A STUDY OF THE THEME OF PERSECUTION AND THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN VICTIMS AND AGGRESSORS IN FOUR TRAGEDIES BY JEAN RACINE: *ANDROMAQUE, BRITANNICUS BAJAZET* AND *PHEDRE.*

BY: KUDAKWASHE GILBERT DHORO

SUPERVISOR: DR V. WAKERLEY

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THESIS ABSTRACT

Human violence has generated a lot of discussion and led to so many attempts, both scientific and philosophical, to understand its prevalence. Why do human beings inflict voluntary suffering or death to others? This is the eternal problem of evil. From the simple assault case to premeditated murder, genocide aimed at the eradication of a well-defined community, violence is both repugnant and fascinating because we can never get used to it. It is never really the same and always displays a new facet that is constantly surprising and unusual. The focus of this thesis is a study of violence and persecution in the theatre of Racine, where they are central themes, and to analyse them in the light of Emmanuel Levinas's ethical philosophy. Three main questions that are presented as the three chapters that make up this thesis. Firstly, what informed the presentation of violence in Racine's plays and what is the link between passion and persecution? Secondly, how is aggression and persecution worked out through the characters depicted in the plays? And finally, what is the role played by language in revealing and promoting aggression and persecution? This thesis is particularly concerned with what makes the Racinian character violent and why he or she so often experiences a passion that for the most part is impossible to satisfy. The thesis attempts to answer these questions with reference to the following tragedies by Racine: *Andromaque, Britannicus, Bajazet* and *Phèdre.,* and it will show how the abandoning of ethical relationships by the characters leads to persecution and aggression, which is carried out in physical, psychological, verbal and non-verbal forms.

Key terms: Jean Racine, Emmanuel Levinas, tragedy, persecution and aggression, relationships between victims and aggressors, the ethical relationship, *Andromaque, Britannicus, Bajazet* and *Phèdre*.

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INTRODUCTION

Theologians, philosophers, anthropologists and psychologists have all attempted to identify the mechanisms and the reasons behind persecution and aggression, offering theories that attempt to account for what must be regarded as an essential component of human activity and socialisation. Examples of such theories are Girardian anthropology[1], conflict and aggression theories and the radical orthodoxy movement[2]. Literature, for its part, has also always paid great attention to violence, with its approach often being that of description rather than explanation.

Violence is central to Racine's theatre, and its representation in his drama is never constant, with each play presenting a unique situation that calls for a unique response from the perpetrators of violence. The centrality of violence to Racinian tragedy amply demonstrates the truth of André Gide's idea that "*on ne fait pas de la bonne littérature avec des bons sentiments*"; violence (in the form of persecution and aggression) permeates almost every page of his writings. Racine's tragedy is a pessimistic reflection on the human condition, on destiny. It shows the individual subjected to overpowering forces, including transcendence, passion and tyranny. The question of the role played by the passions in the persecution-aggression cycle merits further investigation because Racine's plays are suffused with the consequences of violent passions and obsessions. He declares in his *Préface* to *Phèdre* that passions are the cause of disorder and that "les passions n'y sont présentées aux yeux que pour montrer tout le désordre dont elles sont cause".[3] The tragic hero carries within him the guilt of a crime he has not knowingly committed. Whatever he does, he is inexorably

[1] René Girard creates a scientific model of violence as a universal scapegoating mechanism at the origin of all human culture.

[2] An important scholar of the radical orthodoxy school is John Milbank, who views Augustine's theology of history as a narrative of the ontological priority of peace in an attempt to move human desire away from its fascination with violence.

[3] Racine, *Phèdre. Œuvres complètes, Préface*. The edition used for the primary texts is specified in the Bibliography.

precipitated to his downfall. From a dramatic point of view, every action, every act of speech leads the hero closer to the final catastrophe. The heroes are trapped in a cycle of violence, in which they seem to wander incapable of finding a way out.

Choice of subject

Jean Racine's mostly orthodox use of the rules of classical tragedy has made him one of the most frequently perfomed and diversely interpreted playwrights. Drama in France acquired an organised form starting from the Classical period and subsequent developments (the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* as well as the rise of Romanticism) were a reaction against Classicism. Racine gives us an illumination of human experience and how the individual is constantly threatened by the presence of others, all achieved within the confines of French Classical conventions. Racine's plays can be considered as precursors of modern psychology; consequently, it was imperative for us to study the incidence and motivations behind aggression and persecution because we consider these concepts to be central to Racine's tragic vision and his conception of human socialisation. The same emotions that still exist to this day; the violence that is represented in the tragedies is still relevant to our understanding of violence. Despite the seeming antiquity of the characters, the excesses of human nature that they show can still be observed in modern society. This can be regarded as the modernity of Racinian tragedy.

These then were our motivations in choosing to study the incidence of the themes of persecution and aggression in Racine's tragedies.

Research Problem

The object of this study is to examine the various aspects of the themes of persecution and aggression as they are represented in the following tragedies by Jean Racine: *Andromaque, Britannicus*, *Bajazet* and *Phèdre*. This thesis seeks to study the depiction of persecution and aggression as themes, as symbols derived from Racine's tragic vision and as textual elements, a

study that will be underpinned by Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy on violence, cruelty and language. The relationships between victims and aggressors are important because this is the conduit through which aggression passes from one character to the other. The research problem has been broken down into three questions which are then presented as the three chapters of this dissertation.

Justification of Study

Owing to the abundance of critical perspectives on the work of Racine, any endeavour to make a study of his work that is original or ground-breaking is bound to be difficult. So much has already been said, but there has not yet been a study, as far as we are aware, on Racinian tragedy that draws upon Emmanuel Levinas's perspective on persecution and the relationship with the *Other*. For our purposes, Levinas will provide the basis of our perspective on the representation of the themes of aggression, persecution and the relationships between victims and aggressors. The purpose of this study is certainly not to offer a radically new interpretation of Racine's drama or to present an exhaustive analysis of Levinas's ideas; it is a reading of Racine through Levinas, because the aggression and persecution portrayed in his drama constitutes a dramatisation of Levinas's ethical and philosophical project. Levinas considers ethics as primarily philosophy, instead of epistemology or ontology. His philosophy generally focuses on understanding how we orient ourselves towards others in both reasonable and unreasonable ways (what we will consider in this study as the relationships between victims and aggressors) and how this helps us in turn understand how those orientations sometimes conformed with or resisted what we thought of as "essence" or "being" or "truth" in the Greco-Roman tradition. One of the fundamental elements of his writings can be described as a deep appreciation for human dignity, which is entrenched in the individual's relatedness to fellow human beings.

État présent

Racine is a writer to whom many of the critical languages available at particular historical moments have been successfully applied. Contemporary criticism is often informed by the dominant philosophy of the time and sees Racine's work as a field of application of such ideas; traditional criticism[4] (which can be defined as pre-1960s criticism as compared to post-structuralist or modern criticism) still subsists and continues to concentrate on either the life of the writer, his environment or the literary sources of his tragedies. The two most important recent publications on Racine, which can be considered as *états présents* on their own, were produced during the tercentenary of Racine's death in 1699; these are the new *Pléïade Théâtre-Poésie*,[5] edited by Georges Forestier and *Jean Racine: 1699–1999*,[6] a collection of the Acta of the most all-encompassing of the French conferences compiled by Gilles Declercq and Michèle Rosellini.

A turning point in Racinian criticism was the publication of *Sur Racine* by Roland Barthes and it is not easy for any post-Barthes critic to ignore the ideas presented in his seminal work. The violent reaction of Raymond Picard and the involvement of Serge Doubrovsky in the ensuing latter-day *Querelle* meant that Racine became the focus of a new *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*.[7] Owing to limitations of space, we can only outline the major critical approaches to Racine by both French and non-French critics. Jean Pommier's *Aspects de Racine* is biographical in nature and examines *Phèdre* from the viewpoint of the techniques of composition borrowed from ancient and modern sources, with the *moi* of the writer being excluded from the creative process.[8] Réné Jasinski proposed what he called a *biogénétique* reading of Racine which consisted of being able to identify the: [1]"clés biographiques; sa

[4] Represented by the works of Raymond Picard; it is interesting to point out that he wrote "*Nouvelle critique ou nouvelle imposture?*" (New Criticism or New Fraud?) as a reaction against *Sur Racine* by Roland Barthes.
[5] *Œuvres, I, Théâtre- Poésie*, ed. by Georges Forestier (Paris: Gallimard, 1999)
[6] *Jean Racine: 1699-1999*, ed. by Gilles Declercq and Michèle Rosellini (Paris: PUF, 2003)
[7] R. Barthes, *Sur Racine*, Paris: Seuil, 1963; R. Picard, *Nouvelle critique ou nouvelle imposture* (Paris: Pauvert, 1965); R. Barthes, *Critique et Vérité* (Paris: Seuil, 1966); S. Doubrovsky, *Pourquoi la nouvelle critique* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1966)
[8] J. Pommier, *Aspects de Racine* (Paris: Nizet, 1954)

démarche relève au fond du vieux postulat de l'analogie comme genèse de la création littéraire, produit, par imitation, des incidents et rencontres d'une vie".[9] As for Picard, literature should be seen as: "rien d'autre que l'activité volontaire et lucide d'un homme qui se livre à un travail d'expression" and " la profondeur de l'expression est dans ce qu'elle dit".[10]

The "modern" Racinian critic is more interested in the body of work than in the writer himself, given that any work of literature is ambiguous in nature because, on top of what the writer says, 'the explicit', there is the implicit, that which he/she wanted to say, but leaves his audience to discover. For Doubrovsky, "la littérature est faite d'autant de silences que de paroles" and the critic then becomes the *interpreter* of such pieces of work. Mauron with his psychocriticism, Goldmann with his socio-marxist criticism, Barthes with his structuralism and Georges Poulet and Jean Starobinski with their Existentialism have managed to interpret Racine into different "languages".[11] Mauron applies Freudian analytical methods to Racine's oeuvre.[12] The tragic hero represents the "self" of the writer and the characters who surround him represent his temptations, defence mechanisms and his desires or fears. Mauron is careful to concentrate his analyses on the text and any reference to the author is for verification purposes only. For Goldmann, the body of work is inspired from *within* by the experiences of the writer who, according to him, is an element of a group or social class whose aspirations, feelings and ideas he seeks to portray in his work.[13] The methodology applied is sociological, with due emphasis on la *vision du monde*, which explores the fundamental problems posed by man's relationships with others and the universe/cosmos. Roland Barthes finds, on top of the literal significance of Racine's work, a series of *figures* and *functions* that hold it together and he makes use of psychological terminology to explain some of the observed phenomena.

[9] R. Jasinski, *Vers le vrai Racine* (Paris: A. Colin, 1958)
[10] Cf. *Nouvelle critique ou nouvelle imposture*, especially pp. 66, 69, 91, 126, 134, 188.
[11] S. Doubrovsky, op. cit. p. 87.
[12] *L'Inconscient dans l'œuvre et la vie de Racine* (Paris: C.N.R.S., 1957)
[13] L. Goldmann, *Le Dieu caché, Etude sur la vision tragique dans les Pensées de Pascal et dans le théâtre de Racine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1956); and *Jean Racine* (Paris: L'Arche, 1956)

Georges Poulet sees criticism as "la coïncidence de deux consciences" and his approach is both psychological and existential.[14] Jean Starobinski singles out the theme of le *regard* which he sees as the living link between the individual and the world. In Racinian tragedy, the glance (*le regard*) seeks to find the essence of the other.

Jean-Jacques Roubine's *Lectures de Racine* gives an overview of critical reactions to Racine's drama from the author's time to 1971.[15] Judd Hubert advocates a performative reading of Racine, he claims the following: "Leaving perfection aside, Pyrrhus, Hermione, and Oreste, dissatisfied with their roles, vainly seek a different casting and in so doing fail also as dramatists."[16] Turning to major critical works in English, Roy Knight edited a collection of essays by eminent Racinian scholars and the most accessible Racinian specialist to date is Odette de Mourgues.[17] Peter France's *Racine's Rhetoric* opened up the way for Michael Hawcroft and Henry Phillips to undertake in-depth studies of language use and communicative strategies in Racine. [18] Ronald W. Tobin *et al*, in *Racine et/ou le classicism* analyse Racine's work within the context of French Classicism.[19] This section has shown the major trends in Racinian scholarship, the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas means that at the end of the day, not everything has been said about Racine. The Levinassian approach allows for a different reading of Racine's works. This section has outlined the major trends in Racinian scholarship, and shown that they do not include an application of the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas to the work of the dramatist.

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[14] Cf. G. Poulet: *Les Chemins actuels de la critique* (Paris: Union Générale d'Editions, 1968), p. 7, and *Études sur le temps humain* (Paris: Plon, *Racine* in vol. I, 1950, and *Racine, poète des clartés sombres* in vol. IV, 1968).

[15] *Lectures de Racine* (Paris: Colin, 1971).

[16] *Essai d'exégèse racinienne* (Paris: Nizet, 1956). (also available online at : http://se17.bowdoin.edu/node/12.html)

[17] *Racine: Modern Judgements*, ed. Roy Knight (London: Macmillan, 1969) and *Racine or The Triumph of Relevance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).

[18] *Racine's Rhetoric* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), *Word as Action: Racine, Rhetoric and Theatrical Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) and *Racine: Language and Theatre* (Durham: Durham University Press, 1994).

[19] *Racine et/ou le classicisme,* Ed. Ronald W. Tobin: Acta of the conference jointly organised by the North American Society for Seventeenth-century French Literature, October 1999 (Biblio 17).

Choice of corpus

Andromaque is Racine's first great play, his first successful play, the one in which he found his "voice", through this, he brings psychological insight to material adapted from classic Greek texts to which twenty-first-century audiences can readily respond. This then is the starting point of our analysis, and we will analyse aggression and persecution within the context of the Racinian dramatic ideal first presented in *Andromaque*. This study can certainly make no claim to be a complete study of the themes of aggression and persecution in Racine's drama; it is limited to a consideration of the representation of these themes, major and minor, depicted in the tragedies. In nearly every tragedy the above-mentioned themes can be found, but we have limited ourselves to a discussion of them in *Andromaque, Britannicus, Bajazet* and *Phèdre* (generally acknowledged to be Racine's *chef-d'oeuvre*) because of the plays' varied sources, which represent different civilisations. *Andromaque* is Greek, *Britannicus* is Roman, *Bajazet* is Oriental, and *Phèdre*, though set in Greece, actually unfolds in *a palais à volonté* that it has no local colour. These four plays are then taken as being representative of the rest of his plays in so far as the representation of the themes of persecution and aggression are concerned and we will incorporate elements from the other texts that we deem relevant to our research.

Theoretical framework and the philosophy of persecution and aggression

The theoretical framework of this study will draw mainly from Emmanuel Levinas's ideas on persecution, suffering and the relationship with the Other. Since ideas are created and invented by the mind, not discovered, the meaning of another (individual) comes down to one person's interpretation of the Other. We cease to engage with the real person and start to engage with the idea that we would have formed in our mind of that person. This becomes a form of violence to the other that denies them their autonomy. According to Levinas, this is "totalisation" which occurs when I limit the Other to a set of rational and sometimes irrational

categories which may be racial, sexual or based on social class. [20] This becomes a denial of the Other's difference and a denial of the otherness of the other, an inscription of the Other in the same. We will also argue that persecution in Racinian drama is brought about as a result of passion, which can be equated to desire in Levinassian vocabulary. For Levinas, desire has a metaphysical significance:

> No journey, no change of climate or of scenery could satisfy the desire bent toward it. The other metaphysically desired is not "other" like the bread I eat, the land in which I dwell, the landscape I contemplate, like, sometimes, myself for myself, this "I" that "Other". I can "feed" on these realities and to a very great extent satisfy myself, as though I had simply been lacking them. Their alterity is thereby reabsorbed into my identity as a thinker or a possessor. The metaphysical desire tends to something else entirely towards the absolutely other.[21]

In *Otherwise than being*, Levinas posits that each human being "bears responsibility for the persecuting by the persecutor" in that the persecution of the persecutor becomes ours to bear, that is to say our responsibility to deal with.[22] Persecution then becomes a perverse form of authority and the possibility of persecution shows that authority comes from the other. This will be applied to the analysis of the victim's responsibility for the persecution that they suffer.

In Levinassian philosophy, to be persecuted is to be confronted by the face of the other person and called to respond; that response or willingness to respond entails the acknowledgement of a certain level of responsibility on the part of both the aggressor and their victim.[23] For Levinas, to be persecuted is: "To bear responsibility for everything despite oneself. To be responsible despite oneself is to be persecuted. Only the persecuted must answer for everyone, even for his persecutor."[24] The relationship into which the victim enters with his persecutor is not contractual there is no *entente* between the two and the relationship

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[20] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p.111.
[21] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), p. 39. also found online at: http://it.scribd.com/doc/16641841/Emmanuel-Levinas-Totality-and-Infinity.html)
[22] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981).
[23] M. Morgan., *Discovering Levinas* (New York: CUP, 2007), p.15.
[24] ibid., p. 12.

is often based on the idea of a dominator and the dominated. Levinas then further characterises persecution as *hypostasis*, a condition of exposure where the individual no longer exists for "one-self" (*pour-soi*) but is now entirely "for-another" (*pour l'autre*). [25] Levinas then continues:

> […] the accusation effected by [grammatical] categories turns into an absolute accusative in which the ego proper to free consciousness is caught up. It is an accusation without foundation, prior to any movement of the will, an obsessional and persecuting accusation. It strips the ego of its pride and the dominating imperialism characteristic of it.[26]

This is the notion of sacrifice and scapegoating, in which the victim is accused and persecuted without having done anything to deserve such treatment.

These are some of the issues in relation to our selected texts we propose to consider during the course of the present study. According to Bernasconi, a scholar commenting on Levinas:

> Every one of us is guilty before all, for everyone and everything, and I more than others […] Just as Sartre argues that either one is totally free or one is not free at all, so Levinas argues that either one is responsible for everything or one has refused responsibility. This is how Levinas answers those who say that to be responsible for everything is to be responsible for nothing.[27]

This does not necessarily mean that the blame for persecution and aggression is shifted onto the victim, but rather, according to Levinas, the question is not *who* is to be blamed, but rather *what is to be done*?[28]

Of interest to this study is Levinas's equating of persecution with obsession, which he defines as follows:

> Obsession is inscribed in consciousness "as something foreign, disequilibrium, a delirium, undoing thematisation, eluding principle, origin and will". Obsession is a persecution that reveals the passivity of a subject already in question.[29]

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[25] Adapted from G.L Bruns's article entitled: "On the coherence of Hermeneutics and Ethics: An essay on Gadamer and Levinas", in *Gadamer's Repercussions: Reconsidering Philosophical Hermeneutics*- Ed. B. Krajewski (California: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 36-37.

[26] ibid., p. 38.

[27] R. Bernasconi, "What is the question to which 'substitution' is the answer?" In *The Cambridge Companion to* Levinas, Edited by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), p. 239.

[28] ibid., p. 240.

[29] Levinas as quoted by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, ibid. p. 240. Levinas then continues:

This obsession can be interpreted as the manifestation of an excessive passion, the passion that drives the Racinian character, which in Levinassian vocabulary, is not consciousness gone mad, but rather, a defection from consciousness. We argue that this defection from consciousness, coupled with unfulfilled desire, is another basis for aggression. The character is no longer in control and has become something else, a monster who is himself persecuted by an obsession, revealing his own passivity toward the said obsession. It can then be argued that by persecuting others, the subject is trying to fight against this passivity and transfer the persecution that he endures to the victim. To this can also be added the concept of responsibility, which Levinas equates with obsession as follows:

> Obsessed with its responsibilities and accused by everyone, the subject is a hostage. Responsibility in obsession is a responsibility of the ego for what the ego had not wished for, that is, for the other.[30]

This may lead to a clearer understanding of persecution as affecting both the victims and aggressors and the fact that both are hostages and are seeking means of escape.

Structure and methodology

For the seventeenth century texts, we have modernised the spelling where this had not already been done by the editors of the works that we have consulted. For the benefit of anybody who may wish to read this thesis but does not read French, we have included published English translations of the main quotations from the primary texts, which are to be found in the Appendix of this thesis and are numbered with square brackets in the main body of the thesis to facilitate ease of reference (these texts can be found online mainly at; http://www.poetryintranslation.com and http://ebooks.gutenberg.us). Explanations and

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"This inversion of consciousness is ... passivity beneath all passivity. It cannot be defined in terms of intentionality, where undergoing is always also an assuming, that is, an experience always anticipated and consented to, an origin." p. 241.

[30] ibid., p. 244.

paraphrases have been used to clarify the quotations used from secondary texts and these are our own translations.

Chapter One will present the ethical background to aggression and persecution during the classical period and situate Racine within the literary tradition of the same. We will also study the influence of seventeenth-century ideas about human nature with a view to understanding what informed the presentation of violence in his plays. We will then conclude the chapter with an analysis of the theme of passion and its links to aggression and persecution.

Chapter Two will analyse how aggression and persecution are worked out through the characters depicted in the plays. Considering that it covers the most ground and is central to our study, this chapter is the longest. We will look at aggression and persecution in the context of social breakdown and the role played by passion, making detailed textual analyses to support our investigation. Levinassian ideas on suffering and the ethical relationships will be used to shed more light on the characters' behaviour. We will also analyse the concepts of order and disorder, the destruction of the family unit, the themes of monsters and the role played by power in the promotion of violence. The techniques used to persecute others will also be studied in this chapter. The concepts of order, disorder and instability are important to the study of violence and persecution because order is said to depend upon justice, yet as will be seen in the plays, the father figure often legitimises injustice.

Chapter Three, which will be the final chapter of this study, will analyse the language of aggression, that is to say how language reveals the internal suffering and agitation of the characters and how the same is used to persecute others. The linguistic strategies adopted by the aggressors to dominate the victims will also be studied and due emphasis will be placed on concepts such as the *dit* and the *non-dit* and the effectiveness of communication between

the characters. This will be linked to the Levinassian concepts of on *le dit* and *le dire*.

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This introduction has outlined our reasons for studying the themes of aggression and persecution in Racinian drama, as well as presenting the Levinassian approach that will be used in the analysis.

CHAPTER 1

THE ETHICAL BACKGROUND TO AGGRESSION AND PERSECUTION IN 17TH CENTURY FRANCE

1.1. Racine and seventeenth-century classical aesthetics

The main objective of this section is to trace the developments in the moral ideals of the seventeenth century in order to present the reader with a clearer understanding of the ideals that influenced Racine. Racine wrote the following plays: *la Thébaïde* ou *les Frères ennemis* (1664), *Alexandre le grand* (1665), *Andromaque* (1667), *Les Plaideurs* (1688) (his only comedy), *Britannicus* (1669), *Bérénice* (1670), *Bajazet* (1672), *Mithridate* (1673), *Iphigénie* (1675), *Phèdre* (1677), and the two biblical plays, *Esther* (1689) and *Athalie* (1691). Racine was primarily a tragic dramatist, whose plays consist, in his own words, of: "une action simple, chargée de peu de matière".[1] Within the simple plot, Racine is able to illustrate the tormented soul, who vacillates between reason and passion, making full use of rhetorical devices to express this state: [1]

> Son originalité dépend peu de *l'inventio* car le fond des sujets antiques est souvent le même, mais de la *dispositio*: organisation des scènes de l'intrigue, de *l'elocutio*: choix et disposition des mots et de *l'actio* ou de la *pronuntiatio*: diction et jeu de l'acteur.[2]

These concepts will be discussed in detail in the chapter dealing with the language of contradiction in Racinian drama.

The passion of love lies at the heart of Racine's theatre. According to Jean Rohou: [2]

> La condition tragique est un état de malheur inévitable et insoluble parce qu'il ne résulte pas d'un événement extérieur, accidentel mais d'une antinomie constitutive de la condition de la personnalité humaine [...] Tout commence quand le sujet (par exemple, Néron ou Phèdre) rencontre un objet (Junie ou Hippolyte) dont l'idéal de pureté l'excite et le fascine tout en lui faisant prendre plus ou moins conscience de sa coupable déchéance. Il est alors saisi d'une passion qui est à la fois l'expression de sa concupiscence et de son besoin d'être reconnu par cette figure idéale, qui seule peut le sauver de lui-même. Mais cet être qui est par définition son antipode ne peut donc que le

[1] Racine, *Préface* to *Bérénice*
[2] J. Emelina, *Racine Infiniment* (Paris: Éd. Sedes, 1999), p. 89.

> rejeter - et d'autant plus qu'il usera du seul moyen dont il dispose: la menace de violence.[3]

It is this passion that persecutes the individual and leads him to persecute others because he is no longer in control of himself and therefore becomes a powerless pawn of his own desire. Racine's characters conduct themselves as *honnêtes gens* of the seventeenth century and yet in the *Préface* to *Andromaque,* Racine says that his contemporaries found that he gave his characters too much inborn ferocity.

Nicolas Boileau's *Art poétique* (1674) largely embodied the spirit of Classicism. In it he stated his poetic doctrine and analysed contemporary poetry. The *Art Poétique* owes much of its doctrine to Horace and, to a lesser degree, Aristotle. His starting point is the imitation of nature: "Jamais de la nature il ne faut s'écarter",[4] here, he advocates for truth to nature but with limitations; the poet must not imitate everything, but only that which conforms to the rule of reason and good sense: "Tout doit tendre au bon sens".[5] This concept meant that the lower attributes of human nature are excluded as being the opposite of reason, because they tend to be instinctive, in the same way that the accidental and ephemeral are considered as falsifying true nature. This leads to the following question: to what extent does Racine's presentation of the themes of passion, persecution and aggression conform to the rule of reason and good sense?

Although the *Préfaces* of Racine were often written in response to criticism, they reveal the extent to which Racine wished to portray himself as conforming to tradition: "Mes personnages sont si fameux dans l'antiquité que pour peu qu'on les connaisse, on verra fort bien que je les ai rendus tels que les anciens poètes nous les ont donnés", an observation intended as a defence against the alleged *invraisemblance* (lack of verissimilitude) of his

[3] J. Rohou, *Histoire de la Littérature française au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: PUR, 2000), p. 277.
[4] N. Boileau, *Art Poétique,* iii, p. 414.
[5] ibid., p. 45.

characters.[6] Critics might say they are *invraisemblable*, but he replies that, if they are found in reliable historical or ancient sources, and if they behave in this way, then we must accept that behaviour as *vraisemblable*.

He is not attempting to revolutionise the genre, but to bring in his own singularity and creativity into the imitative process and this *imitation créatrice* exploits to dramatic purpose the histories of ambition in *Britannicus* and *Bajazet,* for example. Racine's originality is found in the more intimate moral perspectives of his characters and their entourage: "Il ne s'agit point dans ma tragédie des affaires du dehors. Néron est ici dans son particulier et dans sa famille."[7] Racine's texts can also be considered as new and original in their own right, and modern critics see intertextuality as a means of feeding the imagination and the creativity of the writer, who would then use elements from his own period to make the subject matter contemporary.[8]

Racine manages to modify tradition by adapting it to classical aesthetics and incorporating his tragic vision. His use of the three unities can be interpreted as follows:

- Unity of place - a play should cover a single physical space and the stage should not represent more than one place. The enforcement of this unity is an illustration of the rationality that Racine's contemporaries found in regular dramaturgy. In Racine's drama, this is used to create a prison- like atmosphere, which suffocates the *inmates* and the only escape from this *prison* is death.
- Unity of time - the action in a play should take place over no more than twenty-four hours. In most of Racine's tragedies, there is simply no respite or possibility

[6] Racine, *Préface d'Andromaque* (Paris: Éd. Gallimard, coll. "La Pléïade", 1999), p. 197. In English, this can be rendered as: "my personages are so famous in antiquity that anyone who knows it at all will see quite clearly that I have rendered them as the old poets have shown them."

[7] Racine, *Préface de Britannicus.* "You see Nero here in private and with his family".

[8] In *La poétique de la tragédie classique,* Bénédicte Louvat considers intertextuality and re-writing as a means of illustrating the writer's ability to understand the original text and demonstrate their own creativity: "L'intertextualité qui désigne la manière dont un texte redistribue des énoncés antérieurs et la réécriture qui renvoie au processus de création qui passe par l'appropriation de ces textes pour produire un texte neuf..." B. Louvat, *La Poétique de la Tragédie classique* (Paris: Éd. Sedes, Coll. "Campus Lettres", 1997)

of reasoned reflection because time is always pressing, decisions have to be taken quickly, love must be reciprocated without wasting time etc.

- Unity of action - a play should have one main action that it follows, with no or few subplots. The Racinian hero's action is constantly threatened by the prospect of an impending death, both his own and someone else's.[9]

As we have just discussed, the simplicity of plot is intrinsic to the unity of action, and Racine keeps his plots to a minimum, in order to allow sufficient focus on the main action. For example, in the Préface to *Bérénice,* Racine informs us that: [3]

> Il y en a qui pensent que cette simplicité est une marque de peu d'invention. Ils ne songent pas qu'au contraire toute l'invention consiste à faire quelque chose de rien…
>
> and
>
> Ce n'est point une nécessité qu'il y ait du sang et des morts dans une tragédie ; il suffit que l'action en soit grande, que les acteurs en soient héroïques, que les passions y soient excitées, et que tout s'y ressente de cette tristesse majestueuse qui fait tout le plaisir de la tragédie.[10]

So as far as the art of writing tragedies was concerned, it was not necessary to have characters dying or an accumulation of events, but the most important element was that a tragedy should portray "une action simple".

Another important contemporary text was *La Pratique du Théâtre* by the Abbé d'Aubignac (1657) which was regarded as a key theoretical work on theatre during the classical period. In it, he outlined the degree to which the French classical school was allowed to modify and improve on the rules of tragedy. For Zuber and Cuénin: [4]

> La plupart des problèmes qui y sont débrouillés (l'invraisemblable vrai, la vraisemblance) autorisait à modifier l'histoire, la tragédie non-sanglante, la concentration dramatique, les jeux de scène inscrits dans le texte…[11]

[9] "To What Extent Does Shakespeare Challenge the Aristotelian Views on the Unities in Othello?" StudyMode.com. 12 2012. 12 2012 <http://www.studymode.com/essays/To-What-Extent-Does-Shakespeare-Challenge-1315936.html>.
[10] Racine, *Préface de Bérénice.*
[11] R. Zuber, M. Cuenin, *Littérature Française: Le Classicisme* (Paris: Arthaud, 1984), pp. 292-293.

Racine condenses his plots into tight sets of passionate and duty-bound conflicts between noble characters that have unfulfilled desires and hatreds that will be imposed upon others as forms of persecution. This leads us to the question of the hero assuming responsibility for their persecution.

We will now analyse how seventeenth-century ideas about human nature influenced Racine's conception of human socialisation and propensity to violence.

1.2. The influence of seventeenth-century ideas about human nature on Racine's drama

In this section, we propose to explore the influence of seventeenth-century French thought on Racine's conception of human relationships and socialisation. This will enable us to better understand what informed the presentation and depiction of aggression and persecution in his plays, because we believe that there is a link between the portrayal of violence in the plays and the ability of the audience to understand the background to that violence. We do not seek to present a detailed historical and sociological account of the seventeenth century, but an overview that allows us to understand the nature of Racinian characters.

According to D.C Potts and D.G Charlton, there is a superficial resemblance between Descartes' moral ideal and Pierre Corneille's heroes in so far as stoicism was concerned:

> Passion is a manifestation of personal energy and exigence of personal development and the pursuit of glory is motivated by irrational drives which, as contemporary moralists recognised, go beyond the norms of religion.[12]

The fall from grace suffered by the aristocracy after the activities of the Fronde led to the replacement of the ethic of *la gloire*[13] by that of *honnêteté*[14]. Both *honnêteté* and the ethic of *la gloire* were in turn criticised by Pascal (1623-62), who considered them as being self-

[12] ibid., p. 9.
[13] The myth of *la gloire* is linked to the recognition of the merits of the individual and the concept of *générosité*, developed by Descartes in his *Traité des Passions de l'Âme* (1649).
[14] Potts, op.cit, p. 9.

regarding and consisting of an orthodox separation of the domains of faith and reason.[15] These ethics were seen as being too aristocratic, optimistic and humanistic. Pascal, like the Jansenists, denounced the dominance of *amour-propre* because it indirectly implied the absence of *Amour de Dieu.*[16] Pascal and the Jansenists believed very firmly that human beings were ruled by or governed by *amour-propre*, because of their fallen, sinful nature. Pascal objected to *honnêteté* because it covered up *amour-propre* but did nothing to cure it. The same concept of *amour-propre* was also analysed in detail by La Rochefoucauld in his *Maximes* (1664) where, according to Potts; "he combined acute insight into the subconscious motivation with a positive belief in the moral values associated with the ethic of *honnêteté*".[17] The Fronde may be seen as a turning point in the direction of the focus of tragedies - most of them were now turned towards love and passion, which were presented as the driving force behind the actions of the character presented on stage. On the one hand, the defeat of the aristocracy led to the undermining of the concept of *gloire*, but the centrality of the heart, the passions and particularly a pessimistic view of these came about for other, related reasons. The King, having made the first moves in establishing an absolute monarchy, tolerated no political or religious opposition to his authority. Politics and religion could not therefore be discussed, and writers turned instead to matters of the heart.[18] The optimism and Stoicism of the first half of the century gave way to the pessimism and Jansenism of the second half.

The conflicts seen in the tragedies were no longer between *l'amour-passion* and other forces such as honour and duty, but were now internalised, stemming from the unreasonable demands of an individual (who is usually in a position of power) to be loved. For Zuber and Cuenin, the originality of *Andromaque* did not lie in the domination of love, but in: [6]

[15] ibid., p.11.
[16] ibid., p11.
[17] ibid., p.12.
[18] See La Bruyère, who said that for a Christian *moraliste* of his time: [5] "Un homme né chrétien et Français se trouve contraint dans la satire; les grands sujets [religion and politics] lui sont défendus: il les entame quelquefois, et se détourne ensuite sur de petites choses, qu'il relève par la beauté de son génie et de son style." La Bruyère, *Des Ouvrages de L'Esprit* (Montana: Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2010), p. 65.

> […] la passion au sens stricte du temps, c'est-à-dire un état de soumission et de souffrance, un appétit incoercible de l'autre (l'être aimé), comme si tout l'effort moral du néoplatonisme […] n'avait servi à rien.[19]

Just as the aristocracy was now in a state of suffering and submission to the absolute power of the monarchy, so Racine's depiction of passion reflected a parallel drama of domination and pain.

1.3. A theatre of cruelty[20]

Set down in a violent and incoherent world, the tragic heroes endeavour to deal with their situation in the best way they can, struggling to create some order out of chaos and to make some sense of the world. The heroes are forced to adapt to this reality, becoming unwilling actors in their own personal tragedy, constantly finding themselves in a state of crisis where individual autonomy is limited.[21] They then resort to extremes in order to extricate themselves from the grip of their passions. As Georges Forestier observes in his Introduction to *Andromaque,* the tragic hero can be excused for his/her actions because he or she has temporarily become monstrous, because of the inability to keep passion under any kind of control: [7]

> […] monstres par égarement temporaire, héros provisoirement déchus par leurs incapacités à la plus forte des passions, la passion amoureuse, mais héros tout de même. [22]

This "égarement temporaire" can be equated to the Levinassian defection from consciousness and the implications this has for autonomy and freedom.[23] This rehabilitation of the *monster*

[19] Zuber and Cuenin, op.cit., p. 294.
[20] Expression borrowed from Antonin Artaud in *Le théâtre et son double* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1998)
[21] This can also be related to the seventeenth-century historical context. If the characters could not successfully liberate themselves from royal control, their personal dramas could nevertheless show how much they longed to be released from the authority of another.
[22] G. Forestier, *Notice d'Andromaque*, *Œuvres complètes de Racine* (Paris: Ed. Gallimard, 1999), p. 1319.
[23] According to Levinas: "Obsession is a persecution, where the persecution does not make up the content of a consciousness gone mad; it designates the form in which the ego is affected, a form which is a defecting from consciousness." (*Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, tr. by A. Lingis (London: M. Nijhoff, 1981), p. 101.)

is in fact an attempt to deny him responsibility, responsibility for his passions, responsibility for his aggression and responsibility for his conception of human socialisation.

Racine's theatre of cruelty is often played out amongst three characters who desire each other, who are jealous of each other and who often persecute each other; for example, we find the following combinations of characters in the *cycle of persecution*: Néron-Junie-Britannicus, Atalide-Bajazet-Roxane, Phèdre-Hippolyte-Aricie, etc. These relationships are rendered even more complex by the ambiguous and unpredictable nature of the characters. According to Gisèle Mathieu Castelani: [8]

> La psychologie aux siècles classiques, le discours sur la psyché (âme, cœur, esprit), présente plusieurs caractéristiques. Ce discours est d'abord intimement lié à l'éthique, à la science morale, à la science des mœurs, dont il est l'auxiliaire et l'annexe, et le sujet qu'explore la psychologie, est un sujet éthique: la description des affections, des émotions, des passions, est alors normative.[24]

In this context, passion is seen to follow a specific set of rules which vacillate between psychology and morality. This is how Racine illustrates the fate of characters who possess essentially human characteristics which we see through mimesis. The characters are tormented by the ambiguity of their feelings, the weight of heredity and history, ungovernable passions and the omnipresence of violence. A further analysis of the theme of passion will allow us to better understand the causes of persecution and aggression in Racinian theatre.

1.4 Passion inextricably interwoven with persecution and aggression

The analyses that will follow are drawn from the plays included in our corpus. We will begin our analysis with a seventeenth-century definition of passion that was proposed by Antoine Furetière: [9]

> Passion, en morale, se dit des différentes agitations de l'âme selon les divers objets qui se présentent à ses sens. Les philosophes ne s'accordent pas sur le nombre de *passions*. Les passions de l'appétit concupiscible, sont la volupté et la douleur, la cupidité et la fuite, l'amour et la haine. Celles de l'appétit irascible sont la colère, l'audace, la crainte,

[24] G. Mathieu-Castellani, *La rhétorique des passions* (Paris: PUF, 2000), p. 32.

> l'espérance et le désespoir. C'est ainsi qu'on les divise communément. Les Stoïciens en faisaient quatre genres, et se prétendaient être exempts de toutes passions.[25]

In Racine, we find that a presentation of the emotional disorder of the tragic character and his/her personality (psycho-social profile) is modelled according to the intensity and orientation of his passions. In his plays, ambition is seen as a monstrous force and love assumes inhuman attributes as it demands all or sacrifices all. The major passions found in Racinian drama that are of interest to this study are ambition, hatred, love and jealousy.

Passion transcends the ephemeral, the ordinary and acquires an identity and personality of its own. The afflicted character loses his bearing, his individuality and his will is neutralised and his psyche is taken over. Racinian passion becomes primitive when it leads the character to violence (persecution and aggression) and irrational behaviour. La Rochefoucauld could have been thinking of the Racinian passionate character when he wrote: "Si l'on juge de l'amour par la plupart de ses effets, il ressemble plus à la haine qu'à l'amitié",[26] and we see characters like Roxane and Hermione moving from love, to jealousy and finally to hatred which brings death in its wake. For Furetière, passions can be aroused by *figures*, which are not just faces but also pictures and images, things we see. In the light of this observation, it makes very good sense that Néron should have been moved by Junie's image, this can be equated to Levinas's conception of desire:

> Desire and responsibility are awakened not by spontaneity or knowledge internal to the subject, but by the face of the other, which includes Infinity and an interiority that overflows all comprehension, and which summons me to a responsible ethical relationship.[27]

This responsible ethical relationship is lacking in the Racinian universe where, owing to the egocentric nature of the characters, virtue is often sacrificed in favour of self-interest.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas explains the role played by desire in shaping the human ethical relationship:

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[25] A. Furetière, *Le Dictionnaire universel d'Antoine Furetière*, (1690) (Paris: Éd. Aupelf, 1978), p. 2.
[26] La Rochefoucauld, *Œuvres Complètes Maximes*, no. 72 (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, 1950), p. 254.
[27] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* op.cit., pp. 182–3.

> Having recognised its needs as material needs, as capable of being satisfied, the *I* can henceforth turn to what it does not lack. It distinguishes the material from the spiritual, opens to Desire.[28]

Desire then becomes a movement outside oneself, an insatiable longing to escape one's singularity, to seek passionately a higher realm which can be considered as an erotic summons to break through the narrow bounds of one's personal physical existence. Levinas asserts that though they may lead to predatory acts and evil consequences, human passions, natural drives and instincts are not evil in themselves. The aggressor goes through a process of transformation which often ends in alienation from his object of desire when he, dominated by his passion, fights for the attention of the person that aroused it, namely his victim, aggression often becomes the end result.

The passion that overwhelms Racinian protagonists triggers a series of events which ultimately culminate in the tragic death of either the victim or the aggressor. Racine's plays concentrate on character rather than events and they focus on the internal and psychological display of passion. As Zuber says, it is through the portrayal of the consequences of violent passion that the hero is ultimately unmasked, leading to the discovery that the façade of greatness was hiding a miserable slave to passion, revealing the authentic human condition of being weak, unarmed and having a propensity for violence.[29] This, according to Zuber, can be considered as the tragedy of the fall from moral eminence: [10]

> L'axe de l'œuvre (de Racine) repose sur une passion qui cherche à s'assouvir, mais ne trouve en face d'elle qu'effroi et aversions: pourtant le bourreau se fait mendiant d'amour, alternativement torturant et torturé, cachant et découvrant son mal […].[30]

Racinian drama presents the passion of so-called love, which generally takes the form of an unhealthy obsession appearing as the beginning and the end of most of the action related to persecution and aggression. Passion becomes *une fureur,* which Zuber defines as "une idée

[28] op.cit., p. 117.
[29] Adapted from Zuber's thoughts as presented on page 291.
[30] Zuber et al. op.cit., pp. 291-292.

fixe accompagnée de violence"[31]; this *fureur* can be *une fureur de l'ambition*, as in *Bajazet* when Acomat takes advantage of the absence of Amurat to try and take over control, or in *Britannicus* where both Néron and Agrippine fight for power; alternatively, it can take the form of *une fureur de l'amour* as seen in the actions of Roxane towards Bajazet and Atalide. This *fureur* is much more apparent in *Phèdre,* where it defines the eponymous heroine's passion and is an indication of the extent to which she has fallen (from her moral grandeur) when she is persuaded by Œnone to speak of that which she would rather die than confess, her love for Hippolyte: [11]

Œnone:
Aimez-vous?
Phèdre:
De l'amour j'ai toutes les fureurs.
Œnone:
Pour qui?
Phèdre:
Tu vas ouïr le comble des horreurs.
J'aime… à ce nom fatal, je tremble, je frissonne.
J'aime...

Phèdre, I.iii.258-263.

and also when she confesses this love to Hippolyte himself, where she employs terminology such as *fureur*, *poison*, *fol amour*, *feu fatal* that relates to an unbridled passion that is seen to be persecuting her:[12]

Phèdre:
…Hé bien! Connais donc Phèdre et toute sa fureur.
J'aime. Ne pense pas qu'au moment que je t'aime,
Innocente à mes yeux, je m'approuve moi-même;
Ni que du fol amour qui trouble ma raison
Ma lâche complaisance ait nourri le poison.
Objet infortuné des vengeances célestes,…
Ont allumé le feu fatal à tout mon sang;
Ces dieux qui se sont fait une gloire cruelle
De séduire le cœur d'une faible mortelle.

Phèdre, II.v.671-82.

[31] ibid., p. 299.

Phèdre's passion persecutes her (in the sense that it makes her suffer, to the extent that she considers death as a welcome relief) because it is forbidden on two levels: incest and adultery; this passion is an obsession that she cannot bear and she contemplates death as a merciful release from this monster.[32] This passion can be tolerated neither on earth nor in heaven or in hell and therefore, as long as Thésée is alive, Phèdre's death becomes necessary[33] because it is the only way out of her moral dilemma and according to Zuber, *Phèdre* is essentially: [13]

> …une tragédie de la conscience et de l'honneur féminin. Tragédie de l'épouvante aussi, car le crime commis n'est rémissible ni dans ce monde ni dans l'autre: le soleil, qui symbolise la lumière et la décence terrestres, ne le tolère pas, surtout dans sa famille, et Minos, père de Phèdre, qui juge les morts, n'est pas disposé à faire grâce à une fille qui le déshonore.[34]

Phèdre's love is at the same time a human emotion and Venus's (Phèdre's persecutor) curse in the form of the incestuous passion that has been "killing her", presented as a burden (or a persecution) to the one who feels it: "Ce n'est plus une ardeur dans mes veines cachée: / C'est Vénus tout entière à sa proie attachée",[35] Phèdre becomes the *prey* of Venus; whereas Hippolyte's love for Aricie can be considered as a purely human emotion for which he assumes full responsibility. Racine uses Thésée's assumed death as a dramatic device that allows the full expression (or verbalisation) of both Phèdre's love for Hippolyte and the latter's love for Aricie. Phèdre appears suddenly to be widowed and therefore released from the persecution (i.e. suffering) imposed on her by the passion against which she is powerless; she is now free to substitute the son for the father

[32] The theme of the monster will be studied in greater detail in our second chapter.
[33] This can be considered as Racine's factoring in the rules of moral correctness as defined by the need to respect the *bienséances*; the audience would not have been shocked by her death because she "deserved to die" as a result of the transgressed boundaries of acceptable human passion.
[34] Zuber et al. op. cit., p. 302.
[35] *Phèdre*, I. iii.

Passion is a self-referential desire, inextricably intertwined with this so-called love; Phèdre's passions (jealousy, aggression and revenge) are seen when she learns that Hippolyte loves Aricie: [14]

> Phèdre:
> Hippolyte aime, et je n'en puis douter.
> Ce farouche ennemi qu'on ne pouvait dompter,
> […] Aricie a trouvé le chemin de son cœur.
>
> Œnone:
> Aricie?
>
> Phèdre:
> Ah! Douleur non encore éprouvée!
> À quel nouveau tourment je me suis réservée!
> Tout ce que j'ai souffert, mes craintes, mes transports,
> La fureur de mes feux, l'horreur de mes remords …
>
> Phèdre :
> … Non, je ne puis souffrir un bonheur qui m'outrage,
> Œnone. Prends pitié de ma jalouse rage,
> Il faut perdre Aricie. Il faut de mon époux
> Contre un sang odieux réveiller le courroux. […]
>
> *Phèdre*, IV.vi.1219-60.

The language of passion (*farouche*, *tourment*, fureur, *rage*, *courroux*) used by the characters is essentially intense and reveals the element of violence that is brought about as a result of an unfulfilled passion.

From being the prey of Venus, Phèdre changes into Aricie's aggressor, thus confirming that the two faces of passion are two sides of the same coin; immoderate passion in the form of obsessive love on the one hand leads to hate on the other. Phèdre only understands the depths which her crimes have led her to plummet when she imagines herself pleading for Aricie's death. In the above quotation, the association of "outrage" and "rage" shows us the heroine's determination to be the only object of Hippolyte's desire; despite the fact that her passion for him is not reciprocated, she still sees his love for Aricie as a betrayal which merits punishment.

Hatred as a passion has many faces in *Phèdre*. First we see it in the actions of Œnone; when she orchestrates the slander of Hippolyte, she prefers to lie rather than see Phèdre shamed and in the process, she also ignites Phèdre's jealousy. This passion of jealousy will then result in violence in the form of punishment by the father, Thésée. In the end, Phèdre assumes full responsibility for her actions, this responsibility can be understood in the Levinassian logic of accepting or acknowledging the accusation of occasioning what others do or suffer. Zuber concludes his analysis of Phèdre by saying: [15]

> Entraînée, égarée, Phèdre se ressaisit pour assumer, avec un calme héroïque (ce qui n'est pas le cas des autres 'furieux'), son crime et toutes ses conséquences, non seulement l'homicide, mais aussi la pire des déchéances à cette époque: la perte de l'honneur.[36]

The true hero is therefore able to regain his or her moral awareness after the defection imposed on consciousness by a persecuting obsession, whereas other protagonists, like Roxane, remain in a state of defection, not willing to accept the fact that they did wrong, and they die still blaming their victims for both their passions and the persecution to which they are subjected. This is a better solution to the tragic problem presented in *Phèdre* because if the hero does not accept responsibility for her actions, her lack of moral awareness cannot absolve her from guilt. She is the only one who has fully understood the effects of persecution and aggression on those who perpetrate them. Phèdre is not morally punished, because she has embraced her responsibility, she is physically punished by the fact that she dies but the audience is led to sympathise with her. It was this that Racine's Jansenist teachers found so scandalous. The important question of the acceptance of responsibility for one's actions will be discussed in chapter two, where we will develop, among other things, the idea of self-actualisation and the assumption of responsibility for actions carried out under the influence of an obsession.

[36] Zuber et al. op.cit. p. 304.

Bajazet presents us with a heightened level of aggression and persecution among the main characters and it also brings in a sadistic dimension to the relationship between power, passion and political intrigue. Roxane insists that Bajazet and Atalide must be held responsible for her own passions despite themselves and they are persecuted through her obsessive passion and this is her way of transferring her obsession and guilt to the Other, Jean-Claude Tournard asserts that: [16]

> L'amant racinien a besoin de voir la personne aimée en proie au trouble qu'il éprouve lui-même et de savourer ainsi son ascendant sur l'être auquel il se sent asservi.[37]

This summons is aimed at forcing the object of the passion to confirm that such a passion is reciprocal and that the suffering is mutual, as though persecution by the other were the basis of solidarity with the other.[38] In *Bajazet,* conflicts are solved by death and all the characters resort to lies in order to survive. These lies are, however, powerless in the face of the persecuting passion of Roxane; according to Zuber: [17]

> …la jalousie est clairvoyante, et la sultane extorquera la vérité. Son puissant ressentiment, né du mépris qu'elle éprouve pour ses victimes, la conduit droit à l'exécution préméditée.[39]

Passion, as will be seen in the coming chapters, acquires a new and dynamic dimension in Racinian tragedy, and can be considered as playing the role of a character in these tragedies, who, like a god, is omnipresent and omniscient, leading both the victims and aggressors to live under the watchful eye of its persecuting presence. All of Roxane's love is centred on Bajazet and when she realises that she has a rival, she sees Bajazet as her prey and she even savours the prospect of seeing Atalide looking at the corpse of her dead lover: [18]

> Ah! si pour son amant facile à s'attendrir,
> Il a peur de son trépas la fit presque mourir
> Quel surcroît de vengeance et de douceur nouvelle
> De le montrer bientôt pale et mort devant elle,
> De voir sur cet objet ses regards arrêtés
> Me payer les plaisirs que je leur ai prêtés!

[37] J-C. Tournard, *Introduction à la vie littéraire du XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Dunod, 1997), p.128.
[38] ibid., p. 81.
[39] ibid., p.301.

Bajazet, IV.v.1324-28.

This shows the sadistic pleasure and natural cruelty brought about as a result of passion; she is even prepared to fight to the death with any weapon: [19]

> Je saurai le surprendre avec son Atalide ;
> Et d'un même poignard les unissant tous deux,
> Les percer l'un et l'autre, et moi-même après eux.
> IV.iv.1246-48.

Roxane's fierce passion leads to hatred towards anyone who comes between her and the man she loves, Bajazet, and when he does not reciprocate her love, her passion turns to hatred whose culmination is seen in Act V, scene iv where she pronounces his death sentence in one word: "Sortez". We will now turn to an analysis of the effects of passion in *Andromaque*.

Andromaque presents three distinct and conflicting interests based on passion. Andromaque is loved by Pyrrhus, Pyrrhus by Hermione, and Hermione by Oreste. Andromaque can only save her son from being delivered to the vindictive Greeks by becoming the wife of her tyrant but a deep-seated reverence for the memory of Hector finds itself in conflict with the impulses of maternal affection, and finally, with a determination not to survive the marriage ceremony, she consents to the sacrifice required of her. Hermione is stung by jealousy when she learns of Pyrrhus's love for Andromaque and she plots his downfall from then on. The extent of her madness, her vacillations between love and hatred can be seen in the following lines: "Quel plaisir de venger moi-meme mon injure / De retirer mon bras teint du sang du parjure." (l. 1261-62) which is contrasted with what she says afterwards: "Ah! cours après Oreste et dis-lui, ma Cléone / Qu'il n'entreprenne rien sans revoir Hermione." (l. 1273-74).

The play presents us with the metamorphosis of the passions, love becomes associated with grief, then it turns into jealousy, vengeful anger and finally into hatred, which brings

about aggression. We will now present Hermione's tirade against Pyrrhus (Act IV Scene v) as an illustration of the extent to which passion destabilises the Racinian character and the consequences of such destabilisation. [20]

> Ton cœur, impatient de revoir ta Troyenne,
> Ne souffre qu'à regret qu'un autre t'entretienne.
> Tu lui parles du cœur, tu la cherches des yeux.
> Je ne te retiens plus, sauve-toi de ces lieux :
> Va lui jurer la foi que tu m'avais jurée,
> *Andromaque*, IV.v.1377-81.

Hermione's jealousy is doubled by the contempt she feels for this object who she considers as unworthy of a Greek king: a foreigner, an enemy prisoner and a simple slave, "ta Troyenne". In Hermione's tirade, Pyrrhus is first seen as cruel because he played with her feelings of love, then he is charged with perjury because he promised to marry her. Hermione loves him but she gets nothing in return; he is an "ingrat" because he does not see all the humiliations that she suffered for him. She is ashamed of her behaviour because it lacks nobility, but she can do nothing about it and her confusion is seen in: "Ingrat, je doute encore si je ne t'aime pas" (l.1368). All that she was made to suffer and accept for love is seen in the following: "aimé", "dédaigné", "mes bontés", "mon injure", "j'attendais", "j'ai cru", "je t'aimais inconstant" and "même en ce moment".

Finally the threat of violence is used to conclude this tirade, showing Hermione's exasperation in the face of rejection. The gods become her allies because she is convinced that she is justified in her anger: "Ces dieux, ces justes dieux n'auront pas oublié / Que les mêmes serments avec moi t'ont lié" (l.1383-84). This tirade shows the extent to which the princess is prepared to go in the name of love, fuelled by jealousy and hatred and the risk that Pyrrhus is prepared to take (he is prepared to forget his duty and face possible death) for the love of a slave. There is no sympathy for the Other in Racinian drama; the characters live in a world where there is neither pity nor tenderness because passion annihilates reason and will power,

for de Mourgues: "The passions of love and ambition are self-centred, and in Racine, the stylisation of passion implies total self-centredness".[40]

Passion therefore plays an important role in structuring and conditioning the characters' face-to-face interactions, their priorities, their freedom, their destiny and the suffering and the misery inflicted on the other person. It also plays an important role in defining the qualities of the Racinian character (what they are internally) and the following postulations by Levinas can be applied to these participants in drama, both victims and aggressors:

> …accused before we have done anything, obsessed before we have chosen at all and in a sense overcome, persecuted by the demand made of us before we have accepted it. And, in a sense, this is also what we always are – unjust, inadequately caring and attentive, out of control.[41]

Conclusion

This introductory chapter has allowed us to define the key concepts of our study; aggression and persecution and to propose a framework for the presentation of the same themes in Racinian drama. We have outlined the underlying motivations which lead to the creation of an environment of conflict which often translates into aggressive behaviour and the persecution of the "victims of passion" and the *victims* of these victims of passion.

Having set the scene for the creation of Racinian tragedy, in the next chapter, we shall proceed to a detailed analysis of the incidence of aggression and the factors that influence the relationships between victims and aggressors in his tragedy.

[40] O. de Mourgues, *Racine or the Triumph of Relevance* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1967), p. 51.
[41] op. cit., *The Cambridge Introduction to Emmanuel Levinas*, p. 82.

CHAPTER 2

AGGRESSION AND PERSECUTION AS WORKED OUT THROUGH THE CHARACTERS IN THE PLAYS

2.1. Factors influencing the relationships between victims and aggressors

The action of a play is dependent on the nature of the characters who are portrayed there, who act as vectors of discourse and emotions. They are the intermediaries between the audience and the writer and it is through them that the plot develops and their actions (or lack of) bring tension to the intrigue. The characters assume an identity of their own, they have a past, they have feelings and emotions and they belong to a particular social group. Through mimesis,[1] they are no longer anonymous fictional beings; they become an incarnation of our own humanity. According to Alain Niderst: [1]

> Racine tient à psychologiser la tragédie [...] Il nous peint des hommes aveugles et faibles. Faibles parfois jusqu'à la dissolution de leur personnalité. Toute l'œuvre de Racine proclame qu'il n'est pas de misère humaine à laquelle la littérature ne puisse donner noblesse et majesté.[2]

For Auerbach, in mimesis, the difference between the actor and the action (the performed) is an integral part of mimetic imitation because it attempts to eliminate difference, to integrate the other and even to transform oneself into the other, into the one who lives or who has lived. Racine successfully integrated the principles of mimesis and *vraisemblance* in his drama since he not only used them to enhance his plot structure, but also to develop the characters

[1] According to the OED, mimesis is: "figure of speech, whereby the words or actions of another are imitated" and "the deliberate imitation of the behaviour of one group of people by another as a factor in social change". In addition, mimicry is defined as "the action, practice, or art of mimicking or closely imitating ...the manner, gesture, speech, or mode of actions and persons, or the superficial characteristics of a thing". (*Oxford English Dictionary Online* "Mimesis" and "Mimicry"). The best-known modern scholar on the study of mimesis is Erich Auerbach and his *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* where mimesis is understood as an attempt to represent reality (representational mimesis), art is seen as representing reality or giving reality a new presentation.

[2] A. Niderst, *Essai sur la composition des tragédies de Racine* (Paris: Éd. St-P. Mont, 2001), p. 59.

themselves.[3] Ultimately, these two concepts achieve the same goal: to represent the universality of the characters' behaviour. That is why Néron in *Britannicus* incarnates cruelty while Hermione in *Andromaque* illustrates the various facets of jealousy. This is an illustration of Racine as a portrait artist, capable of painting the complexity of human beings and showing their struggle for autonomy in the face of passion. Racinian characters are tragic actors in spite of themselves, they are constantly threatened by others who seek to persecute them and see them perish. This persecution is what Levinas terms "useless suffering" where reason fails to deal with the human reality of suffering and the persecutor refuses to acknowledge the other person's suffering and despair.[4] These are individuals in crisis, who are robbed of their autonomy and resort to extremes in order to be able to extricate themselves from their passions and the situation that arises from the expression of such passions.

The previous chapter analysed passion and its link to aggression and persecution. Passion destabilises the individual and confers upon him the dual status of both martyr and torturer. This is because in tragedy, "le personnage n'est ni tout à fait coupable, ni tout à fait innocent", giving rise to the problem of ambivalence and responsibility while being held hostage by passion or by an individual acting under the influence of passion.[5] *Andromaque*, *Britannicus*, *Bajazet* and *Phèdre* are plays which centre upon an unnaturalness in human relationships. This unnaturalness is the result of the interaction of various determining factors, which include psychological elements, the power relationship, passion, and finally, the tensions which arise from ineffective communication. According to Phillips, the essence of speech is:

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[3] Aristotle advocates the imitation of nature by building on the actions and characters of men. At no time in his *Poetics* does he forbid the writer to draw upon the customs of his time but he gives prominence to vraisemblance in dramatic mimesis: "It is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen, what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity." Aristotle, *Poetics*. Ed. S. H. Butcher, London: MacMillan and Co., 1911, p.35.

[4] Levinas, "Useless Suffering" in *Entre Nous: Thinking–of-the-Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp.162-162.

[5] Racine, Préface *de Phèdre, Œuvres complètes,* ed. cit. p. 817.

> A transaction where the characters have to negotiate with each other [...]. The drama ensues from a situation where different sets of characters envisage different conclusions and, in general terms, tragedy arises from the conflict of those conclusions.[6]

This unnaturalness is brought about as a result of the strategies used by aggressors to abandon ethical relationships with others and lull them into a false consensus and an equally false sense of security as they orient themselves towards others in both reasonable and unreasonable ways. According to Schönherr-Mann:

> Pour Lévinas, uniquement dans la relation interpersonnelle, dans l'attention portée aux autres hommes. La rencontre provoque la pensée, elle établit la relation avec autrui et donne ainsi naissance à la société et à ses règles. L'éthique jaillit de la rencontre interpersonnelle. Pourtant, cette interaction entre les hommes ne se contente pas du simple respect de principes moraux. Il s'agit plutôt d'aider efficacement autrui, au travers de ses actions et de leurs conséquences. Il ne suffit pas par exemple de désapprouver la persécution.[7]

Interpersonal relations therefore call upon man to be responsible for the Other, to avoid conflict and prioritise an ethical relationship that does not involve conflict. The Racinian characters are unwilling to establish such ethical relationships; they are constantly planning to persecute others, as we see in the following example from *Bajazet*: "Je saurai bien toujours retrouver le moment / De punir, s'il le faut, la rivale et l'amant." (IV.iv.1243-44)

There are multiple levels of violence in the plays under study and this chapter aims to unravel the potential intent of the author, the hypothetical and philosophical reflections that influence the relationships between victims and aggressors, giving rise to the dominance of violence and persecution as major themes in Racine's corpus.

2.2. Order, disorder and their link to violence

Violence disrupts the necessary order and harmony of a society and this is in contrast with French classicism's belief in the need for order at all levels of society – from the family,

[6] H. Phillips, *Racine: Language and Theatre*, (Durham: University of Durham, 1994), p.5.
[7] Hans-Martin Schönherr-Mann, *Miteinander leben lernen [Apprendre à vivre ensemble]*, (Munich: UTB, 2008), p. 154. (also available online at: http://www.global-ethic-now.de/gen-fra/0a_was-ist-weltethos/0a-01-capitel-1/0a-0103-02-levinas.php)

through the nation to the world and to God. Order is inextricably entwined with reason, moderation and self-control, aggression and persecution therefore become transgressions of the laws of reason. Order is embodied in the patriarch or the law-giver, who is often the father, the priest, the king or God. Disorder arises when the patriarch behaves with tyrannical immoderation as a result of an excessive passion, as exemplified by Néron in *Britannicus* and Pyrrhus in *Andromaque* or when the patriarch is physically absent, as is the case with Thésée in *Phèdre* and Amurat in *Bajaze*t. The absence of the father figure or immoderate behaviour on the part of the patriarch throws the family structure and by extension, the kingdom, into disarray. Both Phèdre and Roxane have a brief window of opportunity to reveal their passion and these revelations can be seen as assertions of their defiance of the father, the husband and the law-giver. The articulation of that defiance is punished with violence (death). In *Phèdre*, the two confessions of love by Hippolyte for a woman that his father had condemned to chastity and by Phèdre for her stepson are made in the absence of Thésée, who represents law and order. We will now analyse the incidence of persecution and aggression as a result of disorder within the family unit.

2.2.1. Violence as a destruction of the family unit

Racine's drama refuses to present the individual as an entity who is detached from others. This is because the destinies of his characters are interlinked to the extent that the actions of one individual always have repercussions on the fate of others. Most importantly, the relationships of aggression and persecution are often established between characters that belong to the same caste or lineage, making the stage a privileged place where close family members destroy each other. This shows the futility of proximity, which does not distract them from acts of violence and it even accentuates and amplifies the consequences of aggression. According to Ingrid Heyndels, violence within the family unit is a typical Racinian leitmotiv: [2]

> Que l'on songe au problème de la fratrie (et de la lutte fratricide), à l'ombre portée par la loi sur la pulsion du désir, au vertige de l'infanticide, aux liaisons labyrinthiques de l'Œdipe, de la culpabilité de la dévoration maternelle - on aura reconnu au passage quelques motifs raciniens parmi beaucoup d'autres, tous participant à l'orchestration conflictuelle.[8]

Family ties are seen to be promoting conflict, aggression and persecution and this is in fact the Aristotelian precept of representing the destiny of an illustrious family and how that affects the fate of a nation.

Britannicus is persecuted by his stepbrother, Néron, with the help of Agrippine, who takes away the former's claim to the throne before smothering him into silence. Agrippine is an authoritarian mother and a calculating woman who married her own uncle in order to be able to facilitate her son's ascendance to the throne. In the process, cousins (Britannicus and Néron) become stepbrothers. Act 1, scene 1 of *Britannicus* is typical of what can be considered as an *art de commencer* which seeks to combine information, verisimilitude and action. The audience receives all the relevant information which allows it to imagine the beginning of conflict between the major characters (the clash between Néron, Britannicus and Agrippine): [3]

> Albine:
> Quoi? Vous à qui Néron doit le jour qu'il respire,
> Qui l'avez appelé de si loin à l'empire?
> Vous qui déshéritant le fils de Claudius,
> Avez nommé César l'heureux Domitius?
> Tout lui parle, madame, en faveur d'Agrippine:
> Il vous doit son amour.
>
> *Britannicus* I.i.15-20.

There are no fewer than eight question marks in the fifteen lines spoken by Albine in this scene. She is seen to be coming to Néron's defence, first through a summary of Agrippine and her son's past relationship, then a review of the early years of Néron's reign which, according to her, assures Rome of having a perfect emperor. Néron's poisoning of Britannicus at the end of the play is fratricide where a brother kills his own brother in order to consolidate his hold on power and his domination.

[8] I. Heyndels, *Le conflit racinien* (Bruxelles: Éd. Université de Bruxelles. 1985), p. 61-62.

Néron married Octavie, his cousin, a continuation of a long established tradition in his dynasty which is seen as being, among other things, defined by incest and adultery, proof that it is lacking in strong moral values. This disorder in the family brought about as a result of heredity is concretised by acts of violence (persecution and aggression). This is also the reason why Néron's fratricide is juxtaposed with Agrippine's parricide through the use of poison. Heredity, as has been illustrated by many critics, plays an important role in shaping the characters' disposition to violence. This can also be seen as the past exerting a persecuting influence on the present due to the fact that offspring do not chose their ancestors and their passions. This means that the offspring tend to have the same obsessions and violent inclinations as their ancestors. This leitmotiv is developed in all the plays under analysis (to a lesser extent in *Bajazet* which is set in Turkey, which, in the language of late seventeenth century France, is associated with a mixture of cruelty and sensuality). In *Britannicus,* Néron is seen to have "l'orgueil des Domitius" and "la fierté des Nérons" (I.i.36-38).

Phèdre belongs to a lineage in perpetual disorder, and is therefore a necessary victim of persecution; she is the incarnation of the cursed family member. The Atrides are targets of celestial vengeance, whose origin can be traced back to the sun (*le Soleil*) when he discovered the illegitimate love between Venus and Mars.[9] Phèdre will suffer the vengeance of the goddess, like all members of her lineage: [4]

> Ô haine de Vénus! Ô fatale colère
> Dans quels égarements l'amour jeta ma mère !
> *Phèdre,* I.iii.249-50.

> Puisque Vénus le veut, de ce sang déplorable
> Je péris la dernière, et la plus misérable.
> 257-58.

Throughout the play, Phèdre repeats this allusion to Venus and her wrath, showing us its omnipresence both on stage and in Phèdre's mind. In *Phèdre*, Racine makes full use of the

[9] From **Atreus** (Ἀτρεύς), a king of Mycenae, the son of Pelops and Hippodamia, and the father of Agamemnon and Menelaus

concept of *la fatalité.*[10] On one hand, it is a justification of Phèdre's passion and on the other it allows the writer to discuss the issue of responsibility. The combination of both these factors helps amplify the importance of heredity in the persecution-aggression cycle, according to Niderst: [5]

> Phèdre est à la fois sa passion criminelle, et sa lucidité, qui excite les remords et l'envie de mourir. Elle est la fille de Pasiphaé et la sœur d'Ariane - ce qui suppose des amours violents, une sorte de folie dans le désir. Mais elle est aussi la fille de Minos, le juge des Enfers, et la petite-fille du soleil, qui éclaire les forfaits des hommes. Son père et son aïeul, l'attirent vers la lumière -la conscience, le remords et donc le suicide.[11]

In *Phèdre*, the chaos of the family unit is even more noticeable. On the one hand, Phèdre is married to Thésée but loves her stepson Hippolyte. On the other, she is the daughter of Minos, a direct descendant of Jupiter. Thésée's dynasty is also connected to Jupiter, not only does Phèdre desire her husband's son (her son, culturally speaking), she also desires a member of her own lineage.

In *Bajazet*, the same pattern is observed. Roxane, the Sultan's favourite, loves Bajazet, her brother-in-law. The Sultan himself plans to have Bajazet killed in order to protect his power and eliminate any threats to that power. These illustrations show that Racine's plays can be considered as gladiators' arenas where members of the same family fight to the death, in deadly combat, ignoring all laws of nature and established order. In this universe, aggression and persecution are the end result of a vicious cycle which has the following pattern: Obsession → Jealousy → Revenge → Death.

This vicious cycle is used by Racine to structure and encourage the tensions and conflicts that are seen in all the plays under analysis and passion is seen as a catalyst in this vicious cycle where the character afflicted by passion resorts to violence and deception. This can be illustrated by Phèdre's reaction when she learns that Aricie is her rival in love: [6]

> Non, je ne peux souffrir un bonheur qui m'outrage.

[10] The word *la fatalité* commonly translates as doom, fate or destiny, that which has been spoken or the word of God.

[11] A. Niderst, *Les tragédies de Racine: diversité et unité* (Paris: Éd. A-G Nizet, 1995), p. 131.

> Œnone prends pitié de ma jalouse rage.
> Il faut perdre Aricie ; il faut de mon époux
> Contre un sang odieux réveiller le courroux.
>
> *Phèdre,* IV.vi.1257-60.

The combination of "outrage" and "rage" shows us the character's determination not to be in the background of Hippolyte's heart. Moreover, even if the love is not reciprocal, it is seen as a betrayal at the time of refusal, and precipitates revenge. That is the reason why hatred has many faces and the slander of Hippolyte is orchestrated by Œnone who prefers to lie rather than see Phèdre shamed: "Honteuse du dessein d'un amant furieux / Et du feu criminel qu'il a pris dans ses yeux [...]" (IV.i.1015-16). Jealousy will then result in the father wrongly accusing and subsequently punishing the son, whose status gradually evolves, in the eyes of Phèdre from an object of desire to: "un monstre, un traître puis un criminel" (l.1044-76). Death is omnipresent and, as it hovers above the characters, it is the logical consequence of destructive passion and everyone pays the ultimate price of their alienation. The same sequence of events is seen in *Andromaque* where the characters are constantly faced with the frustrations of the Other and conflict arises from the incompatibility of these frustrations. Picard summarises this chain of frustrations as follows: [7]

> Oreste aime Hermione qui ne l'aime pas, Hermione aime Pyrrhus qui ne l'aime pas, Pyrrhus aime Andromaque qui ne l'aime pas; Andromaque aime Hector qui est mort. Ainsi chaque actant est lié par le pouvoir dont chacun dispose de faire le malheur de l'autre.[12]

Passion and the subsequent persecution that results from frustrated desires and immoderate behaviour destroy family values and the family unit itself, leading to incest, infanticide and fratricide. The affected character abandons all values and respect for others, substituting behaviour dictated to him by the passions for moderation and good judgment. Reason is seen to be defeated by the heart and conscience makes way for unrelenting evil. Aggression and persecution are brought about as a result of a refusal by the character to respect basic human

[12] R. Picard, *Préface d'Andromaque*, *Œuvres complètes*, p. 235. (also available online at : http://rene.pommier.free.fr/BarthesO2.html)

and social values, which are seen as impediments to the fulfilment of their passions. This is how the tragic hero's destiny is forged, through a total refusal to respect the most fundamental of human rights, the right to life.

2.3. Monsters of Racinian tragedy

This section seeks to study the concept of the monster and its links to aggression and persecution in Racinian drama. Phillip Cole claims in *The Myth of Evil*, that the concept of evil divides normal people from inhuman, demonic and monstrous wrongdoers, who can be considered as different from ordinary people.[13] We propose a reading of monsters in Racinian drama as both a sign of *inhuman otherness* and as an inextricable part of the aggression-persecution cycle.[14] Racinian monsters can be understood in both moral and literal senses. According to Williams, the term *monstrueux* as applied in the seventeenth century usually referred to hidden intentions and unspoken desires (or *unspeakable* desires as we will see in Racinian drama), which can be interpreted as excessive passions. We consider these excessive passions as the meanings assigned to the creature by the writer, a creature that modifies the behaviour and character of the individual into another, whose main concern becomes the fulfilment of the passion. The monster becomes an agent of alienation, alienating the character from what can be considered their *normal self*. This becomes a manifestation of the corruption of the human moral form and being, which becomes a persecution in itself and leads to aggressive behaviour towards others. This monster is essentially fluid in nature because, in spite of its otherness, it cannot be separated entirely from the nature of the character himself. According to Shildrick:

> The monstrous is not thereby the absolute other, but rather a mirror of humanity: on an individual level, the external manifestation of the sinner within.[15]

[13] P. Cole, *The Myth of Evil* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2006).
[14] An expression borrowed from W. Williams, *Monsters and their Meaning in Early Modern Culture* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), p. 4.
[15] S. Margrit, *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (London: SAGE Publications, 2002), p. 17.

The monstrous represents the moral failings of the individual and a certain loss of humanity, as was seen in the section dealing with disorder in the family unit and its implications on the fabric of the community itself. This condition is necessary for persecution and aggression to occur in Racinian drama. As an example, Racine himself informs us of his decision to present Néron in Britannicus as a *monstre naissant*: [8]

> Je l'ai toujours regardé comme un monstre. Mais c'est ici un monstre naissant. Il n'a pas encore mis le feu à Rome.[16]

and

> Il n'a pas encore tué sa mère, sa femme, ses gouverneurs ; mais il a en lui les semences de tous ces crimes. Il commence à vouloir secouer le joug. […]. En un mot, c'est ici un monstre naissant, mais qui n'ose encore se déclarer, et qui cherche des couleurs à ses méchantes actions.[17]

Racine's *Phèdre* acknowledges its heroine's incestuous passion for her stepson Hippolyte as monstrous long before the appearance in the plot of the sea monster which kills him offstage at the end of the play. She is far worse than this real monster who finishes him off, after she had already accomplished the act through her actions: [9]

> Digne fils du héros qui t'a donné le jour,
> Délivre l'univers d'un monstre qui t'irrite.
> La veuve de Thésée ose aimer Hippolyte!
> Crois-moi, ce monstre affreux ne doit point t'échapper.
> Voilà mon cœur. C'est là que ta main doit frapper
> *Phèdre.* II.v.700-04.

Incestuous passion and hidden intentions haunt the character (for us, this haunting is the equivalent of a persecution). This persecution, we will argue, helps to order and disorder the discourse and the actions of characters, such as Phèdre, who prefer to die (or kill the monster), than to confess: "Je meurs, pour ne point faire un aveu si funeste" (I.iii.226) and in the following conversation between Hermione and Oreste: [10]

> Hermione:

[16] *Britannicus, Première Préface.*
[17] *Britannicus, Seconde Préface.*

Adieu. Tu peux partir. Je demeure en Épire:
Je renonce à la Grèce, à Sparte, à son empire,
À toute ma famille ; et c'est assez pour moi,
Traître, qu'elle ait produit un monstre comme toi.
Andromaque, V.iii.1561-64.

Oreste:
Elle l'aime ! Et je suis un monstre furieux!
Je la vois pour jamais s'éloigner de mes yeux !
Et l'ingrate, en fuyant, me laisse pour salaire,
Tous les noms odieux que j'ai pris pour lui plaire !
Andromaque, V.iv.1579-82.

These extracts show us the extremes to which the characters resort under the influence of the persecuting presence of a passion. To justify their violence towards the victims, they have to dehumanise them first and the repetition of the term monster is evidence of this dehumanisation.[18] It is only after the victim has become a monster that he or she can be slain.

When encountering *Phèdre* for the first time, the spectator is struck by the large number of times the word monster appears. It is found throughout the text. (lines. 78 / 99 / 520 / 649 / 701 / 703 / 884 / 948 / 963 / 970 / 1045 / 1318 / 1444 /). The term actually refers to more than the ordinary understanding of the term. Racine refers to both moral and physical monsters and both are related to each other. Moral monstrosity gives rise to physical monsters, Pasiphae gave birth to the monster Minotaur and as a direct result of Phèdre's actions; the sea monster responsible for the death of Hippolyte is called forth by Thésée's appeal.

Phèdre is about two versions of a "love that dares not speak its name"[19];

I. Hippolyte's love for a woman whose family has risen up against Thésée and who has been condemned to perpetual chastity by the latter.
II. Phèdre's monstrous love for Hippolyte. Thésée's reputation as a slayer of men and monsters and a philanderer is repeated throughout the play: [11]

[18] Dehumanisation is the act of making somebody less human by depriving them of their individuality, the creative and interesting aspects of their personality, or by refusing to recognise that they are equal to us as human beings, with the tendency being to equate them to lower animals (or monsters in our case).
[19] A quotation from the poem *Two Loves*, by Lord Alfred Douglas, referring to homosexuality, which was regarded in his time as a perversion as much as Phèdre's incestuous love for Hippolyte.

Thésée:
J'ai vu Pirithoüs, triste objet de mes larmes,
Livré par ce barbare à des monstres cruels […]

J'ai su tromper les yeux de qui j'étais gardé.
D'un perfide ennemi j'ai purgé la nature;
A ses monstres lui-même a servi de pâture;
Phèdre, III.v.961-62, 968-70.

Aricie:
Prenez garde, seigneur : vos invincibles mains
Ont de monstres sans nombre affranchi les humains;
Mais tout n'est pas détruit, et vous en laissez vivre
Un…Votre fils, seigneur, me défend de poursuivre.
V.iii.1443-46.

Aricie is trying to tell Thésée that all the monsters are not yet killed; there is still one more that deserves to be slain, his own monstrous son, Hippolyte. The enjambment of "Un" shows the strain that is put on the alexandrine verse form by the suspense generated by the naming of the monster. Here, Aricie makes full use of reticence and the silence after "Un" says more than the strongest and most emphatic words. Uncontrolled passion of various kinds is a monster that constantly threatens disorder in the play. The question that Racine asks is essentially an eternal question still being asked today: What is the nature of these monsters or what is the nature of the evil that permeates the play? Phèdre's confession of her love for Hippolyte is monstrous as is Thésée's treatment of women. It is also heroic, as is Thésée's slaying of monsters, but the outcome of this confession can only be death. Phèdre then demands that Hippolyte rids the world, like his father, of one more monster, with reference to herself: [12]

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.v.700-02.

She specifically demands that he kill her with a sword which was a gift from Thésée. This demand is articulated in the language of sexual desire:

Crois-moi, ce monstre affreux ne doit point t'échapper.
Voilà mon cœur. C'est là que ta main doit frapper.
II.v.703-4.

Phèdre's plea for death is a literary and figurative embodiment of what Thésée is known for: the slaying of the monster and the slaying of the woman as a sexual object. Here, she is trying, through the promotion of aggression, to confer upon Hippolyte his father's status of the slayer of monsters. All this happens as a result of Phèdre's ungovernable passion and the persecution that she feels as a result of that passion. When Thésée reappears, he restores the patriarchy and the direct consequence of his return is the transformation, in Phèdre's eyes, of Hippolyte into a monster who must be slain before it destroys her: "Je le vois comme un monstre effroyable à mes yeux" (III.iii.884). Here, she transfers the monstrosity from herself to Hippolyte, from the one who suffers (and is persecuted by) the lust to the one who has inspired it. This is a psychologically accurate representation of guilt and Œnone then argues for a pre-emptive accusation: [13]

> Vous le craignez. Osez l'accuser la première
> Du crime dont il peut vous charger aujourd'hui.
> III.iii.886-87.

and

> Quelque loi qu'il vous dicte, il faut vous y soumettre,
> Madame; et pour sauver notre honneur combattu,
> Il faut immoler tout, et même la vertu.
> III.iii.906-08.

Levinas shows in *Otherwise than Being* that the concept of substitution is the key to his understanding of the ethical relation between the self and the Other. Not only must Hippolyte respond to Phèdre, he must substitute himself for her and take on both her suffering and her responsibility, even to the extent that she causes him to suffer and be persecuted. Œnone herself becomes a monster in the eyes of Phèdre: "Je ne t'écoute plus. Va-t'en, monstre exécrable: / Va, laisse-moi le soin de mon sort déplorable" (IV.vi.1317-18). Thésée then rushes to judgment against his son and we understand in this immediate burst of passion Racine's views on emotion; passion is brutal, it is instinctive and destructive, it is that which causes fathers to kill their sons. The slayer of monsters now sees his son as one: [14]

Perfide, oses-tu bien te montrer devant moi?
Monstre, qu'a trop longtemps épargné le tonnerre,
Reste impur des brigands dont j'ai purgé la terre.
IV.ii.1044-46.

In the final scenes of the play we see Hippolyte acting in imitation of his father, the slayer of monsters, destroying the monster sent by Neptune before it destroys him: [15]

Hippolyte lui seul, digne fils d'un héros,
Arrête ses coursiers, saisit ses javelots,
Pousse au monstre, etc....
V.vi.1527-29.

and order is finally restored in the family when all the monsters have been slain.

In *Britannicus*, the scale tips heavily on the side of the monsters of the play, Agrippine and Néron. Agrippine, governs her son and through him the universe, but is beginning to see her influence decline, while Néron begins to free himself from her shadow and that of his advisers. The end of the play itself seems to be suspended; we can consider Burrhus' exclamation on realising the true nature of his former pupil as a cry of helplessness which is also concludes the play: "Plût aux dieux que ce fût le dernier de ses crimes!" (V.viii.1769).

In his tragedy, Racine presents the evolution and metamorphosis of Néron: as the play begins, he is not yet the monster that history tells us about, but is already tired of his mother's influence and his pretences to the Roman people: [16]

Soumis à tous leurs vœux, à mes désirs contraires.
Suis-je leur empereur seulement pour leur plaire ?
IV. iii.1335-36.

C'est à vous à choisir, vous êtes encore maître.
Vertueux jusqu'ici, vous pouvez toujours l'être.
l.1339-40.

Racine himself explains his decision to present Néron in the infancy of his monstrosity: "il n'a pas encore mis le feu à Rome. Il n'a pas tué sa mère, sa femme, ses gouverneurs", but "Néron était déjà vicieux [et] dissimulait ses vices".[20] His evolution is marked by acts of aggression and the first step was the kidnapping of Junie by a method that reveals the modus

[20] *Britannicus*, *Préface.*

operandi of this "monster": he fools his mother and his tutor with deceptions, as he does before poisoning his half-brother Britannicus: "J'embrasse mon rival, mais c'est pour l'étouffer" (IV.ii.1314). The evil monster is being born before our eyes. The tragedy is based on terror and pity: the terror we feel faced with the evil Néron and pity for his victims. Néron can be considered a monster because, firstly, he was born with seeds of monstrosity found in his genetic inheritance and secondly, he does not conform to the dictates of human morality.

This monster informs us about what human beings are capable of (violence) and incapable of (distinguishing and choosing good from bad) and this is seen as being due to the following reasons, heredity, passion, education and predestination. One of the central themes of *Britannicus* is Néron's crime. Desirous of becoming and being acknowledged as an adult, he tries to overcome his moral and material addiction to the adults who have hitherto ruled his life. He wants to make his own decisions; yet making decisions implies making a choice between the heart and reason, between order and tradition, between continuity and the present. He embodies the emerging monster that will destroy all those who are seen as impediments to the fulfilment of his passions (love and ambition).

This section has allowed us to analyse the various manifestations of violence in Racine's drama and the factors that promote and condition it. We will now focus our attention on the study of power as a vehicle that facilitates aggression in Racinian drama.

2.4. Power and its links to persecution and aggression

For the purposes of this study, our definition of the classical Racinian victim centres on the power balance, the victims being those who are under the physical control of both others and an intense passion, but who are also capable of inflicting pain and suffering on their aggressors. Power is used as a tool of aggression by the aggressors who are aware of the ultimate power they possess, the power of life and death that they have over their captives.

Racine classifies his characters according to their title and function; this is a means of defining their status and their responsibilities. The Sovereign is the figurehead of this pyramid. He has absolute power which, as in the case of an absolute monarchy, is not shared. In *Phèdre*, when Thésée banishes his son from Trézène, he is exercising this power, which can be considered as reflective of divine justice. Similarly, when Néron sacrifices Britannicus, he is exercising his right to impose life and death with impunity. These actions demonstrate the abuse of power; tyrants do not hesitate to "punish" members of their own family for perceived infractions of loyalty or out of jealousy, for example. In our corpus, the Sovereign is closer to the despot, fickle and frivolous, than the virtuous and just monarch, as represented in the dramas of Corneille. The passion of Pyrrhus is built on ultimatums; his love for Andromaque cannot really express itself without resorting to verbal threats: [17]

> Je puis perdre son fils, peut-être je le dois.
> Étrangère... Que dis-je? Esclave dans l'Épire,
> Je lui donne son fils, mon âme, mon Empire,
> Et je ne puis gagner dans son perfide cœur
> D'autre rang que celui de son persécuteur ?
> Non, non je l'ai juré, ma vengeance est certaine.
>
> *Andromaque*, II.v.692-696.

This is an illustration of the dominant/dominated dynamics since Pyrrhus reduces (or dehumanises) Andromaque to the status of a "foreigner" and "slave". Passion and fury then become closely connected to the exercise of power, and according to Gilles Revaz: "le discours du Roi est un discours rationnel où domine la raison politique, un discours public qui refoule les intérêts privés".[21] That is why the King never easily surrenders to the Other and he is too attached to the cult of appearances to show any real affection. This is in essence a representation of tyranny which Pascal defines as follows in his *Pensée* n° 91: [18]

> La tyrannie est de vouloir avoir par une voie ce qu'on ne peut avoir que par une autre. On rend différents devoirs aux différents mérites, devoir d'amour à l'agrément, devoir de crainte à la force, devoir de créance à la science. On doit rendre ces devoirs-là, on est injuste de les refuser, et injuste d'en demander d'autres. Ainsi ces discours sont faux, et tyranniques: je suis beau, donc on doit me craindre, je suis fort, donc on doit m'aimer, je

[21] G. Revaz, *La représentation de la monarchie absolue dans le théâtre racinien* (Paris: Éd Kimé, 1998), p.191.

> suis... Et c'est de même être faux et tyrannique de dire: il n'est pas fort, donc je ne l'estimerai pas, il n'est pas habile, donc je ne le craindrai pas.[22]

Racinian heroes are often victims of pressure from a tyrant who demands to be loved or seeks to marry by force, not through the exercise of properly wielded authority. Therefore, tyrants like Néron and Amurat have power but they abuse it for their personal ends, having at their disposal only the means to use violence and it is through these means that we perceive tyrants as having power. For Néron, the basis for pursuing aggression against Britannicus and Agrippine is to achieve the goal of having absolute power; this means that he is obliged to get rid of Britannicus so that he is assured that there will be no threat to his position as Emperor. He rids himself of Agrippine because he does not want to continue being beholden to her, despite the fact that she is his mother and therefore owed his love and loyalty, which he has come to see as an intolerable burden. The resistance the victims show in opposing such attempts is a measure of the depth of their love and a manifestation of the inner freedom extolled by love and they are prepared to sacrifice themselves to preserve it and see their values triumph and ultimately prove the illegitimacy of the tyrant's power. Consequently, we see that in Racine's drama, power is tyrannical and it is used by those who possess it to gain control of the Other's thoughts and feelings. In Levinassian vocabulary, Néron's actions constitute s*elf-initiated freedom*, where we find our own freedom by thinking, acting, and consequently enjoying the results of our thoughts and actions. This is what he terms "concreteness of egoism"[23] which implies that:

> Other persons are encountered, but only as objects, subject to my power and freedom. The other is something to be dominated, possessed or discarded; to be incorporated, surmounted, and enveloped by my world […] or to be wiped out. Here freedom is arbitrary and unjustified, and beneath it lurks a self that is murderous and violent.[24]

[22] B. Pascal, *Pensées, opuscules et lettres* (Paris: Éditions Classiques Garnier, coll. Bibliothèque du XVIIe siècle, 2010)

[23] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, op. cit, p.38.
[24] ibid., p. 84

However, according to M.A. Müller: "this kind of freedom is capricious and tends to violate the freedom of others and sabotage the ethical relationship between the self and the Other."[25]

In *Bajazet*, power leads to the establishment of a master and slave relationship between Bajazet and Roxane. Roxane is a slave herself but has been given the power of life and death over Bajazet, which is an exercise of ultimate power. She sees love as an extension of the master-slave relationship: [19]

> Songez-vous que sans moi tout vous devient contraire?
> Que c'est à moi surtout qu'il importe de plaire?
> Songez-vous que je tiens les portes du palais,
> Que je puis vous l'ouvrir ou fermer pour jamais,
> Que j'ai sur votre vie un empire suprême,
> Que vous ne respirez qu'autant que je vous aime?
>
> II.i.505-09.

This is both a declaration and an ultimatum, like all of Racine's tragedies, the political and the sentimental go hand in hand. If Bajazet reciprocates Roxane's love, it will be regarded as a declaration of war on his brother Amurat. Bajazet chooses not to acquiesce to either demand and this double refusal marks an important turning point in the aggression/persecution cycle of the play. Bajazet does not have much choice faced with Roxane who considers his heart as her due: their relationship is based on an element of conflict where if one of the couple cannot love with passion, the other must hate with fury (as found in *Andromaque*).

In the play, we find the theme of the "vainqueur vaincu" (prisoner-of-love) which was commonplace in seventeenth-century French literature.[26] Bajazet is Roxane's captive and is physically in her power, but she has fallen in love with him, becoming the victim of an uncontrollable passion in the process. According to Lapp, the effect of this is to place emphasis on the paradox of power and enslavement. He observes that the words *esclave*, *esclavage*, *puissance* and *pouvoir* occur frequently in the play: "[…] je tiens sous ma

[25] M.A. Müller, *Levinas, Ubuntu and the Power of Weakness: Some basic philosophical similarities and psychological implications*. Published online at: http://www.huronsolutions.com/arnoldmuller/Levinas%20&%20Ubuntu%202.doc

[26] According to Parish: "The political power of the ruler which allows the imprisonment to take place, is countered by a sexual potency that in turn imprisons the imprisoner", (R. Parish, "Racine: the Limits of Tragedy", *Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature*, (1993) pp. 108-26.

puissance, / Cette foule de chefs, d'esclaves, de muets, / Peuple que dans ses murs renferme ce palais" (l.434-36)[27]. Roxane is aware of the superior power of love and the futility of her hopes, but because she is a prisoner-of-love, she cannot break free. She is equally aware of the impossibility of her position and of the fact that despite her power and the criminal nature of her love, she must continue to love Bajazet who encourages her passion until he cannot bring himself to continue feigning affection for her, thereby putting his life in jeopardy. This is a transposition of the person without power to the position of being able to influence those with power until he reaches the realisation that he cannot continue living like that.

Spencer shows that power brings misery to both those who possess it and those who are its victims, for her: "il n'y a pas, chez Racine, de pouvoir heureux".[28] So it is this *pouvoir malheureux* that is used to persecute the victims. If Bajazet refuses, he will loose his life. Roxane later threatens to have Atalide killed to test Bajazet's loyalty: "Viens m'engager ta foi: le temps fera le reste. / Ta grâce est à ce prix, si tu veux l'obtenir." (1546-47). De Mourgues then concludes that:

> Shut within the complex and yet narrow circle of his passion, the Racinian character is completely blind to all the rest. This is why even the characters who appear most harmless can inflict the most refined tortures on others.[29]

We will now turn to an analysis of the dynamics of the power relationships in *Andromaque*. As we have already established, the passion of love takes precedence over all obligations either to the nation or to personal honour, and the aggressors become prisoners-of-love. Since love is an absolute value, and since the character is unwilling to compromise, anything that stands in the way of the realisation of passion has to be destroyed through the abuse of power. The specific passion gripping a character becomes his raison d'être, so his

[27] J. C., Lapp, *Aspects of Racinian Tragedy*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1955), p. 23.
[28] C. Spencer, *La Tragédie du Prince. Etude sur le personnage médiateur dans le théâtre tragique de Racine* (Paris: Biblio 17, 1987), p. 587.
[29] O. De. Mourgues, op.cit. p. 54.

relentless quest for its fulfilment is a search for a fulfilment of the self. It is for this reason that Pyrrhus tries to blackmail Andromaque: [20]

> Je meurs si je vous perds, mais je meurs si j'attends.
> Songez-y: je vous laisse; et je viendrai vous prendre
> Pour vous mener au temple, où ce fils doit m'attendre ;
> Et là vous me verrez, soumis ou furieux,
> Vous couronner, madame, ou le perdre à vos yeux.
> III.vii.972-76.

Although Pyhrrus is in love, he can no longer afford to wait; this is evident in the semantic field of suffering: *soupir*, *périr*, *mon cœur désespéré* and *ne peut plus de son sort souffrir d'incertitude*. This love that works only in one direction and Pyrrhus' threats are evident in the use of vocabulary associated with war and violence: *armes*, *haine*, *sévère*, *ennemi*, *trahir*, *affront*, *périr*, *souffrir*, *menacer* and *furieux*. This idea of blackmail is also taken up in *Bajazet* as: "J'arme votre valeur contre vos ennemis; / J'écarte de vos jours un péril manifeste; / Votre vertu, seigneur, achèvera le reste" (II.i.428-30). Then later on we find: "Mais avez-vous prévu, si vous ne m'épousez, / Les périls plus certains où vous vous exposez?" (II.i.503-04).

In *Andromaque*, Pyrrhus's love for his captive Andromaque metaphorically inflicts the very tortures he has inflicted upon her compatriots, as he suffers through love: [21]

> Je souffre tous les maux que j'ai faits devant Troie
> Vaincu, chargé de fers, des regrets consumé
> Brûlé de plus de feux que je n'en allumai.
> *Andromaque,* I.iv.318-20.

He is all too aware of his condition and the retribution he suffers through love. This constitutes the reversal of the power balance in *Andromaque.* This is another illustration of the *vainqueur vaincu* theme that we demonstrated in our analysis of *Bajazet*. Andromaque conquers her conqueror, enchains her captor and makes a prisoner out of Hermione, Pyrrhus' bride. Pyrrhus passionately loves Andromaque, but this love is made impossible by the presence of Hermione whom the former has to betray. When Pyrrhus tells Andromaque of his

passion for her and lets her know that the only way that she can save her son's life is to return his affection, this is a travesty of love: [22]

> Pyrrhus:
> Madame, dites-moi seulement que j'espère,
> Je vous rends votre fils, et je lui sers de père ;
> Je l'instruirai moi-même à venger les Troyens ;
> J'irai punir les Grecs de vos maux et des miens.
> I.iv.325-28.

In this conversation, Pyrrhus tries to convince Andromaque to do as he wishes, but she is reluctant and he then proceeds to tell her that if she remains faithful to her past, the child will die (a demonstration of his authoritarian power). He is violent and impulsive and his love-passion is so strong that it can go from one extreme to another: "Songez-y bien: il faut désormais que mon cœur, / S'il n'aime avec transport haïsse avec fureur." (I.iv.367-68). As we have shown before, the threat of violence is never far from the lips of the aggressor, who constantly reminds his victim of the extent of his power and the consequences of refusing to acquiesce to his demands.

Having analysed how power is abused by those who possess it to commit acts of violence against others, we will now turn to an examination of the intricate dynamics of Racine's power relationships; we have chosen *Britannicus* as the basis for our analysis because it best illustrates the struggle for power, which opposes a son to his mother.

2.5. The mechanics of the power balance

Roland Barthes, in *Sur Racine*, subdivides the Racinian world into: i) the strong; ii) the weak; iii) the tyrants; iv) the victims; v) the aggressors. This classification, as far as Barthes is concerned, is essentially based on the power balance. Barthes explains that the typical Racinian conflict is further developed into a conflict of space. In *Britannicus*, for example, Néron refuses to share the throne with his mother. The throne is the source of their conflict and Néron, being hierarchically superior, uses his position to persecute Agrippine.

This is what Barthes refers to as "une crise d'espace"[30] which is so violent that the only way the victim can escape or be saved is through crime, death or exile.

We will now analyse the mechanics of the power balance in *Britannicus* and demonstrate how that contributes to aggression. A woman obsessed and haunted by power, Agrippine is aware of everything that happens around her when Néron exercises his power. She still lives in her past glory and is even prepared to fight against her own son in order to recover her lost power; it can be said that power is for her a passion that controls her actions and thoughts, as we see in: "Il m'écarta du trône où je m'allais placer" (I.i). *Britannicus* is the play that best illustrates the failure by the characters to show what Levinas calls the "fear for the Other'' in favour of the fear of the Other. According to Levinas, fear for the Other asks:

> My being-in-the-world, or my 'place in the sun,' my being at home, have these not also been the usurpation of spaces belonging to the other man whom I have already oppressed or starved, or driven out into a third world; are they not acts of repulsing, excluding, exiling, stripping, killing?[31]

The fear for the Other signals solidarity and acts as an impediment against persecution and aggression, it is therefore absent in the relationships between the victims and aggressors of Racinian drama due to the existence of variables such as the passions, language and conflicf of space. Agrippine is monstrously ambitious and this is what constitutes the axis of the play, the struggle between mother and son, two equally ambitious protagonists, fighting to control tyrannical power, recognisable through the fear it instils in the subjects: "Je le craindrais bientôt, s'il ne me craignait plus" (I. i.75). Without this power, she considers herself to be of no worth: "Ma place est occupée, je ne suis plus rien" (III.iv.882).

In his study on the relationship between language and power, Van Delft contends that: "Agrippine foresees her fall from power precisely when she realises that her glance has lost its

[30] R. Barthes, *Sur Racine,* Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1960, p.29.
[31] E. Levinas, *Ethics as First Philosophy*, in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 82.

awesome power. Her fall will be complete when she can use only words."[32] This is because in *Britannicus,* power is found in the unspoken language of the eyes, which are used as weapons. At the beginning of the play, Néron is intimidated by Agrippine's power and he fears her powerful eyes which, according to Van Delft, make the Emperor "tremble" and "flee" from his mother's presence: [23]

> Néron:
> Eloigné de ses yeux, j'ordonne, je menace,
> J'écoute vos conseils, j'ose les approuver;
> Je m'excite contre elle, et tâche à la braver.
> *Britannicus*, II.ii.496-98.

Here we see that Néron is afraid of his mother's eyes (power), which symbolise barriers to his two passions; ambition and his love for Junie. So he avoids physical contact with her by putting in place his own barriers between them. For almost three acts, Agrippine is forced to demand that she be permitted *to see* her son.[33] She knows that if she can cast her eyes on him, her threatened authority will be restored.

In *Britannicus*, this shift in the power balance comes about because of the complicated nature of love and the notion of *le pouvoir impuissant*. Néron has power over Junie, whom he idolises; Agrippine believes she still has power over her son Néron, though while she loves him, he does not love her. Britannicus on the other hand has feelings of affection for Agrippine, who has always tried to protect him and to encourage his love for Junie. Agrippine's affection for Britannicus, her stepson, whom she has deprived of power in favour of her own son, has limits whose boundaries are defined by a primal feeling that she must have power over Néron. Britannicus then acquires some power which, according to Narcisse, would have been politically dangerous to Agrippine.

This section has attempted to show that power is not a static theme in Racinian tragedy, but a very dynamic one; owing to its tyrannical nature, those who have it abuse it, through the

[32] L. Van Delft, "Language and Power, Eyes and Words in *Britannicus*", *Yale French Studies*, 45 (1970) p. 106.
[33] ibid, p. 106.

use of violence to serve their desires. However, there are instances of a shift in the power balance, and this is mainly brought about as a result of love-passion.

2.6. Space as an element of aggression and persecution

The Classical conventions of the three unities, *les bienséances* and *vraisemblance,* were not designed to hinder the dramatist, but rather to help him to achieve the maximum possible tragic intensity. As discussed in the first part of this chapter, mimesis helped the dramatist create a theatrical illusion from historic events. Racine's mimesis led him to choose plots which, according to De Mourgues, are based on psychological events which take place within a confined space, *le lieu*, which promotes tragic tension. In Racinian drama, the setting or the place (*le lieu*) is a dark labyrinth where danger is omnipresent. It is dangerous to venture within this labyrinth because we do not know what monster may come out. This calls to mind Barthes's theory in *Sur Racine* where he identified three distinct locations in Racinian dramas: "la chambre, la porte, l'anti-chambre"[34]. "La chambre ou l'antre de la terreur" is where authority is seated and it is closely linked to the *corridors of power* since that is where everything happens. This *chambre* is seldom represented on stage, but is nonetheless psychologically present. In *Britannicus*, Agrippine cannot gain access to her own son's *chambre*, a sign that her influence is fading. There is force-field acting as an obstacle between her and Néron; the door or *la porte* and this door symbolises both temptation and access to terror; it is hazardous both physically and psychologically. According to Barthes, "on y veille et on y tremble" as if one were waiting for a verdict, a death sentence.[35] The *chambre* is directly linked to the anti-chamber where the actors open up and expresses their desires and torments. For example, this is where Phèdre confesses her passion to Hippolyte: "J'aime. Ne pense pas au moment que je t'aime" (II.v.673) and Néron unveils his monstrous nature:

[34] R. Barthes, *Sur Racine,* op.cit., pp. 15-20.
[35] ibid., p. 17.

"J'embrasse mon rival, mais c'est pour l'étouffer" (IV.iii.1314). These elements combine to create an enclosed and suffocating universe. This is how the *lieu* participates in the action, creating a prison-like environment from which escape is impossible and the prison becomes a trap when the characters try to escape. In *Phèdre*, Hippolyte finds death when he leaves, as he is killed by the sea monster 'summoned' by his father. We can even conclude that his death was the price to pay for this transgression. Barthes also defines the scene as "un lieu aveugle, passage anxieux du secret à l'effusion, de la peur immédiate à la peur parlée".[36]

De Mourgues interprets Racine's application of the convention of unity of place as the representation of a symbolic existence, which, like Sartre's hell in *Huis-Clos*, "seems to mean that human beings should be thrown together to torture one another without any possible escape".[37] The only possible escape from this *huis-clos* is death. This is evident in all the tragedies under consideration, consequently leading us to conclude that the setting of the plays is also capable of creating a space for the physical and psychological persecution of the characters (both victims and aggressors). The seraglio in *Bajazet* and Néron's palace in *Britannicus* are prisons from which characters cannot escape. In *Bajazet*, the seraglio is a prison for Bajazet, Atalide and Roxane herself. Opposed to the theme of the prison is the theme of freedom. Do the characters have the freedom to run away from love?[38] Freedom involves a certain level of responsibility, because to be guilty, a character must have had the opportunity to freely choose not to become guilty. In addition to the fact that it is physically impossible for the victims to escape the palace or the seraglio in the case of *Bajazet*, it is equally impossible for the aggressors themselves to escape because the place in which the action takes place is intricately linked to the birth of the passion that drives them. Richard E.

[36] ibid., p.16.
[37] O. De Mourgues, op.cit. p. 22.
[38] Love is depicted in all of Racine as a kind of cage or net that instantly falls around its "victim", so it is never possible to run away from it because it is a kind of prison from which, usually, the only escape is death. Agrippine is imprisoned in the maternal realm, like a tigress, and Néron can be taken to represent the grown-up cub that challenges the older one for domination.

Goodkin sees *Bajazet* as being infused with imagery of womblike protection in which Bajazet is presented as a creature who is struggling to stay alive.[39] Acomat pleads with Roxane to have him liberated, but to no avail: "Souffrez que Bajazet voie enfin la lumière: / Des murs de ce palais ouvrez-lui la barrière" (I.ii.237-38). Goodkin interprets this as follows: "Raising the barrier of the seraglio would mean allowing Bajazet to see the light of day, *voir le jour* being a Classical euphemism for to be born. It would mean, in effect, giving him the chance to survive on his own […]."[40] He is, however, denied the opportunity to live and to love, to be free; this is understandable because the seraglio is a place of confinement, a place of danger, where order is maintained by the exercise of tyrannical power.

Racinian characters are on a quest that is both physical and psychological for freedom to love, freedom to rule, freedom from the tyrant but this quest is fraught with obstacles, and the wall and barrier imagery which abounds in the plays effectively communicates the source of frustration and persecution that the characters experience. As a result of the link between space and passion, we see that Racine does not often give his characters the choice to escape the dangerous presence of the object of their desire. Death becomes the only escape open to them, which is sometimes the "only solution; the best solution to their dilemma".[41] The setting or place assumes a character of its own as the plays progress. It is identified with persecution and aggression because some of the aggressors like Néron, make it clear to their victims that they are everywhere: "Caché près de ces lieux, je vous verrai, madame. / Renfermez votre amour dans le fond de votre âme." (II.iii.679-80).

The victims themselves are aware of the danger that lurks everywhere as demonstrated by Junie when she is reluctant to openly display her affection to Britannicus, aware of the omnipresence of Néron's power: [24]

[39] R. E. Goodkin, *Birth Marks: The Tragedy of Primogeniture in Pierre Corneille, Thomas Corneille, and Jean Racine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000)
[40] ibid., p. 184.
[41] J. Scherer, *Racine et/ou la Cérémonie* (Paris: PUF, 1982), p.3.

Junie:
Vous êtes en des lieux tout pleins de sa puissance.
Ces murs mêmes, seigneur, peuvent avoir des yeux;
Et jamais l'empereur n'est absent de ces lieux.
II.vi.712-14.

The feeling of aggression and persecution is heightened by the knowledge that evil is invisible and the act of aggression itself is often carried out under some sort of disguise, as illustrated by Burrhus: "Ce dessein s'est conduit avec plus de mystère" (IV.v.1619).

Néron deceives his brother into thinking that he wishes to heal the breach between them, an illustration of his furtiveness and plotting. The act itself is in keeping with his penchant for misleading his victims into thinking that they are safe, as he famously declares: "J'embrasse mon rival, mais c'est pour l'étouffer" (IV.iii.1314). Lapp interprets this antithesis as an illustration of the interplay between appearance and reality, leading him to conclude that *Britannicus* is a drama of *watcher and watched.*[42] We see in the Racinian tragic setting that, "tous nous trahit, la voix, le silence, les yeux" (II.ii.575), where Racine gives meaning not only to expression, but also to the tone of voice, gestures of the body and items of clothing.[43] This essentially means that aggression and persecution are everywhere, and they can be expressed by silence, looks and above all the setting in which the action is taking place.

In this section, we have attempted to show the importance of space as a conditioning element of Racinian socialisation. The characters are thrust into a confined space where they have to defend their interests and affirm themselves through the expression of their passions and the exercise of their power. In Levinassian thought, violence in a society arises when the ethical relation (which consists in placing the Other above me) is forgotten and it is no longer the foundation of the social relation. Levinas points out that: "what I permit myself to demand of myself is not comparable with what I have the right to demand of the Other".[44]When the individual demands more from the Other and uses force to ensure that these demands are met,

[42] J. Lapp, op.cit. p. 8.
[43] ibid., p.144.
[44] E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, op.cit, p. 53.

the end result is political inequality and violence. We will now propose a close reading of *Britannicus* and *Bajazet* as representing the techniques of aggression that are found in Racinian drama.

2.7. Techniques of aggression in *Britannicus*

The first two acts of *Britannicus* examine the evolution of the relationship between victims and aggressors. At this stage, Néron refers to Britannicus as "mon frère" (II. i. 164). and the first act of aggression he commits is to banish Pallas who, he believes, is poisoning his mother against him and influencing his brother Britannicus. Néron is demonstrating his power of self-affirmation, showing a need to be recognised and have the power to become significant in his own right (as Néron) rather than as Agrippine's son. Néron knows that aggression and violence are against all the interests of Rome which is anxious to remain peaceful and prosperous, and he knows that to embark on such an enterprise, he needs to sweep all obstacles from his path and not to be virtuous as he has been from the beginning of his reign:

> Narcisse:
> Quoi donc? Qui vous arrête seigneur?
>
> Néron:
> Tout ; Octavie, Agrippine, Burrhus, Sénèque,
> Rome entière, et trois ans de vertu.
> *Britannicus,* II.ii.460-63.

Junie is another victim of Néron. She steadfastly refuses his advances and is one of the characters in *Britannicus* who is true to herself and who maintains her loyalty to the historical lineage from which she is supposedly descended: "Ah Seigneur, songez-vous que toute autre alliance, / Fera honte aux Césars auteurs de ma naissance" (II.iii.567-68) and: "J'aime Britannicus, je lui fus destinée" (II.iii.643). Her role is largely instrumental – the object which is the catalyst of the two men's struggle to the death, and Agrippine's fall from grace.

Therefore, she is not required to evolve, while the others reach the crisis point in their respective destinies, she is the pivot for the catastrophe. She might be a victim but she causes Néron to suffer a lot of pain and emotional stress and it is on this level that we can say she is one of the few Racinian victims capable of torturing their aggressors. She can also be taken to represent the Rome that Néron is trying to destroy (its culture and its history). She defends her tradition and by persecuting her, Néron is persecuting Rome itself. (As we noted earlier, Néron does concede that even Rome is against him). So Néron's aggression is not confined only to Junie, Britannicus, Agrippine, it is also extended to Rome itself.

Néron's aggression towards Junie is both physical and psychological. By having her kidnapped, he has taken away her physical freedom and then he orders her to forget about Britannicus: "Je ne veux point le perdre. Il vaut mieux que lui-même / Entende son arrêt de la bouche qu'il aime" (II.iii.667-68) and: "Du moins par vos froideurs, faites-lui concevoir / Qu'il doit porter ailleurs ses vœux et son espoir". (II.iii.673-74) Néron's command to Junie to dismiss Britannicus as her lover is a demonstration of the extent of his cruelty. As far as he is concerned, other people (his victims) are pawns on his chessboard and he wants to control them and make them fulfil his devilish wishes. His passions (love and ambition), fuel his cruelty, which is brought about as a result of what Levinas terms "a hungry stomach without ears":

> In enjoyment I am absolutely for myself. Egoist without reference to the Other, I am alone without solitude, innocently egoist and alone. […] entirely deaf to the Other, outside of all communication and all refusal to communicate - without ears, like a hungry stomach.[45]

His two passions (love and ambition) are the sources of his hunger, they have to be satisfied at all costs, all obstacles have to be eliminated. Therefore, the aggressor is without ears, he is deaf to all Others. His other technique of aggression is to give Britannicus the impression that Junie has turned against him. His is a subtle form of cruelty involving not physical pain but

[45] ibid. p.134.

the infliction of incalculable suffering of an emotional kind from which he himself derives a perverse pleasure; not only is it expedient for him to try to destroy Junie and Britannicus's love, it is also a deliberate and sadistic form of self-gratification. Consequently, it is perfectly natural for him to show his sadism: "Je me fais de sa peine une image charmante" (II.viii. .751).

Néron, the aggressor, has managed to make himself omnipresent in the play, looming large in the eyes of all the other characters. This is a technique that Racine's aggressors have mastered. The victims have to live in constant fear, and consequently, they cannot enjoy total freedom, as Junie herself informs Britannicus: "Vous êtes en des lieux tous pleins de sa puissance, / Ces murs mêmes, Seigneur, peuvent avoir des yeux. / Et jamais l'Empereur n'est absent de ces lieux." (II.vi.712-14). In this scene, Britannicus does not listen to the veiled warnings of Junie who tries to tell him that Néron is watching, this is his undoing and gives us an insight into his character. According to Goldmann:

> On peut définir le personnage de Britannicus en une formule qui s'appliquera également, dans *Phèdre*, à Thésée : c'est l'être qui se trompe, qui croit toujours ceux qui lui mentent et qui ne croit jamais ceux qui lui disent la vérité.[46]

Britannicus is often unaware of what is happening around him, he does not question what he is told and is easily misled by the lies of other characters.

The element of omnipresence becomes an important element of aggression because the victims are not only persecuted by his presence, aggression and persecution still occur even when the tyrant is absent. As we mentioned earlier, the same applies to *Bajazet* where Amurat is the absent but omnipresent aggressor. This is also in keeping with the tradition of tragedy representing man faced with a force that he is powerless to overcome.

As for Agrippine, another of Néron's victims, her son's rebellion is his first act of aggression against her. The second act is sending Pallas into exile. Néron does not want to continue to be indebted to her. Her power and position are her reason for being as we have

[46]L. Goldmann, *Racine,* (Paris: L'Arche, 1970), p. 91.

mentioned in the last section and taking that away is one of the many forms of aggression that Néron uses: [25]

> Agrippine :
> Albine, c'est à moi qu'on donne une rivale
> Bientôt, si je ne romps ce funeste lien,
> Ma place est occupée, et je ne suis plus rien.
> III.iv.880-82.

Néron's refusal to grant his mother an audience shows that he is still afraid of her (and her eyes) and at this stage his only means of rebellion is to persecute her by his absence. For Néron, fear is the key to the continuation without challenge to his reign and he is not afraid to let it be known that he wants people to be afraid of him: "Heureux ou malheureux, il suffit qu'on me craigne." (III.viii.1056). He has to choose between being loved and being feared, between Good and Evil; he chooses fear and evil. Rombout articulates that there is a parallel between these words spoken by Néron and those of Louis XIV: "Je sais qu'on ne m'aime pas, mais je ne m'en soucie pas car je veux régner par la crainte."[47] This illustrates the leader's desire to define his reign through fear and violence; all the other characters recognise this fear, beginning with Agrippine: "Las de se faire aimer, il veut se faire craindre" (l. 12) and: "Je le craindrais bientôt s'il ne me craignait plus" (l. 74). When Agrippine begins to fear Néron, his oedipal revolt against his mother has been accomplished. Fear is a key element of the tyrant's mechanism of aggression in *Britannicus*. The tyrant knows this and he makes sure that an atmosphere of fear reigns in Rome and at his court; this is his oppressive view of kingship.

Néron uses deceit to confuse his victims, making them believe that he is on their side only to "stab them in the stomach with a dagger as they hug him in joy". This is exactly what he does to Britannicus: [26]

> Néron:
> Avec Britannicus je me réconcilie;
> Et quant à cet amour qui nous a séparés,

[47] P. Somville, "Le rôle de la crainte dans *Britannicus*", *Neophilologus*, 52 (1968), pp. 1-12.

Je vous fais notre arbitre, et venez nous juger.
Allez donc, et portez cette joie à mon frère.
IV.ii.1300-03.

He knows that he has no intention of doing all this or seeing all this happen but his aim is to give his victims a false sense of security, only to strike them when they least expect it, showing the world his disregard for the fear for the Other. His actions are against the logic of solidarity proposed by Levinas where he articulates how the instruction "you shall not commit murder" entails "you shall not leave me to die alone. Be with me now and in the hour of my death".[48]

Levinas then concludes that an analysis of history shows us that communities based on a foundation other than that of the fear for the Other are violent communities. The Racinian community is an example of such a violent community.

2.8. Techniques of aggression in *Bajazet*

We now propose to move on to an analysis of the techniques of aggression and the relationships between victims and aggressors in *Bajazet*. Even though Amurat is not physically present, he has the same omnipresence that Néron has in *Britannicus*. Roxane has absolute power, delegated to her by the Sultan and Barthes points out that she is herself the subject and object of absolute power.[49]

In *Bajazet,* human life is cheap and executions and murders are commonplace. From the beginning of the play we learn that the sultan is cruel and is not afraid to kill his own brother: "On craignait qu'Amurat par un ordre severe / N'envoyât demander la tête de son frère." (I.i.74-5). We also learn that Acomat himself is a victim of the sultan: "Je sais bien qu'Amurat a juré ma ruine; /Je sais à son retour l'accueil qu'il me destine" (I. i.85-6). This is in sharp contrast to Néron's hide and seek tactics of "J'embrasse mon rival pour l'étouffer".

[48] E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, op.cit., p.76.
[49] R. Barthes, op.cit., p.24.

In *Bajazet,* there is no time to pretend or to make elaborate plans to persecute someone. Bajazet is born a victim because he is Amurat's brother and as is the culture, the sultan cannot let his brother live to enjoy absolute power as long as he himself is still alive: [27]

> Acomat:
> Il a fait plus pour elle, Osmin: il a voulu
> Qu'elle eût dans son absence un pouvoir absolu.
> Tu sais de nos sultans les rigueurs ordinaires:
> Le frère rarement laisse jouir ses frères
> De l'honneur dangereux d'être sortis d'un sang
> Qui les a de trop près approchés de son rang.
>
> *Bajazet*, I.i.103-08.

In *Bajazet* we find the omnipresence of violence and aggression, as much in the form of atmosphere as action. This is due in part to the fact that the Classical unities do not allow any actual violence on stage, therefore all the aggression and violence are in menacing words and looks and the threat of violence. We have already pointed out that the Seraglio itself can be taken as an aggressor or facilitator of aggression; Racine himself asks in his preface to *Bajazet*: "Y a-t-il une cour au monde où la jalousie et l'amour doivent être si bien connus que dans un lieu où tant de rivales sont enfermées ensemble […]?" Such an atmosphere obviously gives rise to conflicts, and conflicts lead to the creation of aggressive behaviour between the conflicting parties. In this case, aggression arises because all the women in the Seraglio want to please and consequently gain the love and favour of their lord and (though this is not said) falling out of favour can mean banishment or, at worst, death. The Seraglio becomes a conditioning element, that is to say it provides a fertile environment for aggression to breed.

We will now turn to an analysis of the role played by bloodline and sibling rivalry in *Bajazet*. Aggression and persecution in the play are closely linked to inheritance and sibling rivalry. Our presentation of violence in *Bajazet* is based on Dewald's reading of the tensions that exist between siblings, a family dynamic he claims is based on conflict between the

younger and more enterprising brother and the older, family-identified sibling.[50] By extension, this becomes a conflict between an aristocratic ethics of maintenance and a bourgeois sense of enterprise. This sense of enterprise can be considered as one of the reasons why Amurat persecutes his younger brother. Roxane's love for Bajazet creates a new form of tension which directly leads to aggression. The relationship between Bajazet and Roxane seems simple at first, but when Amurat gives Roxane absolute power, she becomes Bajazet's aggressor because of her new position in the social hierarchy. She loves him, but the question she needs answered is whether he wants to marry her. She uses her new-found power to persecute him for not returning her love: [28]

> Du pouvoir qu'Amurat me donna sur sa vie.
> Bajazet touche presque au trône des sultans:
> *Bajazet*, I.iii.314-15.
>
> Quand je fais tout pour lui, s'il ne fait tout pour moi,
> I.iii.320.
>
> J'abandonne l'ingrat, et le laisse rentrer
> Dans l'état malheureux d'où je l'ai tiré.
> I.iii.323-4.
>
> Sa perte ou son salut dépend de sa réponse.
> I.iii.326.

These lines illustrate the intricate link between love and freedom, power and persecution, Roxane does not hesitate to use her power and her passion to menace Bajazet into submission. These words illustrate her conception of love, which should be backed by tyrannical power

[50] According to Dewald: "In Racine's *Phèdre,* there is not only the heroine's incestuous love for her stepson but Hippolyte's love for a girl whom his father has adopted and to whom he has forbidden marriage. Less directly, his *Andromaque* and *Bérénice* likewise focus on forbidden loves, cases in which young men fall in love with women for whom they should have inherited enmity. *Bajazet* centers on a wife in love with her husband's brother, and the expectation of fratricide is essential to its plot: "You know the harsh practices customary to our sultans. They rarely allow their brothers long to enjoy the dangerous honor of descending from blood that places them too close to the throne." The tragedians' recurrent interest in incest suggests the intensity of the emotions that familial competition mobilised. In the tragedies, family members long violently for the same objects, sexual as well as material. The tragedies teach that proper family life demands renunciation of such desire, ultimately under the threat of parental violence. In the tragedians' vision, the continuity of the *race* rests on a series of losses and conflicts that reach the bases of family itself. Parents sacrifice their children, heirs their younger siblings. As in the Grand Condé's experience, self and inheritance cannot fully coexist." (J. Dewald, *Aristocratic Experience and the Origins of Modern Culture: France, 1570-1715* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p.77)

and her "volonté de puissance", with Bénichou proposing that: "la menace est dans sa bouche comme l'expression naturelle de l'amour".[51] As well as [29]

> Ce qui distingue le personnage de Racine n'est pas la puissance de l'amour, mais la forme de cet amour, à la fois égoïste en ce qu'il vise à la possession de l'objet à n'importe quel prix, et ennemi de lui-même, tout entier tourné vers le désastre.[52]

Bajazet, like Junie in *Britannicus*, is steadfast in his refusal of the tyrant's advances and he would rather die than become her husband: "J'aime mieux en sortir sanglant, couvert de coups, / Que chargé, malgré moi, du nom de son époux." (II.iii.631-2). This resistance makes her desire him even more and she threatens to use more severe forms of aggression. His absolute rejection of her, his unwillingness to compromise with what he knows to be right constitutes Bajazet's tragic fatal flaw as it will lead to his demise. Racine himself explains this character trait in his *Seconde Préface*: [30]

> Il garde au milieu de son amour la férocité de la nation. Et si l'on trouve étrange qu'il consente plutôt de mourir que d'abandonner ce qu'il aime et d'épouser ce qu'il n'aime pas, il ne faut que lire l'histoire des Turcs.[53]

The play ends with the deaths of Bajazet, Roxane and Atalide, because each of these characters had adopted an *all or nothing* attitude that consists in being possessed by the desire to follow the dictates of their passion with no compromise, without taking into consideration the consequences of such an attitude. Roxane's execution comes just after Bajazet's death and her assassin dies immediately afterwards. Such is the nature of violence and the exercise of power in *Bajaze*t.

Conclusion

This chapter has established that the unnaturalness in human relationships that exists in Racine's tragedies promotes and sustains aggression and persecution. This unnaturalness

[51] P. Bénichou, *Morales du Grand Siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948).
[52] ibid., p.65.
[53] Racine, *Bajazet, Seconde Préface*, lines 72-4.

comes about as a result of the failure by the characters to establish ethical relationships with the other, and their refusal to recognise the humanity of others, leading to a community without solidarity and without a "fear for the Other". Central to this is the theme of love-passion, which, as has been defined before, is a negative emotion which obliterates all other feelings and coupled with power, brings about aggressive behaviour in the individual concerned. This power is not monopolised by any one character in the plays; it is very dynamic and can shift from victim to aggressor. We also underscored that authoritarian attitudes show inequality in viewing human relationships, submissiveness toward individuals possessing higher status, and domineering propensities toward lower status individuals. When the components of Racinian authoritarianism are analysed, authoritarian aggression and authoritarian submission are generally accepted as being relevant in the understanding of the authoritarian personality and how that promotes violence. The victims are irredeemably on trial, with death being their only escape. We also looked at the relationships between victims and aggressors in order show how the careful selection of the characters' passions determines the techniques of aggression that they employ. Elements such as space, family ties, order and disorder are creatively used to promote and sustain violence in the plays.

We may conclude from our discussion above that Racinian tragedy consists essentially of the tension between the victim and aggressor, weakness and power, steadfast honour and abuse of authority by those who have it.

CHAPTER 3

THE LANGUAGE OF AGGRESSION AND PERSECUTION

3.1. INTRODUCTION

Racine's tragedies can be considered as rituals or ceremonies which codify human beings and their association with the world. Such ceremony is viewed as a poetic meditation on conflicts between individuals and their failure to integrate fully into the social sphere. Since drama is maintained by verbal exchanges and the discourse of the characters, we suggest that the victim-aggressor relationship and the consequent power balance are dependent on the effectiveness or failure of this discourse. In this chapter, we will analyse the linguistic strategies used by the aggressors to persecute others and the expression of suffering through language by both the victims and aggressors. According to Emmanuel Levinas:

> We form, in discourse, a "society" that does not dispense with alterity. In this society, we are obligated to respond to each other. What obligates us is the fact that the Other sees the world from a different perspective. To the point that I take it on, I am uprooted from my perspective, my consciousness is centred on my point of view.[1]

This act of responding then marks the beginning of language as dialogue and coupled with the inequality among individuals imposed by power, language acquires the function of suppressing the Other. At the same time discourse becomes the object of struggle and control because of its capacity to empower the individual. In *L'Ordre du discours*, Foucault regards discourse as "une violence que nous faisons aux choses" and a weapon in the struggle for power and:

[1] E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, op. cit., pp. 204-219.

> Le discours n'est pas simplement ce qui traduit les luttes ou les systèmes de domination, mais ce pour quoi, ce par quoi on lutte, le pouvoir dont on cherche à s'emparer.[2]

This implies that power can be found and maintained through discourse; language can then be used to restrict the freedom of others as well as perpetuate violence. Conflict therefore arises as a need to control discourse, which becomes a source of authority. The conflictual nature of the relationship between the self and the Other means that language becomes disordered and abused. This is how characters in Racinian tragedy seek to manipulate language in order to discover and control both the thoughts and actions of others through what Mary Reilly terms *linguistic engineering.*[3] She proposes that Racine's power relationships are concentrated in the question of language and its manipulation. According to Kearney:

> Man can give himself in saying to the point of poetry - or he can withdraw into the non-saying of lies. Language as saying is an ethical openness to the other; as that which is said - reduced to a fixed identity or synchronised presence - it is an ontological closure of the other.[4]

Essentially this is what Levinas terms the difference between the *Saying* and the *Said*, where the *Saying* can be described in simple terms as the act of speech or the exposure of the individual to the other and the *Said* denotes to the intelligibility, sincerity and reference of what is transmitted. Levinas makes a distinction between *le dire*, the act of saying, from *le dit*, the actual content of what is said. In analysing this concept, Edgoose asserts that:

> Levinas suggests that this tidy visual world is not the whole story. It is transcended in face-to-face interaction, where speech "cuts across the vision of forms" and denies neat-edged closure. In the to-and-fro of conversation, he writes, closure is ever evasive. The ambiguity of language fails to satisfy the desires of speaker and listener for stable agreed meaning and mutual recognition. The content of speech - the Said (*Dit*) - strives for universality and solidity. Yet, in the failure of that striving, the Saying (*Dire*) is revealed - conversations continue and are not discreet exchanges of information.[5]

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[2] M. Foucault, *L'Ordre du discours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p.12.

[3] M. Reilly, *Racine: Language, Violence and Power* (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2005). *Linguistic engineering* is essentially the careful manipulation of the word by characters to discover, channel and control the thought and actions of others. To illustrate this, we will use the following quotation from Reilly: "One need not look to the narrow field of literary theory to find evidence of the salience of language. In every political party we find the formidable spin doctors who excel at concealing the real meaning of words in trite phrases. Calculatively manipulating language to mould the opinions of others remains the means to power." (ibid, p.132.)

[4] R. Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers* (Manchester: MUP, 1984)

[5] J. Edgoose, *An ethics of hesitant learning: The caring justice of Levinas and Derrida* (Philosophy of

In Levinas's view, it is impossible to have an agreement on the meaning of a word without an initial trust - a trust that we mean well and that we mean what we say – and this initial trust must be a sacrifice given without hope of an exchange.[6] We argue that this moral significance of language is absent in Racinian drama because the characters always act out of their own self-interest. Levinas sees language as a vehicle that allows us to respond and call out to the Other, to do good or bad and much else.[7] According to Morgan's analysis of this concept:

> Levinas calls this the *saying*; it is the ethical matrix in which language as communication takes place. Without it, there would be no ultimate reason to have language or languages and no point in their employment. The social, concrete context for language is the interpersonal setting in which it is employed, the ethical core of that interpersonal setting is the call of the other person to the self to accept and acknowledge it, to respond with a linguistic 'piece of bread' so to speak, to share a word with it.[8]

This section will focus on the link between linguistic strategies and the promotion of persecution and aggression, taking into account the ideas of Levinas on *le dit* and *le dire*, which we equate to *le dit* and le *non-dit*, and those of Foucault on the fight to control language and the power it has to control others.

In addition to the concept of promoting violence through language, Racinian characters must find speech that allows them to express their suffering, and so the victims of passion turn to language through which they expose their experiences of persecution and dehumanisation to others, fully aware that language communicates only through a revelation of the character's hidden emotions. This is what we find in *Phèdre* where the heroine prefers to die than to confess her love-passion, as Hippolyte learns from Théramène: "Phèdre, atteinte d'un mal qu'elle s'obstine à taire" (I. i.l.45) as well as: "Elle meurt dans mes bras d'un mal

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Education Society Yearbook, University of Illinois College of Education, 1997, pp. 266–274.)

[6] E. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being, or Beyond Essence*, n. 3, p 49.

[7] According to Jonathan Burroughs: "One of Levinas' most important distinctions, introduced *in Otherwise Than Being*, is between the Saying (*le dire*) and the Said (*le dit*). He explains that the Saying is the activity through which we put linguistic meanings into circulation by speaking, gesturing, making faces, having silent thoughts, and most relevant to this paper, writing. […]The Said, for its part, are the linguistic meanings that have already been put into circulation by the Saying. It is a statement, assertion, or proposition of which the truth or falsity can be ascertained. It is the identifiable meaning of the content of my words." (J. Burroughs "Emmanuel Levinas's Methodological Approach to the Jewish Sacred Texts" *Heythrop Journal 53* (2012), pp.124-136.)

[8] M. Morgan, op.cit., p.135.

qu'elle me cache" (I. ii.146).This is because, by speaking, Phèdre would be attempting to communicate that which is incommunicable; consequently, her silence represents a defence mechanism, a refusal to communicate, to be free of the oppression imposed upon her by her *faute*. On the other hand, as long as this *faute* remains hidden, she is protected because she cannot be accused of that which is not known. Therefore by remaining silent, Phèdre is trying not to betray her love for Hippolyte.

3.2 Strategies of communication in Racinian tragedies

As we have shown in the preceding chapters, passion affects the ability of the Racinian character to control and master his relationship to the world. The anguish brought about by passion therefore silences him in several ways: the passion becomes a monster that is nameless and voiceless, so must be translated from nothingness into speech, which has to contend with the limited linguistic choices employed by the writer. This economy of words sometimes fails to fully convey his suffering. Tragic avowal thrusts the listener into a position of passivity and obligation, for he is called to witness the speech of the Other and to accept the transmission of the Other's suffering. The witness can either be the confidant or members of the audience. According to Barnett, language or rather the *choice of language* becomes the most important tool used by Racine to portray the inner workings and motivations of his multi-faceted conflict helix, through the manipulation of *le dit* and *le dire*.[9] This conflict helix is influenced by the passions, which are inherently brutal, murderous and self-centred.

Brody believes that writers such as Racine depend on the reader's or audience's complicity.[10] The choices of linguistic expression or language used by characters are carefully made to orient the audience towards certain interpretations, providing clues enabling them to decode and interpret the text: [1]

[9] R. Barnett, "Le conflit du non conflit", in *Orbis Litterarum, Vol*. 35. Issue 2, pp.115-131.
[10] J. Brody, "Images de l'homme chez La Bruyère", in *Esprit Créateur*, vol XXV, no 1-2, 1975 p. 167.

> Ce décodage consiste surtout à reconnaître que la parole ici demeure un outil effectif, parfois mensonger, presque toujours inconsistant, c'est-à-dire sa véritable relation avec la pensée et qui, hors de son contexte spécifique, tend à frustrer le procédé d'analyse.[11]

This means that there needs to be a specific language to illustrate the effects of passion on the behaviour of the characters, taking into consideration the Pascalian affirmation that: "Le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point". The language of passion then becomes interlinked with rhetorical strategies as illustrated by d'Aubignac: [2]

> Il faut mêler les figures de tendresse et de douleur avec celles de la fureur et de l'emportement; il faut mettre l'esprit par intervalle dans le relâchement et les transports; il faut qu'un homme se plaigne et qu'il soupire, et non pas qu'il criaille: il faut quelquefois même qu'il éclate [...] Mais en remettant le Discours pathétique dans l'ordre, il faut y mêler et varier les grandes figures comme nous avons dit, afin que cette diversité d'expressions porte une image des mouvements d'un esprit troublé, agité d'incertitude, et transporté de passion déréglée. Ainsi par l'ordre des choses qui se disent, on réforme ce que la Nature a de défectueux en ses mouvements; et par la variété sensible des Figures, on garde une ressemblance du désordre de la Nature.[12]

Racine not only relied on his poetic and rhetorical skills to write his tragedies, he also looked for the complicity of the audience as we have previously mentioned with reference to Brody. This complicity is the beginning of the process of catharsis, the emotional purging which according to Aristotle, the audience is intended to experience during the course of the play.

We will now turn to an analysis of the methods that Racine uses to create the characters' responses to others, and their reactions to the situations that they find themselves in, through the use of language.

3.2.1 Linguistic strategies: the *dit* and the *non-dit*

The *non-dit* is to literature what silence is to music, Racinian tragedy is solely a drama of words – there is no action as such and both words and silence promote the forward movement of the play. In other words, the characters have no other weapon than words, or their opposite, the withholding of words. The silences are as important as what is said and

[11] J. Brody, ibid., p.168.
[12] F. D'Aubignac, *La pratique du Théâtre* (Paris: Slatkine Reprints, 1996), pp. 344-345.

consequently, it is not a coincidence that classical rhetoric categorises the degrees of communicative density (or lack thereof) which range from hyperbole to understatement, repetition to ellipsis, allusion to aposiopesis, etc. We also have assumptions, innuendos, suggestions, which can have far reaching consequences on the comprehension of speech and in addition, we must recognise the fact that the *non-dit* is not only a play with language, it can, in some cases, express the unspeakable. An example of this is the use of metonymy by Racine in his drama. Metonymy is based on substitution by things that are found together, making it possible to envisage a second reality parallel to the one presented initially. We will illustrate this by taking an extract from *Phèdre,* where Aricie is discussing Hippolyte with Ismène: [3]

> J'aime, je l'avoûrai, cet orgueil généreux
> Qui jamais n'a fléchi sous le joug amoureux.
> Phèdre en vain s'honorait des soupirs de Thésée:
> Pour moi, je suis plus fière, et fuis la gloire aisée
> D'arracher un hommage à mille autres offert,
> Et d'entrer dans un cœur de toutes parts ouvert.
> […]
> Contre un joug qui lui plaît vainement mutiné;
> C'est là ce que je veux, c'est là ce qui m'irrite.
> *Phèdre*, II.i.443-453.

In her response to Ismène, Aricie begins by equating love with servitude, "fléchir", "captive", "fer" and "joug". Her speech seems to be detached from the emotional domain. This is far from the case because her words reveal the strategy that she seeks to use to win the heart of Hippolyte. We see the presentation of two realities, whose common denominator is the theme of alienation. Consequently, metonymy operates as a transition between the literal and figurative sense; we cannot, therefore, confine ourselves to the initial interpretation of her words, we must also seek their various implications and meanings.

The relationship between speech and silence was a prevalent theme in classical literature contemporary with Racine's theatre. La Fontaine based his *Contes* on the aesthetics of suggestion, the art of making readers understand without explicit exposition. He reminds us of this concept in a fable dedicated to La Rochefoucauld: "il faut laisser / Dans les plus beaux

sujets, quelque chose à penser".[13] La Rochefoucauld himself wrote in his *Maximes*, under the topic dealing with conversation, that: "Il y a de l'habileté à n'épuiser pas les sujets qu'on traite, et à laisser toujours aux autres quelque chose à penser et à dire"[14] and: [4]

> Comme c'est le caractère des grands esprits de faire entendre en peu de paroles beaucoup de choses, les petits esprits au contraire ont le don de beaucoup parler, et de ne rien dire.[15]

For La Rochefoucauld, the maxim can be seen as a verbal construction codified by what Montandon calls the "esthétique de la conversation", and the latter then concludes that: "la pratique de la brièveté suppose, entre l'auteur et son lecteur, une relation de complicité sous-tendue par le modèle de la conversation".[16]

We will now turn to the point of view of the spectators who have an advantage over the characters of omniscience: they see all the scenes and are allowed to follow all the conversations on the stage. This feature, commonly found in theatre, is called "discrepancy of awareness". That is to say, there is a discrepancy between what the audience knows (they are able to interpret things differently) and what some of the characters know (because they have only partial knowledge). In addition, the audience have access to monologues that are meant for their benefit to enlighten them. So the spectators are not fooled by all the characters' double dealings, but understand the thoughts and the true intentions of each character. They cannot be part of the game: they can neither deceive nor help any one of the characters and have the possibility of reviewing the play in order to decode all the linguistic pitfalls.

Racine himself claimed that *Britannicus* is the tragedy on which he laboured the most. *Britannicus* presents several interesting aspects of linguistic strategies employed by characters to manipulate others. The dialogues are often biased, ambiguous or misleading, the characters often hide behind words that hide their true intentions, which still betray them anyway and

[13] J. de La Fontaine, *Fables* Livre X, Fable XIV, *Discours à Monsieur le Duc de La Rochefoucauld* v. 55-56.
[14] F. de La Rochefoucauld, *Réflexions Diverses*, IV: *De la conversation*.
[15] Maxim 142.
[16] A. Montandon, *Les formes brèves* (Paris: Hachette Supérieur, 1992), p.27.

they adapt their speech to their audience so as to avoid revealing their true nature. Goldmann sees the rhetoric employed by the characters (both victims and aggressors) as a justification for their egoism and individualism. He sees each scene of *Britannicus* as being: [5] "occupée par les mêmes fauves égoïstes que domine la délectation égoïste de la passion et l'ambition, et par des pantins inconscients qui en sont les victimes".[17] His characterisation of the occupants of the play as supreme egoists and their unconscious puppets suggests that this egoism is a natural consequence of the very nature of passion and ambition and this is evident in the speeches given by the characters themselves. A good example is Néron's conversation with Agrippine where he claims to have made peace with Britannicus: "Avec Britannicus je me réconcilie; / Et quant à cet amour qui nous a séparés, / Je vous fais notre arbitre, et vous nous jugerez" (l. 1300-02). The spectators know that this is said in bad faith; it is an illustration of his modus operandi. Racine's dialogues are structured in such a way that they often operate at two levels, that is to say, the explicit level and the implicit level. There is always an element of misunderstanding to be found between the said and the unsaid, between ordinary language and coded messages, which can only be decoded by a careful reader or spectator. Each one of the characters communicates in their own manner, depending on their nature and interests; Racine's language therefore reflects a variety of linguistic codes and the limits of human communication. We argue that this dysfunctional nature of language allows the aggressors to manipulate others and, at the same time, prevents the victims from fully comprehending the implications of events occurring around them.

We will illustrate this point with a further analysis of *Britannicus*. The eponymous hero is still more or less an adolescent who has not yet been fully immunised against the pitfalls of society. He is unable to decode most of what is said, he takes the information made available to him at face value. During the scene in which Néron eavedrops on Britannicus

[17] L. Goldmann, *Racine,* op.cit., p. 90.

and Junie “Vous êtes en des lieux tout pleins de sa puissance. / Ces murs mêmes, seigneur, peuvent avoir des yeux; / Et jamais l’empereur n’est absent de ces lieux.” (II.ii.l.712-14), he does not understand Junie’s signs, but naively believes everything she says (using verbal communication). Unable to grasp the language of double meaning, he often misses the irony in the words of his interlocutors. He also is unable to interpret the silence between the words, the “non-dit”. In this regard, we can also cite the following: “Ah! Quelle âme assez basse... / C’est à vous de choisir des confidents discrets, / Seigneur, et de ne pas prodiguer vos secrets” (l. 336-338) where Narcisse advises him to choose his confidants with caution, when he himself is plotting against him, but Britannicus misses the point. Britannicus is a character entirely enclosed within himself and literally cut off or detached from external communication, he is primarily unable to plot against his enemies because he does not have the capacity to master the strategies of language. His age and inexperience are against him – he has no conception of the strategic subtleties, particularly of language, being played out by the other characters.

Agrippine has enough self-control not to reveal the source of her agitation to Albine at the beginning of the play. Strong emotions mean that she is not in total control of herself to be able to effectively defend her interests (through linguistic engineering). She also employs her own rhetorical strategies to convince Albine and the audience of the injustice she is suffering at the hand of her son. We will quote a few lines as examples. She announces the tactics she will be using at the beginning of her speech, the portrayal of incomprehension and surprise: “J’ignore de quel crime on a pu me noircir / De tous ceux que j’ai faits je vais vous éclaircir.” (IV.ii.1117-18). She then enumerates all her victories, in a pitiful crescendo: “Claude vous adopta, vaincu par ses discours, / Vous appela Néron, et du pouvoir suprême / Voulut, avant le temps, vous faire part lui-même” (l. 1146-48), and all the risks she took (l. 1159-64, l. 1178, l.1180, l.1189-90). Up to this point, nothing had stopped her march to power, until the

ungrateful Néron abducted Junie, reducing to nought all her efforts: “C’est le sincère aveu que je voulais vous faire: / Voilà tous mes forfaits. En voici le salaire” (IV.ii.1195-96). The number of question marks and exclamation marks used in the following lines 1261-64 and 1273-76 show the distress of this once headstrong woman. She gives the impression that all her actions were meant to ensure that her son became the Emperor, but we know that she wanted all the power for herself as she clearly states in Act 1: “Sur son trône avec lui j’allais prendre ma place.” (I.i) and “Il m’écarta du trône où je m’allais placer. / Depuis ce coup fatal, le pouvoir d’Agrippine / Vers sa chute, à grands pas, chaque jour s’achemine.” (l. 110-112). Her discourse and actions can be considered as an illustration of what Foucault considers as: “mais ce pour quoi, ce par quoi on lutte, le pouvoir dont on cherche à s’emparer”.[18] She is not the only hypocrite in this conversation; the play’s action can be said to move forward with Néron’s mastery of the art of *la mauvaise foi.* This *mauvaise foi* is seen to be linked to political machinations (resulting in violence) and the expression of love-passion; the end result is that the language used by aggressors such as Néron always has a double meaning, because sometimes, through the use of irony, he means the opposite of what he says in his speeches. A good example is his false reconciliation with Britannicus: “Avec Britannicus je me réconcilie; / Et quant à cet amour qui nous a séparés, / Je vous fais notre arbitre, et vous nous jugerez” (l. 1300-02). So it will be with great astonishment that Agrippine learns of the assassination of Britannicus (lines 1611-13, and 1618). Through linguistic manipulation, Néron succeeds in duping his mother who knows him so well.

Néron’s lies and deceit show that others do not matter to him; he deceives them at will, using language to hide his real intentions. He tries in vain to hide behind a mask but this mask is transparent (to the audience who know him for what he is), it reveals his face all the time and his speeches also sound wrong and, despite all his efforts, they always reveal his real

[18] M. Foucault, *L’Ordre du discours*, op.cit., p.12.

thoughts. He has neither the patience, nor the discretion not to always express what he has in his heart: [6] “C’en est trop. De tous deux il faut que je l’écarte. / Pour la dernière fois, qu’il s’éloigne, qu’il parte; / Je le veux, je l’ordonne; et que la fin du jour. / Ne le retrouve pas dans Rome ou dans ma cour.” (II.i.367-72).

The whole scene portrays the theme of the *dialogue de sourds*, since, manipulated like a puppet, Néron is unaware that Narcisse has abused his trust. He can be considered as *un flatteur cynique et intéressé*. Narcisse himself manipulates others to promote his own interests and does not let himself be deceived by anything or anyone. He manipulates others through his linguistic prowess and leads them where he wants them to go, knowing what to say to convince and seduce. This is how Britannicus became his victim. First, Narcisse convinced him that he is not alone in his fight against Néron and that Agrippine supported him as far as Junie was concerned: “N’importe. Elle se sent comme vous outragée; / A vous donner Junie elle s’est engagée” (I.iii. 311-13). Britannicus appears to be completely hesitant and is unable to notice Néron’s *mauvaise foi*; he even asks Narcisse what to do, showing how he blindly trusts him: “Que t’en semble, Narcisse?” (I.iv.336-39) and: “Narcisse, tu dis vrai.” (I.iv.341-342). Narcisse even manages to insult Britannicus without him noticing it: “Ah! Quelle âme assez basse.” (l. 336) He also uses his linguistic skills to influence Néron, whose confidence he gains by showing him that he cannot rely on others and this he does by carefully selecting words that appeal to Néron, bringing in the argument of the balance of power and specifically the fact that Agrippine is more powerful than him: (l. 1414-15). Narcisse’s reference to Agrippine is also used to stir Néron’s passion and resentment, thus preventing effectively any reconciliation with Britannicus and persuading him instead to go ahead with his murderous plans. This is how he manages to destabilise Néron who in turn does not know what to think and turns to him for advice on the best way forward and eventually obeys him blindly:

"Viens, Narcisse. Allons voir ce que nous devons faire" (IV.iv.1480). The audience is made aware of his true intentions only in a side conversation, an *aparté*: [7]

> La fortune t'appelle une seconde fois,
> Narcisse: voudrais-tu résister à sa voix?
> Suivons jusques au bout ses ordres favorables;
> Et pour nous rendre heureux, perdons les misérables.
> II.ix.758-61.

Junie is the most transparent and sincere character in the play but she is not naïve, she never gets her hands dirty, she never wears a mask, and she remains transparent up to the end. She sees through Néron, who spies on them in the *scène du rideau* and during her conversation with Britannicus she tries to warn him of Néron's omnipresence (l. 712-714). In addition, she tries to reformulate, correct and mitigate Britannicus's words so as to make them sound pleasant to Néron: [8]

> Ah! Seigneur, vous parlez contre votre pensée.
> Vous-même, vous m'avez avoué mille fois
> Que Rome le louait d'une commune voix;
> Toujours à sa vertu vous rendiez quelque hommage.
> II.vi.724-8.

This is her strategy: she knows how to flatter and soften Néron: (l.663). She does not seek to manipulate either the truth or the others. As seen in the play, her sincerity and *bonne volonté* are out of place in this violent world of machinations, *mauvaise foi* and Machiavellianism.

The play shows us that, apart from the young couple, each character uses language as a formidable weapon for persecution and aggression. Some succeed thanks to their linguistic skills; others fall into traps or take everything at face value. They can be easily classified into categories according to their competencies, their treacherous personality or the situation that leads to such manipulation of language, and so forth. The result is usually the same: there will be losers and winners. At the bottom we find Britannicus, who does not manifest any real manipulative skill, he is condemned to be the eternal victim. He is followed by Junie who is far from naive, she has linguistic subtlety and then Agrippine, calculating, and capable of

formulating effective strategies, but who is overconfident and intoxicated by her past victories. Néron manipulates all the events and the individuals surrounding him because of his natural pride and an obsession to demonstrate his power, but is unable to master the techniques of linguistic engineering: he hides too many weaknesses of confidence in his position and needs to make others recognise his power; he does not have the experience to show linguistic subtlety. Narcisse is the character who finally prevails, albeit momentarily, the ultimate manipulator of language. He has mastered all these techniques and pulls all the strings; however this path directly leads to his death.

In conclusion, we can say that the play of words and linguistic strategies employed by the characters are an intrinsic part of the plots of Racinian plays. They contribute towards the staged psychological transformation and upheaval in their victims, through the manipulation of the Levinassian concepts of *le dit* and *le dire* and the lack of sincerity in what is said. Foucault suggests that although he considers discourse as "une violence que nous faisons aux choses" as we have highlighted at the beginning of this chapter, the ideal discourse should promote truth: "je voudrais que [le discours] soit tout autour de moi comme une transparence calme, profonde, indéfiniment ouverte où les autres répondraient à mon attente et d'où les vérités une à une se lèveraient".[19] These concepts are, however, not purely theatrical or literary artifices, but help demonstrate how the aggressors are able to inflict pain and suffering through careful manipulation of spoken language, consequently showing us their 'hidden agendas'. We will now turn to an analysis of a variation of the notion of *le dit* and *le non-dit*, the concept of incommunicability.

[19] ibid. p. 9.

3.2.1.2 Incommunicability in *Britannicus*

Racinian tragedy can be considered as an excellent platform to deliberate on the contradictions and ambiguities of the human condition, while adding dramatic psychological realism. In this tragedy Racine portrays sadistic and deceitful characters who do not always communicate effectively. In fact, *Britannicus* is filled with false dialogues, deliberate misunderstandings or even lies that undermine any authentic communication. The characters find themselves in situations of incommunicability,[20] a factor which is directly related to the psychological profile of each one of them. From the first scene of *Britannicus*, Racine presents Agrippine's avowal to Albine, her confidant, whose primary purpose at that moment is the make Agrippine speak of her internal suffering. Yet despite her good intentions, she does not understand her mistress; her understanding of the facts is illusory, illustrating her level of incomprehension concerning political matters and her analyses of the situation are naïve and this is evident in her astonishment when she discovers that her mistress has to wait outside Néron's door: [9]

> Quoi ! Tandis que Néron s'abandonne au sommeil,
> Faut-il que vous veniez attendre son réveil ?
> Qu'errant dans le palais sans suite et sans escorte,
> La mère de César veille seule à sa porte ?
>
> *Britannicus*, I.i.1-4.

She is unable to fully comprehend the significance of what is happening, the fall from grace of Agrippine and the rise to absolute power on Néron. The rhythm of these lines, punctuated by questions and exclamations, reflects her misinterpretation of the situation, as demonstrated by the anaphora "Quoi", the conjunction "Qu", as well as the relative pronoun "Qui". In

[20] According to William Shannon: "the term incommunicability has two senses. The first sense relates to the limitation on the level of true communication that two characters from different backgrounds can meaningfully achieve; the second sense is more philosophical and relates to the notion that some 'things' (including individuals) cannot change what they truly are, although they may change some of their attributes. In the context of these stories, incommunicability in the second sense refers to the impossibility of a Character to truly leave behind her or his origins and background." W. Shannon, *Otherness, Subjectivity and Incommunicability in "The Broken Globe" and "Two Sisters in Geneva"*, Centre for language and Literature, University of Athabasca, 2005. Published online at:http://www2.athabascau.ca/cll/writers/english/writers/hkreisel/essay3.php

addition, unable to fully grasp the implications of events, Albine even compares Néron to Auguste: "Enfin Néron naissant / A toutes les vertus d'Auguste vieillissant." (l.29-30), showing her incomprehension of the monster that Néron is becoming, whereas Agrippine's intuition helps her to understand fully what she has helped create: "Britannicus le gêne, Albine; et chaque jour / Je sens que je deviens importune à mon tour" (I.i.13-14). Néron now sees Britannicus as a stumbling block to his future plans. She exercises some restraint in her comments by not telling Albine about Junie's kidnapping; she is content, at this moment, with the evocation of her *chagrins* (in line 7). So there is no real communication between these two characters. She also holds back vital information on Néron's persecution of Junie. Is it possible that she has not yet accepted that her son is becoming like her or worse? Agrippine is already calculating the consequences of the situation, whereas Albine is still complacent. The discourse taking place between these two characters can be considered as a *dialogue de sourds*, where each individual assesses the facts differently and they do not *hear* each other. This scenario is repeated in every act of *Britannicus*. For example, in the sixth scene of Act II, Britannicus and Junie, who meet for the first time since the abduction, are also unable to communicate effectively. [10]

> Madame, quel bonheur me rapproche de vous ?
> Quoi ? Je puis donc jouir d'un entretien si doux ?
> Mais parmi ce plaisir quel chagrin me dévore !
> Hélas ! Puis-je espérer vous revoir encore ?
> II.vi.693-696.

Britannicus seems momentarily to give way to emotion, but he is then seen to pay more attention to his own suffering than to Néron's persecution of Junie: he focuses on his "chagrin" (l. 695) and "douleur" (l. 706). A recurring theme in his discourse is the use of the first person singular. The density of exclamation marks and question marks reflects his failure to control his feelings and his interpretation of reality. A victim since his youth and frustrated at not being able to love freely, Britannicus is therefore a weak character, who seems to be

content with his misfortune. He is a tragic figure who is unable to fight but prefers to complain about his fate. His speech does not contain verbs expressing resolutions and he frequently uses passive or negative expressions, for example, in lines 701-702: "Quel démon envieux / M'a refusé l'honneur de mourir à vos yeux?" Junie remains silent, therefore in control, knowing that she can only count on herself.

Unlike Britannicus, who naively believes that he is sharing an intimate moment with his beloved, Junie is aware that Néron is spying on them, undermining any attempt at real communication by his omnipresence. Britannicus is blinded by his pain and does not understand the significance of Junie's actions. So we find another *dialogue de sourds,* even between the two characters we thought were very close.

Barnett contends that in *Britannicus*, Junie and Britannicus do not communicate effectively because they only communicate on a superficial level: "comme des acteurs dans les spectacles muets, ils poursuivent des conversations sans paroles".[21] In his view, each of them says and absorbs only what pleases them and rejects that which they do not consider to be in their interest. For Barnett, this couple represents what he calls a 'verbal conspiracy' where dialogues are not entirely assimilated by either party.

In *Britannicus,* communication does not always follow the generally accepted format of *destinateur-parole-destinataire* because of barriers to communication which exist between the characters. Such barriers may often lead to aggression and persecution when the *destinateur* realises that he or she is not communicating effectively. The spectators are only able to perceive this aggression when the characters verbalise their thoughts and their words translate into action. Language, *la parole,* then becomes: "l'unique véhicule entre le personnage, le lecteur et, finalement, entre dramaturge et auditoire".[22] More often than not, this verbalisation often results in aggressive behaviour "both on the linguistic and physical

[21] R. Barnett, *Le conflit du non-conflit*, op.cit. p.66.
[22] ibid., p.32.

level because tragic characters only communicate through the language of aggression which they invent themselves because it is their only reality and it delimits their world".[23] This is because, as we pointed out before, the fundamental Racinian relationship is based on some form of conflict. This conflict is compounded by the egocentricity that we find in most of the characters that make up Racine's *univers tragique*.

Henry Phillips suggests that the 'demands of presence' in Racine can be an explanation of the ineffectiveness of communication in *Britannicus*. He further observes that: "the demands of presence, within the Racinian dramatic form, weigh heavily on the characters, who demonstrate a keen awareness of speaking under extreme pressure."[24] Presence provides the most specific kind of expectation of speech because this is a situation where two characters *have* to meet on stage because of the requirements of the crisis at that given time in the tragedy. Speech under such conditions can result in conflict or it can help resolve an existing conflict.

Agrippine spends much of *Britannicus* waiting to see Néron (in actual fact, she only meets him twice in the course of the play and each one of their meetings is highly consequential). We may view this as a form of aggression by absence on the part of Néron; the consequences are that she has to deal with Burrhus rather than with the Emperor, showing her decline in power. Néron's avoidance of Agrippine is understandable if one subscribes to the point of view that Néron himself is 'persecuted' or tormented internally by Agrippine's presence. He is only able to find his voice when she is not there: "Eloigné de ses yeux, j'ordonne, je menace" (lines 496-506), but he is powerless when he is in her presence. This is an example of what Barthes refers to as aphasia or loss of speech. In addition, Néron flees his mother's anger and presence in vain because she is confident that he will have an audience with her soon: "Tôt ou tard, il faudra qu'il entende sa mère" (l. 920) as she vows to pursue

[23] Adapted from the ideas of R. Barthes in *Sur Racine*, op.cit p.66.
[24] H.Phillips, "Theatricity of Racinian Discourse", *Modern Languages Review*, 84 (1989), pp. 78-96.

him “d’autant plus qu’il m’évite” (l.123). These examples demonstrate that incommunicability is an important theme in the socialisation process of the characters in *Britannicus*.

Incommunicability takes two main forms in Racinian drama: (I) de facto incommunicability and (II) a deliberate short-circuiting of communication. The first form mainly comprises of the *dialogue de sourds* which mostly occurs without the knowledge of the characters as we have highlighted in this section. In the case of Albine and Agrippine, the distance between the two characters is due to their different social standing and the fact that Agrippine knows how power is exercised, and we can see in particular how it can aid the tyrant in his quest for total control. The *dialogue de sourds* therefore occurs when the characters are not on the same wavelength. The second form of incommunicability which we consider as ‘voluntary’ encompasses all actions aimed at interfering with communication: this is mainly achieved through lies and manipulation. Narcisse may be considered as the champion of this form of incommunicability; he lies to all the characters with the exception of Néron, who abuses his position of authority to deceive, mislead and persecute the other characters in the play (including his own mother).

This section has dealt with the problematic aspects of language and discourse. Speech becomes ineffective because the act of speech itself gives rise to complications on two levels: (I) There is a difference between the act of speech and the contents of the speech itself, (II) there is a certain distance between the speaker and the listener in terms of comprehension and linguistic agility. Finally, the failure by the characters to recognise the humanity of the Other gives rise to violence through language because the speakers are usually interested in imposing their will on others, in giving them a false sense of security and in perpetuating their control of power.

3.3 How suffering is expressed through language

Violence and aggression cause suffering, but also many of the characters do violence to themselves by inflicting suffering upon themselves. Levinas claims that rhetoric often leads to injustice because it only pursues the affirmation of the speaker's desires, to persuade the Other to think as he does or, in the Racinian context, to reciprocate his love:

> Rhetoric, absent from no discourse, and which philosophical discourse seeks to overcome, resists discourse. ... It approaches the Other not to face him, but obliquely - not, to be sure, as a thing, since rhetoric remains conversation, and across all its artifices goes unto the Other, solicits his yes ... It is for this that it is pre-eminently violence, that is, injustice.[25]

In spoken language, rhetoric is an autonomous move, as it seeks to reduce others (opposition) to the same as oneself and Levinas claims in this quotation that rhetoric is *a form of violence* because it limits the freedom of others through the selfish manipulation of discourse. This is because Levinas calls for the establishment of ethical relationships of caring and compassion with others and rhetoric is seen as essentially self-centred. When the characters' rhetoric fails, they turn language into a means of expressing their suffering to the world and inflict suffering upon others.

In *Phèdre,* the eponymous heroine dies as a result of having finally confessed her secret to Thésée, and Hippolyte dies because of Œnone's slander. Thésée's curse is allowed to run its course: it is because of this curse that Hippolyte it is attacked by the monster. Words are therefore the essential tools of tragic action. In his *Préface* to *Phèdre*, Racine insists on the punishment that follows the slightest error on the part of the heroes of his tragedy. According to him, the play makes moral virtue its cornerstone by emphasising the gravity of Phèdre's crime: [11]

> Les passions n'y sont présentées aux yeux que pour montrer tout le désordre dont elles sont cause; et le vice y est peint partout avec des couleurs qui en font connaître et haïr la

[25] E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, op.cit., p.70.

> difformité. C'est là proprement le but que tout homme qui travaille pour le public doit se proposer et c'est ce que les premiers poètes avaient en vue sur toute chose.[26]

This was also meant as a response to the accusations by the Jansenists against the theatre, which was considered as a potentially corrupting influence, both through the content of the plays as well as the theatres themselves which were seen as loci of moral decadence. As the Marquise de Sablé declared: [12] "Tous les grands divertissemens sont dangereux pour la vie chrétienne; mais entre tous ceux que le monde a inventé il n'y en a point qui soit plus à craindre que la Comédie."[27] The passion that consumes Phèdre is portrayed as a disease of the soul and the body, a fatal disease and a persecution whose symptoms are accurately described on several occasions. The term *fureur*, that is to say madness, is employed by the Queen herself, especially during her confession to Hippolyte. Ancient philosophers, principally Stoics such as Seneca, viewed the passions as diseases. In the play, Phèdre is obsessed with her guilt and the constant presence of the gods overshadows the play, as the promise of punishment. The themes of defilement and purity are often found in her speeches, as is seen in her last words: "Et la mort, à mes yeux dérobant la clarté, / Rend au jour, qu'ils souillaient, toute sa pureté" (l.1643). Her suffering comes from this impossible longing for innocence, and she expresses this suffering through language. Through it, we witness the fall of the Sun's granddaughter to the dark regions of passion and suffering.

For Barthes, *Phèdre* is a nominalist tragedy where the question is to name or not to name: "Tout est dans le dire ou ne pas dire".[28] The play is preoccupied with the naming of evil, the naming of the monster and this act of naming demands the breaking of silence. As long as Phèdre is silent, she can neither live nor is she able to die and it is her confession that allows the action to flow, to move forward. This leitmotif is also seen in the actions of both

[26] *Phèdre, Préface.*
[27] Marquise de Sablé*, Maximes de Mme de Sablé 1678*, ed. Damase Jouaust, (Paris: Librairie des bibliophiles, 1870), (Available online at the Projet Gallica on the webpage of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.)
[28] Barthes, *Sur Racine.op.cit*., pp. 109-116.

Hippolyte and Thésée. Phèdre confesses her crime three times, first to Œnone, then to Hippolyte and finally to Thésée. This leads Barthes to ask why it is so difficult to speak of the unspeakable? To which he answers: [13]

> C'est d'abord qu'elle (la parole) est un acte, le mot est puissant. Mais c'est surtout qu'elle est irréversible: nulle parole ne peut se reprendre. [...] Et si l'on a commencé à parler par un égarement involontaire, il ne sert à rien de se reprendre, il faut aller jusqu'au bout.[29]

Throughout the play, Phèdre's persecution is accompanied by the frightful power of the word, and the decisive role it plays in the manifestation of passion and the characters' errors. In *Phèdre*, the speech act is irreversible and damaging. Speech is not only harmful to the person who speaks, but it also affects the fate of those who hear it, the Others. Not speaking constitutes a preservation of one's dignity as well as that of others. For this reason, Hippolyte refuses to reveal Phèdre's love for him; by not telling his father of this incestuous love, he avoids damaging his own reputation as well as that of Thésée. This is how he intends to preserve his innocence. *La parole* essentially becomes an act, a persecution insofar as it condemns even the one who pronounces it. When Œnone seeks to make her confess (verbalise) that which is torturing her, Phèdre tells her that, having confessed: "Je n'en mourrai pas moins; / J'en mourrai plus coupable" (l. 243). Throughout the play, the power of the word is omnipresent; the characters are doomed to remain silent if they want to preserve their innocence or to avoid incriminating themselves. In the play, passion alienates the characters and leads them to gradually deviate from the path of reason and this deviation through passion is expressed almost entirely through speech. A study of their language is also a study of the development and settling-in of their passions, since their speech betrays their inner thoughts and turmoil. Therefore, Phèdre cannot help but reveal her love for Hippolyte to Œnone in scene 3 of Act I, neither can she hide it from Hippolyte himself: "Dans le fond de mon cœur, vous ne pouviez pas lire" (l. 598). She makes her confession in full consciousness of the consequences of such a betrayal of her inner persecution.

[29] ibid., p.153.

These examples allow us to understand that, when controlled by their passions, the characters are no longer in control of their discourse and this constitutes, as we stated in the introductory paragraph of this section, the cry for help of a suffering soul. At the same time, the ideas put forward by Barthes can be linked to the Levinassian concept of *le dit* and *le dire* that we explored in section 3.2.

Declercq identifies what he terms "le paradoxe racinien de l'expression passionnelle et harmonieuse" which leads to: "une rhétorique paradoxale de la fureur et de la tendresse" and to "une alliance d'intensité émotionnelle et de noble retenue exprimée dans la tristesse majestueuse".[30] In this way, suffering is expressed at the same time via affectionate and violent language; this is how we are able to hear what Phillips terms *la voix de la douleur,* which is linked to the concept of tragedy itself: [14]

> Les personnages rien qu'en exprimant, en extériorisant, en découvrant leurs sentiments entrent a priori dans le domaine de la douleur, car ces sentiments agissent sur celui qui parle et sur l'autre, se révélant douloureux à tous les deux, n'apportant enfin que de la peine même là où les sentiments sont légitimes ou bien reçus. Une fois que les personnages aiment, ils doivent l'exprimer. A partir de ce moment-là, la tragédie semble nous enseigner que l'on ne saurait vivre sans douleur […].[31]

This *douleur* can also be the violence and the feeling of being persecuted that the victims of passion have to endure. A persecution that make them feel as if they were being relentlessly hunted down, as we can see in Phèdre's words: "Ma blessure trop vive aussitot a saigné", (l. 304), "C'est Vénus tout entière à sa proie attachée" (l. 306) and: "Ce n' est plus une ardeur dans mes veines cachée" (l. 305).[32]

For Phillips, the expression of suffering is often seen in the vocabulary used by the characters, particularly the rhymes of *pleurs / douleurs,* as seen in *Andromaque*: "Mais

[30] G. Declercq, "Représenter la passion: la sobriété racinienne", *Littératures classiques*, II (1989), pp. 69-83, 79 and 87.
[31] H. Phillips, 'Racine et la douleur: le voile du langage', published in L'Ull crític, Vol.6, 2000 pp. 77-78, available online at: http://www.raco.cat/index.php/UllCritic/article/viewFile/207727/285606
[32] As quoted by Phillips, ibid., p. 68.

qu'Oreste à son gré m'impute ses douleurs: / N'avons-nous d'entretien que celui de ses pleurs."[33] And in: "Dissimulez ; votre rivale en pleurs/ Vient à vos pieds, sans doute, apporter ses douleurs. "[34] In *Phèdre* we find: "A vos douleurs je viens joindre mes larmes."[35] as well as: "Mon désespoir, mes yeux de pleurs toujours noyés."[36] Phillips then concludes by saying: [15]

> […] l'expression 'les pleurs' aboutirait à la dépersonnalisation. La force métaphorique ou métonymique des larmes ne fait aucun doute, surtout dans un vers tel que: "Je veux qu'à mon départ toute l'Epire pleure". (*Andromaque*, l. 1169) Les pleurs ou les larmes nous font remonter à leur source, à leur origine pour nous exposer la situation ou les circonstances qui expliquent la douleur des personnages.[37]

This is how the spectator is made aware of the internal suffering of the character, and how the character attempts to deal with their pain. Violence and suffering occupy a central place in Levinassian thought; he asserts that, when one suffers, one is robbed of his will and ability to act:

> The whole acuity of suffering lies in the impossibility of fleeing it, of being protected in oneself from oneself; it lies in being cut off from every living spring. And it is the impossibility of retreat. […] the imminence of what escapes power is inserted into the present; here the other grasps me, the world affects, touches the will. In suffering reality acts on the *in itself* of the will, which turns despairingly into total submission to the will of the Other.[38]

The Racinian character then has to resort to language (both verbal and non-verbal) to let the world know of his suffering, which is either self-imposed or imposed up him by others. So what are the words that the character uses to express this suffering? We will now turn to a study of the vocabulary of *Bajazet* which we consider as an indication of the dominance of the theme of violence found in the play.

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[33] *Andromaque,* l. 847-8.
[34] ibid., l. 856-7.
[35] *Phèdre*, l. 585.
[36] ibid., l. 1155.
[37] H. Phillips, *Racine et la douleur: le voile du langage*, op.cit., p.69.
[38] E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, op.cit., p. 238.

3.4 *Bajazet* and the vocabulary of persecution

Bajazet has been described by Maurice Rat as the most 'violent' of Racine's tragedies, "la plus sanglante et la plus fortement intriguée".[39] In this section we shall analyse the distinctive terms in the vocabulary of *Bajazet* and their lexical, ethical and thematic links to the themes of violence and aggression.

3.4.1 Analysis of the most frequently employed terms in *Bajazet*

Kirkness has identified what he calls common Racinian terms and he enumerates them as follows: *père, mère, fille, enfant, époux, hymen* and *cruel, funeste, vengeance, terreur, pitié*, based on the frequency of their use in most of Racine's tragedies. [40] This list is indicative of the vocabulary and, by extension, the themes that are characteristic of Racinian tragedy. This section will analyse the terms / words that are frequently used by the characters of *Bajazet.* This will enable us to achieve a fuller understanding of their preoccupations with their own suffering and that of others.

Amour / Aimer

This is the most frequently used word in *Bajazet* and it is for the most part employed by Roxane. There are twenty-eight occurrences of this term in Act 1 where it is predominantly associated with pain or suffering. This is experienced by both Roxane and Bajazet, albeit for different reasons and causes.

Roxane as the aggressor tries to justify her aggression towards Bajazet by transforming his refusal to acquiesce to her demands into a crime, because she is the individual who wields most power in the relationship that exists between her and Bajazet: "Voilà sur quoi je veux que Bajazet prononce. / Sa perte ou son salut dépend de sa réponse." (l.325-26). Roxane then

[39] Racine, *Théâtre Complet,* Edition Maurice Rat (Paris: Garnier, 1953), p. 12.
[40] W. J. Kirkness, 'The Language of Racine's Alexandre and its lexical links with Cinna and Attila' (French Studies, XLII (1988) pp. 36-58), p. 44.

uses her position of authority to persecute Bajazet and she gives him an impossible choice – *love me or perish*: "Bajazet doit périr, dit-elle, ou l'épouser. / S'il se rend, que deviens-je en ce malheur extrême?" (l. 340-41). This is an illustration of the structure of blackmail, which is a recurring theme in Racinian drama. It is found in the three tragedies under analysis, which, with *Phèdre*, we have elected to consider as being representative of Racinian tragedy. The *or else* structure is a dominant leitmotif and we argue that, coupled with the power balance, it constitutes an important factor in aggression and persecution. In *Andromaque*, Pyrrhus presents his captive, Andromaque with the following dilemma: she must marry him *or else* he will deliver her son into the hands of the Greeks; Junie must discourage Britannicus*, or else* Néron will kill him; Roxane is in love with Bajazet: he must marry her *or else* Roxane will carry out the Sultan's order to have Bajazet killed and he will eventually be a witness to the killing of Atalide. *Or else* therefore constitutes the dominant motif of the tragic choice that is often found in Racinian drama.

An analysis of the frequency of the term *amour* and its synonyms shows that Bajazet does not pronounce this word at all in Roxane's presence. This is his way of affirming his freedom. This is important to our understanding of the nature of the Racinian character because, according to Scherer:

> Les personnages de Racine ont un sentiment aigu de leur responsabilité, souvent ils se jugent et souvent ils se punissent. [41]

So Bajazet's choice is a difficult one, in keeping with Racine's dramatic tradition and it is an affirmation of his freedom and his non-compliance with his persecutor.

La mort / mourir

The second most frequently used term in *Bajazet* is *la mort* and the associated verb *mourir*. In addition, there is an abundance of terms associated with death such as: *périr*,

[41] J. Scherer, *Racine et/ou la Cérémonie*, op.cit., pp. 34 -35.

perdre, *expier*, *expirer*, *assassiner* and *sacrifice*. The characters (the victims) are constantly reminded that their lives are precarious, because life belongs to the more powerful as illustrated by Roxane in her conversations with Bajazet: "J'ai sur votre vie un empire suprême (l. 509), and with Atalide: "Du pouvoir qu'Amurat me donne sur sa vie" (l. 314). The frequent use of this term heightens the sense of danger or impending danger that is felt throughout the play. The characters are constantly reminded of the danger that surrounds them and this danger defines the environment of persecution that exists in the play, as demonstrated by the atmosphere of brutality and ferocity created by words such as *puni*, *vengé*, *sang* and *mort*. Danger is very important to a tragedy because it accentuates the seriousness of its content and the communication of violence. According to Artaud in *The Theatre of Cruelty*:

> Current theatre is in decline because on the one hand it has lost any feeling for seriousness and on the other hand for laughter because it has broken away from solemnity, from direct, harmful effectiveness, in a word, from danger.[42]

This solemnity, this "direct and harmful effectiveness", is the object of study of this section. Violence in the victim-aggressor relationship thrives in such an environment and the repetition of terms linked to death and suffering heightens both parties' awareness of the existence of danger as a tragic element. Death is omnipresent and inevitable but the actual death itself does not have as much dramatic value as the preparation or the action leading to it. Michael Edwards sees death in *Bajazet* not only as part of the Turks' culture, but as a separate and well-defined entity, a character with his own designs: [16]

> La mort pénètre tout aussi subitement la pensée et les émotions des personnages, le tissu du langage et le trame des événements, pour se réaliser à la fin dans l'anéantissement de Bajazet, de Roxane, d'Orcan et d'Atalide.[43]

The characters have to live in a world of fear, fear for their own lives or those of others. This creation of a violent context is also found in *Andromaque* and *Britannicus*.

[42] A. Artaud, "The Theatre of Cruelty", in *The Theatre and its Double* (London: John Calder, 1977), p. 48.
[43] M. Edwards, *La Tragédie Racinienne*, (Paris: La Pensée Universelle, 1972), p. 180.

A repeated expression in Racinian drama is "C'en est fait", which translates to the expression of inevitability, fatality and finality of an event. This expression is found five times in *Bajazet*: lines 334, 568, 584, 904 and 941, three times in *Britannicus*: "Narcisse, c'en est fait, Néron est amoureux." (l. 382), "Madame, c'en est fait, Britannicus expire." (l. 1613) and: "C'en est fait: le cruel n'a plus rien qui l'arrête" (l. 1699). On close analysis, the usage of this expression is an indication of the evolution of the action of the play itself and can be considered as a summary of the plot, with passion and violence being a central theme, culminating in Néron becoming the cruel "maître du monde". The expression is also found three times in *Andromaque,* and we will quote two of them: "Nous n'avons qu'à parler: c'en est fait. Quelle joie, / D'enlever à l'Epire une si belle proie! " (l. 597-98) and "Madame, c'en est fait, et vous êtes servie: / Pyrrhus rend à l'autel son infidèle vie" (l. 1493).

3.4.2 *Bajazet* and the expression of human suffering

Bajazet, is predominantly concerned with suffering which is directly linked to the victim-aggressor relationship and the prevailing environment of persecution. According to Draper:

> Suffering is the experience from which tragedy springs and to which it seeks to give a meaningful context. The effect of a tragedy may well be to underline the inexplicability of suffering, to ask the question to which no answer is expected: Why?[44]

Levinas asserts that suffering takes away the humanity of those who suffer: "the humanity of those who suffer is overwhelmed by the evil that renders it and the justification of the Other's pain is certainly the source of all immorality".[45] So in our context, aggression and persecution become an overpowering of a character's humanity in a violent and cruel manner that we can only describe as being evil or absurd. In *Bajazet*, Racine uses the clever associations of words or terms to draw attention to the victim-aggressor relationship and the mechanics of persecution. We find that the terms *amour/aimer* are closely associated with *la vie* and

[44] R.P. Draper, (ed.) *Tragedy: Developments in Criticism* (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 39.
[45] E. Levinas, "Useless Suffering", in *Entre Nous: Thinking of the Other*, trans. by Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), pp. 90-98.

mourir/la mort are associated with *trahir.* The association between *mourir* and *trahir* is found on two levels, the first being that Bajazet prefers to die rather than to betray Atalide. His death is perceived as a way of escaping betrayal, thus heightening the audience's appreciation of Bajazet's nobility of character: "Seigneur, vous pourriez vivre et ne me point trahir." (l. 727), showing us Bajazet's predicament; if he continues to live, the chances are that he will betray Atalide, in order to avoid this, he needs to die.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we discussed how Racinian characters abuse language (that is to say use language for their own purposes) through rhetoric to inflict suffering upon others. The writer uses various techniques to highlight the dangers of speech and silence; with a view to moving the audience and illustrating that aggression and persecution are not only found in acts of violence, but in speech *le dit* and silence the *non-dit* as well. The concepts of *le dit* and le *non-dit* were illustrated as equal to the Levinassian ideas of *le dit* and *le dire*. The choice of vocabulary plays an important role in conditioning and instilling the sentiment of persecution in the victims, who have to live under the shadow of impending death; language is then constantly used to remind them of this fact. The social dimension in which language is employed is of paramount importance and a distinction was made between the *said* or *discourse-as-content* and the *saying*. Both external factors (the environment or the *lieu*) and internal factors (passion) help shape the discourse of the characters, who will ultimately use language as a tool in both creating and depicting aggression and persecution. Power is found in discourse which becomes a source of authority and rhetorical devices are employed to maintain it, with language being used to restrict the freedom of others as well as perpetuate violence.

CONCLUSION

This research set out to answer three main questions that were then presented as the three chapters of this thesis. Firstly, what informed the presentation of violence in Racine's plays and what is the link between passion and persecution? Secondly, how is aggression and persecution worked out through the characters depicted in the plays? And finally, what is the role played by language in revealing and promoting aggression and persecution?

Concerning the first question, this study has shown that Racine drew inspiration from the sources of his tragedies; however, he shifts the tragic emphasis by giving prominence to fatality and persecution by the Other, but maintaining the tragic conception that presents humanity falling prey to superior beings and powers. In his *Préfaces*, he insists on the respect for tradition and what can be termed *des modèles antiques*. Excessive passions of love and jealousy make the characters both vulnerable and insensitive to the violence that they cause. These passions lead to the annihilation of reason and will-power, which we likened to the Levinassian concept of a *defection from consciousness*. Each act of Racine's plays can be said to illustrate the different stages of evolution of passion: possession, obsession, illusion, perversion and destruction. Consequently, violence is closely associated with the development of passion. The relationships established between Racinian characters are characterised by a lack of compassion and admiration for the Other. Self-interest and fatality (which leads man to a pre-defined destiny, from which, by definition, there can be no escape) give rise to and maintain violence. Those passions lead to the destruction of the character and the fact that this is something beyond his control allows passion to be regarded as a form of persecution; for example, Phèdre is born to fatality, that is to say, her fate is pre-determined by her ancestry, and she is persecuted by her genetic inheritance.

To respond to the second question, Levinas's philosophy states that human beings' social relations must be underpinned by ethical relations between individuals; when that is not the case, violence and aggression may result. In Racinian tragedy, these elements (persecution and aggression) symbolise the failure of these relations when the persecutors fail to acknowledge the humanity of the Other. The Other is seen either as an object of desire or a source of fear. Racinian characters are unwilling to establish ethical relationships with others because that would imply compromise and the prioritisation of the needs of the Other. Strategies are therefore employed to control and dominate him, excuses are found to justify such dehumanisation and the end result is a refusal to acknowledge the Other's suffering and pain. Disorder in the family and in society is brought about as a result of the character committing an unpardonable sin, that of daring to pursue an impossible love. This pursuit often brings undesirable results, such as the aggressor's alienation from the victim and the eventual death of the character because they try to bring them under their control but they cannot. This leads to the destruction of the family unit through aggression and persecution.

Mimesis is used to present characters who incarnate universal human traits which are still identifiable in humanity to this day. Batache-Watt justifies the universality of Racinian drama by the following: [1]

> Si les femmes [et les hommes] raciniennes nous semblent modernes, c'est, sans doute, en vertu de leur universalité même: aux prises avec des passions irrésistibles, fondamentales, éternelles, elles se débattent dans cet abîme d'incertitude, de contradiction et de chaos que représente leur personnalité dans ce qu'elle a de plus intensément humain.[1]

Among these traits, we singled out those of monstrosity and the predisposition to commit violence. This monstrosity is the "inhuman otherness" that does not hesitate to persecute even close members of its family. It is also an agent of alienation and corruption of the human form, thereby becoming necessary in the persecution-aggression complex. The passion of love

[1] E. Batache-Watt, *Profils des héroïnes raciniennes* (Paris: Éd. Klincksieck, 1976), p. 93.

also acquires monstrous dimensions, leading to the persecution of the individual experiencing it and by extension, the object of their desire.

The victim-aggressor relationship is based on some form of power balance and this power is used to the advantage of those who possess it to make impossible demands on those under their dominion. In the plays analysed in this study, the exercise of power is never just, it is always tyrannical. The plays illustrate the paranoia of power which presents the character with the dualistic potential of becoming either a victim of power or a despot, as in the case of Néron in *Britannicus*. Power therefore establishes and conditions the victim-aggressor relationship and brings about an antithesis of the Levinassian fear of the Other (not *fear for the Other* which would imply compassion). This fear is accentuated by the setting, which is an important dramatic element in Racinian tragedy, it can be said to constitute an omnipresent persecutor, a prison in which the victims are perpetually on trial until their death.

Turning to the question of the role played by language in the promotion of aggression and persecution, Racine succeeded in putting aggression and persecution *into words*, and indeed in making the words the very instruments of those actions. This is done on two levels, firstly, on the level of the individual letting the world know of his internal turmoil and secondly, on the level of the aggressor using the power of words to dominate others. The first scenario illustrates the heroes' attempts to put into words the tragic burden that weighs on their shoulders and is threatening to crush them to death. The tragic dilemma arises when the impossible choice leads to silence and incommunicability. Racine uses a meticulously chosen and finely tuned vocabulary to portray the extent of this tragic dilemma and to illustrate the violence that permeates the various Acts of his drama. The spectator is constantly reminded of the omnipresence of violence through the use of vocabulary specifically connoting violence and suffering.

The second scenario is the most predominant, with discourse being combined with power to manipulate the Other. This is achieved through the use of rhetoric, silence and the exploitation of linguistic strategies such as the *dit* and the *non-dit,* which all serve to perpetuate dominance. These strategies are what we consider as *la violence que les personnages font aux autres.* It is in this context that language is used to perpetuate domination, violence and fear.

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By combining a study of the themes of persecution and aggression with the philosophy of Levinas, this thesis hopes to have identified the motivations of the characters behind the representation of violence in Racinian drama. These findings have shown that the Racinian universe is composed of characters who are victims of fatality (especially love-passion) and that their thoughts are always focused on the problem of their passion, thus lending to the tragedies an atmosphere of terror, which is maintained by language and the setting in which the action takes place. In the Racinian universe, violence aims not only at the destruction of the other, it also is an attempt to possess the otherness of the Other, the sheer difference from the individual that is the reality and the essence of the Other. As Levinas says:

> Violence does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their own substance, making them carry out actions that will destroy every possibility for action.[2]

The Levinassian ethical relationship, built on the principle of responsibility towards the Other, is abandoned in favour of the promotion and perpetuation of what Levinas calls 'useless suffering' through language, the abuse of power and the desire to satisfy an uncontrollable passion. Levinas's thinking about violence is to imagine that if we could just get closer to people, if we could see them as fellow suffering humans like ourselves, then we would not

[2]Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, op.cit., p. 21.(also available online at: http://www.academia.edu/470053/Beyond_the_Dialectic_Conrad_Levinas_and_the_Scene_of_Recognition)

hurt them. This study of a small number of Racine's plays is therefore applicable to the rest of his work. The Levinassian approach shows that the meaning and significance of another individual is based on the subject's interpretation of the Other and that elements such as fatality, power and self-interest drive the actions of Racinian characters, leading both to their destruction and to that of others. This work could be taken forward by presenting a reading of Racine through a combination of Levinassian ethics and the African philosophy of Ubuntu,[3] given that both these trends call for a deep appreciation of human dignity which is entrenched in the individual's kinship with fellow human beings.

[3] The South African Nobel laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu defines Ubuntu as follows: "Africans have this thing called UBUNTU... the essence of being human. It is part of the gift that Africans will give the world. It embraces hospitality, caring about others, willing to go the extra mile for the sake of others. We believe a person is a person through another person, that my humanity is caught up, bound up and inextricable in yours. When I dehumanise you I inexorably dehumanise myself. The solitary individual is a contradiction in terms and, therefore, you seek to work for the common good because your humanity comes into its own community, in belonging." Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness: A Personal Overview of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (London: Doubleday Publishers, 1999), p.22.

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Appendix

Translations of major quotations found in Chapter 1

[1]
Racine is interested in psychologizing tragedy [...] He presents blind and weak men, sometimes their weaknesses leads to the dissolution of their personality. All Racine's work asserts that there is no human misery that literature cannot endow with nobility and majesty.

[2]
As we consider the problem of siblings (and the fratricidal struggle), the shadow of the law on the impulse of desire, the instability of infanticide, the labyrinthine connections of the Oedipus complex, the guilt of the devouring mother - we recognize some Racinian leitmotifs, among many others, all involved in the orchestration of conflict.

[3]
Albine:
Can he forget, that it is to you he owes
His life, his empire? How from Claudius' son
You snatched the crown, to place it on his brow?
All that surrounds him pleads for Agrippina;
Love, duty, reverence, he owes you all.

[4]
Because Venus wills that of this dreadful race
I shall perish the last, and the most disgraced.

[5]
A man born Christian and French finds himself forced into satire; the great subjects are forbidden him [religion and politics].

[6]
She is the daughter of Pasiphaë and the sister of Ariane - which represents violent love, a type of madness in desire. She is also the daughter of Minos, Judge of the Underworld, and the granddaughter of the Sun, which illuminates the crimes of men. Her father and her grandfather draw her towards the light of conscience, remorse and therefore suicide.

[7]

No, I cannot endure a happiness that galls me,
Oenone. In this jealous rage, take pity on me.
Aricia must perish. We must rouse the enmity
Of my husband against that odious dynasty.
No light punishment should be the sister's:
Her crime exceeds that of all her brothers.

[8]
Orestes loves Hermione who does not love him, Hermione loves Pyrrhus who does not love her, Pyrrhus loves Andromache who does not love him and Andromache loves Hector who is dead. Thus, each character is bound by the power that each has to inflict misery upon the other.

[9]
I have always regarded him as a monster, but here he is a nascent monster. He has not yet set fire to Rome.

and

He has not killed his mother, his wife, his tutors but he has in him all the seeds of these crimes. He is beginning to want to free himself of all restraint [...]. In short, he is a budding monster, but not yet bold enough to declare himself and he seeks to camouflage his horrible actions.

[10]
Worthy son of a hero who granted you light.
Deliver the world from a monster so odious.
Theseus' widow dares to love Hippolytus!
This dreadful monster won't escape: believe me.
Here's my heart. Here's where your hand should strike me.

[11]
Hermione
Farewell. Go now. I'll stay in Epirus:
I renounce Greece; Sparta; all my house;
All my family; it is enough for me
That she produced you: you, monstrosity.

Oreste
She loves him! And I'm the raging monster!
Far from my sight, I lose her now, forever!
Ungrateful, fleeing, leaves me for my prize,
Her slave, all the harsh names she can devise.

[12]
Thésée:
I saw the sad object of my tears, Pirithous,
Thrown to cruel monsters by that barbarian,

I tricked the eyes of those who guarded me, at last.
I freed Nature from a treacherous opponent:
He served as food for that monstrous regiment.

Aricie:
Take care, my Lord. Your unconquerable hand
From countless monsters, has freed the land:
But not all are destroyed, and you have spared

One…your son, my Lord, forbids me to declare

[13]
Take vengeance: punish me for loathed delight.
Worthy son of a hero who granted you light.
Deliver the world from a monster so odious.

[14]
You fear him. Be first to accuse him, though,
Of a crime he may accuse you of today.
and

Whatever sentence is pronounced, you must submit,
Madame, if embattled honour would be rescued,
You must sacrifice everything, even virtue.

[15]
Traitor, do you dare to show yourself before me?
Monster, whom the thunderbolt too long has spared,
Foul leavings of those thieves I swept from the earth!

[16]
Hippolyte alone, worthy to be a hero's son,
Reined in his horses, seized his javelin,
Drove at the monster, and with a steady hand

[17]
Is it for them I reign? To please their will
Must I for ever sacrifice my own?

The choice is yours;
Virtuous till now, you have but to proceed.

[18]
I can destroy her son; perhaps I should.
A stranger…slave, in Epirus, she's become,
One who has my heart, a throne, her son;
Yet in her traitorous heart I only win
The role of one she persecutes on whim.
No, I forswear her, vengeance shall be mine.

[19]
Tyranny is the wish to have in one way what can only be had in another. We render different duties to different merits; the duty of love to the pleasant; the duty of fear to the strong; duty of belief to the learned. We must render these duties; it is unjust to refuse them, and unjust to ask others. And so it is false and tyrannical to say, "He is not strong, therefore I will not esteem him; he is not able, therefore I will not fear him.

[20]
But hast thou thought of the worse perils, though,
Which, if thou dost not wed me, thou'lt be in,
Of how 'tis I whose favour thou must win
Above all else, how if I aid thee not,
All will be hard for thee? Hast though forgot
That it is I who hold the palace gates?

That I can open them for thee, thy fate's
Mistress, or keep them closed for evermore?
That I have o'er thy life absolute power?
That thou still breathest only because i
Love thee

[21]
I'll die if I lose you, die if I must wait:
Think then: I'll return, to lead you swiftly
To the temple where your child awaits me;
There, angry, or submissive if you're wise,
To crown you, or slay him before your eyes.
[22]
I suffer the ills I dealt at Troy, I say:
Vanquished and in chains, regret consumes me,
Burned by more fires than I lit around me.

[23]
Pyrrhus
Madame, tell me I may hope further,
I'll give you your boy, act as his father;
I'll teach him myself to avenge the Trojans;
Punish the Greeks for your ills and my own.

[24]
Néron:
Absent from her, I threaten and command
And listen and approve the advice that you give
But to thee will…

[25]
Junie:
This place, my Lord, is full of Nero's power:
The Emperor is ever present here:
These very walls perhaps; have eyes and ears.

[26]
This blow is aimed at me
To break this fatal marriage should I fail?
My place, my name and my power are lost forever.

[27]
Néron:
Britannicus, again shall be my brother;
Of Junia's fate I will make you arbiter,
Go to Britannicus declare my pleasure,
Guards let my mother in all be obeyed.

[28]
He did still more for her, my Osmin: he
Hath given her complete authority
Here in his absence. Thou art well aware
Of the cruel customs of our Sultans. Rare
It is that they will let their brothers long
Enjoy the dangerous honour of having sprung

From the same stock and being to them too near

[29]
The best uses have i made of the power supreme
Which Amurath granted to me over him
Bajazet to the Sultan's throne draws nigh

When I do everything for him, if he
Will not do everything for me

I shall cast off the ungrateful wretch and let him fall
Back into that sad plight I drew him from.
His doom or safety hangs on what he now will say.

[30]
What distinguishes the Racinian character is not the power of love, but the very form of this love, it is selfish in that it seeks to possess the object at any price, and is also an enemy of itself, always precipitating towards disaster.

[31]
He kept the ferocity of the nation in the centre of his love. And if you find it strange that he consents to die rather than give up what he loves and to marry where he does not love, you have only to read the history of the Turks.

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[10]
Hermione:
Farewell. Go now. I'll stay in Epirus:
I renounce Greece; Sparta; all my house;
All my family; it is enough for me
That she produced you: you, monstrosity.

Oreste:
She loves him! And I'm the raging monster!
Far from my sight, I lose her now, forever!
Ungrateful, fleeing, leaves me for my prize,
Her slave, all the harsh names she can devise.

[11]
Thésée:
I saw the sad object of my tears, Pirithous,
Thrown to cruel monsters by that barbarian,

I tricked the eyes of those who guarded me, at last.
I freed Nature from a treacherous opponent:

He served as food for that monstrous regiment.

Aricie:
Take care, my Lord. Your unconquerable hand
From countless monsters, has freed the land:
But not all are destroyed, and you have spared
One…your son, my Lord, forbids me to declare

[12]
Take vengeance: punish me for loathed delight.
Worthy son of a hero who granted you light.
Deliver the world from a monster so odious.
[13]
You fear him. Be first to accuse him, though,
Of a crime he may accuse you of today.

and

Whatever sentence is pronounced, you must submit,
Madame, if embattled honour would be rescued,
You must sacrifice everything, even virtue.

[14]
Traitor, do you dare to show yourself before me?
Monster, whom the thunderbolt too long has spared,
Foul leavings of those thieves I swept from the earth!

[15]
Hippolyte alone, worthy to be a hero's son,
Reined in his horses, seized his javelin,
Drove at the monster, and with a steady hand

[16]
Is it for them I reign? To please their will
Must I for ever sacrifice my own?

The choice is yours;
Virtuous till now, you have but to proceed.

[17]
I can destroy her son; perhaps I should.
A stranger…slave, in Epirus, she's become,
One who has my heart, a throne, her son;
Yet in her traitorous heart I only win
The role of one she persecutes on whim.
No, I forswear her, vengeance shall be mine.

[18]
Tyranny is the wish to have in one way what can only be had in another. We render different duties to different merits; the duty of love to the pleasant; the duty of fear to the strong; duty of belief to the learned. We must render these duties; it is unjust to refuse them, and unjust to ask others. And so it is false and tyrannical to say, "He is not strong, therefore I will not esteem him; he is not able, therefore I will not fear him."

[19]

But hast thou thought of the worse perils, though,
Which, if thou dost not wed me, thou'lt be in,
Of how 'tis I whose favour thou must win
Above all else, how if I aid thee not,
All will be hard for thee? Hast though forgot
That it is I who hold the palace gates?
That I can open them for thee, thy fate's
Mistress, or keep them closed for evermore?
That I have o'er thy life absolute power?
That thou still breathest only because i
Love thee

[20]
I'll die if I lose you, die if I must wait:
Think then: I'll return, to lead you swiftly
To the temple where your child awaits me;
There, angry, or submissive if you're wise,
To crown you, or slay him before your eyes.

[21]
I suffer the ills I dealt at Troy, I say:
Vanquished and in chains, regret consumes me,
Burned by more fires than I lit around me.

[22]
Pyrrhus
Madame, tell me I may hope further,
I'll give you your boy, act as his father;
I'll teach him myself to avenge the Trojans;
Punish the Greeks for your ills and my own.

[23]
Néron:
Absent from her, I threaten and command
And listen and approve the advice that you give
But to thee will…

[24]
Junie:
This place, my Lord, is full of Nero's power:
The Emperor is ever present here:
These very walls perhaps; have eyes and ears.

[25]
This blow is aimed at me
To break this fatal marriage should I fail?
My place, my name and my power are lost forever.

[26]
Néron:
Britannicus, again shall be my brother;
Of Junia's fate I will make you arbiter,
Go to Britannicus declare my pleasure,
Guards let my mother in all be obeyed.

[27]
He did still more for her, my Osmin: he
Hath given her complete authority
Here in his absence. Thou art well aware
Of the cruel customs of our Sultans. Rare
It is that they will let their brothers long
Enjoy the dangerous honour of having sprung
From the same stock and being to them too near

[28]
The best uses have i made of the power supreme
Which Amurath granted to me over him
Bajazet to the Sultan's throne draws nigh

When I do everything for him, if he
Will not do everything for me

I shall cast off the ungrateful wretch and let him fall
Back into that sad plight I drew him from.

His doom or safety hangs on what he now will say

[29]
What distinguishes the Racinian character is not the power of love, but the very form of this love, it is selfish in that it seeks to possess the object at any price, and is also an enemy of itself, always precipitating towards disaster.

[30]
He kept the ferocity of the nation in the centre of his love. And if you find it strange that he consents to die rather than give up what he loves and to marry where he does not love, you have only to read the history of the Turks;

Translations of major quotations found in Chapter 3

[1]
This decoding is primarily concerned with accepting that speech remains an effective tool, sometimes deceptive, almost always inconsistent; accepting in fact its true relationship with thought which, outside its specific context, tends to frustrate the process of analysis.

[2]
We must combine the symbols of tenderness and pain with those of fury and anger, we must put the mind through a process of relaxation and ecstasy; a man needs to complain and groan, and not grumble: he must have outbursts at times [...].We have to mix and vary the major symbols when rearranging emotive speech, so that this diversity of expressions gives a true representation of the movements of a troubled mind, agitated by uncertainty and upset by wanton passion.

[3]
I love, I must confess, that generous pride,
Which has never bent beneath a yoke of sighs.
Phaedra was honoured by Theseus' breath in vain,
For myself, I'm prouder, and flee the glory gained
From homage offered to hundreds, and so easily,
From entering a heart thrown open to so many.
[…]

Fighting the yoke, that delights him so, in vain:
That's what I wish, that is what excites me.

[4]
Just as it is the nature of great minds to be make clear many things in a few words, it is the lot of small minds, on the contrary, to talk a great deal and yet say nothing.

[5]
Preoccupied by the same selfishness that characterises passion and ambition and the puppets who are the ignorant victims of passion.

[6]
My patience has too long endured his pride,
He is their chief advisor. At this hour,
They sit in secret council at his house.
Ere the sun set let him be gone from Rome.
Such is my pleasure. Burrhus see it done

[7]
Proceed Narcissus, fortune smiles again
It is up to you to profit from the blessed occasion.
He, who can all bestow, shall all command,
And must with zeal be served. No hesitation
But to the potent sacrifice of the weak.

[8]
I know my Lord
These thoughts are not your own. Often have you said,
That Rome, with a common voice, pays homage due
To Caesar's virtues

[9]
Madam, becomes it you, while Nero sleeps,
To wait all unattended at his door?
Return, dear Empress, you debase your state.

[10]
Ah Princess! Do I then behold you
My palpitating heart can scarcely trust
The happiness it feels. By stealth, alas!
Can I hope to see you again?

[11]
The passions are only presented to show all the disorder that they cause, and vice is painted with colours that make us know and hate its abnormality. This then is the goal that everyone who writes for the public must set himself and was the focus of the first poets.

[12]
All the great diversions are dangerous for the Christian life, but among all those which the world has invented, there is none greater to fear than the theatre.

[13]

To begin with, (speech) is an act, the word is powerful. But it is also irreversible: no words can be taken back. [...] And if one starts to talk as a result of an involuntary error, it then becomes useless to take the words back and one has to go all the way.

[14]
Merely by expressing, externalizing and discovering their feelings, the characters must necessarily enter the domain of pain because these feelings affect both the speaker and the Other, are painful to both and only bring pain even in instances where the feelings are legitimate and well received. Once a character loves, he must express his love. From that moment on, tragedy teaches us that we cannot live without pain [...].

[15]
[...] The term 'tears' leads to depersonalization. The metaphorical or metonymic strength of tears is seen in lines such as: "Let Epirus weep at my going" *(Andromaque,* l. 1169) Weeping and tears take us back to their source, providing us with an explanation of the circumstances that led to the characters' pain.

[16]
Without notice, death enters the mind and emotions of the characters, the fabric of language and the sequence of events, to finally culminate in the annihilation of Bajazet, Roxane, Orcan and Atalide.

[17]
Sire, say all that is needed, to save your life

Thou knowest what I have done for thee.
It comes to this: thy very life thou owest to me

[18]
Require naught more; not death nor thou, to move her,
Will ever make me tell her that I love her,
Since I shall ever love but thee.