leads Phèdre to her downfall. This production casts a new light on the story and the issue of guilt and responsibility, as Œnone and Thésée become the main culprits whilst Phèdre is their vulnerable victim, for whom they both seem to display erotic desire. These two characters end up destroying the beings they love (Phèdre and Hippolyte) on account of their desires and impulses. The performance invites the audience to contemplate this aspect of the story, and to consider more

broadly the way patriarchal authority sacrifices human beings in order to uphold the law and the existing order.

Our analysis has revealed that all three productions of the dramatic text reinterpret the issue of guilt and responsibility and put forward new meanings of the characters' behaviour and new readings of the story. In Chéreau's *mise en scène* Phèdre and Thésée emerge as the main culprits, sharing the responsibility for the tragic outcome. This production combines a psychoanalytical reading with a re-emergence of the body approach to the characters in order to convey the way the two spouses' behaviour is driven by unconscious impulses and desires which lead to the destruction of those around them. Marmarinos's staging puts forward a reading of the story in which Phèdre and Œnone share the guilt for the tragic outcome. The queen reveals an immoral, aggressive side, as she attempts to seduce a young, inexperienced Hippolyte whilst the servant driven by erotic desire for her mistress accuses the prince out of jealousy and ill will. The illegitimate desires of these two women lead to destruction, in this new interpretation of the story. Rauck's production also reinterprets the issue of guilt and responsibility, and Thésée becomes the main culprit alongside Œnone who embodies Phèdre's dark conscience. The king is a tyrant, the monster of the house who abuses everyone in order to assert his authority and satisfy his desire. Œnone emerges as an incestuous mother figure that leads a vulnerable Phèdre to downfall on account of her repressed desire. The excessive violence and eroticism of these two characters lead to the tragic outcome. These interpretations emerging from the productions we have analysed in this section cast a new light on the issue of guilt and responsibility within the play, and in the process put forward new interpretations of the story and the characters' actions, which indicate that there are new meanings to be found particularly when it comes to exploring potential motives for the transgressive behaviour incorporated in these works.

### **3.1 Conclusion**

This analysis of the performances has revealed the manner in which these approaches to the classical plays provide alternative interpretations of the characters' experience and behaviour, and strengthen the arguments put forward in the previous chapters of this thesis. They enable the audience to know and look at these tragic characters and canonical texts differently, and this represents their contribution to the re-evaluation of Médée's, Clytemnestre's and Phèdre's actions and behaviour. They also reflect the way the relationship of the text with present day evolves as society progresses, which is at the basis of this thesis's endeavour to provide alternative readings and a means to interpret these female tragic characters by using modern theories of moral psychology and psychoanalysis.

The stagings of *Médée* have reinforced some of the ideas put forward in chapters 2 and 3 of this work whilst also bringing other elements which contribute to a new interpretation of the dramatic text and the tragic heroes. Correia's production reinforces the idea that Médée plays the role of the outcast on account of her inability to conform to the norm and limit her desire which is presented in chapter 3. It also puts forward Créon, Créuse and Jason's contribution to their downfall, a point I make in the transactional analysis of the play, and the moral transformation that Médée undergoes in the form of abandoning all connection in favour of a position of power and invulnerability mentioned in the ethics of care interpretation. The idea that isolation and powerlessness is at the centre of Médée's experience and influences her decision to put Jason in a similar position and to deprive him of all relationships of care, put forward in the ethics of care analysis, emerges in Candoni's production. Nonetheless, there are also other meanings and interpretations that these productions bring to the story: in the case of Correia Médée becomes a mythical witch, in a story from the beginning of human civilisation, able to stimulate the audience's awe and wonder, whilst in Candoni's production Médée is a vulnerable character caught in a bitter divorce and custody battle, and this stimulates the audience's sympathy. These treatments of the dramatic texts reinterpret the characters' actions and provide new perspectives on the issue of guilt

and responsibility, as in the case of Correia's mise en scène Médée's behaviour is a reaction to the violence she is subjected to, and the ruthless world she inhabits whilst in Candoni's production her revenge is an act of despair stemming from the traumatic experience of divorce.

The analysis of the productions of *Iphigénie* has also strengthened some of the ideas incorporated in the previous chapters of this thesis. Kokkos's staging enables the interpretation of Clytemnestre's diatribe against Agamemnon as a means to express an accumulated rage, and to avoid dealing with any feelings of guilt related to her family curse, an idea incorporated in the transactional analysis of the play. It also presents the two different moral approaches to the dilemma which correspond to the conflict between an ethics of care stance and a justice and rights one discussed in chapter 2. Jeanneteau's mise en scène conveys the idea that the behaviour of the characters represents a constant movement between different aspects of the psyche which is at the basis of transactional analysis. Nonetheless, these productions also put forward other interpretations. Kokkos's staging transforms Clytemnestre into the main tragic hero, as her plight takes centre stage, and conveys the fact that the queen's behaviour at the beginning of the play is marked by apprehension and fear. Jeanneteau's mise en scène presents the isolation and solitude of the tragic characters who have to look inwards for support, and the way impulses emerge into conscious behaviour. These performances present two different readings of the dramatic text: one in which the play becomes the story of Clytemnestre and the way she stands against patriarchy inviting the audience to consider the sacrifices demanded by the established order and the law, and another which conveys the human experience of a dramatic situation, and invites the spectators to a broader contemplation of the human condition. Both readings provide new perspectives on the story and the characters' behaviour.

The stagings of *Phèdre* incorporated in this analysis also reinforce some of the ideas incorporated in the previous chapters whilst simultaneously presenting elements which add new meaning to the story. In Chéreau's production Phèdre's

tormented body conveys an unconscious belief in her inherent monstrosity which strengthens the argument incorporated in the transactional analysis of the play. Some of the ideas incorporated in the ethics of care analysis also emerge in this performance, namely, the fact that Cœnone considers the relationship with Phèdre essential for her sense of identity, and the idea that the queen's responsibility towards her son informs her decision to initiate a connection with Hippolyte. The idea that Phèdre's confession to Hippolyte has an element of intentionality which is incorporated in the transactional analysis of the play is reinforced in Marmarinos's *mise en scène*. However, the productions analysed also incorporate readings which give new meanings to the characters' actions: Chéreau's staging puts forward the ruthless and rigid aspect of Thésée's behaviour, as he is unable to acknowledge his guilt, the relationship between Phèdre and Cœnone acquires an erotic dimension in Marmarinos's and Rauck's stagings, and Thésée emerges as a violent tyrant whilst Phèdre deals with mental breakdown in Rauck's production. These readings cast a new light on the issue of guilt as Phèdre and Thésée (Chéreau), Phèdre and Cœnone (Marmarinos) and Thésée and Cœnone (Rauck) share the responsibility for the tragic outcome and this enable us to interpret the story from different perspectives.

These interpretations of the story and the characters put forward readings which strengthen the analysis performed in the previous chapters of the thesis and give new meanings to the characters' behaviour which enables us to explore the different motives underlying their actions (violence, despair, erotic desire, vulnerability). They allow us to approach these tragic heroines from different perspectives and this casts new light on their behaviour and opens up the issue of their guilt and responsibility for the tragic outcome allowing us to consider other factors or contexts that may have informed their actions. Therefore, this analysis of contemporary performances contributes to the overall endeavour of the thesis of finding new ways of engaging with these tragic female characters and providing alternative interpretations of their actions and decisions.

## Conclusion

This study reinterpreted the behaviour and actions of Médée, Clytemnestre and Phèdre in order to challenge previous critical approaches which focused on placing them in the emotion versus reason or nature versus culture dichotomy (Charles Mauron, Serge Doubrovsky, Roland Barthes, Constant Venesoen, Mitchell Greenberg) which situates women as inferior to men.<sup>122</sup> These interpretations are deeply problematic as they rely on androcentric methodologies to exclude these female tragic characters from the concept of the heroic project. They are also outdated as they do not reflect the developments that have occurred in the fields of ethics and psychoanalysis from which they draw their methodology. These interpretations provide a stereotypical image of the tragic heroines' actions as stemming from unregulated emotions and desires which oppose (male) rationality and the law as well as social norms. This study reassessed these characters' actions in order to challenge this legacy by suggesting new ways of connecting with these texts and these tragic heroines that reflect contemporary social reality and provided a new perspective on their behaviour.

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<sup>122</sup> The works I am referring to are: Charles Mauron, *L'Inconscient dans l'œuvre et la vie de Racine* (Aix-en-Provence: Éditions Ophrys, 1957), *Des Métaphores obsédantes au mythe personnel: Introduction à la Psychocritique* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1964), *Phèdre* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1988), Serge Doubrovsky, *Corneille et la dialectique du héros* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), Roland Barthes, *Sur Racine* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1963), Constant Venesoen, *Jean Racine et le procès de la culpabilité* (Paris: La Pensée Universelle, 1981), Mitchell Greenberg, *Baroque Bodies: Psychoanalysis and the Culture of French Absolutism* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), *Subjectivity and Subjugation in Seventeenth-century Drama and Prose: The Family Romance of French Classicism* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1992), *Racine From Ancient Myth to Tragic Modernity* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

For this purpose, this analysis used methodologies drawn from recent developments in the fields of moral psychology and psychoanalysis, which place the experience of women at the centre (ethics of care) or challenge Freudian concepts like the nature versus culture dichotomy and the Oedipal framework in the analysis of relationships (transactional analysis). Instead of looking at the tragic hero as an isolated figure, defined by autonomy, I approached the behaviour of these tragic characters from a relational perspective. Ethics of care connects goodness with the ability to establish and maintain connections and puts forward a relational view of the world and the self. Transactional analysis discusses the strategies used in social interactions and the way they provide insight into the unconscious factors and beliefs that inform one's behaviour. The application of these theories served a double purpose: to incorporate the advances made in ethics and psychoanalysis and to find a solution to the problematic readings stemming from androcentric methodological approaches. These methodologies were combined with an analysis of recent productions of these plays which reinforces the argument incorporated in the interpretations informed by ethics of care and transactional analysis. The directors' choices have also (at times) emphasized the relational and this illustrates the relevance of these approaches. One example is Patrice Chéreau's decision to bring Phèdre's son on stage the moment she confesses her passion to Hippolyte, which suggests that this gesture stems from a concern for her son's well-being revealing the way this maternal relationship informs her behaviour. Furthermore, contemporary productions look at the dynamic between characters from a universal as well as a specific perspective informed by contemporary values and beliefs. The directors approach these dramatic texts through this connection with contemporaneity because they consider that it will appeal to the audience and in the process provide new interpretations and new perspectives on the heroines' behaviour. Overall, this approach, inspired by Josephine Schmidt's work which

sought to carve a space for the female tragic heroine,<sup>123</sup> has adopted three main axes which explore the behaviour of these female tragic characters in order to put forward new and original readings which support their status as tragic heroines and challenge established, problematic interpretations.

The analysis and re-evaluation of these characters' behaviour focused on: their ethical standpoint, the unconscious factors that inform their actions and the meaning that their behaviour and deeds acquire in recent production of the plays. When it comes to the ethical standpoint of these tragic heroines, the ethics of care analysis incorporated in chapter 2 introduces the possibility of an alternative mode of deliberation focused on a view of goodness and morality stemming from developmental experiences which do not fit the androcentric model and belong to (female) voices that have been marginalised on account of their different values and beliefs. This approach combined with Martha Nussbaum's revalorisation of emotions as judgements of value enabled an interpretation which incorporated recent developments in the fields of ethics, challenged previous readings and brought forward aspects of the characters' behaviour and actions which have been devalued, misinterpreted or overlooked. I was able to argue that Phèdre confesses her love to Hippolyte out of consideration for her son's safety, not only on account of her passion or her irrationality as Venesoen, Harry Barnwell, Jean Rohou, Georges Forestier, have argued.<sup>124</sup> I also argued that Médée inflicts her revenge out of a desire to place Jason in a position of vulnerability and insolation she experiences at the beginning of the play, and not merely out of jealousy or in order to usurp his role as Claire Carlin argues.<sup>125</sup> Clytemnestre learns from Agamemnon at Aulis that the strong do not have to care about relationships and modifies her behaviour accordingly, and it is not only fear or jealousy that inform her actions. These new and original interpretations brought to the forefront the fact that Phèdre,

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<sup>123</sup> See Introduction, pp. 27-8.

<sup>124</sup> See pp. 208-10 for the ethics of care analysis.

<sup>125</sup> See pp. 28-9 Introduction on Carlin's critical approach.



Clytemnestre and Médée are not as immoral or irrational as previous studies argue. Their actions are based on specific beliefs about goodness or traumatic experiences that inform these values. Although these ethical standpoints fall short of the androcentric benchmark, they still represent valuable and valid ways of approaching a dilemma, and for this reason we must do away with placing these heroines outside the heroic project. We must perceive them as three-dimensional characters whose actions and behaviour are the result of a complex set of factors which may not correspond to a predominant ideology but are equally valuable because they provide insight into a marginal, alternative experience that has been so far devalued or disregarded.

Future research might address the ethical standpoint of other female tragic characters who have been placed by Mauron, Barthes, Doubrovsky and Venesoen within this nature versus culture dichotomy in order to recuperate aspects of their behaviour which have been devalued or overlooked. This endeavour would represent an opportunity to revisit these works from a different perspective and to put forward readings which offer new insight into the tragic heroines' decisions and actions. One example is Corneille's Cléopâtre (*Rodogune*) who has been placed by Carlin in the category of monstrous mothers and queens.<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, the application of this theory to the analysis of the male characters' behaviour and actions, although slightly problematic on account of Gilligan's focus on female experience, could represent an important avenue for future research. Such an endeavour would provide a more nuanced image of the tragic hero not just someone who puts duty and honour above everything, but someone who may as in the case of Agamemnon find value in family bonds and seek to negotiate between his responsibility as a leader and his responsibility as a father. More focus on the way men engage with this ethical standpoint would bring forward the idea that men also act according to their familial role and are guided by a duty of care. Tragic heroes

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<sup>126</sup> See p. 29 in the Introduction.

are not just representatives of authority and the law (the superego as Mauron argues), they have feelings and care for their children, their parents and their spouses. This would further undermine the idea of men representing culture (law, honour) and women representing nature (connection, love, care) emphasizing the ethical process as a mixture of different ideas about goodness and responsibility which are universal rather than gendered. Putting forward the idea that there is a similarity between the way male and female characters react to a tragic dilemma could also contribute to challenging critical approaches which place women on the other side of the heroic project. The original findings of this analysis represent a starting point in this initiative to challenge the concept of tragic hero and to present new and original interpretations of the tragic heroines' decisions and actions. This endeavour can be continued and developed through similar approaches to other tragic characters both male and female in order to achieve a redefinition of the idea of the tragic hero and to do away with this male versus female, nature versus culture, emotion versus reason dichotomy which informs the ethical approaches to early modern dramatic texts.

The ethics of care approach incorporated in chapter 2 looks at the guiding principles which stem from this relational view of the world and of the self and influence intentions. The transactional analysis approach incorporated in chapter 3 looks at the tactics and strategies of interaction in order to offer a glimpse into what the characters are looking for beyond ethics of care. This methodology focuses on the unconscious aspects of the characters' actions in order to challenge Mauron's, Barthes's and Greenberg's Freudian interpretations and to put forward new insight into the characters' motives and behaviour. By applying this methodology to the analysis of the texts, I was able to argue that Médée and Clytemnestre derive satisfaction respectively from Jason's and Agamemnon's betrayals, because they reinforce the heroines' beliefs about the world and themselves. Furthermore, I also argue that they set up other contexts for betrayals, Médée through her agreement with Égée, and Clytemnestre by asking a foreign warrior, she just met, to murder

her daughter. This represents a new approach to the characters' behaviour which emphasizes the fact that although the tragic heroines do not consciously desire the tragic outcome, they unconsciously work towards it.

This need for satisfaction and confirmation of one's beliefs about life informs the interactions and behaviour of all characters not just the tragic heroines. They all inadvertently contribute to the tragic outcome and in some cases (Agamemnon, Créon, Énone, Créuse) to their own demise on account of this pursuit of satisfaction. One example is Créon who alongside Jason provides the betrayal that Médée needs in order to feel that her revenge is justified. The dynamic of the tragic plot is the result of an inadvertent collaboration between the characters concealed underneath these conflictual interactions. I have shown that the relationships between the characters are no longer governed by a general scheme which follows the Oedipal model or a clash between parental figures or men versus women as Mauro and Greenberg have argued. Main characters as well as secondary ones, male as well as female, they all pursue their desires and beliefs and contribute to the unfolding of the tragic plot in the process. The issue of guilt and responsibility becomes more complex and these tragic female heroines emerge as three-dimensional, relatable characters driven by specific needs and desires stemming from their situation and their heredity. This interpretation challenges previous readings which focused on the characters' gender role to the detriment of their experience.

These findings enable us to look at the tragic conflict from a different perspective and to consider the motives that underlie this type of interactions and are related to the satisfaction one derives from social transactions (interactions). This inadvertent collaboration which underlies these interactions is a source of insight into the unconscious desires and beliefs that inform the characters' behaviour. This analysis opens avenues for future research in terms of the interactions between characters in tragedy and beyond, because it enables us to consider this dynamic from the perspective of the satisfaction that the characters

derive and pursue in these relationships or to uncover the influences stemming from their heredity through parental programming.

The analysis incorporated in chapter 4 has considered recent stagings of the play in relation to the readings incorporated in chapters 2 and 3 as well as contemporary approaches to staging these dramatic texts. This work reinforces some of the arguments incorporated in the previous chapters, a few examples are: the idea that Médée plays the role of the outcast on account of her inability to conform to the norm and limit her desire which is presented in chapter 3 is reinforced in Paulo Correia's production, the interpretation of Clytemnestre's diatribe against Agamemnon as a means to express an accumulated rage and to avoid dealing with any feelings of guilt related to her family curse, an idea incorporated in the transactional analysis of the play is emphasized in Yannis Kokkos's staging of Iphigénie. These performances also put forward new readings in an attempt to breathe new life into these texts and to stimulate the interest of the modern audience. We have seen the relationship between Phèdre and Œnone acquire a sensual dimension in Michel Marmarinos' and Christophe Rauck's stagings whilst the issue of guilt and responsibility becomes more complex in productions like Nicolas Candoni's *Médée* where the infanticide is a desperate gesture stemming from the traumatic experience of a bitter divorce and custody battle. The stagings analysed presented various interpretations of the characters: an alcoholic and depressed Médée (Candoni), a depressed, self-medicating Phèdre (Rauck), the Colchian witch in all her glory endowed with supernatural powers (Paulo Correia). This reveals that performance finds new ways of looking at these tragic heroines as our ideas regarding human behaviour and psychology develop in order to make these characters relatable and relevant to contemporary audiences. The fact that some of the arguments put forward in the previous chapters are reinforced by the analysis of recent productions indicates that the readings incorporated in this work reflect the new ways in which the relationship of these dramatic texts with the audience evolves. Furthermore, this study uses the new interpretations put forward by these

recent stagings to analyse the dynamic of the characters, and this produces original readings which may not be readily grasped by the literary critic. Therefore, this chapter incorporates different approaches which enable us to look at the characters' story and behaviour from various perspectives and reflect the way the characters' behaviour and actions acquire new meaning as society develops.

This work represents an original contribution to the field as so far, no study has been dedicated to the analysis of these recent performances and the existing works focus on a historical account of the approaches to staging these classical plays (Brigitte Prost, Noël Peacock). The performance analysis of the recent stagings of the plays offers new and original interpretations of the characters' behaviour and actions. For example, Candoni's approach to *Médée* changes the meaning of the heroine's transgressive behaviour which becomes a desperate gesture and the way we perceive the characters and her story by framing it as a traumatic divorce. As a result, this chapter contributes to the emerging scholarship on contemporary stagings of classical plays. This endeavour will hopefully pave the way for similar studies as modern productions represent a valuable source of new meaning since they do not rely so heavily on literary studies, rediscover these dramatic texts through intuitive, sensible responses as well as desire to make them relevant and relatable.

We cannot continue to interpret *Médée*, *Clytemnestre* and *Phèdre*'s stories and behaviours through these biased frameworks and performance is leading the way towards finding new ways of connecting with these dramatic texts in the light of contemporary social realities (Candoni) or modern views of sexuality and relationships (Marmarinos, Rauck). The literary analysis incorporated in this study does the same, namely, provide an interpretation which offers a fresh perspective on the characters and their stories in the light of modern ideas regarding ethics, emotions and social interactions. This work does not provide an authoritative narrative account; rather it promotes multiple perspectives and serves as a space for reflection and re-evaluation. It aims to show that alternative interpretations can be

obtained and must be obtained by applying modern methodologies in order to challenge the biased readings from the past and to see these characters in a new light.

This study has implications for seventeenth-century French tragedy as it promotes a new way of exploring the behaviour and actions of the female and potentially male characters as I have discussed at page 384. In this sense it urges a redefinition of the concept of tragic hero in order to make this category more inclusive and reflective of contemporary social realities. The study challenges the legacy of Mauron's, Barthes', Doubrovsky's, Greenberg's and Venesoen's androcentric interpretations and promotes ways of approaching these dramatic texts which allow us to recuperate aspects that have been devalued or overlooked (like emotions, behaviours that fall short of the established benchmark or are considered to define and belong to 'female nature') in order to present a fresh perspective on their actions. This work contributes to the studies which have been dedicated to challenging the established readings in terms of practices, tragic model, tragic hero in the works of Racine and Corneille, namely John Campbell's *Questioning Racinian Tragedy* and the volumes edited by Myriam Dufour-Maître *Héros ou personnages? Le personnel du théâtre de Pierre Corneille* and *Pratiques de Corneille*, which are discussed in the Introduction.<sup>127</sup> Unlike these studies I do not use androcentric methodologies inspired by Freudian psychoanalysis or the predominant justice and rights ethical approach in order to fulfil this task because they are deeply problematic when dealing with female tragic heroines.<sup>128</sup> In this sense this represents a change in the way we approach the behaviour and interactions of the tragic characters in the field of early modern French tragedy and potentially

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<sup>127</sup> John Campbell, *Questioning Racinian Tragedy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, 2005). See pp. 29, 33 Intro. Myriam Dufour-Maître (ed.), *Héros ou personnages? Le personnel du théâtre de Pierre Corneille*, (Rouen : Presses Universitaires de Rouen et du Havre, 2013). See p. 25 Intro. Myriam Dufour-Maître (ed.), *Pratiques de Corneille* (Rouen: Publications des Universités de Rouen et du Havre, 2012). See the Scholarship review section for a discussion of the critical approaches incorporated in these works.

<sup>128</sup> The problematic nature of these types of readings is discussed in the Introduction, see pp. 26, 32.

beyond it. This study will be particularly useful for those scholars approaching the behaviour of female characters and seeking to challenge this type of outdated readings or to put forward new and original insight regarding the actions, decisions and the story of literary heroines.

These findings also provide a new way of approaching the tragic conflict and the interactions between characters which will be useful to scholars exploring this dynamic. This study has provided an interpretation of these conflictual relationships as unconscious collaborations which shifts the way we look at these relations and provides insight into the characters' needs, desires and the influences coming from their ancestry. This analysis proposes an alternative approach to the interactions between the characters which presents new and original interpretations of these relationships and the tragic heroes and this may be of interest to all scholars in the field of tragedy.

This study also contributes to the emerging field of performance studies as the literary analysis incorporated in this work may be used as a way of approaching the staging of these classical plays. The new meanings that emerged in terms of the characters' behaviour and relationships could be explored further in performance. The findings from recent productions contributed to my literary analysis and the re-evaluation of the characters' behaviour; I would hope that my literary study would be an inspiration for theatre practitioners who consider staging these plays.

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