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THE LANGUAGE OF POWER RELATIONSHIPS IN RACINE (*BRITANNICUS*, *BERENICE*, *BAJAZET*), WITH PARALLELS IN SARTRE

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For my mother, Margaret, and the memory of my father, Edward (1942-95)

ABSTRACT

This study is concerned with the way in which Racine, particularly through his use of language, dramatises areas of tension inherent in the concept of power. Considering three plays from Racine's middle period (*Britannicus*, *Bajazet* and *Bérénice*), Chapter One seeks to uncover the basis of political power. Taking as its starting point the ambivalence underpinning the term legitimacy, Section A examines the foundations of power in the sense of political and moral authority. Section B in turn looks at the implications of these findings for the nature and operation of power, while Section C highlights the discrepancy between real and imagined power, by raising the all-important question as to its locus.

Chapter Two takes a fresh look at the relationship between power and love. The ruler / lover dichotomy dramatises both an exterior clash and an interior conflict. We see firstly how the role of ruler impinges upon the role of lover, betraying the transgressive nature of power. However, the examination of the operation of power in a realm where it should not prevail, is ironically confounded by the fact that the political and the erotic are shown to be almost inextricably intertwined. The roles of ruler and lover therefore paradoxically conflict and concord simultaneously.

By examining relations between individual characters from the Sartrean perspective of *pour autrui*, Chapter Three ultimately reveals what the power structure would conceal, that is that those in power are subject to the same cycle of dominance and subservience as those who are not. Section A demonstrates the way in which the familiar acts of thinking and speaking, traditionally perceived as our principal means of positive interaction with others, give rise to conflictual relationships similar to those portrayed three centuries later by Sartre in *Huis Clos*. Language itself, far from uniting characters, becomes a source of anxiety and discord. Characters find themselves in a bewildering hall of mirrors as speech becomes increasingly deceptive, distorting and concealing the

truth. In this way we see how the *dit* gives way to the tyranny of the *non-dit*, for like a sinister 'thought police', Racine's protagonists set about capturing and controlling the Other's mind. Section B highlights the development of techniques of manipulation and suppression. The title of this section, *Merry-Go-Round*, reflects the endless and fruitless struggle to dominate the Other's thought-process.

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PREFATORY NOTE

Quotations are taken from J. Racine, *Oeuvres*, ed. by P. Mesnard, 8 vols (Paris: Hachette, 1865-73). References indicating the play and line number are either given in the body of the thesis after the relevant quotation, or, for multiple references, in the notes. Italics in verse quotations are my own. Quotations from J.-P. Sartre's *Huis Clos* are from the Gallimard edition (Paris, 1947). Bibliographical references are given in accordance with the Modern Humanities Research Association style book. An amended version of Section A of Chapter Three appeared in *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 18 (1996), 133-44, under the title 'Racine's Hall of Mirrors'. I would also like to acknowledge here a work which proved to be of invaluable help: B. C. Freeman and A. Batson, *Concordance du Théâtre et des Poésies de Jean Racine*, 2 vols (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968).

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INTRODUCTION

For over three hundred years Racinian theatre has provoked a multitude of conflicting interpretations. One is reminded of what Norman Rabkin wrote of Shakespeare's *Henry V*: 'Leaving the theatre at the end of the first performance, some members of the audience knew that they had seen a rabbit, others a duck. Still others [...] knew that they did not know what to think.'[1] The fact that Racinian tragedy continues to generate new interpretations, which seem to confound previously hard-won conclusions, is testimony to the perennial fascination Racine has exerted. Of course one might wonder what there is left to write on Racinian tragedy. In the words of Shakespeare, 'What's new to speak, what now to register?'[2] This thesis is an attempt to show that one area at least deserves fresh scrutiny: the question of power and its implications for Racinian tragedy as a whole.

A glance at the political and philosophical writing of the seventeenth century, and even at its tragic drama, suffices to show that a major preoccupation of the time was the nature and limits of absolutism.[3] At a time of political revaluation, it is hardly surprising we find Racine concerned with the limits of power and the consequences of its transgression. It will become clear from the subjects Racine chooses to treat that he wishes to focus, not on wars and victories, kingdoms and riches, but rather on the nature and operation of power. This is not merely a subjective whim. Power and rank have become intrinsic to the tragic vision. D'Aubignac's famous prescription that tragedy should be '... une chose magnifique, grave et convenable aux agitations et aux grands revers de la fortune des princes', reflects the fact that it has been largely concerned with the agony of men and women of power.[4] Indeed Jean Dubu recently defined tragedy as 'le cercle étroit des têtes couronnées, cette espèce de club de monarques'.[5] Racine maintains and indeed accentuates this prerequisite. Alain Quesnel points out that 'la question du pouvoir sur autrui est au fondement même de l'oeuvre'.[6] It is the purpose of this thesis to look beyond the conventional pageant of

power and explore how it operates as an essential determinant in the movement of the tragic action by giving rise to transgressive and repressive relationships. It will focus on the issue of limits to elucidate how Racine dramatises areas of tension inherent in the very concept of power itself. Each of the three main chapter seeks to untangle the complex web-like structure of power in *Britannicus*, *Bajazet* and *Bérénice*. Why this choice? The demands of space and time self-evidently preclude a detailed examination of each one of Racine's tragedies. On the other hand, it is only through such an examination that one can begin to grasp the complexity and wide-ranging nature of Racine's treatment of power. It was for these severely practical reasons that the decision was taken to concentrate on these three plays. They were not chosen arbitrarily. They are all from Racine's middle period, successive works written within a three-year period, and all offer much evidence on the theme treated. In addition, while the main emphasis will be on these three plays, reference will throughout be made to the other tragedies, insofar as they offer points of comparison or difference.

The 1950s and 1960s witnessed something of a Racinian critical renaissance. The tragedies became the battleground for a new style of literary criticism, given the name of literary theory. This is not the place to rehearse how the band-wagon of this *nouvelle critique* was set in motion by critics such as Charles Mauron,[7] Lucien Goldmann[8] and Roland Barthes.[9] However that this trend is still vigorous may be seen in the recent work of Catherine Spencer's feminist study, in the self-reflexive approach of Mary-Jo Muratore and the revival of historicist criticism by Timothy Reiss.[10] Many of these studies have offered interesting perspectives. But there has been, perhaps inevitably, a concomitant tendency for the texts themselves to become obscured and distorted.[11] This is perhaps in part a reflection of the new cult status that theory itself has acquired. One only needs to look at publishers' lists (and the number of new degree courses set up in universities over recent years) to realise that theory is now something which is studied for its own sake and not necessarily as a tool for literary criticism.[12] It seems, however, that we have now reached a crossroads. We

have entered a disorientating phase in literary criticism, with theorists like Edward Saïd paradoxically attacking the very notion of theory both as the preserve of a few and as an inadequate tool for literary criticism.[13] Recent examples such as a conference on literary criticism was given the suggestive and provocative title of *Post Theory*,[14] or the titles of publications such as that of Nicholas Royle's *After Derrida*[15] all combine to indicate that the hegemony of theory-centred approaches may now be over. More than ever, a re-evaluation of the texts themselves is necessary. It is for this reason that this thesis will concentrate on the evidence provided by the plays themselves, with the emphasis throughout on close engagement with the text rather than the adoption of any one theoretical approach.[16]

While many studies have approached the theme of power in Racinian tragedy, not all have done justice to the depth and complexity of both subject and treatment. Many have been limited in scope, and have concentrated on one particular aspect of statecraft. This distance, between the experience of power relationships in Racine and the critical treatment they have received, inevitably produces a feeling of dissatisfaction. For example, Peter France outlines the dangers of kingship by demonstrating, through his examination of flattery, how the king can easily be led astray. Although from this he deduces that man is not up to the role of king, this leaves much unsaid about the nature and operation of political power. France goes on to suggest that in some plays where the image of a monastery or temple is offered, or where indeed there are recurrent images of the sea, Racine is putting forward symbols of an alternative political system. However some key questions are left tantalisingly unanswered. What is it about the current form of power that makes us seek an alternative? What is the alternative and in what way(s) will it improve on the previous form of power?[17] Harriet Stone comes closer to the crux of the problem of power by entering into an examination of the nature of obedience to an absolute ruler. Even here, however, there is a strange acceptance that the ruler's power is 'absolute' and a distinct lack of explanation and definition as to what is understood by this term.[18]

Another example is Yves Pihan's study of the role of the people in Racine's tragedies. He fastens upon a key aspect of statecraft and, identifying power as a reciprocal relationship, he explores the link between public opinion and political power.[19] Although he illustrates the ambiguity of the role of the people in Racine's tragedies, the evidence he provides rather contradicts his unequivocal conclusion that 'vox populi' equates with 'vox Dei'.[20] He also fails to enter into any discussion of why the ruler must heed public opinion, be it for reasons of political expediency or moral obligation. An investigation of these aspects of the question would have revealed more about the features and style of government. Other critics, including Jean-Marie Apostolidès and Jane Alison Hale, have explored the whole concept of absolutism, working from the seventeenth-century notion of the king as God on earth.[21] For these critics the secret of Racinian power lies in a basic equation: absolutism = invisibility.[22] This implies that in order to be absolute, the king must remain in a distant, hidden position with the power to see and hear all without actually being seen or heard himself. This is therefore a power which consists in remaining outside the action, but a power inevitably lacking in the theatrical sovereign. Catherine Spencer takes the same equation and overturns it, concluding that absolutism = visibility.[23] While we perhaps learn something about the limits of power from these studies, the fact that the analyses are rooted in the *staging* of kingship, means that its nature and operation remain vague.

This thesis aims to address some of these questions that have been incompletely studied, or perhaps not persistently enough asked. Working from the simple, yet not always recognised, distinction between power and authority, Chapter One takes as its starting point an analysis of the basis of political power. The first section of this chapter immediately identifies and confronts an inherently problematic area of power, that is, the ambivalence of the term 'legitimacy' with its connotations of political and moral authority. It firstly examines the issue of political legitimacy, that is the ruler / subject relationship, and asks what binds the two together and what tears them

asunder. Secondly this section considers moral legitimacy, that is, the ethical foundations of power. The traditional assumption of the ruler as a mortal god implies that power is a fusion of the temporal and the spiritual, the political and the moral. In the analysis we seek to uncover the degree of vulnerability of power established on moral as well as immoral foundations. The second section of this chapter builds upon these findings by probing into whether the moral or immoral basis of power ultimately influences its nature and operation. Having looked beyond the outward trappings of sovereignty in the first two sections, in the final section is posed the all-important question as to the locus of power, that is, whether the ruler, despite being challenged in terms of legitimacy, be it political or moral or both, can in the end be said to wield any effective power. This section therefore highlights the distinction between real and imagined power.

Chapter Two takes a fresh look at the perennially fascinating relationship between power and love. The many works devoted to this topic have concentrated on the psychological pressure of passion as the dynamic force driving the action forward.[24] The political decline of a ruler is often viewed as the inevitable consequence of overriding passion. Such interpretations clearly see political power and erotic love as distinct. Indeed there is an ongoing debate as to whether politics or love is more important to Racine's tragic vision. Paul Bénichou dismisses the political dimension as 'un ornement', while Spencer insists that the problems engendered by political power are paramount to the movement of the tragic action. It is not the purpose of this chapter to attempt to arbitrate in this debate, but rather to elucidate how politics and love interact. Instead of portraying love against a political backdrop or vice versa, it seeks to demonstrate how the role of ruler impinges upon the role of lover, thus again betraying the transgressive and permissive nature of power. While recognising that there is a fundamental distinction between the realm of politics and the realm of love, this chapter examines to what extent in Racine the overstepping of boundaries means that the distinction between the two becomes blurred. In other words, political and

erotic power may become so intertwined it might seem difficult to define power without considering love, and vice versa. Chapter Two therefore deals with the question of how the roles of ruler and lover paradoxically conflict and concord simultaneously.

While Chapter Two, through its examination of the ruler / lover dichotomy and its exploration of the idea of invisible limits, examines the idea that there is no simple division between those in power and those who are not, Chapter Three reinforces this observation by analysing power relations between individual characters from the Sartrean perspective of *pour autrui*.[25] Racine and Sartre may seem an unlikely or even provocative pairing. After all, in the many critical studies of Racine, he has been compared most regularly with Shakespeare, Corneille and Pascal. However, in many respects both Racine and Sartre may be shown to express a strikingly similar tragic vision. Given the similarities between their portrayal of human relationships, I have found it useful at certain points in this final chapter to draw parallels. However, because of the diversity of Sartre's writing (both literary and philosophical), the many loose ends in his work (not to speak of the presiding constraints of time and space), I have limited the comparison to *Huis Clos*.[26] It is in this play that we find Sartre confronting head-on the problem of constant interaction with others and, in particular, the dramatic representation of how language and thought-structures are fundamental to and yet detrimental to human relationships. The principal dynamic element in Sartre's existentialism is the idea of the Other and Otherness. This Sartrean ensign will feature prominently in this chapter, since its inherent sense of estrangement conveys the way in which human relations in the three plays under examination are defined in terms of alienation and discord. Jean Starobinski, even if he does not make the link explicit, has already explored a major facet of Sartre's philosophy of *pour autrui* in his analysis of the destructive power of the *regard* in Racinian tragedy.[27] However, while Starobinski illustrates how a simple look can establish dangerous and oppressive relationships of dominance and subservience in Racine, this final chapter explores

another prevalent Sartrean concern: language. Racine in effect takes language, our principal means of relating to others, to illustrate how it becomes an appalling instrument of power. This chapter therefore explores how, in the desperate attempt to acquire ultimate power, that is, control of the Other's consciousness, the familiar acts of thinking and speaking, which represent the communal nature of existence, become precarious and are ultimately revealed as an instrument of power which signifies distance and defines separateness.

[1] Cited in Christopher Pye, *The Regal Phantasm. Shakespeare and the Politics of Spectacle* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 14.

[2] William Burto (ed.), *Shakespeare: The Sonnets* (New York: Signet, 1964), Sonnet 108.

[3] See for example Pierre Le Moyne, *De L'art de régner* (Paris: Chez S. Cramoisy and Mabre-Chamoisy, 1665). Claude Bontems, *Le Prince dans la France des XVIIe et des XVIIe siècles* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965); Henri Sée, *Les Idées Politiques en France au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Marcel Giard, 1923); Orest Ranum, *Artisans of Glory: Writers and Historical Thought in Seventeenth-Century France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

[4] D'Aubignac, *La Pratique du Théâtre*, ed. by Pierre Martino (Paris: Champion, 1927), p. 143.

[5] Jean Dubu, 'La femme et l'exercice du pouvoir au théâtre au XVIIe siècle', in *Madame de Lafayette, La Bruyère, la femme et le théâtre au pouvoir*, ed. by Claude Abraham (Paris: Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature, 1988), pp. 143-53 (p. 144).

[6] Alain Quesnel, *La tragédie racinienne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995), p. 86.

[7] Charles Mauron, *L'inconscient dans l'oeuvre et la vie de Jean Racine* (Gap: Ophrys, 1957). For a further development of the Freudian approach see Maurice Delacroix's, 'La Tragédie de Racine est-elle psychologique?', in *Racine: Mythes et Réalités*, ed. by Constant Venesoen, (Paris: Société d'Etude du XVIIe, 1976), pp. 103-15. For a critique of this approach, (in particular an attack on Mauron), see Paul Delbouille's, 'Les Tragédies de Racine: Reflets de l'Inconscient ou Chronique du Siècle?', in *French Studies*, 15 (1961), 103-21.

[8] Lucien Goldmann, *Le Dieu Caché: Etude sur la vision tragique dans les Pensées de Pascal et dans le théâtre de Racine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955).

[9] Roland Barthes, *Sur Racine* (Paris: Seuil, 1963).

[10] Catherine Spencer, *La Tragédie du Prince: étude du personnage médiateur dans le théâtre tragique de Racine*, Biblio 17 (Tübingen: Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature, 1987); Mary-Jo Muratore, *Mimesis and Metatextuality in the French Neo-Classical Text* (Geneva: Droz, 1994); Timothy Reiss, *Tragedy and Truth: Studies in the Development of a Renaiassance and Neoclassical Discourse* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

[11] One of the most striking examples of the counter-theory offensive is René Pommier's *Le "Sur Racine" de Roland Barthes* (Paris: SEDES, 1988). Pommier is vitriolic in his attack on Barthes's structuralist interpretation of Racine: the vocabulary he employs speaks for itself, *contradictions, densité de sottises, fariboles, étonnante nullité intellectuelle, incohérence, absurdité* ... and so the list goes on (pp. 7-10). However, it is his final sentence in the introduction which strikes the most damaging blow against the impact of theory: 'Racine est devenu un "alibi" pour les fariboles d'un Roland Barthes et de tant d'autres aliberons, j'ai voulu que ce livre sur le *Sur Racine*, fût aussi, contrairement au *Sur Racine*, un livre sur Racine' (p. 12). For an incisive attack on Pommier, see James Supple, 'Pommier Versus Barthes: Critiques et Contreverités', in *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 13 (1991), 153-61.

[12] This was forcefully demonstrated recently by a physics Professor at New York University. *The Times Higher* revealed how Alan Sokal sent a spoof article, weighed down by esotoric language, to the leading US journal *Social Text* entitled 'Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity', and managed to fool the editors into accepting and publishing his nonsense article. While it must be recognised that this is an extreme case, it nevertheless betrays a worrying trend. (*The Times Higher*, 7 June 1996, p. 19).

[13] Saïd expounds his dislike for what he terms 'the private clique-consciousness' thus: 'At a recent MLA convention, I stopped by the exhibit of a major university press and remarked to the amiable sales representative on duty that there seemed to be no limit to the number of highly specialized books of advanced literary criticism his press put out. "Who reads these books?" I asked, implying of course that however brilliant and important most of them were they were difficult to read and therefore could not have a wide audience [...] The answer I received made sense, assuming I was told the truth. People who write specialized, advanced [...] criticism faithfully read each other's books' ('Opponents, Audiences,

Constituencies and Community', in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. by Hal Foster, (London: Pluto, 1985), pp. 135-59 (pp. 135-41, 153-56).

[14] The conference was held at the University of Glasgow, 4-6 July, 1996.

[15] Nicholas Royle, *After Derrida* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

[16] Recently, however, linguistically orientated projects which ensure that the plays are placed centre stage seem to be back *in vogue*. Henry Phillips in particular, by concentrating on the theatrical dimension of Racine's plays, focuses on the act of speech as the principal source of tension and drama: *Racine: Language and Theatre* (Durham: Durham University Press, 1994). It is interesting that Michael Hawcroft in his review of Phillips's book, *Racine: Mithridate* (London: Grant and Cutler, 1990), noted that 'In focusing almost exclusively on the text, Dr Phillips's guide is refreshingly different', in *French Studies*, 46 (1992), 449. See also Michael Hawcroft, *Word as Action. Racine, Rhetoric and Theatrical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); chapter 4 of David Maskell's, *Racine: A Theatrical Reading*, entitled 'Verbal Action', (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Peter France, *Racine's Rhetoric* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965).

[17] Peter France, 'Détestables flatteurs ...', *Esprit Créateur*, 8 (1968), 116-28. See also his article, 'Racine, le roi et les rois', *Silex*, 27/28 (1984), 102-11.

[18] Harriet Stone, 'Racine's Praise of Power: Representations of the King in the Histiographer's Discourse and on the Stage of *Mithridate*', *Cahiers du dix-septième*, 1 (1987), 79-86.

[19] Yves Pihan, 'Reflexions sur le rôle de l'opinion publique dans les tragédies de Racine', in *Cahiers Raciniens*, 19 (1966), 7-12.

[20] Ibid, p. 12: '... arbitre et conscience, tribunal sans pouvoir juridique mais pourtant redoutable, devant lequel tous ou presque se retrouvent égaux et fragiles, l'opinion publique apparaît dans ses tragédies l'expression même du Destin', (p. 12).

[21] Jean-Marie Apostolidès, *Le Prince Sacrifié: théâtre et politique au temps de Louis XIV* (Paris: Minuit, 1985); Jane Alison Hale, 'La perspective et le pouvoir. L'échec de Néron et le triomphe du spectateur', in *Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature*, 13 (1986), 313-28.

[22] Apostolidès, pp. 33-34, declares that in the end only the spectator can claim *toute-puissance*: 'Comme Dieu, qui connaît tout l'avenir de l'humanité mais qui n'intervient point dans la vie de ses créatures, le

spectateur connaît la fin de la pièce dès le commencement. Aucun protagoniste sur la scène n'arrive à saisir la vérité totale que possède le spectateur à partir de sa place privilégiée'; Hale, p. 315, in turn reiterates Apostolidès using the example of *Britannicus*, 'Un personnage qui joue dans un spectacle ne pourra jamais atteindre le regard tout-puissant de celui qui se tient à l'écart. Néron ne réussira jamais à rejoindre le spectacle dans la place du roi'.

[23] Spencer, 'Racine s'en va-t-en guerre: Tragédie du pouvoir ou pouvoir de l'histoire?', in *Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature*, 17 (1990), 273-85 (278), points out the dangers for characters who base their power on invisibility, 'En se voulant invisible, le pouvoir s'aveugle; en se délégant, il se perd'.

[24] Paul Bénichou, *Morales du grand siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 247; Spencer, *La tragédie du prince*.

[25] The existentialist term *pour autrui* will be understood simply as existence with others, for this chapter will be concerned primarily with the ways in which characters relate and establish relationships with one another.

[26] Rhiannon Goldthorpe, *Sartre: Literature and Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 2-3, points out that 'Sartre's philosophy rejects stability and closure'. The following are but a few of the terms used by her to describe Sartre's work in her two-page introduction: *tension, inconsistencies, disruption, discontinuity, variations, wide-ranging, open-ended.* Ronald Aronson, another leading critic on Sartre, does not desist from expressing his exasperation with Sartre's lack of coherence: 'Sartre will leap with dizzying speed through the twentieth century, run up many blind alleys, and stumble over several major obstacles, all of his own making: his writing is often sloppy and unfinished, careless and unsystematic', in *Sartre Alive*, ed. by Ronald Aronson and Adrian van den Hoven (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991). Likewise Laurent Gagnebin complains of '... un puzzle d'idées très, trop diffuses. Il est difficile de ne pas s'égarer dans le labyrinthe ...', *Connaître Sartre* (Paris: Resma, 1972), p. 75.

[27] Jean Starobinski, 'The Poetics of the Glance', in *Racine: Modern Judgements*, ed. by Roy C. Knight (London: Macmillan, 1969), pp. 88-100.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PORTRAYAL OF POWER IN *BRITANNICUS*, *BAJAZET* AND *BERENICE*

> Many social and political theorists, indeed all theorists with a critical bent, write about power. And all critical approaches - liberal democratic, hermeneutic, Marxist, Frankfurt / critical, or poststructural - attempt to disclose the workings of power in places which prevailing social, administrative and political discourses tend to disguise it.[1]
>
> Michael J. Shapiro

As we noted in the Introduction, the theme of power has been approached by various critics in the past. Indeed it is difficult to conceive of an examination of Racinian tragedy which does not lend some consideration to its fundamental theme, *le pouvoir*. However as Shapiro's quotation demonstrates, power is very much an umbrella term which has come to mean all things to all people. Commentators on Racine's theatre have, on the whole, been content to examine power insofar as it relates to the dramatist's hallmark: passion.[2] The most famous linking can undoubtedly be found in Barthes's simple formula, 'A a tout pouvoir sur B. A aime B qui ne l'aime pas'.[3] Conny Nelson sets out to examine the nature and operation of power in the tragedies of Racine and Shakespeare, but in the end seems simply to establish the importance of the political dimension in relation to passion, leaving much unsaid about the nature and features of power itself.[4] Others, clearly working on the assumption that the theatre could create a *boomerang* effect, that is, that the playwright's ideas must rebound on the reigning monarch, adopt a more historical approach concentrating on how Racine's (essentially negative) portrayal of kingship reflects on the reign of Louis XIV.[5] Few, however, concentrate on the actual presentation of power. Timothy Reiss, for example, tries to relate Racinian tragedy to contemporary political theory. Seeing Racine's theatre essentially as a series of 'thought experiments', he applies to it different elements of seventeenth-century political theory. The thrust, however, seems to be firmly on political theory as opposed to textual analysis.[6] Marcelle Blum's study seems promising

in that she pledges a return to the texts and immediately points out the significance of the political theme, asking pertinent questions as to who will keep power and who will be reduced to obedience.[7] However her findings prove to be very disappointing and her conclusions far-fetched. Her textual analysis consists of little more than pointing out that the rhyme *ance/ence* is related to the theme of power, thus again leaving much unsaid about the nature and operation of power itself.

This diversity of approaches undoubtedly reflects the fact that the image of power which emerges from the plays is fragmentary, contradictory and fraught with tension. The aim of this chapter is less to discuss different theories of power than, by examining the text, to examine how it operates on a concrete political level. It is time for a move away from the cult of *isms* and a return to the text.

A good starting point is an apparently banal phrase from *Britannicus*: 'qui vous arrête...?' (460). The startling simplicity of the question masks the tantalising complexity of the reply. The uncertainties, the confusion, and the ambiguities of power are all there in one stark interrogative, for it ostensibly confronts the jeremiad of *absolute* power which in turn opens a Pandora's Box. The issue of limits raised by the above question is inevitably central: it implicitly challenges the notion of the supremacy of control, invoking questions about the basis, nature and source of political power, and thus about the inherent moral concerns such as obligation, constraint and obedience.

This chapter seeks firstly to uncover the basis of political power by looking initially in Section A at the question of legitimacy in the sense of political authority, that is, at what is involved in the right to rule, and the relationship between ruler and subject. It will then examine legitimacy in the sense of moral authority, that is, the ethical (or unethical) foundations of power. In Section B this analysis will be developed through a scrutiny of the nature and operation of power, and an analysis of how the way in which power is

exercised reinforces or undermines its moral fibre. Finally Section C will consider the dramatisation of the discrepancy between real and imagined power.

While there is a discernible thematic unity in *Britannicus*, *Bajazet* and *Bérénice*, the complexity of Racine's portrayal of power in the three plays means that the isolation of different strands is an inherently difficult operation. Racine's presentation of power is intricate in the extreme. Indeed its dramatic portrayal could be described as a web, its various threads interwoven in a way that makes them difficult to unravel. This chapter will endeavour to elucidate how each theme functions within a coherent whole, bearing in mind the intricate interlacing and interdependence of themes and remembering also that individual plays may stress particular themes to a greater extent than others and will therefore need more attention.

SECTION A. THE BASIS OF POWER

Political authority is a major concern dominating and eroding the power structure of *Britannicus*. When the curtain rises we are confronted with an act of raw power, Junie's abduction, which immediately poses questions about the basis of power. Néron is *César*, but is his power hollow? His right to that title is persistently questioned both implicitly and explicitly. There are various statements sprinkled throughout the play which repeatedly undermine Néron's legitimacy. Albine reassures Agrippine in scene 1:

> ... vous [...]
>
> Qui l'avez appelé de si loin à l'empire? (15-16)

The key phrase here is *de si loin*. This, together with Agrippine calling Néron 'Domitius' (18, 36), his name before being adopted by Claudius, her claim that he has traits of 'Des fiers Domitius' thus firmly linking him with his paternal ancestors, her reference to Britannicus as 'Le fils de Claudius' and 'le fils d'un empereur' and to Néron as 'le fils d'Enobarbus, / Appuyé de Sénèque et du tribun Burrhus', all combine to form a scathing attack on the foundations of Néron's power and distance him from the right to rule.[8]

Moreover, the attack stretches from the exposition to the denouement. The absence of ancestral ties linking Néron with the imperial crown is graphically conveyed when a tearful Junie, clinging to the statue of Augustus, refers to 'ta race' and 'ton palais'.[9] It is one final reminder that Néron has no legitimate right to rule, that his power is hollow.

It is above all in IV, 2, however, at the long-awaited meeting of mother and son, that the whole theme of legitimate rule is mercilessly spotlighted. Agrippine's initial blunt statement of fact, 'Vous régnez' (1119), is immediately made devoid of any meaning by her subsequent debasing assertion:

> Vous savez combien votre naissance
>
> Entre l'Empire et vous avait mis de distance. (1119-20)

The issue of legitimacy, of Néron's right to rule, is now brought to the fore as its complexities begin to be unravelled:

> De nos crimes communs je veux qu'on soit instruit
>
> On saura les chemins par où je l'ai conduit.
>
> [...]
>
> J'avoûrai les rumeurs les plus injurieuses
>
> Je confesserai tout, exils, assassinats,
>
> Poison même ... (849-54)

This disquieting warning highlights the vulnerability of Néron and the instability of his power. The vocabulary employed is most revealing about the nature and operation of power: *crimes*, *exils*, *assassinats*, *poison*. It is a system based not on rights and authority, but on corruption and vice. Though the double reference to confession ('J'avoûrai', 'Je confesserai') underscores the notion of sin, confession here has nothing to do with guilt or remorse, it is purely an act of vengeance: 'Le ciel m'en laisse assez pour venger ma ruine' (836). The most foul *rumeurs* will be confirmed to destroy Néron. We note, too, the double reference to knowledge, *instruit*, *saura*, resulting inevitably in the shattering of an image. The 'untarnished' monarch, the god on earth, will be unmasked as iniquitous, ungodly, a corrupt mortal.[10]

Burrhus, however, would have us believe that this issue of imperial succession is not so unequivocal. His account in III, 3 of how Claudius's adoption of Néron complicated the whole affair may initially obscure reality. Néron it would seem is not a *straightforward* usurper:

> ... c'est un fils qui succède à son père.
>
> En adoptant Néron, Claudius par son choix
>
> De son fils et du vôtre a confondu les droits. (860-62)

From this standpoint one could argue that Néron has both legitimate power and authority. However, the key phrase here in Burrhus's justification of Néron's rule is perhaps *par son choix*. Yet we know that Agrippine manipulated the last days of Claudius. Britannicus asks Narcisse:

> ... N'est-ce pas cette même Agrippine
>
> Que mon père épousa jadis pour ma ruine
>
> Et qui, si je t'en crois, a de ses derniers jours,
>
> Trop lents pour ses desseins, précipité le cours. (307-10)

Agrippine confirmed this, as noted above ('Je confesserai tout, exils, assassinats / Poison même'), and she finally concedes, 'De ses derniers soupirs je me rendis maîtresse'.[11] Indeed the final stages of Agrippine's report on her triumphant conquest of power presents a solemn and redoubtable image of a weak, dying emperor, robbed of his power: 'Ses gardes, son palais, son lit m'étaient soumis' (1178). Soft vowel sounds dominate the description of the circumstances surrounding Claudius's death, underlining the idea of an elaborate façade created to conceal the appalling, surreptitious, treacherous act Agrippine has committed: *en apparence, secrètement, ordres trompeurs*.[12] Hence Burrhus is incorrect when he says that 'Claudius par son choix' left the empire to Néron. Clearly the element of choice was eradicated, demonstrating the way in which appearances are belied by reality, and once again rocking the foundations of Néron's emperorship

In terms of Néron's legitimacy, the role of Britannicus is obviously of particular significance. In I, 2 we are given a possible explanation by Burrhus for the abduction of Junie:

> Vous savez que les droits qu'elle porte avec elle
>
> Peuvent de son époux faire un prince rebelle. (239-40)

The awesome image of a potential pretender, a rebel *with* a cause, raises the issue of legitimacy with a certain urgency. It seems that power rests on precarious foundations, like a castle built on sand, but the vulnerability of Néron's power is not essentially political in that Britannicus never enters the political power struggle as a serious rival. Agrippine's warning to Burrhus is a red herring,

> J'irai, n'en doutez point, le montrer à l'armée,
>
> Plaindre aux yeux des soldats son enfance opprimée,
>
> Leur faire, à mon exemple, expier leur erreur. (839-41)

This is subsequently shown to be no more than an empty threat:

> Moi, le faire empereur, ingrat! L'avez-vous cru?
>
> Quel serait mon dessein? Qu'aurais-je pu prétendre?
>
> Quels honneurs dans sa cour, quel rang pourrais-je attendre? (1258-60)

Moreover, Néron tells Narcisse in IV, 4, 'Je ne le compte plus parmi mes ennemis' (1413). Britannicus himself is quite willing to relinquish his claim on power:

> Pour moi, quoique banni du rang de mes aïeux,
>
> [...]
>
> Il semble me céder la gloire de vous plaire,
>
> Mon coeur, je l'avoûrai, lui pardonne en secret,
>
> Et lui laisse le reste avec moins de regret. (1489, 1492-94)

His role is therefore not to pose a serious political threat to Néron in the way that Bajazet does to Amurat, but rather to provide a contrast which ultimately spotlights the illegitimate nature of Néron's rule.

Junie's portrait of Britannicus only accentuates the illicit foundations of Néron's power even further:

> Ses honneurs abolis, son palais déserté,
>
> La fuite d'une cour que sa chute a bannie ... (646-47)

The repetition of the possessive article, the vocabulary of loss and deprivation, *abolis, déserté, fuite, chute, bannie*, inevitably conjures up an image of *what should have been.* Junie also talks of a time 'Quand l'Empire devait suivre son hyménée' (644). The verb *devoir* here contains implicit moral undertones reinforcing the fact that Britannicus is the rightful heir and Néron a usurper. This is echoed by Agrippine, '... du trône, où le sang l'a dû faire monter, / Britannicus par moi s'est vu précipiter' (61-62). Again *sang* and the use of the moral imperative inherent in *devoir* combine to drive home the fact that Britannicus is the rightful ruler.

While Britannicus demonstrates that Néron's is a power bereft of political authority, Junie in turn reveals the absence of moral authority.

Act II, 3 manifestly elucidates the real power possessed by Junie: the power of refusal. Néron warns her:

> ... ne préférez point, à la solide gloire
>
> Des honneurs dont César prétend vous revêtir,
>
> La gloire d'un refus, sujet au repentir. (624-26)

What Néron calls *la solide gloire* is here set up in direct opposition to *la gloire d'un refus.* The material, temporal trappings of power are pitted against a spiritual, transcendent morality illuminating the contrast between the sham worldly power of Néron and the moral authority of Junie.

Not only does Junie reject Néron's offer with disdain, more importantly and more seriously, she undermines his authority, both political and moral. Firstly she tells him

that Britannicus 'obéit à l'Empereur *son* père' (559), hence distancing Néron from the line of succession to the imperial throne, then she tells him:

> Ah! Seigneur, songez-vous que toute autre alliance
>
> Fera honte aux Césars auteurs de ma naissance? (567-68)

thus rendering all the more ironic Néron's subsequent statement, 'Du sang dont vous sortez rappelez-vous la mémoire' (618). Although Junie is still unaware here that Néron has himself in mind, the same mocking touch is nevertheless present and is echoed later when he has finally revealed his intention. She declares:

> J'ose pourtant dire que je n'ai mérité
>
> Ni cet excès d'honneur, ni cette indignité. (609-10)

The uncomfortable juxtaposition of *honneur* and *indignité* is a telling reflection on Junie's perception of Néron's power. The insult is reinforced when she asserts:

> Je sais de vos présents mesurer la grandeur;
>
> Mais plus ce rang sur moi répandait de splendeur,
>
> Plus il me ferait honte, et mettrait en lumière
>
> Le crime d'en avoir dépouillé l'heritière. (629-32)

Again the juxtaposition of *grandeur* and *splendeur* with *honte* and *crime* constitutes a half-veiled debunking of imperial power. The subtle equation of *honneur* with *indignité* implies a power devoid of moral authority.

This lack of moral authority is subtly reinforced by the direction of the Racinian gaze. Significantly Néron does not dare raise his eyes to heaven:

> ... ses yeux mal assurés
>
> N'osent lever au ciel leurs regards égarés. (1757-58)

Junie, on the other hand, twice raises her eyes heavenwards, stressing the distinction between Néron's worldly power and her moral authority:

> Triste, levant au ciel ses yeux mouillés de larmes. (387)
>
> ... vos yeux, vos tristes yeux,
>
> Avec de longs regards se tournent vers les cieux. (1501-02)

In *Bajazet* the issue of political authority is, on the whole, in the background. There is no questioning of Amurat's right to rule in the way that there is with Néron. However, a contrast is set up between Bajazet and Amurat which sharply highlights the question of political legitimacy. Bajazet is presented as diametrically opposed, not only to Amurat but to the Ottoman system. He contrasts himself with Soliman. We are given the most amazing description of the lands Soliman had conquered, from the cool banks of the Danube to the burning plains of Africa (474-79). The contrast could not be greater as one between David and Goliath. Bajazet poses a question of identity which is inextricably bound up with his lack of power: 'Que suis-je? J'attends tout du peuple et de l'armée!' (481).[13] He is famous not as a heroic conqueror, but as a wretched individual doomed to misfortune:

> Mes malheurs font encor toute ma renommée.
>
> Infortuné, proscrit, incertain de régner ... (481-83)

Soliman, by contrast, 'Faisaient taire les lois devant ses volontés' (480); his was power without limits. The word *volontés* reminds us of the self-seeking *désirs* and *plaisirs* of Néron's reign.[14] If we compare Bajazet's plea, 'Daignez m'ouvrir au trône un chemin légitime', and his reference to the law as 'Un obstacle éternel', 'cet obstacle invincible', it becomes clear that he is an unconventional product of the Ottoman system.[15] A distinction is being drawn between arbitrary power based on self-interest and power based on legitimate political authority.

The issue of political legitimacy does, however, provide an ironic contrast with the situation in *Britannicus*. While Néron's political authority is questionable because he has no blood ties linking him with the imperial crown, Bajazet's difficulty is that he does:

> 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. (105-08)

If Amurat's right to rule is not questioned in the way that Néron's is, the same cannot be said for Roxane. Her very right to the title Sultane is implicitly questioned in the first scene of the play. The Sultane's power, we are told, is traditionally dependent on the birth of a son (298), but here Roxane's title is unjustified, unfounded:

Et même il a voulu que l'heureuse Roxane,

Avant qu'elle eût un fils, prît le nom de Sultane. (101-02)

The basis of her supremacy is therefore immediately revealed to be unsound.

However, as noted above, rather than being an all-pervasive consideration as in *Britannicus*, the question of political legitimacy furnishes a frame within which the drama of the nature of power unfolds. Moral authority as opposed to political authority is dramatised in *Bajazet*. If in *Britannicus* the moral climate diminishes authority in favour of power, this is even more true in *Bajazet*. The act of promising proves to be particularly revealing in terms of the nature and principle of Ottoman power. The third scene of Act II begins with a frenzied series of questions and exclamations from Acomat: five questions and two exclamations appear in the space of just over three lines as he desperately tries to discover what has happened and find a solution. By the end of the scene, two solutions have been envisaged: the storming of the *sérail*, forecasting lines 1629-32, or having Bajazet marry Roxane and then simply break his promise. Acomat's advice to Bajazet uncovers the duplicity inherent in the pledge: 'Promettez [...] Vous verrez de quel poids sera votre promesse' (641-42). However, the deception is simply in keeping with the nature and operation of Ottoman power:

Et d'un trône si saint la moitié n'est fondée

Que sur la foi promise et rarement gardée. (649-50)

In *Bajazet* promises are invariably surrounded by uncertainty, deceit and treachery. This is evident with the first occurrence of the verb *promettre* in the opening scene when Osmin tells us that Amurat '... semblait se promettre une heureuse victoire' (34). The

addition of the qualitative *semblait* indicates doubt and misgiving. Roxane expresses the gnawing scepticism inherent in the act of promising:

> Je ne retrouvais point ce trouble, cette ardeur,
>
> Qui m'avait tant promis un discours trop flatteur. (283-84)

This suffocating mask of deception ironically uncovers the shameful face of Ottoman power, elucidating the moral laxity which forms the foundations upon which power is built.[16]

This patent lack of moral authority is perhaps best highlighted by the dramatic contrast set up between Bajazet and Amurat.

> Bajazet touche presque au trône des sultans:
>
> Il ne faut plus qu'un pas. Mais c'est où je l'attends. (315-16)

The whole tragedy could be summed up in these two lines: Bajazet is so near and yet so far. The goal is apparently within reach, yet unreachable. Power, it seems, is within his grasp, but like a precious stone guarded by a poisonous spider. Acomat tells Bajazet that, 'De la religion les saints dépositaires / [...] Sont prêts de vous conduire à la Porte sacrée'; the young prince himself admits that he fears, 'les soins d'un trône où je pourrais monter', while Atalide talks of 'sa prochaine gloire'; *prêts*, *pourrais*, *prochaine*, the styx separating Bajazet and the throne has narrowed to a step.[17] However, he frequently appears animated by sentiments of honour and integrity. The vocabulary associated with the solution put forward firstly by Acomat and then by Atalide, reflects disgust both with Roxane and the proposed betrayal of her: *lâcheté*, *ignominie*, *bassesse*, *indigne détour*, and he frequently blushes, *Ne rougissez point*, *rougir*, *rougissant*, suggesting shame and contempt at such deception.[18] This is also evident in his recurrent expressions of regret:

> O Ciel! combien de fois je l'aurais éclaircie ... (749)
>
> J'irai [...]
>
> Détromper son amour d'une feinte forcée. (1008-09)
>
> Mon coeur a mille fois voulu vous découvrir ... (1492)

In this way, the gap between power and morality is brought sharply into focus.

In III, 4 the gulf between power and morality is once again brought to the fore by the emphasis placed on both the imminent seizing of power and its intrinsic dishonour. This tension is succinctly expressed in two lines:

> ... je serais heureux, si la foi, si l'honneur
>
> Ne me reprochaient point mon injuste bonheur. (943-44)

While the use of the conditional *serais* emphasises the possibility of happiness, the verb *reprocher*, the adjective *injuste*, and the repetition of *si*, all imply a crisis of conscience. As the scene progresses Bajazet's preoccupation with feelings of guilt and deception become unequivocal and the result is an appalling self-loathing: we note the reference to *remords*, to his *âme agitée*, his *trouble*, the verb *affliger*, his desire to confess, *laissez agir ma foi*, and his stark declaration: 'Je me trouvais barbare, injuste, criminel'.[19] It seems that a distinction is being drawn between arbitrary power founded on deceit and power based on moral authority.

In *Bérénice*, Racine grapples with the problem of political and moral authority with such a fierce intensity that it strikes us as agonisingly urgent. 'Contemplez mon devoir dans toute sa rigueur': the nature of the imperative has now changed.[20] This is not an order given by a mighty emperor, but an anguished plea from a tormented mortal. The *désirs* and *plaisirs* of Néron's reign have now been replaced by the harshness and severity of *devoir* and *rigueur* which reflect the austere nature of the imperial role. It is interesting to observe the way in which Titus describes his acquisition of power:

> J'aimais, je soupirais dans une paix profonde:
>
> Un autre était chargé de l'empire du monde.
>
> [...]
>
> Mais à peine le ciel eut rappelé mon père,
>
> Dès que ma triste main eut fermé sa paupière,
>
> De mon aimable erreur je fus désabusé:

Je sentis le fardeau qui m'était imposé. (455-56, 459-62)

Here the soft sounds of *aimais, soupirais, paix, aimable*, evoking a sense of tranquillity, quickly give way to the harsh sounding *chargé, désabusé, fardeau, imposé*. From this point on, when Titus refers to his power, the key word is *devoir.*[21] This *devoir* is presented as a dark, despondent force, 'mon triste devoir' (997), 'un austère devoir' (1365), with an inherent sense of overwhelming sorrow and sacrifice, but at the same time with obvious moral undercurrents:[22]

Je connais mon devoir, c'est à moi de le suivre. (551)

... de ce devoir je ne puis me défendre. (1252)

Arsace's description of the new *César* standing before the adoring crowd demonstrates that his new power is an inexorable force which immobilises, it is almost as if Titus is trapped in ice, his human emotions frozen forever:

... ces noms, ces respects, ces applaudissements

[...]

Fixent dans son devoir ses voeux irrésolus. (1273, 1277)

The contrast with *Britannicus* and *Bajazet* is striking; while in these plays we see power separated from moral ends, here in *Bérénice* its very essence is rooted in moral / legal considerations. In this way political and moral authority become insolubly linked.

Titus's relationship with Rome is therefore very different from the Néron / Rome relationship. The idea that the ruler had a responsibility to his subjects is approached only to be dismissed in *Britannicus*. Néron's question is almost rhetorical:

Soumis à tous leurs voeux, à mes désirs contraire,

Suis-je leur empereur seulement pour leur plaire? (1336-37)

Leurs voeux are weighed against *mes désirs* and Néron swiftly begins his descent into tyranny. The same question is asked by Titus, but this time we observe the evocation of chaos in the words *renversant* and *débris*, the image is one of destruction:

Si dès le premier pas, renversant tous ses droits

Je fondais mon bonheur sur le débris des lois. (469-70)

Mon bonheur is pitted against *ses droits* and *lois*, but now the balance of the scales is different. The *voix populaire* so devalued in *Britannicus* becomes a piercing imperative in *Bérénice* because it is synonymous with the law. Titus's succinct and pointed question, 'Maintiendrai-je des lois que je ne puis garder?' (1146), strikes at the heart of the power concern in the play for it raises the vital issue of the limits of power: should the ruler be subject to the laws he enforces? This also provides a striking comparison with Roxane in *Bajazet*. Bajazet's pretext for not marrying Roxane is the law that Sultans never marry (319). However Roxane proves quite willing to trample any law underfoot that conflicts with her passion. She refers to the law as 'une odieuse loi' (319) and to Bajazet's observance of it as 'raisons forcées' (521), pointing out that 'l'amour ne suit point ces lois imaginaires' (461).[23] Though Bérénice talks in similar terms to Titus of 'd'injustes lois que vous pouvez changer' (1149), if the new emperor is to retain his authority, he cannot alter the law to suit himself, but must reign with the consent of the people. Failure to gain this consent will mean that he will, like Néron and Roxane, have power without authority.[24] We have moved from a world where a title inevitably meant the obedience of the masses to a world where the ruler can lose his authority, a world where what the ruler does, not his title, is the source of his rights over the people.

Given the emphasis placed on the *right* to rule, it is not surprising that in *Bérénice* we are made very aware that power is a two-sided relationship. The idea of a sovereignty related to notions of duty and morality ineluctably raises the problem of a higher power. According to the seventeenth-century theory of Divine Right, power could only come from God himself.[25] The idea that power was derived from the people or their representatives and that the ruler was in some way accountable to them is not only radical, but involves the harnessing of might and right, politics and ethics. There are constant suggestions that the source of imperial power lies with Rome. It clearly imposes on Titus the separation from Bérénice.[26] While Néron defies the people's wishes, in *Bérénice* public opinion is sovereign. In Spencer's apt summary, 'Titus fait du suffrage populaire le fondement même et l'unique garant de sa souveraineté.'[27] The

consent of the people is now inextricably linked to the right to rule thus implying that they can withdraw their obedience. This is always evident in Racine; we are constantly aware of the possibility of the overthrow of the ruler. Bérénice's question 'Voyez-vous les Romains prêts à se soulever?' (1138), and Titus's apprehensive reply, 'qui sait de quel oeil ils prendront cette injure' (1139) remind us of the threat of imminent disorder.[28]

This potential danger highlights the important relationship between public opinion and political power. The Roman people can effectively hold Titus to ransom.[29] Their insistence on the historical basis of power proves fundamental in boosting Titus's authority and in ultimately crushing his power.

Hence, if with Néron we see the corruptability of power without authority, with Titus we see the other side of the coin, the degradation inherent in authority without power. Titus is clearly caught in an *impasse*; he has no power with laws, and no authority without them. Power and authority are presented not as two inextricably linked concepts, but as alternatives.

SECTION B. THE NATURE AND OPERATION OF POWER: FEAR

In the opening scene of *Britannicus*, we are given two different images of Néron's reign. Albine tells Agrippine:

> Depuis trois ans entiers, qu'a-t-il dit, qu'a-t-il fait
>
> Qui ne promette à Rome un empereur parfait?
>
> [...]
>
> Il la gouverne en père. Enfin Néron naissant
>
> A toutes les vertus d'Auguste vieillissant. (25-30)

These reassurances are reiterated by Burrhus in the following scene:

> Rome, à trois affranchis si longtemps asservie,
>
> A peine respirant du joug qu'elle a porté,

Du règne de Néron compte sa liberté.

Que dis-je? la vertu semble même renaître.

Tout l'Empire n'est plus la dépouille d'un maître.

Le peuple au Champ de Mars nomme ses magistrats;

César nomme les chefs sur la foi des soldats;

Thraséas au sénat, Corbulon dans l'armée,

Sont encore innocents, malgré leur renommée;

Les déserts, autrefois peuplés de sénateurs,

Ne sont plus habités que par leurs délateurs. (200-10)

The image here is positive; the break from the oppression of the past is emphasised by *autrefois*, the repetition of *ne...plus*, and the vocabulary of life and rebirth, *naissant*, *renaître*, *respirant*, *liberté*. However, this is not the only image of Néron given in the exposition. Even in the glowing tributes quoted above, one can detect slight chinks: the interrogative of lines 25-26 and the word *semble* signal uncertainty and unpredictability. Indeed in the first five lines of the play alone there is a sense of unease, an awareness of tension seething beneath the surface:

Quoi! tandis que Néron s'abandonne au sommeil,

Faut-il que vous veniez attendre son reveil?

Qu'errant dans le palais sans suite et sans escorte,

La mère de César veille à sa porte?

Madame, retournez dans votre appartement.

We know that the *sommeil* of line 1 cannot last, a fact reinforced by the emphatic rhyme of *reveil* in line 2. The somnolent rhythm of the first line, evoked by the repetition of the consonants *t*, *s* and *m*, is negated in the following line with the harsh *v* and *r* sounds. This together with the exclamation, the unanswered questions, the verbs *attendre* and *veiller*, all create a disquieting atmosphere of apprehension and unrest. There is a definite air of change, we suspect that we have reached a crossroads, that something new and much more sinister and fearful is hatching. One is subsequently reminded of Jekyll and Hyde when we hear that Néron 'se déguise en vain' (35), and we fear that his

unmasking is imminent. There is now an image of a tyrant lurking behind closed doors, a caged tiger ready to pounce:

> L'impatient Néron *cesse de* se contraindre,
>
> Las de se faire aimer, il veut se faire craindre. (11-12)
>
> Mais crains que, *l'avenir détruisant le passé*,
>
> Il ne finisse ainsi qu'Auguste a commencé. (33-34)
>
> Toujours la tyrannie a d'heureuses *prémices.* (39)
>
> Non, non, *le temps n'est plus* que ... (91)

The fear and apprehension created by this image is reinforced by the repeated use of the verb *craindre*, and words like *frayeur* and *alarme*.[30] Indeed fear is a key word which strikes at the heart of the power structure of the play; it is presented as inevitable, the very kernel of being. We shudder at Agrippine's bleak prediction, 'Je le craindrais bientôt, s'il ne me craignait plus' (74): fear recedes into the past and stretches out into the future, it's existence unequivocal.

Hence, despite the ambiguous presentation of Néron's reign in Act I, we have already begun to uncover the nature of his power, the outward gloss is ostensibly tarnished.

In the notorious spy scene, we see for the first time precisely how Néron exercises his power. He seems to be all-powerful, but his power here is of a sort, it is clearly not all-encompassing. In trying to be *tout-puissant*, he is reduced to what in other circumstances might make him an almost comic figure, a Tartuffe, hiding behind a curtain to eavesdrop. Afterwards a tearful Junie declares: 'Vous êtes obéi' (745), yet the obedience is shallow, empty, Néron's power hollow. He cannot possibly be satisfied by the way in which he has been obeyed. Similarly Burrhus's simple statement in III, 1, 'Pallas obéira' (761), reflects something of the nature of Néron's power. Obedience is empty because Néron's power is based on fear and brute force, it is a power empty of authority, a tyrannical, despotic force. To yield to fear or force is an act of necessity, not of will, and there is certainly no sense of moral duty involved. The duty of obedience is

only to power with authority. Yet a power fuelled by fear is presented as the only option in the play. Narcisse's advice to Britannicus captures this insistence on fear as a premise of power in a nutshell:

> Tandis qu'on vous verra d'une voix suppliante
>
> Semer ici la plainte et non pas *l'épouvante*,
>
> Que vos ressentiments se perdront en discours,
>
> Il n'en faut point douter, vous vous plaindrez toujours. (315-18)

Power is conceived and defined in terms of fear. Burrhus tells Néron, 'Craint de tout l'univers, il vous faudra tout craindre', Britannicus asks Junie, 'Si vous craignez Néron, lui-même est-il sans crainte?'[31] It is clearly a reciprocal process, and not just in *Britannicus*. In *Bajazet*, Osmin describes Amurat's relationship with his soldiers, 'Comme il les craint sans cesse, ils le craignent toujours'. Pyrrhus's famous question in *Andromaque* 'Peut-on haïr sans cesse?', in *Britannicus* and *Bajazet* becomes 'Vous craindrez-vous sans cesse?'[32]

In III, 8, Néron's ominous perception of power is reinforced. After bursting in on the young lovers, the scene is played out like a verbal duel with Néron trying to assert his power over Britannicus. He draws a sharp distinction between past and present power: 'J'obéissais alors, et vous obéissez' (1042). Significantly, it is the verb *obéir*, the form of submission, he emphasises, underlining that for Néron power is all about obedience. It is an essentially negative perspective. The repetition of the aggressive imperatives, *Imitez*, *Souhaitez*, culminates in a dramatic resort to violence with the arrest of Britannicus, the assertion of might over right.[33] Néron clearly outlines the demands of his power in this sequence: silence, and fear. He proffers no more lists of obstacles which impede him.[34] Instead he now chooses to live out his sinister maxim: 'Heureux ou malheureux, il suffit qu'on me craigne' (1056). Once again fear is revealed as the first premise of power.

Acts IV and V only accentuate this negative perspective of power. Act IV begins with the assertion of might as Burrhus informs Agrippine that she is to be retained by Néron's

guards, and tries, albeit unsuccessfully, to soften the blow by painting Néron in a favourable light. He tells her that the mighty emperor 'consent de vous entendre' and has acted 'à dessein de vous entretenir' (1102), but his speech betrays his own misgivings. We detect sinister undertones. A note of fear is instilled by words such as *ordre*, *retenir*, *menace*, while various phrases reinforce this feeling of apprehension and uncertainty vis à vis Néron's intentions: 'peut-être', 'Quoi qu'il en soit', 'qu'il [...]ou bien qu'il [...]'.[35] As the curtain rises on this final Act, Britannicus appears before us ecstatic at the impending 'reconciliation' with Néron. Most significant is Junie's fear and apprehension at 'un si grand changement' (1509). This is reflected in the vocabulary employed: *crainte*, *craignez*, *craindre*, *contrainte*, *tristes*.[36] Her blunt, stark announcement, 'je crains', standing alone in a broken line has a disquieting effect, creating as it does a feeling of menace and foreboding. This is heightened by the air of uncertainty 'Je l'ignore', the steady accumulation of interrogatives and the emphatic repetition of 'si' which in fact constitutes a build-up of harrowing scenarios, each one more awful than the one before.[37] The nouns *félicité* and *sincérité* are swamped by a lavish vocabulary of deception which provides a telling reflection on the nature and operation of power: *suspect*, *noir pressentiment*, *pièges dressés*, *cacher*.[38]

This prevarication induces a certain unease consistent with a power contingent on fear; the characters remain in a tormented state of vigilance and expectancy. This unease is given prominence in V, 2, when we are instantly made aware that time is precious. There is a sense of immediacy when Agrippine enters uptight and ill at ease. We feel the tension and urgency in her question to Britannicus, 'que tardez-vous?'. The imperatives *Partez* and *Allez* are reinforced by Britannicus's own instructions to Junie, *Allez*, *Hâtez-vous*.[39] Néron is *impatient*, the guests and Octavie *attendent* and Agrippine urges Junie, *allons*.[40] This acute sense of pressure, this desperate realisation that time is running out, signals a hastening of the tragic tempo. Once again there is a suspicion of danger at hand, an unnerving atmosphere of alarm reflected in the vocabulary: the disquieting force behind *se plaint*, the harsh sound of *éclater*, and now the sinister undertones

inherent in the word *embrassiez* sends not so much quivers of fear, but shock waves of sheer terror through the spectator.[41] We now recall the image of the 'caged tiger' we saw lurking in the exposition. The action now appears to have come full circle as the tiger once again seems ready to break free.

Burrhus's account of the murder, rendered all the more dramatic by his use of the present tense, represents a chillingly vivid enactment of the inevitable outcome of power based on fear. The incident is presented like a series of tableaux. Firstly he describes Néron greeting Britannicus: 'Il se lève, il l'embrasse, on se tait[...]' (1621). We see the statue-like figures gathered round motionless, we feel the shivers of terror at the word *embrasse*, we can sense the tension in the atmosphere. Then he recounts how Narcisse filled Britannicus's goblet. Again, the involvement of Narcisse and the concrete image of a poisoned chalice create a sense of foreboding, of imminent catastrophe. Forthwith we are offered a mental picture of the dead body of Britannicus stretched out on his couch, and then the subsequent image of disarray among the guests:

> La moitié s'épouvante et sort avec des cris;
>
> Mais ceux qui de la cour ont un plus long usage
>
> Sur les yeux de César composent leur visage. (1634-36)

Hence just as Narcisse had predicted all eyes are fixed firmly upon Néron, not because of 'l'éclat dont vous brillez' (450), but rather in terror and awe at the savage cruelty of a ruthless tyrant.

The final tableau of Néron himself completes the grim spectacle and now fixes power irrevocably in a context of fear. He is painted like a statue, unfeeling, phlegmatic, cold. The man who was 'saisi d'un long étonnement' in the abduction scene, now 'D'aucun étonnement il ne paraît touché'.[42] The traditionally pejorative connotations of the word 'power' are thus ostensibly borne out in this shocking triumph of Néron's formula for achieving it: 'Heureux ou malheureux, il suffit qu'on me craigne' (1056).

Power based on fear and obedience inevitably brings the complex issue of the ruler's relationship with his subjects sharply into focus. We now uncover another dark premise underpinning the power structure. In II, 2, Narcisse urges Néron on to an arbitrary style of government, devoid of all considerations of law, centred only around the *désirs* and *plaisirs* of the ruler (481-82). Indeed ostensibly Néron has already embraced his Machiavellian councillor's advocacy of a government based on self-love and hedonism. Narcisse himself tells him 'Tout vous rit: la fortune obéit à vos voeux' (381), Agrippine declares 'Néron jouit de tout' (67), and both statements are echoed by Junie:

> Tout ce que vous voyez conspire à vos désirs;
>
> Vos jours toujours sereins coulent dans les plaisirs. (649-50)

Simple statements with profound implications. Terms such as *rit, jouit, désirs, plaisirs*, present the image of a reign ruled by self-interest and lasciviousness, an image supported by the projections of eroticism in the nouns. The positive nuance of *désirs* and *plaisirs* becomes confounded by the negative association with repressive politics. Clearly Néron regards his virtuous reign as a form of restraint, a limitation on his power. In reply to Narcisse's question 'qui vous arrête, / Seigneur?' (460-1), he answers:

> Tout. Octavie, Agrippine, Burrhus,
>
> Sénèque, Rome entière, et trois ans de vertus. (461-62)

This final element of his reply is subsequently reaffirmed in IV, 3, with his exasperated exclamation, 'Quoi! toujours enchaîné à ma gloire passée ...' (1332), the adjective *enchaîné* impressing upon us how he feels confined by and enslaved to his exemplary past. Moreover, in the ensuing battle with Burrhus, Néron paints a dismal portrait of the 'good' monarch chained to virtue and ever attentive to the wishes of his people. He asks:

> Soumis à tous leurs voeux, à *mes désirs* contraire,
>
> Suis-je leur empereur seulement pour leur plaire? (1335-36)

This pre-empts Narcisse's provocative question in the following scene, 'De *vos propres désirs* perdez-vous la mémoire?' (1435). Both interrogatives reflect a preoccupation with the personal pleasure of the ruler and constitute an antithesis to Burrhus's question, 'Néron dans tous les coeurs est-il las de régner?' (1330). This question implies a whole

different conception of kingship and power, one based on humanitarianism and altruism, totally alien to Néron's conception of a power based on fear, obedience and personal pleasure, a power separated from moral ends.

However, with the proposed assassination of Britannicus in IV, 4, Néron reveals he is worried about his reputation, his identity in the eyes of the world, thus shedding light on the ruler / subject relationship from a different angle. Ostensibly sparked by Burrhus's pointed 'Que dira-t-on de vous?' in the previous scene, Néron ponders the potential reaction from his subjects and his unease at such an openly arbitrary government becomes apparent:

> Mais de tout l'univers quel sera le langage?
>
> Sur les pas des tyrans veux-tu que je m'engage,
>
> Et que Rome, effaçant tant de titres d'honneur,
>
> Me laisse pour tous noms celui d'empoisonneur?
>
> Ils mettront ma vengeance au rang des parricides. (1427-31)

But the people are portrayed by Narcisse as fickle:

> Au joug depuis longtemps ils se sont façonnés
>
> Ils adorent la main qui les tient enchaînés. (1441-42)

The monarch, he declares, should be arbitrary, imperious, despotic:

> ... prenez-vous, Seigneur, leurs caprices pour guides?
>
> [...]
>
> Est-ce à vous de prêter l'oreille à leurs discours?
>
> De vos propres désirs perdez-vous la mémoire? (1432-35)

Leurs caprices is here pitted against *vos propres désirs*, capturing two forms of government, the democratic and the despotic. The idea of a monarch created for the good of his subjects is dismissed contemptuously by Narcisse. His repeated interrogatives present it as absurd as a round triangle. The monarch exists for the unyielding pursuit of pleasure, which effectively negates any authority at the centre of the political power structure.

In *Bajazet*, as in *Britannicus*, fear is again the watchword which characterises the nature of and reveals something about the basis of the ruling power. The first lines of the play immediately reveal the atmosphere of secrecy and subterfuge which prevails in the *sérail*.

Acomat: Viens, suis-moi. La Sultane en ce lieu se doit rendre.
Je pourrai cependant te parler et t'entendre.

Osmin: Et depuis quand, Seigneur, entre-t-on dans ces lieux
Dont l'accès était même interdit à nos yeux?
Jadis une mort prompte eût suivi cette audace. (1-5)

We can imagine Acomat's 'Viens, suis-moi' of line 1 being spoken in a whisper. There is an oppressive sense of restriction, *interdit*, of limits, boundaries that should not be crossed, *audace*.[43] The very setting of the *sérail*, takes on ominous undertones from the outset with the use of vague, portentous terms like *ce lieu* (1), *ces lieux* (3) which endow it with a mysterious, disquieting character. This atmosphere of secrecy and solicitude is henceforth reinforced by the repetition of verbs like *trembler* and *troubler*, while the reoccurrence of the noun *audace* and the verb *oser* imply the attraction to and yet the fear of the suppression of those boundaries delineating order and chaos.[44] Evidently it is a place where ultimate power has been exercised, the power of life and death, death for anyone who dares transgress the boundaries (5).

Indeed this power of life and death is central to the nature and operation of power in *Bajazet*. Just as the threat of impending death ensures obedience to Néron in the opprobrious spy scene, so the fear of death ultimately guarantees submission in *Bajazet*. However, here we are constantly made aware that the threat is sustained; throughout the play Bajazet awaits execution on Racine's *death row*. There are strikingly persistent references to the fact that his life is on the line (535, 536, 544, 557, 593, 609, 687, 689, 694, 721, 1142, 1267, 1293, 1326, 1368, 1387, 1448, 1456). A barbarous, ruthless, savage power structure is in place, a power structure defined and perpetuated by the

god-like right to take life, giving rise to terror and dread. For in the Ottoman tradition, the Sultan's brothers were strangled with silken cords to remove any potential challengers to his power. It is a most ferocious presentation of power for this bloodshed is the established conception of it; this is the rule not the exception. This correlation between power and death is accentuated in the following quotation by the use of the collective plural *nos sultans* and the adjective *ordinaires*, suggesting the customary nature of the brutality of Ottoman power:

> 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. (105-08)

The emphasis is clearly on blood ties here highlighted by the pertinent rhyme of *sang* and *rang*, and the juxtaposition of *frère* and *frères* stressing that the bloodshed is all the more appalling because it occurs within the family. Significant too in the above quotation are the contradictory terms *honneur* and *dangereux*. When in *Britannicus* we hear Junie talk of *l'honneur indigne*, the adjective *indigne* betrays something of the nature of Néron's power by bringing into relief the distinction between political power and moral authority. In the example from *Bajazet* the extreme fierceness and inhumanity and the inevitable fear and terror of power are being stressed in the adjective *dangereux*.

Fear is unequivocally the fuel in the engine driving the Ottoman power machine; it underpins the ruler / subject relationship with a startling tenacity. Interestingly, the Sultan and his army endure a relationship of mutual fear, 'Comme il les craint sans cesse, ils le craignent toujours' (44). This is reinforced by the repetitive use of the verb *craindre* and the noun *crainte(s)*.[45] However, throughout the play it is clearly the Sultan who retains a firm hold on the lever controlling the mechanics of power. He is repeatedly presented as an awesome, god-like figure. Despite never actually appearing on stage, his presence is constantly felt. The characters always seem to be under his imperious, ubiquitous gaze. Like Agrippine in her glory, he is there 'derrière un voile,

invisible et présente' (*Britannicus*, 95). Indeed it has often been suggested that it is his very absence which renders his power absolute.[46] Frequently referred to as *jaloux*, at times he strikes us as a bloodthirsty deity:

> Apaisons le Sultan par un prompt sacrifice. (1354)
>
> Vous verrez par sa mort le Sultan adouci. (1387)

Furthermore the vocabulary associated with him is often religious: *sacrifice*, *saints*. The Palace is seen as a kind of temple, 'la Porte sacrée', 'ce sacré palais', 'Profanant des sultans la demeure sacrée ...', and the throne as a kind of altar, 'un trône si saint'.[47] This undeniably contributes to the prevailing reign of terror which is underlined in turn by the rhyme of *terreur* and *empereur* (851-52). Amurat's sovereignty is ostensibly based on the ultimate, god-like power to take life. Osmin reminds Acomat in the opening lines of the play:

> Jadis une mort prompte eût suivi cette audace. (4)

Roxane forewarns Bajazet of the merciless accumulation of death upon death,

> De ma sanglante mort ta mort sera suivie (557)

Amurat's letter contains an explicit death threat,

> Vous, si vous avez soin de votre propre vie ... (1191)

Zatime cautions Roxane,

> Des coeurs comme le sien, vous le savez assez
>
> Ne se regagnent plus quand ils sont offensés;
>
> Et la plus prompte mort, dans ce moment sévère,
>
> Devient de leur amour la marque la plus chère. (1291-94)

All are baleful pronouncements which are echoed by Acomat in a final pithy, almost mathematical formula,

> Et qu'une mort sanglante est l'unique traité
>
> Qui reste entre l'esclave et le maître irrité. (1395-96)

Power is therefore based on fear of a ruler who, as we noted, never appears on stage, yet succeeds in making his power felt. The inhabitants of the *sérail* remain locked in a

world of 'témérité, périls, craintes communes' (161). This is primarily due to the presence of the *esclaves*, the menacing force behind his power, the agents of his reign of terror. These shadowy, ghost-like figures are sometimes used as guides in the maze of the *sérail*. As a collective band they are indistinct and often trembling, as individuals they are fearful emissaries. The arrival of a slave usually signals impending doom.[48] The word *esclave*, like *Sultan*, thus comes to denote terror and dread, it resounds like a knell of doom for the *esclave* is simply an extension of the Sultan. In I, 1 Osmin talks of 'Un esclave chargé de quelque ordre secret', in III, 8 we hear of the arrival of Orcan, 'Né sous le ciel brûlant des plus noirs Africains', a splendid contrast with the brilliance of the blazing sun set against the blackness of his skin.[49] He appears before our horrified gaze as Amurat's power personified: 'Orcan, le plus fidèle à servir ses desseins'. The only slave to be distinguished 'de tous ceux que le Sultan emploie', his very name instils fear and terror:[50]

> ... un esclave arrive de l'armée
>
> [...]
>
> ... c'est Orcan qu'il envoie. (1097, 1101)

Paradoxically described as *fier*, even the guards of the Palace open the gates to this dreaded slave on their knees. Roxane's reaction when she learns of his arrival is one of alarm signalled by an exclamation of disbelief.[51] Similarly, Atalide's reaction when she sees him in the *sérail* is made clear by the repetition of the verb *craindre*, the word *frayeurs*, and the baleful *ce moment fatal*.[52] Osmin's gruesome description of Orcan after his brutal execution of Roxane focuses our attention on the violence of the living rather than the demise of the victim, thereby vividly dramatising the inevitable culmination of a power based on fear:

> ... son poignard tout fumant ...
>
> [...]
>
> Il a marché vers nous, et d'une main sanglante ... (1676, 1686)

Moreover Orcan confirms this sense of the slave as the extended arm of the ruler, 'Adorez [...] l'ordre de votre maître' (1682). Sub- or super-human, 'ce monstre' (1688) is

the personification of the Sultan's arbitrary, despotic power, the very incarnation of the fear inherent in that power.

Roxane's power is likewise exercised through fear and obedience. This is highlighted in her first appearance on stage by a dramatic string of imperatives (252, 253, 257). The way in which she subsequently presents her decision to confront Bajazet face to face equally reveals a power based on threats and violence:

> Bajazet touche presque au trône des sultans:
> Il ne faut plus qu'un pas; mais c'est où je l'attends.
> Malgré tout mon amour, si dans cette journée
> Il ne m'attache à lui par un juste hyménée;
> S'il ose m'alléguer une odieuse loi,
> Quand je fais tout pour lui, s'il ne fait tout pour moi;
> Dès le même moment, sans songer si je l'aime,
> Sans consulter enfin si je me perds moi-même,
> J'abandonne l'ingrat ... (315-23)

The buoyant sense of hope and optimism of the first one and a half lines is swiftly halted by the 'mais' which signals an abrupt change in tone; *mais* (316), *Malgré* (317), and the negatives of lines 318 and 320 indicate that we have moved from a world of hope where the attainment of dreams seems possible, to a world of threats where the frustration of those desires demands punishment. Roxane's speech becomes increasingly threatening as it develops into a grim warning of the price of defiance. The accumulation of *si* clauses indicate not only the build-up of her anger at the thought of rejection, but also emphasise that this is a power which demands unquestioning submission.[53] Her demands are presented as immutable and absolute, her power unchallengeable. This is evident in the simple 'sans songer [...] Sans consulter' (321-22), there will be no mercy, no justice, once again we are in an *all or nothing* situation emphasised by the repetition of *tout* (317, 320).

Act V reinforces this negative perspective on power. As Atalide tries desperately to recall the moments before she fainted, 'Ses menaces, sa voix, un ordre m'a troublée' (1438), we can almost hear the threatening tone of Roxane's voice, the pert, snarling command, the image is one of an outraged, tyrannical ruler, a wild beast set free. Her appearance in the following scene is unusually brief. The scene consists of a mere two and a half lines constructed from incomplete sentences and brusque, jarring imperatives; the twice repeated 'Retirez-vous' implying imperious isolation, and the 'ne repliquez pas' informing us that Roxane's power demands silence. We are reminded here of Néron's words to Britannicus in III, 8, 'Rome se tait du moins. Imitez son silence' (1052). And just as Néron's confrontation with Britannicus ended with the assertion of might over right with Néron ordering his guards to arrest Britannicus, so Roxane orders her guards to restrain Atalide. Fear and force remain the means to power.

SECTION C. THE LOCUS OF POWER

'What's in a name?' The glib superficiality insinuated by Shakespeare's famous question gives way in Racine to the complexity of deceit. There is a constant nagging suspicion that a name is misleading; we note Agrippine's spurious reproaches to Burrhus, 'vous l'ai-je confié ... / Pour être, *sous son nom*, les maîtres de l'Etat?' (149-50), Néron's blasting accusation of Agrippine 'Vous n'aviez, *sous mon nom*, travaillé que pour vous' (1230), Acomat's subversive revelation that,

> Atalide a *prêté son nom* à cet amour
>
> [...]
>
> Du prince, *en apparence*, elle reçoit les voeux;
>
> Mais elle les reçoit pour les rendre à Roxane,
>
> Et veut bien *sous son nom* qu'il aime la Sultane. (168, 172-74)

The word *nom* thus elicits a pervasive sense of deception which is central to Racine's analysis of power.

'N'ose-t-il être Auguste et César que de nom?' (198); Burrhus's intrepid question wrestles with this central aspect of the presentation of power. In *Bajazet* we hear Roxane boldly declare that she has 'la puissance aussi bien que le titre' (301) as if the two are quite distinct. In *Bérénice* we are repeatedly reminded that all that glitters is not gold, be it in Titus's retort to Paulin,

Paulin: Sur cent peuples nouveaux Bérénice commande.

Titus: Faibles amusements d'une douleur si grande! (527-28)

or in Bérénice's relentless insistence on the unimportance of titles and honours:

Moi qui, loin des grandeurs dont il est revêtu,

Aurais choisi son coeur et cherché sa vertu. (161-62)

Voyez-moi plus souvent, et ne me donnez rien. (580)

La grandeur des Romains, la poupre des Césars

N'ont point, vous le savez, attiré mes regards. (1477-78)

Similarly in *Britannicus* we hear Agrippine scorn the 'vain titre' (883) of Octavie and disparage the vacuum behind her own distinctions, 'Je vois mes honneurs crôitre, et tomber mon crédit' (90). Racine thus invites us to look behind the charade of titles in search of the locus of power.

As Burrhus's question emphasises, Néron ultimately retains the noble title *César* charged with connotations of majesty and might, but now we must ask whether despite his patent lack of political and moral authority, he can meaningfully be said to possess (any) effective political power.

The opening scenes present an ostensibly ambivalent image of Néron in our mind's eye (he does not appear on stage until Act II), which reflects the tenuous status of power in the play as a whole. Initially he is depicted as a powerful figure of authority, commanding respect. First identified as *César*, a title evoking awe, honour and deference, Agrippine by contrast is defined in terms of her relationship to him, 'la mère de César' (4). The series of questions in lines 55-58 together with Agrippine's avowed

desire to discover 'les secrets de son âme' (127), not only suggest a mysterious, enigmatic figure, but a man of decision, action and will with the power to do as he pleases. These factors also evoke the mystical aloofness appropriate to the dignity of leadership, that compelling fascination for the enigmatic figure of the ruler.

The second scene continues this flattering presentation of Néron's power. He is confirmed as a figure of power when Burrhus enters to explain to Agrippine an order given 'Au nom de l'Empereur' which is reinforced by the emphatic 'César a voulu que ...', the reference to 'César tout-puissant', and by Agrippine, who, bitter at her fall from grace, talks scornfully of 'ses augustes secrets', only to be told by Burrhus 'Ce n'est plus votre fils, c'est le maître du monde'.[54] When Néron finally appears before us for the first time in Act II, the image he projects corresponds to that of the mighty emperor depicted in Act I: we heed the authoritative, decisive tone, 'je le veux, je l'ordonne ...' (369) and the string of imperatives.

However the image of power in *Britannicus* is ironically ambiguous. Against this portrait of a mighty, fearful emperor, lies the backcloth of the recent past depicted by Agrippine which presents Néron in quite a different light. The all-powerful ruler is juxtaposed with a puppet-emperor, an inept, irresolute figure, incapable of making his own decisions, manoeuvred and manipulated by others. It is not so much a question of a wolf in sheep's clothing here, as a sheep in wolf's clothing. In Act I alone, even before he appears on stage and when he is being portrayed as all-powerful, cracks appear in his make-up. There is a systematic erosion of the mighty emperor image from the outset. Firstly one must note the very fact that Burrhus is obliged to explain Néron's order to Agrippine thus undermining his power. Secondly, Agrippine portrays herself as the master-puppeteer of days gone by:

> [...] derrière un voile, invisible et présente,
>
> J'étais de ce grand corps l'âme tout-puissante. (95-96)

If we consider this statement together with her expressed disdain for the outward ceremony of power (89-90), and contrast them with her portrayal of Néron as 'ébloui de sa gloire' (100), the image of a puppet-show or masquerade of power is brought further into relief. We are being invited to contrast the superficial with the real, power with its mere pageant, and hence question where power actually lies. An exasperated Agrippine asks Albine:

> Ai-je mis dans sa main le timon de l'État
>
> Pour le conduire au gré du peuple et du sénat? (45-46)

Apart from emphasising her own role in the acquisition of power for Néron, this statement highlights a recurrent intimation in the play that someone else must always be at the helm, that Néron is a mere pawn, a figurehead. This is echoed in scene 2 both in Burrhus's pointed question, 'N'ose-t-il être Auguste et César que de nom?' (198), and in a blatant series of interrogatives from Agrippine which once again gives us the impression that Néron is a mere mouthpiece. She asks Burrhus:

> Vous l'ai-je confié pour en faire un ingrat?
>
> Pour être sous son nom les maîtres de l'État?
>
> [...]
>
> N'est-il pas temps qu'il règne? (149-50, 159)

The implication here is thus that up until now he has not reigned, underlining the impression of a puppet-emperor who dances as others pull the strings.

Significantly, and in apparent contradiction, Néron is presented in an all-powerful, god-like role at various stages in the play. Narcisse reassures him, 'Tout vous rit: la fortune obéit à vos voeux', a statement echoed by Junie, 'Tout ce que vous voyez conspire à vos désirs', and Agrippine, 'Néron jouit de tout'.[55] Britannicus depicts him as an omniscient, silent being, watching and listening without being seen:

> Il prévoit mes desseins, il entend mes discours;
>
> Comme toi, dans mon coeur il sait ce qui se passe. (334-35)

Narcisse wilfully persists in projecting this flattering image of Néron as a god on earth, a king of kings, surrounded by '... les rois sans diadème / Inconnus dans la foule ...' (451-52), with all eyes firmly fixed upon him - an impression accentuated later by Junie when she talks of 'un rang qui l'expose aux yeux de tout le monde' (616). An ideal of kingship (reflected in the use of the conditional) is dangled before him like a carrot before a donkey where those who have tried to control Néron would now genuflect before him as before a god, '... devant vous / Ces maîtres orgueilleux fléchiraient comme nous' (1465-66). Narcisse's 'qui vous arrête?' (460) again elevates Néron to divine status. One recalls how in *Bajazet*, Roxane asks the same question 'qui m'arrête?' (525), affording herself superhuman power. Néron's reply, however, in which he lists the obstacles limiting his power shatters conclusively the illusion of *toute-puissance*:

> Tout. Octavie, Agrippine, Burrhus,
>
> Sénèque, Rome entière, et trois ans de vertus. (461-62)

The all-powerful, god-like image is thus seen to be a sham; when the mirror is held up before 'César tout-puissant' (214), there is no reflection.

Yet Néron insists on playing out this role for which he is so ill-cast. He tries to match this image held before him of an omniscient, omni-présent being, a mortal god, devising an appalling scene of torture. Just as Britannicus's statement revealed above, 'dans mon coeur il sait ce qui se passe' (335), there are to be no secrets, Néron wants the unearthly power to gaze into the hearts and minds of others:

> Caché près de ces lieux, je vous verrai ...
>
> [...]
>
> Vous n'aurez point pour moi de langages secrets
>
> J'entendrai des regards que vous croirez muets. (679, 681-82)

This is subsequently reinforced by Junie when she tries to warn Britannicus of the danger close by:

> Vous êtes en ces lieux tout pleins de sa puissance
>
> Ces murs mêmes, Seigneur, peuvent avoir des yeux;

Et jamais l'Empereur n'est absent de ces lieux. (712-14)

These are terrifying Orwellian lines; Néron is striving to be a Racinian Big Brother, an omniscient, omnipotent being, a mortal god.

With Néron playing god in this way, we begin to wonder if the puppet has taken on a life independent of the puppeteer. Burrhus twice tries to make Agrippine accept her new role as Néron's subject. His brusque and provocative rebuke in Act I, 'Ce n'est plus votre fils, c'est le maître du monde' (180), is attenuated somewhat at their confrontation in IV, 1 when he at least acknowledges her role in acquiring power, although the sting is clearly still there:

Quoiqu'il soit votre fils, et même votre ouvrage,

Il est votre empereur. Vous êtes comme nous

Sujette à ce pouvoir qu'il a reçu de vous. (1108-10)

Significantly the ambiguity remains, a question mark still hangs over who is actually in command, the final line here is a marvellous expression of the fluidity of power, never stable, always mobile, ephemeral. We are constantly being invited to look behind the spectacle and focus on who is actually wielding power, the all-important question repeatedly posed by Agrippine in Act I (45-46, 95-96, 149-50, 159) and the question which dominates the power politics of the entire play. Inevitably this raises the issue of the role of Agrippine herself. She poses a threat to Néron's power by her desperate avowal that she will side with Britannicus to avenge her ignominious fall. Burrhus's question, 'Serez-vous toujours prête à partager l'Empire?' and her reply, 'Il doit ... affermir son empire ... / Mon nom peut-être aura plus de poids qu'il ne pense', reinforces the idea that Néron's emperorship is on shaky foundations, that it is not yet consolidated.[56] Act III continues in this vein, raising the same question, 'How stable is Néron's power?' with a renewed urgency. Burrhus warns Agrippine:

Sur tant de fondements sa puissance établie

Par vous-même aujourd'hui ne peut être affaiblie. (667-68)

Yet this is a blatant contradiction of his previous warning to Néron of the threat posed by Agrippine:

> Agrippine, Seigneur, est toujours redoutable.
>
> [...]
>
> Elle sait son pouvoir ... (768, 771)

These simple, unembellished statements stress the danger hovering in the wings. In III, 3 the fears of Burrhus are confirmed when Agrippine, bitter at her (apparent) exclusion from power, reminds him that if he is minister and Néron emperor, it is thanks to her, ('l'ouvrage de mes mains' (834)), and goes on to talk in terms of vengeance, not only threatening to set Britannicus up as a formidable rival, but also swearing to reveal the precarious foundations of Néron's power.[57] Significantly this is to be done by painting him in a favourable light to the army (839-41), hence implicitly underlining the ruler's need for army support and destroying the idea of the power structure as the preserve of one man. In IV, 2 the concept of army support as the basis of power is reinforced. We note how Agrippine's stealthy conquest of power began with seeking the consent of the army:

> Et, tandis que Burrhus allait secrètement
>
> De l'armée en vos mains exiger le serment ... (1185-86)

and was sealed only when they acquiesced:

> Enfin des légions l'entière obéissance
>
> Ayant de votre empire affermi la puissance ... (1191-92)

Néron's perception of his own political strength evinces an ironic contrast between his imperial performance and the harsh reality beneath its glittering surface. Clearly Néron remains nervously aware of Agrippine's political might. One can imagine the alarm and dread in his voice as well as the sheer disbelief at Narcisse's defiance of his mother as he asks, 'ne connais-tu pas l'implacable Agrippine?' (483). She is presented by Néron as a ruthless, invincible force that ultimately has an unyielding hold over him:

> ... mes efforts ne me servent de rien,

Mon Génie étonné tremble devant le sien. (505-06)

The terms he employs, *étonné, tremble*, are not those of a prodigious ruler, but of a feeble disciple. This weakness is reinforced as he imagines the eventual confrontation with Agrippine, it is almost like defying a god: 'un oeil enflammé', 'les saints droits', 'De quel front soutenir ce fâcheux entretien?' (489). Narcisse asks almost tauntingly, 'N'êtes-vous pas, Seigneur, votre maître ...?' and then even reverses the traditional fear of the ruler in a half-finished question (493) which is still enough to portray Néron not as feared, but fearing. The words Néron himself uses to describe how he actually exercises power completes the reversal, making an irreverent farce of the whole process: *ose, tâche, braver, soumette, dépendance, devoir, tremble, étonné* (496-506). These are patently not expressions of an absolute ruler. In a dramatic reversal, the ruler has become the ruled.

It is in IV, 2, with the long-awaited meeting between mother and son, that the real power struggle is played out. Agrippine takes control from the start, thoroughly undermining Néron's power. The stage directions are critical: Agrippine sits down and issues the orders, 'Approchez-vous, Néron, et prenez votre place' (1115), the double imperative emphasising the authoritative tone. It is interesting to compare this to Néron's earlier speech of independence to Junie, his order to have Agrippine placed under arrest, and Burrhus's many declarations of the emperor's power and Agrippine's subjection.[58] Her statement 'Vous régnez' (1119) is immediately emptied of significance by the frequent repetition of the first person pronoun which emphasises that she alone conquered power. She vociferates at length about the opposition she had to overcome (1149-58), presenting it like a systematic silencing and elimination of Britannicus's supporters:

Que de Britannicus la disgrâce future

Des amis de son père excita le murmure.

Mes promesses aux uns éblouirent les yeux;

L'exil me délivra des plus séditieux. (1151-54)

This has been confirmed by the words of Britannicus in Act I:

Mais je suis seul encor. Les amis de mon père

Sont autant d'inconnus que glace ma misère. (323-24)

Agrippine's speech, however, is still very much concerned with past power; the puzzle as to who controls the present remains unresolved.

The tone of Néron's reply is one of anger and sarcasm (1224). His taunting gibe, 'Vous n'avez sous mon nom, travaillé que pour vous' (1230), reflects his recognition that he has been used as a mere pawn, a mere lackey through whom Agrippine could ultimately retain real power. He goes on to expand on this theme of pseudo-kingship, reporting on how the senate and the people saw him as a puppet emperor, indeed the image evoked is one of a ventriloquist and his dummy. They were, he declares,

... irrités

De s'ouir par ma voix dicter vos volontés. (1241-42)

and were questioning where power actually lay:

Est-ce pour obéir qu'elle l'a couronné?

N'est-il pas de son pouvoir que le dépositaire? (1234-35)

Interestingly Agrippine's entrenched, dogmatic stance weakens somewhat at this stage. She presents her demands in attenuated form ('Que...' is repeated seven times). The subdued tone stands in direct contrast to her provocative imperatives at the beginning of the scene. Moreover, she goes on to deny vehemently what she had earlier insisted she would do:

J'irai, n'en doutez point, le montrer à l'armée,

Plaindre aux yeux des soldats son enfance opprimée,

Leur faire, à mon exemple, expier leur erreur. (838-41)

Now she appears to have retracted her threat:

Moi, le faire empereur, ingrat! L'avez-vous cru?

Quel serait mon dessein? Qu'aurais-je pu prétendre?

Quels honneurs dans sa cour, quel rang pourrais-je attendre? (1258-60)

The final line here is particularly revealing in that it manifestly elucidates the narcissism of Agrippine, lending truth to Néron's accusation just thirty lines earlier that anything she has done has been for her own benefit (1230). Her subsequent implicit intimidation of Néron with the threat of popular revolt should she become one of his victims, once again stresses not only that Agrippine is still a major player in the power stakes, or that Néron's power is precarious, but that the power game is not a one-man show, rather it is dependent on everything and everyone else remaining subservient:

> Pourvu que par ma mort tout le peuple irrité
>
> Ne vous ravisse pas ce qui m'a tant coûté. (1285-86)

The sense of pervasive ambiguity surrounding the locus of power is intensified by the apparent utter capitulation of Néron. He appears to give in to all of his mother's demands, the return of Pallas, a reconciliation with Britannicus, he even declares that he is willing to give up Junie and seems to have restored Agrippine to her former power ('qu'on obéisse aux ordres de ma mère', 1304). But there remains a feeling of unease, it is all too sudden, too unexpected, Néron appears too willing to make amends, too eager to appease, too ready to let bygones be bygones; Agrippine's victory seems fragile. In Néron's own words in the following scene, 'Elle se hâte trop [...] de triompher' (1313).

Néron's need to demonstrate that political power lies with him and to liberate himself from the hold Agrippine has over him, reaches its peak when in IV, 3 we learn of his awful, duplicitous plan, 'cet horrible dessein' as Burrhus calls it, giving us a chilling glimpse of the denouement: 'J'embrasse mon rival, mais c'est pour l'étouffer'.[59] This is a sublime elucidation of the Racinian kiss of death, a loving gesture inverted and suffused with danger and nefarious undertones. There follows what appears to be a revealing statement from Néron, 'Tant qu'il respirera je ne vis qu'à demi' (1317). However, care is needed here, the threat comes not from Britannicus, but from Britannicus with Agrippine behind him:

> ... il faut que sa ruine

Me délivre à jamais des fureurs d'Agrippine. (1315-16)

Britannicus must perish to liberate Néron once and for all from the clutches of his mother, not because he himself constitutes a source of fear and apprehension (Néron himself admits, 'Je ne le compte plus parmi mes ennemis' (1413)), but because he is a formidable weapon at Agrippine's disposal. She alone is the stumbling block, the impediment as Néron sees it to the acquisition of *toute-puissance*, the obstacle to, 'Ma gloire, mon amour, ma sûreté, ma vie' (1324). She can destroy Néron and put his rival on the throne:

... je ne prétends pas que sa coupable audace

Une seconde fois lui promette ma place. (1319-20)

The interesting juxtaposition of *coupable* and *audace* here implies guilt in any opposition to the ruler. For Néron the ideal sovereign should be supreme, absolute, unrivalled. Ostensibly, however, he falls far short of his own ideal.

It becomes clear that Néron's desire to establish the locus of power is ironically undermined by that very desire. His emotions are aroused and actions inspired by the very name of the woman he would deny to the world holds any power over him. Although we perceive a brief change of mind from Néron signalled by his abrupt 'C'est assez' (1397), IV, 4 is interesting from the point of view of how Narcisse manages to manipulate him again. His black prophecy of future damaging revelations, 'Il n'est point de secrets que le temps ne révèle', and his warning that an emboldened Britannicus may one day seek revenge, '... peut-être il fera ce que vous n'osez faire', are in themselves insufficient to make Néron backtrack on his planned reconciliation.[60] As we noted above, Britannicus in Néron's eyes is not a threat. Therefore Narcisse steps his argument up a gear and in so doing strikes a raw nerve. His bold observation that Agrippine 'a repris sur vous son souverain empire' (1415), provokes a furious response. We find three anguished interrogatives in one line, 'Quoi donc? Qu'a-t-elle dit? Et que voulez-vous dire?' (1416). Néron is shaken, unnerved, his resolve irrevocably weakened, he is now

putty in his Machiavellian counsellor's hands, 'Mais, Narcisse, dis-moi, que veux-tu que je fasse?' (1423).

This ambiguity is brought further into relief by the self-absorption behind the dark obsessive will to power, inexorably exposed in V, 3. Agrippine and Junie are left alone, but there is no real dialogue between the two women; the scene centres on Agrippine basking in the glory of her apparently triumphant return to power. Various declarations spotlight her egotism which in turn explains her naivity in this scene. She asks Junie, 'Doutez-vous d'une paix dont je fais *mon ouvrage*?' (1576), and to Junie's confession of doubt and fear, she replies with a short, sharp, definitive statement. There are no ifs, buts, or maybes, 'Il suffit, *j'ai parlé*, tout a changé de face' (1583), a direct reflection of Agrippine's vanity and inflated self-importance. She relishes her own handiwork, boasting of and revelling in thoughts of her future eminence and honour, 'Rome encore une fois va connaître Agrippine' (1604). Her references to Néron are hardly flattering. He is depicted as childlike and guileless:

> Sa facile bonté, sur son front répandue
>
> [...]
>
> Il s'épanchait en fils, qui vient en liberté
>
> Dans le sien de sa mère oublier sa fierté. (1591-94)

The words *bonté* and *facile*, imply a certain credulity and inexperience on Néron's part and recur a mere ten lines later driving home the image of a weak ingenuous Néron:

> Son coeur n'enferme point une malice noire;
>
> Et nos seuls ennemis altérant sa bonté,
>
> Abusaient contre nous de sa facilité. (1600-02)

We are a far cry from the silent, terrifying being of the spy scene. The ambivalence as to the locus of power remains as baffling as ever.

With the murder of Britannicus, Néron exercises the ultimate power of life and death, yet even as he wields this supreme power, we are aware that it is being startlingly

debased by the tantalising drama of real and imagined power underlying the action. Significantly we witness an interesting reaction from Agrippine when she learns of Britannicus's death: 'Vous verrez si c'est moi qui l'inspire' (1647). Although we see here the same self-centredness and self-importance resurface, it was in fact she who set the tragic chain of events in motion. Moreover, Néron's exclamation upon seeing Agrippine at the beginning of scene 6, together with Agrippine's appeal for him to 'Arrêtez' (1648), imply his continued reluctance to face her and suggest that he is still under her spell.

The last three scenes of the play present us with the same kind of 'double vision' with which the play began. The vocabulary leaves us with the appalling vision of a bloodthirsty tyrant: *mort, morte, mourant, mourir, périr, coups, assassins, sang, hais, barbaries, fureur, furieux, farouche, colère, crimes, victimes, armer, tyran, souffrir, audace, punie* (1649-1755). And this bleak, infernal vision is simultaneously projected forward into the future and back into the past:

> Et ton mon paraîtra, dans la race future,
>
> Aux plus cruels tyrans une cruelle injure. (1691-92)

Agrippine balefully declares '... le cruel n'a plus rien qui l'arrête' (1699), but this is not entirely true. Tyrant or not, Néron is still enchained. Agrippine remains dictatorial and condescending to the end. Her final words resound like an order: '... tu peux sortir' (1694). Indeed in this divided line, the two hemstitches encapsulate the divided power of the play:

Agrippine: Adieu, tu peux sortir.

Néron: Narcisse, suivez-moi.

All of this ironically makes a mockery of Narcisse's earlier temptation : 'Vous seriez libre, alors, Seigneur' (1465). Freedom and *toute-puissance* prove to be illusory. Even the death of Agrippine will not bring respite to Néron:

> Tu voudras t'affranchir du joug de mes bienfaits.
>
> Mais je veux que ma mort te soit même inutile.
>
> Ne crois pas qu'en mourant je te laisse tranquille.

Rome, ce ciel, ce jour que tu reçus de moi,

Partout à tout moment, m'offriront devant toi. (1678-82)

This is a short quotation charged with significance. Firstly, the repetition of *vouloir* highlights the clash of wills; secondly, we find that the traditional association of death with peace and tranquillity is overturned as we glimpse an afterlife of frenzied activity in tormenting the living; and finally, the words *Rome*, *ciel* and *jour*, which should conjure a positive image of unrestricted open space, of liberty, instead create a suffocating effect caused by their juxtaposition with 'que tu reçus de moi'.

Though the tragedy is left open with the final words of Burrhus, 'Plût aux dieux que ce fût le dernier de ses crimes!' it could be asserted that the action and the image of power have come full circle. Just as it began, the play ends with Agrippine seeking an interview with Néron, this time a shattered, broken Néron. 'N'ose-t-il être Auguste et César que de nom?' (198), Burrhus's question it seems is as pertinent at the denouement as it was in the exposition. The uncertainty, confusion and ambiguity as to the locus of power remains; as we leave the theatre we are reminded of the final word of Garcin in Sartre's *Huis Clos*, 'Continuons'.[61]

Before embarking upon a quest for the source of power in *Bajazet*, it seems pertinent to note that its portrayal is equally ambiguous. The play presents a complex, multi-faceted portrayal of power. Ostensibly a great deal of emphasis is placed on rank in this play.[62] Distinctions are repeatedly drawn between the men of rank and the slaves. Yet there is a complicated, paradoxical power structure in place which involves the blurring of these distinctions. Roxane, ruler in Amurat's absence, is in effect an 'Esclave couronnée' (*Mithridate*, 253), she is a slave with ultimate power of life and death over Bajazet, a prince of royal blood. The *esclaves*, as a projection of the power of the Sultan, ineluctably involves a merging of identities.[63] The overall effect is a blurring of the distinction between rulers and slaves. Yet ultimately the slaves remain slaves; Acomat preaches to Bajazet that 'le sang des Ottomans / Ne doit point en esclave obéir aux

serments' (643-44), and we are reminded again and again in the course of the play that Roxane is a slave.[64] However despite these constant reminders, the ambiguity remains unshakable for as Roxane herself declares,

> ... je tiens sous ma puissance
>
> Cette foule de chefs, d'esclaves, de muets ... (435-36)

The *chefs* and the *esclaves* are grouped together with no distinction made; the power structure seems ill-defined and enigmatic.

When the curtain goes up in *Bajazet*, we find ourselves once again in a state of transition. Order appears to have given way to a chaos of distorted values. The word 'Jadis' (5) is revealing in that it signals a change, a shift in power. There is now a situation of revolt in the *sérail*; the inhabitants we are told 'Sortis de leur devoir n'osèrent y rentrer' (164), thus immediately challenging our assumptions about duty and rebellion. It appears a new structure of inverted values is in place, for the daring here is connected with duty not rebellion. Power, it seems, is up for grabs; Amurat, the Sultan is away at war, Acomat, the vizir, has been left behind. He is portrayed as a Machiavellian figure similar to Néron's evil counsellor, Narcisse, but unlike Narcisse, Acomat sets himself up in direct opposition to the ruler. Like Agrippine he has ignominiously fallen from grace and his statements resound with bitterness: he declaims his 'gloire passée' and decries his 'pouvoir inutile'.[65] Seeing himself as the centre of a campaign of persecution,

> ... Amurat a juré *ma ruine.* (85)
>
> Tu vois, pour *m'*arracher du coeur de ses soldats,
>
> Qu'il va chercher *sans moi* les sièges, les combats. (87-88)

he embarks on a nefarious plot to regain power by insurrection. He turns to Bajazet's cause making the young prince a focus of revolt, a source of unease and anxiety for the Sultan: 'J'ai su lui préparer des craintes et des veilles' (93). Bajazet is thus a possible pretender to the throne, another rebel with a cause.

As for Amurat, the official head of state, the first scene of the play offers a teasingly ambiguous presentation of his power. Osmin's récit on the state of battle is remarkably ambivalent. Amurat is *Résolu* and *attendait* like a tiger ready to pounce. His soldiers *le craignent toujours*, the camp *tremblait* and *craignait* because of an *ordre secret*: again the emphasis is on a power founded on fear.[66] Yet on the other hand, the fearsome image of the Persians closing in on the Sultan's army illustrates vividly that power is literally under seige. In line 32 the ultimate question is posed: 'Amurat jouit-il d'un pouvoir absolu?' Some sixty lines later we hear the vizir rage against his own 'pouvoir inutile': the oxymoron is provocative for it suggests a void behind the title. The same paradox it seems is being presented here: Amurat is Sultan but is his title empty? Where does power lie?

Amurat himself is *fatigué*, *désarmé*, he is hardly depicted as the heroic warrior-ruler as he seems to want to *laisser Babylone tranquille* and his war-machine seems to have ground to a halt, *siège inutile*, *assauts impuissants*.[67] He is affecting a façade of contentment concealing the worry and turmoil within:

> Mais *en vain* par ce calme il croit nous éblouir
>
> Il *affecte* un repos dont il ne peut jouir. (35-36)

The Sultan is thus ostensibly confronting sedition on three fronts: the revolt within the *sérail*, the advancing army, the opposition from within the ranks of his own men. Unlike Bajazet 'Emportant après lui les coeurs des soldats', the Sultan is portrayed with a reluctant band of men, stressed by the repetition of the verb *regretter*.[68] The same emphasis on the ruler's need for army support that we saw in *Britannicus* can also be found in *Bajazet*. Acomat's solicitous questioning of Osmin in scene 1 is particularly revealing, 'Que faisiaent cependant nos braves janissaires?' (29), for we are made aware that mutiny would mean the downfall of Amurat:

> ... si, dans le combat, le destin plus puissant
>
> Marque de quelque affront son empire naissant,
>
> S'il fuit, ne doutez point que, fiers de sa disgrâce,

A la haine bientôt ils ne joignent l'audace ... (63-66)

Power therefore seems all the more precarious given that a similar atmosphere of secrecy and subterfuge exists in the army as in the *sérail*: *soupçons*, *sujets de murmure*, *les murmures du camp*.[69] These are dangerous whispers, hints of conspiracy, for Amurat had previously tried to halve the number of the janissaries in a bid to liberate himself from 'leur tutelle'. In the way that Néron needs to 'affermir son empire', so Amurat is trying to 'affermir sa puissance'.[70] His power is ostensibly based on a battle that we feel can go either way (54), emphasised by the repetition of *si* (59, 63, 65), and the sense of uncertainty which surrounds the title *Sultan* each time it occurs:

... que fait le Sultan? (16)

Rendent-ils au Sultan des hommages sincères? (30)

Il faut voir du Sultan la victoire ou la fuite. (54)

Et le Sultan triomphe ou fuit en ce moment. (224)

Victory will only bring Amurat 'une aveugle et basse obéissance' and defeat will lead to 'la haine' and 'l'audace' of the janissaries and his inevitable fall from power. The initial image of power therefore seems contradictory and negative in the extreme.

Thus by the end of the first scene the wheels of the *machine infernale* are in motion. We have gained glimpses of an arbitrary power founded on fear and listened to revelations of the violence, the terror, and perforce the secrecy and subversion entailed in the subsequent conspiracy. Power is apparently in flux, wavering, vacillating within an equivocal power structure which is complicated even further by the subterfuge and scheming within the *sérail*. The repetition of *ordre* (71, 73, 76, 79) in rapid succession, reinforces the idea not only of revolt, but of the instability or rather mobility of power, for these are orders and counterorders. Amurat's 'ordre sévère' that the slave return with Bajazet's head is overturned by another *ordre* for the execution of the slave.[71] The seeds of a potential power struggle have been sown leaving us the tantalising question as to who effectively wields power.

Roxane, we are told, has been granted in Amurat's absence 'un pouvoir absolu' and has been left 'arbitre souveraine' of Bajazet's life to kill him 'à ses moindres soupçons'.[72] Her power would thus appear not as simply absolute, but arbitrary and her first appearance on stage in scene two seems to confirm this. The repetition of the first person pronoun, the authoritative, short, sharp, definitive statements, 'Il suffit', 'Je verrai Bajazet', the imperatives, *Allez*, *venez*, *revenez*, all project the image of a dynamic figure of power, an image which Roxane strives to project throughout the play.[73]

However, Act III presents further complications: it becomes evident that within the power struggle which ostensibly threatens Amurat's position, another battle for control is being waged between Roxane and Bajazet. At the end of Acomat's *récit* in scene 2, he comments on what he believes to be the impending marriage, placing great emphasis on the new royal status of Bajazet: 'Voilà ... votre prince et le nôtre' who will receive 'les honneurs souverains'. We are told that 'un peuple obéissant' await him as Acomat himself falls at his feet before the imminent coronation.[74] But these pronouncements are deceptive: all are debased in scene 5 with the re-entry of Roxane. This scene is very interesting from the point of view of where power now lies within this rival faction. Her double imperative in the first line and the definitive 'il est temps', restates her power and re-establishes Bajazet's subordinate status. Roxane declares 'il est temps [...] que tout le sérail reconnaisse son maître', but the word *maître* is emptied of all meaning and significance. The inhabitants of the *sérail* she tells us are 'Assemblé[s] par mon ordre', they 'attend[ent] ma volonté'. 'Mes esclaves' we are told 'Sont les premiers sujets que mon amour vous livre'.[75] Bajazet is pushed into second place by this relentless succession of possessive adjectives, pushed down the power hierarchy. Then we have an unequivocal assertion of her power:

> Tantôt à me venger fixe et déterminée
>
> Je jurais qu'il voyait sa dernière journée
>
> [...]
>
> J'ai cru dans son désordre entrevoir sa tendresse:

J'ai prononcé sa grâce, et je crois sa promesse. (1021-22, 1025-26)

Again the persistent repetition of the first person pronoun clearly reflects Roxane's desire to show that she has ultimate power, that her word is law, her decision final.

Yet despite such an implacable display of force, chinks appear in Roxane's armour from the outset, her power is tenuous, doubtful. Her statements of *toute-puissance* are continually juxtaposed with references to the real source of power. 'L'ordre dont elle seule était dépositaire' (154): the might bestowed on her by the emphatic *elle seule* is immediately tempered for the order is not hers, she is merely the *dépositaire* of the Sultan's order to kill Bajazet. Her power over Bajazet is repeatedly undermined by the emphasis placed on Amurat: 'Amurat ... / *a voulu que* l'on dût ce titre à son amour', 'Et des jours de son frère *il me laissa* l'arbitre', 'Du pouvoir qu'*Amurat me donna* sur sa vie'.[76] Her power is by proxy. Significantly the letter from Amurat is read aloud by Roxane. The vocabulary of absolute power and the repetition of the possessive adjective leave us in no doubt as to its 'owner': *ma puissance, mes ordres absolus, mon ordre souverain, mes lois*. This is underlined by the adjectives *absolus* and *souverains* which are indicative of the monolithic nature of Amurat's supremacy, and by *obéissance* and *asservie* which remind us of the prerequisite subservience of others.[77]

The same tension between Roxane's statements of absolute power and overtones of the reality of her powerlessness is in evidence in III, 8 with the arrival of Orcan. Amurat has now ordered Bajazet's death 'une seconde fois' (1112). Roxane's response is one of arrogant defiance:

On ne peut sur ses jours sans moi rien entreprendre.

Tout m'obéit ici. (1113-14)

The egocentric *sans moi* and the implicit opposition of *Tout* and *rien* reminds us that it is an all or nothing situation, a life or death wager. But her declarations of absolute power ring hollow for they are blatantly contradicted by her subsequent indecision:

... Mais dois-je le défendre? (1114)

... Que faire en ce doute funeste? (1117)

Quel est mon empereur? Bajazet? Amurat? (1115)

Quel est mon empereur? Where does power lie? The answer to this question does not lie with Roxane, her power is not supreme, as her question reveals someone else will wield power, but the fact is that Roxane believes she has the key to who will hold that power, and it is this decision that gives her an illusion of *toute-puissance*.

It is true that her final command, the notorious *Sortez* which seals Bajazet's fate, could be seen as an expression of Roxane's supremacy, she has after all exercised ultimate power in taking Bajazet's life. However that power is again debased and undermined three times by references to Amurat:

Maîtresse du Sérail, arbitre de ta vie

Et même de l'État qu'Amurat me confie. (1529-30)

The phrase 'Amurat me confie' here merely stresses as we saw in the first scenes of the play, that the real source of power lies elsewhere, that hers is power by proxy. The final *Sortez* is not hers, it is 'l'ordre d'Amurat', a fact reinforced by Bajazet when he provokes her, 'Aux ordres d'Amurat hâtez-vous d'obéir'.[78] The bellowing imperatives which stretch from the exposition to the denouement are like a voice vaulting a chasm.

Towards the end of the play we find the same picture of disorder we glimpsed in the exposition. We receive the news from Zatime that the *sérail* has been taken over by Acomat and his band of rebels: 'Le rebelle Acomat est maître du Palais' (1628). Power has apparently been beseiged and conquered from within. There is an image of chaos, slaves fleeing, muffled orders, and general confusion as to the locus of power:

Vos esclaves tremblants, dont la moitié s'enfuit,

Doutent si le Vizir vous sert ou vous trahit. (1631-32)

This picture of disarray is mirrored by Acomat as he describes his frantic search of the *sérail* for Bajazet:

Je cours, et je ne vois que des troupes craintives

D'esclaves effrayés, de femmes fugitives. (1661-62)

Frenetic activity, fear, uncertainty: these, the inevitable effects of apparently shifting power relations, are succinctly conveyed by these lines. It seems that the question as to who actually wields power has never been more compelling.

'Amurat jouit-il d'un pouvoir absolu?' (32). This agonisingly urgent question is cynically confounded by the subtle complexity of Racine's portrayal of power. The first scene of the play where we find the title of Sultan shrouded in uncertainty together with a definite sense of the mobility of power, is something of a red herring, for power is never actually up for grabs. The tragic irony is that the battle has been won, Babylon conquered and the Sultan's power reaffirmed. This is conveyed implicitly by the fact that Osmin's récit in scene 1 is related in the imperfect tense, all attempts at seizing power thereafter are futile. The all-important question posed in scene 1 regarding the locus of power is finally answered with the death of Roxane herself. While she retains the power of life and death over Bajazet, in her battle for supreme power with Amurat she is shadow-boxing from the exposition to the denouement, the position of Sultan is not vacant.

This process of discovery is in fact implicit from the very first scene of *Bajazet* where we find frequent references to knowledge, finding out and revelation: *parler* and *entendre*, the repetition of the verb *instruire*, the unremitting interrogatives of the opening lines.[79] It is clearly a scene of revelations indicated by the constant repetition of *Quoi* by Osmin. Thus from the beginning we are on a *voyage of discovery*, but it is a discovery not so much related to the locus of power as it is in *Britannicus* where Néron and Agrippine openly vie for control. As the play progresses it becomes clear that Amurat remains *tout puissant* as Roxane's power is by proxy and Bajazet's route to the throne is barred by his love for Atalide and an abhorrence of Roxane. The final discovery is related rather to the principles of power. The discovery the denouement provides is an essentially *moral* discovery connected with finding limits, the limits of

temporal, physical power. Those who seek to play God for other men sink below the level of humanity.

Yet is there not an inherent paradox, a mocking absurdity in this discovery? For while this conclusion may be drawn vis à vis Roxane, it is clear at the end of the denouement that the barbaric inhumane power structure that we glimpse in the exposition is still intact, the 'ordre accoutumé' (572) survives, indeed is reinforced. Thus the vision of an arbitrary power without limits, the portrayal of someone who plays God for other men, that we see condemned in the course of the play through Roxane's degradation, paradoxically prevails at the end. In *Bajazet,* the relentless quest for revelations of hidden, infallible truths proves futile. One recalls Kafka's tale in *The Trial* of a man searching for the right question to ask the series of doorkeepers he faces in order to proceed, and how, enmeshed in a *machine infernale*, he confronts a more powerful doorkeeper at the end of each hallway. In *Bajazet* we feel as though we have gone through a long line of doors only to find the last one locked. There is no joyful enlightenment, no brave new world. In our quest for light, we find ourselves stranded in darkness.

In *Bérénice*, the question of the locus of power is essentially addressed from a similar angle. The pattern is now established; firstly, as with Néron and Roxane, we are given an impression of a model ruler. The following sprinkling of comments projects an image of Titus as the all-powerful emperor: Antiochus maintains, 'Aujourd'hui qu'il peut tout ...', 'Titus est le maître' and 'Tout disparaît dans Rome auprès de sa splendeur'. Paulin reiterates this by telling him simply, 'Vous pouvez tout'. Likewise Bérénice insists, 'il peut tout: il n'a plus qu'à parler', ultimately putting him on the level of a god, 'rien n'arrête vos pas'.[80] Indeed when we first see Titus on stage in Act II surrounded by his suite he appears in a political role defining his friend Antiochus in his official capacity, 'le roi de Comagène' (327), and he seems authoritative in his questioning of Paulin. However, as with Néron and Roxane, the hidden reality of power is about to be

uncovered. His forceful interrogatives quickly give way to despairing exclamations. By the next scene he has ordered his guards, the visible apparatus of his power, to leave and we glimpse the man behind the mask; now far from cutting a powerful figure, he is alone, confused, unsure of himself. Like Néron in the celebrated abduction scene, Titus, the man whose word should be law, is speechless:

> J'ai voulu devant elle en ouvrir le discours;
>
> Et dès le premier mot, me langue embarrassée
>
> Dans ma bouche vingt fois a demeuré glacé. (474-76)

For his love for Bérénice is threatened and condemned by an invisible presence which is there from the exposition to the denouement. There is no pretender in the wings as in *Britannicus* and *Bajazet*, the threat to the ruler is ironically the ruled. Rome, the most powerful character in the play, is present throughout the action. The word *Rome* occurs 52 times, each time like a knell of doom. As the vocabulary of vision highlights, it is a kind of pre-Orwellian Big Brother, ever-watchful,

> Rome vous vit ... (233)
>
> Rome vous voit ... (293)
>
> Rome observe ... (467)
>
> Rome ... verra partir la Reine (488)
>
> Rome vit passer au nombre des vaincus ... (689)

and constantly sitting in judgement,

> Rome lui sera-t-elle indulgente ou sévère? (368)
>
> Rome jugea ta reine en condamnant ses rois (1017)
>
> Ce que Rome en jugeait ne l'entendis-tu pas? (1022)[81]

However the presentation of Rome in *Bérénice* is paradoxical; it is noble in that it demands high standards,

> Rome par une loi qui ne se peut changer
>
> N'admet avec son sang aucun sang étranger (377-78)

The double negative, the forceful *aucun* stress the rigidity of the law, while the word *sang* hints at contamination and places the emphasis firmly on purity. But at the same

time this is clearly not the patriotic, refined Rome of Cornelian drama; referred to as 'ce peuple furieux', it is the 'foule insensée' that invades the imperial palace. One recalls the Romans of *Britannicus* who tore Narcisse limb from limb.[82]

Titus's relationship with Rome is ambiguous. The Roman people, in their frenzy of adulation, encircle and imprison Titus in his role as emperor, 'Le peuple avec transport l'arrête et l'environne' (1271). In this intricate play of mastery and submission, they suppress, suffocate and crush. The oft-quoted nocturnal epiphany in I, 5, ostensibly presents a vision of infinite splendour depicting Titus as the essence of majesty, *splendeur, grandeur, éclat, gloire, victoire,* but when we look behind the ritual, the scene presents a hidden reality.[83] The apotheosis becomes a purgatorial experience for the exaltation and glorification are unveiled as submission and humility. The image of the royal condition is now distressingly bleak. Ultimately Titus becomes a victim of the power he acquires to such an extent that he is deprived of his identity.[84] The popular conception of the ruler as marvellous, as being beyond the ordinary human realm, means that he experiences profound alienation.[85] In a dramatic inversion of power, Titus becomes a mere agent, an actor pronouncing the will of Rome, a mirror in which the Romans can see a representation of their own glory.[86] The description ends as Bérénice declares, 'Le monde en le voyant eût reconnu son maître ...' (316): significantly the connotations of power inherent in the word *maître* are subtly diminished by the preceding possessive. The Roman people have effectively assumed control of Titus's very being; this is totalitarianism inverted for Rome is absolute in a way that the emperor can never be, in a shocking reversal the ruler has once more become the ruled.

'Contemplez mon devoir dans toute sa rigueur' (1053): the adjective *toute* here stresses the absoluteness of the imperial role, but this is not the absolutism of supreme power, this is the absolutism of submission. A vision of sovereignty is being put forward where clearly the ruler's power cannot extend beyond thoroughly limited bounds. His right to

rule is now dependent upon his conformity with the law, the accent is unequivocally on the limited nature of power.

'qui vous arrête...?' (*Britannicus*, 460)

We can now perhaps begin to grasp the sheer complexity of Narcisse's question posed at the start of this chapter. Echoed in Roxane's 'qui m'arrête?' and in Bérénice's words to Titus, 'rien n'arrête vos pas', it is clearly a question which presents many ambiguities but no satisfying sense of a solution.[87] In each play the social ideal of stability and greatness traditionally associated with sovereignty is pitted against the political reality of power and found to be an elusive abstraction. Each time the political world is one of struggle and flux, there is a nagging awareness of constant movement, imminent change and insecurity. In this way we are led to ask what 'real' or 'effective' power is. In *Britannicus* and *Bajazet* Racine seems to be working towards a moral-political conception of power. The 'brute force' aspect of power that we see as the curtain goes up in these plays is clearly condemned through the dramatisation of the issue of legitimacy which lends the plays their moral dimension. However, in *Bérénice* the apparently ideal combination of moral and political power proves equally unsettling. In *Britannicus* we are made aware through occurrences of the verb *obéir* of the emptiness behind obedience to a power devoid of authority; in *Bérénice* power is confounded by the irony that a ruler with authority is ultimately reduced to obedience. In the nocturnal epiphany scene, the very staging of Titus's majesty and glory, we witness the shocking paradox of the ruler ruled, a bleak portrait of personal degradation, suffering and sacrifice. In the end each image of power put forward in the three plays is found to be unacceptable. The same problems are resurrected in a new guise in each play and every time power is shown to exist within a perilous matrix of force and political/moral legitimacy, might and right. Racine has ostensibly bequeathed us a challenging riddle, a riddle not just relating to the concerns of his age, but one that propounds problems which remain as baffling today as they did then.

[1] Michael J. Shapiro, 'Language and Power: The Genealogical Perspective', in *Texts, Contexts, Concepts. Studies in Politics and Power in Language,* ed. by Sakari Hänninen and Kari Palonen (Jyväskylä: The Finnish Political Science Association, 1990), p. 12.

[2] Quesnel's remarks, p. 86, are particularly poignant here: "On a généralement tendance à ne voir l'intrigue politique dans une pièce de Racine que comme un adjuvant à l'intrigue amoureuse. Elle serait donc extrêmement secondaire et il n'y aurait pas à proprement parler de politique racinienne. A y regarder de plus près, le pouvoir politique joue cependant un rôle primordial dans les palais raciniens. Il manifeste un incoercible volonté de puissance, participant du jeu global des passions humaines, et impose une implacable logique qui pèse sur le chétive existence humaine'. See Chapter Two on the ruler / lover dichotomy for a more detailed look at previous studies of politics and passion.

[3] Barthes, p. 35.

[4] Conny Edwin Nelson, 'The Tragedy of Power in Racine and Shakespeare', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Washington , 1964).

[5] Peter France in his article, 'Racine, le roi et les rois', p. 105, points out that Racine 'se sert de la scène tragique pour flatter le maître du royaume'. However, most of the examples he gives are tenuous and can be little more than conjecture. See for example the dubious anecdote he relates in 'Détestables flatteurs...' about how Louis stopped dancing at court ballets after hearing the denunciation of Néron in IV, 4 of *Britannicus*. Sweetser too, in her article, 'Representations of Power in Racine's Theatre', in *Western Society for French History*, 14 (1987), 123-29, is concerned with setting the plays within their historical context by examining the way in which the dramatisation of power could be regarded as 'lessons' for Louis XIV.

[6] Timothy Reiss notes, 'Racine's theater can usefully be understood as [...] applying different elements of contemporary political theory to partly fictional facts, events, and players', 'Racine and Political Thought: Les Plaideurs and Law', in *Cahiers du dix-septième*, 1 (1987), 1-19 (5). For a further development of this approach, see his article *'La Thébaïde* ou la souveraineté à la question', in *L'Age du Théâtre en France*, ed. by Nicole Boursier and David Trott, (Edmonton: Academic Printing and Publishing, 1988), and his book *Tragedy and Truth.*

[7] Marcelle Blum, *Le Thème Symbolique*, (Paris: Nizet, 1965).

[8] *Britannicus*, 837, 842, 845-46.

[9] *Britannicus*, 1732, 1733.

[10] For a discussion of the complexity of confessional discourse in the three plays, see Chapter Three.

[11] *Britannicus*, 853-54, 1180.

[12] *Britannicus*, 1181, 1185, 1189.

[13] Of course his list is lacking, incomplete. One important factor has been missed out - Roxane.

[14] See below p. 38.

[15] *Bajazet*, 565, 578, 585.

[16] For a further discussion of the significance of the act of promising, see Chapter Three.

[17] *Bajazet*, 622, 625,, 735, 382.

[18] *Bajazet*, 596, 602, 754, 755, 643, 757, 991.

[19] *Bajazet*, 1000, 1002, 1005, 1006, 1007, 995.

[20] *Bérénice*, 1053.

[21] Marie-Odile Sweetser notes: 'L'accession à l'empire, souhaité jadis comme un pouvoir, s'est révelé comme un devoir', 'Création d'une image royale dans le théâtre de Racine', in *Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature*, 15 (1988), 657-75 (664).

[22] The vocabulary employed here seems to contradict William Cloonan's view in his article, 'Love and Gloire in *Bérénice*: A Freudian Perspective', in *Kentucky Romance Quarterly*, 22 (1975), 517-25 (524), that Titus covets power and his description of the emperor as 'more secure in his public role than in an intimate relationship with another human being'.

[23] Gilbert Schilling, 'La Terreur dans le Théâtre de Racine', in *Jeunesse de Racine*, 12 (1958), 17-22 (18), remarks on the laws of the *sérail*, 'On ne parle de ses rigoureuses lois que pour mieux marquer qu'elles sont sans cesse transgressées'.

[24] Robert McBride explains, 'Inculquant le respect des lois à ses sujets, il se doit et leur doit par conséquent de s'y astreindre le premier', 'Le rôle de Rome dans *Bérénice*', in *Studi Francesi*, 52 (1974), 86-91 (88).

[25] See for example Jacques Bossuet, *Discours sur l'Histoire Universelle* (Tours: Cattier, 1886), p. 358: 'Les empires du monde ont servi à la religion et à la conservation du peuple de Dieu'.

[26] See lines 246, 293-96, 323-24, 623, 1011-23.

[27] Catherine Spencer, *La Tragédie du Prince*, p. 468.

[28] In many of Racine's tragedies the importance of the role of the people is acknowledged. In *Britannicus* Agrippine's arrogance can be explained by her confidence in her popularity (1604-05). Néron too knows he is sustained by the people. While Narcisse invites him to treat the Romans as slaves (1437-52), he timorously asks 'de tout l'univers quel sera le langage?' (1427). In *Bajazet* Acomat talks of 'les murmures du camp' (137) as he speculates on the likelihood of the Sultan retaining power. Similarly in *Andromaque* Oreste warns Pyrrhus that 'Toute la Grèce éclate en murmures confus' (68). Cléone later reveals to Hermione that Oreste 'craint la Grèce, il craint l'univers en courroux' (1467). In *Phèdre* Hippolyte informs us of how Thésée owes his power to the love of the people (498-500).

[29] See below, Section C - The Locus of Power.

[30] *Britannicus*, 12, 33, 74, 160; 75.

[31] *Britannicus*, 1352, 1528.

[32] *Bajazet*, 44; *Andromaque*, 312; *Britannicus*, 269.

[33] *Britannicus*, 1051, 1052; 1063.

[34] *Britannicus*, 1052, 1056; 461-61.

[35] *Britannicus*, 1101, 1111; 1102, 1103, 1111.

[36] *Britannicus*, 1499, 1503, 1500, 1501.

[37] *Britannicus*, 1503; 1541, 1543, 1545, 1546.

[38] *Britannicus*, 1505, 1506; 1537, 1539, 1542, 1544.

[39] *Britannicus*, 1563; 1563, 1568, 1569, 1570.

[40] *Britannicus*, 1564, 1566, 1568.

[41] *Britannicus*, 1564, 1566, 1566. See Chapter Three for an examination of the nefarious undertones in loving gestures.

[42] *Britannicus*, 397, 1638.

[43] *Bajazet*, 4, 5.

[44] *Bajazet*, 72, 149; 150, 152; 5, 66; 152, 160, 164, 166, 194.

[45] *Bajazet*, 44, 73, 109, 186, 204; 93, 161, 205.

[46] See for example Apostolidès, *Le Prince Sacrifié*, and Hale, 'La perspective et le pouvoir'. For an alternative view see Spencer, 'Racine s'en va-t-en guerre'. See footnotes 22 and 23 of my Introduction.

[47] *Bajazet*, 1354, 623, 625, 1684, 1629, 649.

[48] *Bajazet*, 209, 1457; 149, 1631, 1662; 75, 878, 1097, 1167, 1172.

[49] *Bajazet*, 71, 1104.

[50] *Bajazet*, 1103, 1102.

[51] *Bajazet*, 1124; 1099; 1102.

[52] *Bajazet*, 1125, 1126; 1123; 1125.

[53] See lines 317, 319, 320, 321, 322.

[54] *Britannicus*, 129, 132, 214, 138, 180.

[55] *Britannicus*, 381, 649, 67.

[56] *Britannicus*, 268, 256, 260.

[57] 'Je confesserai tout exils, assassinats. / Poison mème' (853-54). See Section A above for a discussion of legitimacy in *Britannicus*.

[58] Britannicus, 562-66; 1090-92; 108, 1100, 1110.

[59] *Britannicus*, 1325, 1314.

[60] *Britannicus*, 1404, 1408.

[61] Some critics clearly take a different perspective on the locus of power at the end of *Britannicus*. Schilling, p. 20, for example states that, 'Le [...] meurtre signifie également la fin de la puissance d'Agrippine'. Harold Ault's assertion, 'The Tragic Protagonist and the Tragic Subject in *Britannicus*', in *French Studies*, 9 (1955), 18-29 (23, 26), that Agrippine's situation at the conclusion of the tragedy is unaltered is difficult to reconcile with his subsequent statement that things have changed: 'We feel that once Néron learns that Agrippine will never set the young prince in his place, he ceases to fear her. [...] He has destroyed Agrippine's hopes of power and can dismiss her with Britannicus from his thoughts'.

[62] The word *esclavage* occurs twice out of seven occurrences in the Racinian corpus as a whole, *esclave* twenty times out of fifty-four, and *esclaves* six out of twelve, that is, half of all occurrences in Racinian theatre.

[63] See pp. 43-44 above.

[64] *Bajazet*, 296, 604, 644, 719, 1538.

[65] *Bajazet*, 49, 90.

[66] *Bajazet*, 24; 44, 73, 72, 71.

[67] *Bajazet*, 21, 127, 22, 21, 23.

[68] *Bajazet*, 120; 42, 45.

[69] *Bajazet*, 37, 46, 137.

[70] *Bajazet*, 40, 42; *Britannicus*, 226, *Bajazet*, 41.

[71] *Bajazet*, 73, 79.

[72] *Bajazet*, 104, 130, 132.

[73] *Bajazet*, 252, 257; 253; 257.

[74] *Bajazet*, 890, 892, 893, 895, 900.

[75] *Bajazet*, 1016; 1017, 1018.

[76] *Bajazet*, 299-300, 302, 314.

[77] Richard Goodkin, 'The Performed Letter, or How Words Do Things in Racine', in *Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature*, 17 (1990), 85-102 (92), interestingly points out that the medium of the letter not only implies distance, but lends more staying power to the orders contained therein than verbal orders.

[78] *Bajazet*, 1541, 1559.

[79] *Bajazet*, 6, 11; 2, 13, 43, 160, 203, 208; 4, 16, 29, 30, 31, 32, 49-50, 51-52.

[80] *Bérénice*, 43, 248, 794; 349, 298, 565.

[81] Goldmann, p. 378, provides an apt definition of Rome: 'Rome qu'il ne peut pas ateindre mais qui existe quelque part, cachée et muette, surveillant chacun de ses actes avec la même exigence implacable du Dieu caché ...'

[82] *Bérénice*, 733, 1319; *Britannicus*, 1748-54.

[83] *Bérénice*, 301, 302, 306, 307, 308.

[84] *Bérénice*, 464, 1100-02, 1380-84. For a full discussion see Chapter Two, pp. 110-11.

[85] *Bérénice*, 3, 310, 359-60. Again, see Chapter Two, pp. 107-11.

[86]Antoine de Baecque, 'Rituels du pouvoir moderne et mise en scène nationale', in *Lendemains*, 16 (1991), 30-38 (36), likewise emphasises this as he describes how the staging of the sovereign, the ceremony of power, is simply a *mise en scène* of the people themselves: '... en assistant à un rituel du pouvoir, quel qu'il soit, le public honore certes le pouvoir [...] mais il s'honore également lui-même, car le pouvoir en présentation lors de la cérémonie est une émanation du peuple, donc du public. Ce double regard est précisément celui de l'intégration, regard qui reconnaît le pouvoir, regard qui se reconnaît soi-même ...'

[87] *Bajazet*, 525; *Bérénice*, 565.

CHAPTER 2

RULER/LOVER

Many critical studies have grappled with the problematic relationship between power and love in Racine. Yet not all, as we shall see, have adequately expressed the complexity and depth of this crucial and compelling feature of the dramatisation of power. It is the purpose of this chapter to re-examine this relationship by elucidating the way in which the roles of ruler and lover interact to produce tension and conflict.

> Pourquoi suis-je empereur? Pourquoi suis-je amoureux? (*Bérénice*, 1226)

Pierced with anguish, echoing with despair, the fierce intensity of this double interrogative spotlights an impossible contradiction that strikes at the heart of the internal conflict of Racinian majesty: the ruler / lover dichotomy. In Racine love and power are inseparable and irreconcilable at the same time. His portrayal of power and love places the ruler and the lover in venomous conjunction, but care is needed: the opposition is not simply binary, the split is not just without (Néron and Britannicus, Roxane and Atalide), but within (Néron, Roxane, Titus). Ernst Kantorowitcz captured this schism when he talked of the 'king's two bodies'.[1] It is an image which paradoxically conveys both the fusion and distinction of politics and love, a double identity within one man. John Jackson recently summarised the enigma:

> Devoir renoncer à l'éros pour accéder au pouvoir, ou renoncer au pouvoir en faveur de l'amour, cela peut vouloir dire que l'un exclut naturellement l'autre, qu'il existe une incompatabilité naturelle entre eux. Mais cela peut signifier tout aussi bien que ce choix n'est ni si crucial que du fait de leur trop grande proximité, voire de leur tendance à se confondre.'[2]

Yet often in Racinian criticism we find either that the ruler is examined separately from the lover, or more commonly, the lover separately from the ruler.[3] Albert Cook points

out that a ruler can never be a happy lover in Racine and conversely that a lover can never be a happy ruler, but it is rare to find a study which examines in detail the interplay of the two.[4] The ongoing debate as to which is more important, politics or love, has led to the spheres of love and government on the whole being kept separate.[5] However, I would argue that within the tragic structure of the plays it is the confusion of the ruler and the lover which sets the *machine infernale* in motion. Philip Butler in the Introduction to his edition of *Britannicus* rightly points out that 'Néron's self-assertion as a lover was intimately bound up with his self-assertion as a ruler'.[6] Harriet Stone talks of 'l'érotisation de la politique'.[7] John Lapp and Richard Parish portray Racine's tragedies as variations of the prisoner-of-love cliché, directing our attention to the paradox of the captor / captive. Parish notes, 'The political power of the ruler which allows the imprisonment to take place, is countered by a sexual or personal potency that in turn imprisons the imprisoner'.[8] Apostolidès's belief that the conflict between 'la raison du coeur et la raison d'Etat' is central to the tragic experience is expressed by his simple definition: 'Le théâtre classique est la bataille de la conscience'.[9] Others such as Mitchell Greenberg and Louis Marin have also alerted us to this fusion. [10]

The aim of this chapter is to examine the way in which relationships are established and conducted within a framework of power. This does not exclude highlighting the ostensible clash between love and power, but the priority will lie in exploring Racine's intricate interlacing of the two, that is, his dramatisation of the operation of power in a realm where it should not and cannot prevail. For in our understanding of love as reciprocal, there is a contradiction between the exercise of power and the submission to it. Power appears to imply control, and love the opposite. This is further complicated by the idea of love as the exercise of power, that is, a subject obtaining or demanding submission from an apparent ruler (Junie, Bajazet, Bérénice).

In the light of this uneasy relationship, this chapter will therefore attempt to elucidate the extent to which Racine, particularly in his use of language, explores and challenges

our assumptions, and how he uses the volatility of the situations created by the ruler / lover dichotomy to produce emotion.

> Que veut-il? Est-ce haine, est-ce amour, qui l'inspire?
>
> Cherche-t-il seulement le plaisir de leur nuire?
>
> Ou plutôt n'est-ce point que sa malignité
>
> Punit sur eux l'appui que je leur ai prêté? (55-58)

Agrippine's opening dialogue with Albine in *Britannicus* immediately alerts us to the division between the private and the public figure of Néron. He has acted under cover of darkness, but what has incited his actions, love or power? Clearly, at the opening of the play, the two domains are distinct. Emotion (*haine, amour*) is set apart. The emphasis is on Néron's power: 'le plaisir de leur nuire', 'sa malignité', 'punit'. Indeed these lines do not simply present him as a man of power, but words such as *plaisir* and *malignité* portray him as a man who abuses his power in the most cruel and perverse way to gratify his own desires. I would therefore disagree with the assessment of Paul Kelley that these lines represent the point at which 'the political and erotic are shown to be inextricably linked'.[11] It is odd too that he does not offer any development, or any explanation as to why he perceives the two as linked at this point. It is not until Néron's first appearance on stage that Agrippine's precarious distinction between power and love is shattered.

'C'en est fait, Néron est amoureux' (382) - stark, simple, fatalistic. The baleful words have been spoken; we gasp unnerved as the portentous undertones in *C'en est fait* and the arresting fascination inherent in *amoureux* strike home like daggers.[12] In the celebrated description of Junie's abduction which follows this chilling revelation, we have a striking contrast between the mighty emperor, the man of action and decision we saw issuing a string of commands in the previous scene, and the man no longer master of his own emotions; 'Excité d'un désir curieux ...' (385), the word *curieux* stressing not only a mysterious and perplexing sensation, but evoking the idea of exploring new,

unexplored territory; Néron is like an excited traveller, but he is about to embark on a voyage on the Titanic. The 'maître du monde' (180) is now seen to be no longer 'maître de lui-même'. The ruler is about to discover a new domain where his power holds no sway. The man whose word is law is now struck dumb; 'J'ai voulu lui parler, et ma voix s'est perdue' (396).[13] The man of action, the man from whom one gesture could set a chain of action(s) in motion is now motionless: 'Immobile, saisi d'un long étonnement ...' (397). A lonely figure ('solitaire', 399), Néron is reduced to lying awake: 'Mes yeux, sans se fermer, ont attendu le jour' (406), and acting out a fantasy scene with Junie in his imagination. This is the point at which Néron makes his tragic error of judgement. This is an arbitrary act of raw power which totally contradicts how he has ruled up until now and which ostensibly sets the *machine infernale* rolling.

Like so many Racinian rulers, Néron thinks he can use his power to buy love, indeed that his power entitles him to love. He clearly sees and defines love in terms of power: 'Si César est aimable, ou bien s'il sait aimer' (426). It is significant that although talking about himself here, Néron does not use the first-person pronoun, but rather prefers to employ his title *César* which indicates that he is setting up an *image* of power. This is recurrent. We see firstly how he presents those who *would* love him:

> ... tandis qu'il n'est point de Romaine
>
> Que mon amour n'honore et ne rende plus vaine,
>
> Qui, dès qu'à ses regards elle ose se fier,
>
> Sur le coeur de César ne les vienne essayer ... (419-22)

and then observe how he presents himself to Junie:

> ... je vois que César, digne seul de vous plaire ... (579)
>
> Et ne préférez point à la solide gloire
>
> Des honneurs dont César prétend vous revêtir. (624-25)

The vocabulary of love, *coeur, aimable, plaire*, is poignantly juxtaposed each time with the title *César*. Néron is trying to impose an image of himself both as gallant lover and majestic ruler, but the roles jar: love is clearly being viewed and expressed in terms of

imperial power. He goes on to ask Narcisse of Britannicus, 'Sur son coeur il aurait quelque empire?' (435). The juxtaposition of *coeur* and *empire* exemplifies the confusion of domains. Similarly his subsequent stark warning, 'Néron impunément ne sera pas jaloux' (445), conveys clearly the way in which Néron constructs relationships within a framework of power. The double negative, the sense of menace, and the scarcely contained fury in this statement, all indicate that desire will be satisfied through the arbitrary exercise of a blatantly transgressive power. Indeed Néron's whole attitude to love is aptly summed up by Narcisse's glib counsel, 'Commandez qu'on vous aime, et vous serez aimé' (458), reflecting a totalitarian, tyrannical grasping for power after power with an obstinate refusal to acknowledge a distinction between the empire of politics and that of love, and an alarming inability to perceive the powerlessness of power to shape emotions.[14] Significantly when Néron, in reply to Narcisse's question 'qui vous arrête, / Seigneur?' (460), goes on to expound the obstacles limiting his power, his list is lacking, incomplete:

> Tout. Octavie, Agrippine, Burrhus,
>
> Sénèque, Rome entière, et trois ans de vertus. (461-62)

Again he fails to recognise that Junie herself checks his power, that his appreciation of love as a domain within the realm of his power is diametrically opposed to Junie's perception of love as reciprocal, as something outwith the sphere of political power.

The irony of Néron's belief in his power to win love is spotlighted when, in a striking contrast, Junie stresses her lover's powerlessness:

> Ses honneurs abolis, son palais déserté,
>
> La fuite d'une cour que sa chute a bannie,
>
> Sont autant de liens qui retiennent Junie.
>
> [...]
>
> Britannicus est seul. Quelque ennui qui le presse,
>
> Il ne voit dans son sort que moi qui s'intéresse,
>
> Et n'a pour tout plaisir, Seigneur, que quelques pleurs

Qui lui font quelquefois oublier ses malheurs. (646-48, 655-58)

She clearly emphasises his qualities as a lover, not as a (potential) ruler: *ses soupirs*, *ses désirs*, *malheurs*, *pleurs*, it is the language of emotion which dominates her speech.[15] Néron's reply, 'ce sont ces plaisirs et ces pleurs que j'envie' (659), mirrors his desire to establish an erotic identity, but his method pivots on an abuse of power.

The misuse of political power in the field of emotion is vividly illustrated in the crucial meeting between Néron and Junie in II, 3. Here Néron continues to pursue the image of an all-powerful, god-like ruler held before him by Narcisse, but it clearly clashes with the role of lover he wishes to adopt. His encounter with Junie is just how he had imagined it would be: 'J'employais des soupirs et même la menace' (404). The words *soupirs* and *menace* present a sharp dramatisation of the ruler / lover within him and act as a chilling forecast that when the techniques of the lover fail, Néron will resort to the domain of brute force.[16] The tone progresses from implicit suggestion to oblique sarcasm, and then to a sharp, menacing, imperious snarl when Junie inadvertantly touches a raw nerve by reminding him that Agrippine had approved her union with Britannicus:

Ma mère a ses desseins, Madame, et j'ai les miens.

Ne parlons plus ici de Claude et d'Agrippine:

Ce n'est point par leur choix que je me détermine.

C'est à moi seul , Madame, à répondre de vous;

Et je veux de ma main vous choisir un époux. (562-66)

The process is clearly one of substitution: *ses desseins* are replaced by *les miens*, Claude and Agrippine by *moi seul* , and *leur choix* now becomes *je veux* [...] *choisir*. Néron is obviously desperate to appear independent, unconstrained and masterful here. However once again the image is deflated. Junie's reaction to his nomination of himself as the proposed *époux* is reminiscent of Narcisse's reaction in II, 2, when he first learned that Néron was in love. The incredulity of the interrogative 'Vous?' (383, 573), once again undermines the image of Néron as the gallant ruler / lover. Indeed he is almost a

Harpagon figure here - the obstacle to the young lovers, in typical Molière style he refers to the situation in economic terms: Junie is 'le trésor', (578) and he has become 'l'heureux dépositaire' (580).[17] His inflated self-image very nearly provokes a smile, 'si j'en savais quelque autre au-dessus de Néron' (574), lending him what in another situation would be traits of the egocentric comic hero. However here the consequences are grave, the situation alarmingly perilous. Néron is not Harpagon; his disquieting sense of his own power exorcizes the comic spirit and sends a shiver down the spine of the stunned spectator. The ruler and the lover thus appear to simultaneously blend and clash in this chilling exercise of political power and erotic desire.

The notorious spy scene intensifies the ruler / lover conflict through dramatic shifts in language. We hear firstly the terms used by Britannicus, *bonheur, jouir, doux, plaisir, chagrin, frayeur, douleurs, heureuse, envier, courroux,* all woven together by an abundance of interrogatives and exclamations: the language of emotion. However Britannicus's words contrast with the terms used by Junie: *lieux, puissance, l'Empereur, Rome, une commune voix*, the solicitous command *Retirez-vous.* There are no questions and a distinct lack of exclamations, her statements are definitive, without ifs, buts or maybes. *Tout, jamais, toujours, sans doute*: this is the language of power. Junie silenced in the realm of love adopts the language of government, a reflection of how Néron's power has transgressed the invisible boundaries of its dominion and mercilessly subverted love.

In an ironic twist, however, in this scene where we witness the cruel enactment of Néron's power, Racine's use of language indicates its limits. Junie's warning to Britannicus implicitly unveils the restricted area of the emperor's sovereignty:

> Vous êtes en ces lieux tout pleins de sa puissance.
>
> Ces murs mêmes, Seigneur peuvent avoir des yeux;
>
> Et jamais l'Empereur n'est absent de ces lieux. (712-14)

The word *lieux* here clearly signifies a place of power. Indeed it almost seems to personify Néron's physical power to entrap his victims.[18] Yet ironically by defining the confines of power, by depicting an enclosed world, the use of the word *lieux* tacitly suggests limits.[19] Physical boundaries are implicitly defined outwith the realm of emotion.

This contradictory, concurrent separation and interlacing of love and power is emphasised in III, 8 when Néron enters to surprise Britannicus, on his knees before Junie. The scornful taunting, 'Prince, continuez des transports si charmants' (1025), and the derisive sarcasm, 'Ce lieu le favorise, et je vous y retiens / Pour lui faciliter de si doux entretiens' (1029-30), demonstrate that he mocks the role he cannot adopt.[20] He malevolently sneers at the powerlessness of the lovers, and yet in a dramatic inversion of power, he is isolated, helpless in the world of unreciprocated love. Once more the ruler / lover dichotomy is expressed through an overt gap in language: Britannicus again employs the language of emotion, *douleur, joie*, while Néron reverts to the language of power. The repetition of the verb *obéir* and the double imperative *Imitez* places the emphasis firmly on obedience: 'il faut qu'on me respecte et que l'on m'obéisse', 'J'obéissais alors, et vous obéissez'.[21] His definition of his relationship to the lovers marks his awkward retreat to the realm of power:

> Du moins, si je ne sais le secret de lui plaire
>
> Je sais l'art de punir un rival téméraire. (1059-60)

The verbs *plaire* and *punir* capture the ruler / lover opposition with a remarkable precision. The noun *secret* recalls the adjective *curieux* (385), highlighting the foreign nature of love for Néron and his unease in the role of lover, while the phrase *l'art de punir* elucidates how he has elevated cruelty to an art. Indeed, the words *secret* and *art* are virtually antithetical here, underlining the distance between politics and love for Néron and his exclusion from the world of emotion.

Closely connected with this ruler / lover pair is the political / sexual link. In IV, 2 we witness the inevitable confrontation of mother and son where Agrippine gives a disturbing account of how Néron came to the throne: this involves the intricate intermingling of sexual and political power until they become inextricably linked. Agrippine's power, like Roxane's in *Bajazet*, is in essence sexual. She was chosen 'Parmi tant de beautés qui briguèrent son choix ...'; similarly Roxane was selected 'Parmi tant de beautés qui briguent leur tendresse ...'.[22] One should note in this speech of Agrippine in IV, 2 the juxtaposition of *trône*, the seat of power, the very symbol of kingship, with *lit* (1128, 1127). It expresses the conquest of power by seduction reinforced by the application of sexual language to the main political body: 'Le *sénat* fut *séduit*' (1136). There is also an interesting combination of words in this speech; *fléchis*, *orgueil*, *maître*, *sévère*, are opposed to *caressé*, *bras*, *l'amour*, *tendresse*, underlining not only the mingling of sex and politics, but also the cold, calculating, Machiavellian manipulation behind sexual seduction. Perhaps even more significant is the repeated, concrete sexual image conjured by *lit* (1127, 1134, 1137). This progression from '*son* lit' to '*un* lit' and then to '*mon* lit' reflects the gradual transfer of power. From being in full control, Claudius's power is systematically weakened until finally he is ensnared. One could substitute the word *trône* for *lit* in this progression - '*son* trône', '*un* trône', '*mon* trône', for Agrippine advances from being simply one 'parmi tant de beautés' to having 'Rome à mes genoux'.[23] Significantly, in her blatant declaration, 'Ses gardes, son palais, son lit m'étaient soumis' (1178), she works her way inwards from the *gardes* to the centre of power. The word *lit* is therefore both a symbol of eroticism and the instrument of political domination; the link between the sexual and the political could not be more elegantly conveyed.

At this point it should be noted how Racine manipulates the nuances of the term *maîtresse* to convey the relation between erotic and political power. Its sexual and political connotations signify the merging of the two domains. While Néron's warning to Agrippine, that 'Rome veut un maître et non une maîtresse' (1239), clearly uses the term

in a political context, if we compare Agrippine's use of the same term, we find an inherent ambivalence. We firstly become aware of the ambiguity of *maîtresse* as she expresses her fears that Junie 'aura le pouvoir d'épouse et de maîtresse', and then as she relates how she killed Claudius to gain political power: 'De ses derniers soupirs je me rendis maîtresse'.[24] The onomatopoeic thrust of this line, and the use of the nebulous *maîtresse*, presents the killing like an act of sexual seduction, mirroring the employment of sexual means to achieve a political end.

The politico-sexual focus effectively offers a mirror image of the ruler / lover dichotomy in that while the latter dramatises the workings of power in the field of love, the former illustrates the workings of erotic power in the field of politics. However, while Agrippine successfully blends power and sex, in the end the hybrid creature, the ruler / lover, proves to be a chimera.[25] The denouement offers no celebration of imperial power, no glittering spectacle: the ruler is debased. The future for Néron is defined by Albine as an 'éternel ennui', a forlorn existence signalled by words like *crainte*, *solitude*, *douleur*, *désespoir* and *inquiétude*, with even the hint of possible suicide and madness. He now walks 'sans dessein' just as Agrippine was 'errant dans le palais' at the beginning of the play.[26] We are told that 'le seul nom de Junie échappe de sa bouche' (1756), there are no more powerful imperatives from the mighty Caesar trumpeting his superiority. We are left with the devastating paradox that his power, intended by him to be the vehicle of his salvation, has irrefutably been the instrument of his downfall. The singleness of purpose, the energy and force at the heart of power have ironically been transferred to an impossible love and we now question whether power without design is power at all.

In *Bajazet*, beneath the deceptively pellucid surface of an apparently rigid hierarchy of power, lies an intricate power structure defined by the ruler / lover conflict which emerges once again, this time with even more stunning complexity.

From the beginning of the play we are aware of the confusion of power and love. Acomat tells us in scene 1:

> Amurat, plus ardent, et seul jusqu'à ce jour,
>
> A voulu que l'on dût ce titre à son amour. (299-300)

The juxtaposition of *titre* and *amour* here eloquently expresses the elliptical and intricate mingling of the sexual and the political. We are instantly informed that the roots of Roxane's political power are unequivocally sexual: the sexual attractiveness of Roxane is stressed by Osmin in the opening scene:

> ... Roxane, Seigneur, qu'Amurat a choisie
>
> Entre tant de beautés dont l'Europe et l'Asie
>
> Dépeuplent leurs États et remplissent sa cour?
>
> Car on dit qu'elle seule a fixé son amour. (97-100)

The final line here suggests an almost hypnotic charm with the word *fixé* stressing the singleness of desire so typical in Racine.[27] Roxane's subsequent lengthy speech in scene 3 elucidating the *Sultan / Sultane* relationship confirms conclusively that her power has been built on sexual foundations:

> Ils daignent quelquefois choisir une maîtresse;
>
> Mais toujours inquiète avec tous ses appas,
>
> Esclave, elle reçoit son maître dans ses bras;
>
> Et sans sortir du joug où leur loi la condamne,
>
> Il faut qu'un fils naissant la déclare Sultane. (294-98)

Ostensibly it is a master / slave relationship based on the power of sexuality: *Esclave, elle reçoit son maître dans ses bras,* the innuendo is glaring. It seems that it is a relationship of inequality, one based on dominance and subservience. We are struck first of all by the words and phrases associated with the ruling Sultans, *Ils daignent* [...] *choisir, maître, leur loi,* and then by those associated with their chosen partner: *faut, inquiète, sans sortir du joug, condamne.* However, the power distribution is not so unequivocal. The ambivalence is captured in that powerful line, *Esclave, elle reçoit son maître dans ses bras.* This line is a striking expression of the union of sexual and

political power; this *esclave* receives in the manner of a king, but the reception is sensual not political, a fact emphasised by the word *bras* which evokes the concrete image of an embrace.

Love, however, does not enter into the picture for Roxane; like Agrippine, she is cunningly embroiled in the cynical exploitation of sexual power to attain political power. This partakes of something essentially tragic, it is the paradigm of Faustian culture, power at any price: 'Et moi qui n'aspirais qu'à cette seule gloire' (305). Her language, when she talks of how she has tried to gain power for Bajazet, echoes that of Agrippine. The repetition of the first person pronoun lays the stress firmly on personal supremacy, while words such as *soumis* and *séduit* tacitly betray the origin of that dominion:

> Femmes, gardes, vizir, *pour lui* j'ai tout *séduit* ... (311)

Compare Agrippine:

> Le sénat fut *séduit.* (1136)
>
> Ses gardes, son palais, *son lit m'étaient soumis.* (1178)

In the character of Roxane we find a complex fusion of Agrippine and Néron; from the conquest of power by seduction, Roxane now dramatically reverses the process and tries to conquer love by means of power. Like Néron she now strives for the elusive ruler / lover role.

When Roxane first appears on stage in the second scene, she immediately strikes us as a figure of power. We hear the frequent repetition of the first person pronoun, the authoritative, short, sharp, definitive statements, *Il suffit, Je verrai Bajazet,* the imperatives *allez, venez, revenez,* all suggesting a decisive, strong-minded character.[28] Yet, from the outset, chinks appear in her armour, allowing us to see that her power is tenuous. Like Néron a relationship of dependence has been set up. Acomat discloses to Osmin:

> Je plaignis Bajazet; je lui vantai ses charmes,

[...]

Que te dirai-je enfin? La Sultane éperdue

N'eut plus d'autres désirs que celui de sa vue. (138-42)

The key word here is *éperdue*, expressing the emptiness behind the trappings of power and the title *Sultane*. Moreover, incorporated into the high-sounding imperatives and wilful utterances is a startling confession of weakness which marks the start of a long to-ing and fro-ing, signifying an astounding mixture of power and dependence:

Je verrai Bajazet. Je ne puis dire rien,

Sans savoir si son coeur s'accorde avec le mien. (255-56)

Je ne puis dire rien: like Néron, Roxane's imperious command has been suspended, an indication of how she is wavering between two identities: the political and the erotic.[29]

This weakness is re-emphasised as the third scene further develops the limits of Roxane's power and spotlights the instability of the foundations of that power. Once again we witness the paradoxical mixture of power and dependence. Acomat up until now has stressed that their destinies depend on the outcome of the battle:

Songe que du récit, Osmin, que tu vas faire,

Dépendent les destins de l'empire ottoman. (14-15)

Mais enfin le succès dépend des destinées. (58)

Ce combat doit, dit-on, fixer nos destinées ... (221)

Roxane's assessment of the situation differs significantly from this in that Bajazet has now been cast in the key role:

Il faut de nos destins que *Bajazet* décide. (258)

This declaration represents the supreme abdication of her power, the prime manifestation of her weakness. This, like her many other imperious statements of resolution, resounds with a profound anguish which indicates not power, but in effect constitutes an oblique expression of the relationship of dependence in which she has become enmeshed. The futility of all her bald assertions, her many statements of determination, is encapsulated in her claim that she is going to consult Bajazet 'Pour la

dernière fois' (259), for ultimately this declaration is meaningless given that in V, 4, almost 1300 lines later, she is still about to consult him 'Pour la dernière fois' (1540). Mary-Jo Muratore's affirmation about Racinian tragedy in general is particularly true of *Bajazet*: 'Racine's is essentially a theater of non-evolution; the characters travel over and over the same ground, ending precisely where they begin.'[30] Atalide initially confirms the self-image Roxane is trying to project as an all-powerful head of state with the frequent repetition of *Vous*, and the possessive adjectives *votre*, and *vos*.[31] While this has the effect of ennobling Roxane, we nevertheless are quickly made aware that this is flattery from fear, Atalide has no genuine respect for Roxane's status in the power hierarchy. This is demonstrated by the subsequent *coup de théâtre* when Roxane reveals that Bajazet must marry her, what Atalide later calls her *funeste dessein* (338). Now the *Vous* takes on a deflating effect: 'Vous épouser! O Ciel! que prétendez-vous faire?' (289). The incredulity inherent in the exclamation together with the horror expressed in the interrogative constitute a crushing debasement of not only Roxane as a ruler, but also of Roxane as a lover.

Roxane's downfall, like that of Néron, ultimately results from the blatant misuse of her borrowed political power, the attempted fusing of two distinct domains, love and power, in short, the transgression of invisible limits. Power, love and life (that is, simply, continued existence) combine to form a deadly nexus:[32]

> Malgré tout mon amour, si, dans cette journée,
> Il ne m'attache à lui par un juste hyménée,
> S'il ose m'alléguer une odieuse loi,
> Quand je fais tout pour lui, s'il ne fait tout pour moi
> Dès le même moment, sans songer si je l'aime,
> Sans consulter enfin si je me perds moi-même,
> J'abandonne l'ingrat et le laisse rentrer
> Dans l'état malheureux d'où je l'ai su tirer.
> [...]

Sa perte ou son salut dépend de sa réponse. (317-326)

This is an archetypal Racinian love / death ultimatum.[33] The irrationality of love is captured in the 'sans songer [...] Sans consulter'. The only solution to love thwarted is the annihilation of the Other and if need be of the Self. The resort to evil represents a solution to frustrated desire, a form of power in a domain where she is powerless, a form of action when she finds herself in an *impasse*. This is accentuated by the subtle ambiguity in Atalide's subsequent remark, 'Si Roxane le veut, sans doute, il faut qu'il meure' (401), which is very expressive of the link between eroticism, power and death. The use of *vouloir* and *falloir* implies a power that demands unquestioning obedience, while the 'le' remains ambivalent, its sexual undertones equating sexual desire and death, indicating not only that desire in Racine is like the kiss of death, but that power limited by unfulfilled desire will ineluctably result in the destruction of the one desired. Love therefore becomes a life / death choice, a 'To be or not to be' dilemma. For Bajazet, loving, living, and ruling are inextricably bound together. Becoming Roxane's lover is a necessary prerequisite for both living and ruling, a fact which is stressed repeatedly from the exposition to the denouement: 'Sa perte ou son salut dépend de sa réponse', 'Bajazet doit périr, dit-elle, ou l'épouser', '... vous ne respirez qu'autant que je vous aime', 'sans ce même amour ... / ... vous ne seriez plus', 'il nous doive et le sceptre et le jour', 'couronnons l'amant, ou perdons le perfide'.[34] The series of sinister juxtapositions within these unequivocal statements, *respirez* and *aime, perte* and *salut, périr* and *épouser, sceptre* and *jour, couronnons* and *perdons* highlights the perilous co-existence of life, love and power. All three knot together, culminating in the shockingly blatant 'veux-tu vivre et régner?' (1540). It seems that the gulf separating Bajazet the ruler from Bajazet the lover has narrowed to a step. He could unite the titles *ruler* and *lover* in one leap, but of course Bajazet's love for Atalide and the humiliation inherent in giving in to Roxane's perfidious blackmail, ensure that while for most of the play he juggles with love, power and life, one must finally give way ineluctably bringing the other two crashing down and sending him to his death.

It is interesting to compare the situation in *Andromaque* where Hermione uses her sexual power over Oreste to order the assassination of the ruler who has spurned her. Once again the erotic, the political, life, and death unite in a fatal compound as she imagines the most exquisitely cruel revenge for her betrayal:

> Quel plaisir de venger moi-même mon injure,
>
> De retirer mon bras teint du sang du parjure,
>
> [...]
>
> Ah! si du moins Oreste, en punissant son crime,
>
> Lui laissait le regret de mourir ma victime! (1261-66)
>
> Qu'il périsse! aussi bien il ne vit plus pour nous. (1408)
>
> Qu'il meure, puisqu'enfin il a dû le prévoir. (1418-19)

Néron's words to Narcisse reveal that he too revels in a fiendish retribution, although in this twisted reprisal he directs his vindictiveness on to the object of Junie's desires:

> Elle aime mon rival, je ne puis l'ignorer;
>
> Mais je mettrai ma joie à le désespérer.
>
> Je me fais de sa peine une image charmante...
>
> [...]
>
> Par de nouveaux soupçons, va, cours le tourmenter;
>
> Et tandis qu'à mes yeux on le pleure, on l'adore,
>
> Fais-lui payer bien cher un bonheur qu'il ignore. (749-56)

Into this perverse mixture of power and love he adds the final ingredient, life: 'J'embrasse mon rival, mais c'est pour l'étouffer' (1314). These would-be lovers must atone for their rejection by punishing the object of their desires. Power thus ceases to function within a closed political system, and acts instead in a shocking violation of the privileged areas of love and life.

In II, 1, we see how Roxane exercises her power in the realm of love as she tries to pressure Bajazet into marriage. The imperatives have a goading effect: *Commencez, hâtons-nous, Montrez, Justifiez.*[35] However, these are not political but sexual

imperatives masquerading in the language of power. Significantly the characters' attitude to the proposed union with Roxane is viewed with horror, thus underlining the hopelessness of combining the roles of ruler and lover. Roxane's self-interrogation, 'L'offre de mon hyménée l'eût-il tant effrayé?' is echoed later by Bajazet: 'L'horreur et le mépris que cette offre m'inspire.'[36] Paradoxically they both refer to the proposal as an *offre* suggesting an element of choice, but in fact Bajazet was left no real room for manoeuvre: Roxane's decision is very much presented as a *fait accompli.* This is underscored by the subsequent distinction drawn between Soliman and Bajazet as lovers in II, 3. Soliman is presented in command, with freedom to choose his partner. He is clearly the dominant party in the relationship:

> Son esclave trouva grâce devant ses yeux;
>
> Et, sans subir le joug d'un hymen nécessaire
>
> Il lui fit de son coeur un présent volontaire. (604-06)

The vocabulary here is telling. *Subir, joug, hymen nécessaire,* these terms stress how Bajazet perceives his own situation, his own lack of power to act freely. His *esclave* clearly has the upper hand:

> J'épouserais, et qui? [...]
>
> Une esclave attachée à ses seuls intérêts,
>
> Qui présente à mes yeux les supplices tout prêts,
>
> Qui m'offre ou son hymen, ou la mort infaillible. (718-21)

The switch from the possessive to the indefinite is revealing: *Son esclave* (604) becomes *Une esclave* (719). While the possessive adjective implies a bond (albeit one of dominance), the use of the indefinite article underlines the distance between Bajazet and Roxane. We shudder too at the irony in the sinister juxtaposition of *périr* and *épouser* in Roxane's proposal, 'Bajazet doit périr, dit-elle, ou l'épouser' (340), for Roxane clearly fails to recognise that these terms are almost synonymous for Bajazet.[37] Her *offre* repels rather than tempts. The proposed marriage is seen by him as a fatalistic sacrifice:[38] 'ce funeste hyménée', 'cette fête cruelle', 'une perfidie', 'le joug d'un hymen nécessaire.'[39] Marriage to Roxane is looked upon with fear, revulsion and disgust. Similarly the verb

épouser for Atalide denotes danger and fright. Her question in III, 1, 'L'épouse-t-il?', is asked with dread, and she recoils in horror as the full impact of its meaning strikes when she hears it uttered a few lines later by Zaïre.[40]

Bajazet's response to Roxane's proposal in II, 1, is little more than a list of obstacles, of *raisons forcées* (521), which provokes a chain of threats from Roxane. There is a biting, almost mocking tone in the interrogatives, and we note in particular how the twice-repeated interrogative *Songez-vous* is presented each time like a goading imperative:

> Mais avez-vous prévu, si vous ne m'épousez,
> Les périls plus certains où vous vous exposez?
> 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?
> Et, sans ce même amour, qu'offensent vos refus,
> Songez-vous, en un mot, que vous ne seriez plus? (503-12)

Roxane is clearly playing god in this scene. She clearly sees her power as limitless. Act II has already begun ominously with her declaration that 'l'heure fatale est enfin arrivée' and her assumption of a god-like role: 'Rien ne me retient plus'.[41] Again one is struck by the remarkable repetition of *me, moi, je*, which completely undermines the *vous* and the possessive adjectives *vos* and *votre*.[42] In the quotation above, the blatant egoism is again prevalent, 'sans moi', 'c'est à moi', 'je tiens', 'je puis', 'j'ai sur votre vie ...', 'je vous aime'.[43] Indeed this last quotation represents the supreme exemplification of the appalling abuse of power. Before our horrified gaze, power, love and life are juggled in a deadly performance of narcissism and intimidation until finally one must give way.

However, Bajazet's reply this time confirms only the physical power Roxane has over him, thereby implicitly drawing a distinction between the worlds of political power and love:

> Oui je tiens tout de vous; et j'avais lieu de croire
> Que c'était pour vous-même une assez grande gloire,
> En voyant devant moi tout l'Empire à genoux,
> De m'entendre avouer que je tiens tout de vous.
> Je ne m'en défends point; ma bouche le confesse,
> Et mon respect saura le confirmer sans cesse:
> Je vous dois tout mon sang; ma vie est votre bien.
> Mais enfin voulez-vous ... (513-20)

His twice repeated acknowledgement that 'je tiens tout de vous' rings hollow, there is an emptiness, something is lacking. Love, not gratitude, is demanded by the Racinian lover. The subsequent *Mais* indicates the limits of Roxane's power; it cannot extend beyond physical coercion into the hearts and minds of others. This is reinforced by the emphasis placed on speech in Bajazet's reply. Terms like *défends*, *confirmer*, and the double reference to confession, *avouer* and *confesse*, suggest shame and humiliation: the bond uniting him to Roxane is one of power, not love or affection. It is significant too that the concrete image of *bouche* rather than *coeur* is evoked, for these are words not feelings. A distinction is implicitly being drawn between what is said and what is felt.

Yet Roxane refuses to accept the limits of her power. When Bajazet rejects the saving word, she takes on the role of spurned redeemer. She becomes even more menacing as she continues to play god, 'qui m'arrête?' (525). Yet the superhuman role is ostensibly shallow. Firstly, her reference to Amurat and his *colère*, the need to justify herself in his eyes, and then the reference to her *propres périls*, all betray the real source of power.[44] Secondly, the undignified crumbling of her resolve, the giving of a second chance as she tells Bajazet 'le chemin est encore ouvert au repentir' (538), demonstrate weakness, not power. We encounter here the contrast of two separate spheres, power and love,

delineating the limits of Roxane's power. And yet paradoxically at the same time, we confront the non-separation of the ruler from the lover, that is, her refusal to concede these limits. We observe the remarkable confusion of domains:

> Dans son coeur? Ah! Crois-tu quand il le voudrait bien,
>
> Que, si je perds l'espoir de régner dans le tien
>
> [...]
>
> Je puisse souffrir une autre idée ... (547- 50)

Roxane's words here evoke two distinct worlds signalled by *coeur* and *régner*, the realm of love and that of temporal power, but she fails to recognise the distinction. Like Néron she persistently refuses to acknowledge the powerlessness of power to shape emotions. She can no more reign in Bajazet's heart than Amurat can in hers. However, the vocabulary she employs throughout the play mirrors the fact that she seems unable or simply unwilling to separate the ruler from the lover:

> Maîtresse du Sérail, arbitre de ta vie
>
> [...]
>
> Sultane, et, ce qu'en vain j'ai cru trouver en toi,
>
> Souveraine d'un coeur qui n'eût aimé que moi. (1529-32)

Sultane and *Souveraine*: two titles are employed to evoke two different kinds of power, yet the distinction is clearly blurred in Roxane's mind. This ambivalence is in turn captured by the term *maîtresse* which, just as in *Britannicus*, evokes the interplay of the political and the sexual, the ruler and the lover. This can be seen from the first occurrence of this word in I, 3, 'Ils daignent quelquefois choisir une maîtresse' (294); it indicates the nebulous status of Roxane both as co-ruler and as lover of the Sultan. Various statements illustrate how her sexual power has won her political power, which she in turn is now abusing as a weapon to demand love: 'Son amour me laissait maîtresse de son sort', 'Je suis pourtant toujours maîtresse de son sort', 'Maîtresse du Sérail, arbitre de ta vie'.[45] Power spins and twists forming successive circles of abuse. The juxtapositions within the following quotations accentuate the ambivalence:

> Où j'allais par ses mains *couronner* mon *amant*. (352)

Et *couronnons l'amant*, ou perdons le perfide. (1122)

Sa main en osera *couronner* ma *rivale*. (1242)

Vil rebut d'un *ingrat* que j'aurais *couronné* ... (1536)

We cannot help but be struck by the startling simplicity of this absolutist embrace. These statements reflect how power and love fuse and jar at one and the same time. Roxane is clearly flaunting her power here as proof of her entitlement to become a lover.[46] It is significant, too, in this respect that Roxane's repeated use of the verb *trahir* and the nouns *trahison* and *traître*, with their *double entendres*, again reflects this mingling of the sexual and the political:

Il osera *trahir l'amour* qui l'a sauvé ... (1240)

Tu pleures? Et l'*ingrat*, tout prêt à te *trahir* ... (1311)

Mes brigues, mes complots, ma *trahison* fatale ... (1073)

Ah! de la *trahison* me voilà donc instruite. (1269)

Qu'il me voie, attentive au soin de son *trépas*. (1316)

Significantly all occurrences of the verb *traître* are spoken by Roxane:

Que le *traître* une fois se soit trahi lui-même. (1274)

Ah! *traître*, tu mourras! (1314)

Bajazet est un *traître*, et n'a que trop vécu. (1344)

Si nous devons d'un *traître embrasser* la defense. (1350)

Thus not only is political terminology juxtaposed with the vocabulary of love, but both frequently overlap in meaning to produce a striking chain of *double entendres* hammering home this concurrent confusion and clash of domains.

It is interesting that Bajazet's rejection of Roxane's proposal should be met with a retreat to the realm of power: the pattern is evidently established. Her anxiety at the thought Bajazet might be hiding something is reflected in a series of anguished interrogatives:

Quoi donc? Que dites-vous? et que viens-je d'entendre?

Vous avez des secrets que je ne peux apprendre?

Quoi! de vos sentiments ne puis-je m'éclaircir? (561-63)

In a manner reminiscent of Néron (III, 8), Roxane returns to the domain where she is mistress, resorting to physical force, might over right, ordering the arrest of Bajazet.

This movement leads, irresistibly, to a moment of tragic lucidity, a moment when the inability to combine the ruler and the lover becomes apparent. As we noted above, with the tragic realisation of the powerlessness of power in the realm of love, Racine's characters often reach the zenith of passion in a dramatic resort to sadism. In *Britannicus* we heard Néron tell Narcisse, 'Par de nouveaux soupçons, va, cours le tourmenter' (754), the verb *courir* betraying his eagerness to inflict suffering on his rival. Similarly in IV, 5 of *Bajazet*, after reading the fateful letter, we promptly hear Roxane's expressed desire for vengeance, its exigency again stressed by the repetition of *courir*, the broken alexandrine and the rasping imperatives:

> Ma tranquille fureur n'a plus qu'à se venger.
>
> Qu'il meure; vengeons-nous. Courez; qu'on le saisisse.
>
> [...]
>
> Cours, Zatime, sois prompte à servir ma colère. (1276-77, 1281)

The triple imperative to Zatime, *Courez*, *cours*, *sois prompte*, reflects the frenzied desire for vengeance, but the urgency of these commands is balanced by the desire to lengthen and refine the revenge. One simultaneously senses the silent satisfying pleasure in the act of revenge and the persistent fiery tensions seething below the surface, a puzzling juxtaposition highlighted by the oxymoron *tranquille fureur*. These tensions immediately burst forth and mount to a crescendo in the ferocious *Qu'il meure* (1277) and, just as in *Britannicus*, the terms *plaisir* and *jouir* quickly acquire negative, sadistic undertones as Roxane prepares to become a malign spectator of Bajazet's moral degradation:

> Laissez-moi le plaisir de confondre l'ingrat.
>
> Je veux voir son désordre et jouir de sa honte. (1360-61)

Raging at the irremediable, Roxane wants to exult in a long drawn-out vengeance, extracting the maximum pleasure from her power to punish an unwilling lover. This

speech is the supreme exemplification of how love so quickly turns to hate in Racine. Roxane here appears not even to hear Zatime's subsequent attempts at dissuading her from the path of revenge with the sombre warning that Amurat is still more fearful (1287-90).

This pattern, of love rejected signalling an urgent and critical retreat to power, is particularly prevalent in Roxane's monologue in IV, 5, when she talks with bitterness of how Bajazet and Atalide have played on her *credulité* (1296). She enters a half-hallucinatory state in which her use of the second-person pronoun to address various people in rapid succession, mirrors her loss of perspective, indeed loss of identity, as she swithers between two roles, unable to combine the two; it shifts from Bajazet (1298, 1306) to herself (1308, 1310, 1311), back to Bajazet and then to Zatime. She reaches an excruciating level of lucidity in this monologue: 'Pour plaire à ta rivale, il prend soin de sa vie' (1313). With this chill recognition of the powerlessness of power in the realm of love, she quickly reverts to that domain of power where she can exert most control, where she can be master: the domain of sadism. The ruler must compensate for the failure of the lover. Words like *joie*, *douceur*, *plaisirs*, again take on sadistic undertones as she fiendishly sets out in her mind the most elaborate torture plans for those who have demonstrated that her power is not all-encompassing. The theatrical aspect of these shockingly grim scenarios is particularly striking because of the emphasis placed on the senses: we are invited with Bajazet and Atalide to hear and see these gruesome spectacles. Firstly Roxane imagines the most inhuman, brutal torment for Bajazet:

> Qu'il n'ait, en expirant, que ses *cris* pour adieux. (1320)

and then for Atalide:

> Quel surcroît de vengeance et de douceur nouvelle
>
> De le *montrer* bientôt pâle et mort devant elle,
>
> De *voir* sur cet objet ses *regards* arrêtés
>
> Me payer les plaisirs que je leur ai prêtés! (1325-28)

The torment she has in mind for Atalide has developed; it is now not simply aural but visual. This final line is a perverse justification of cruelty. Like Néron, Roxane is clearly setting up an image of her power each time. However, her final proposed torture is the most appalling of all. Bajazet will not simply be presented with a *fait accompli*, that is, the corpse of Atalide, as proof of Roxane's power, he must now endure the spectacle of her murder. This time Roxane is dramatising her power in a theatrical showdown:

> Ma rivale est ici: suis-moi sans différer;
>
> Dans les mains des muets viens la voir expirer,
>
> Et libre d'un amour à ta gloire funeste,
>
> Viens m'engager ta foi: le temps fera le reste.
>
> Ta grâce est à ce prix, si tu veux l'obtenir. (1543-47)

Her commands, *suis-moi* and the repeated *Viens*, together with the urgent *sans différer* indicating that there will be no time for reflection, and the onerous *engager*, all sit uneasily with the language of choice: *libre*, *foi*, *si tu veux*. This incongruous discourse captures the essence of the ruler / lover division within Roxane. She clearly wants Bajazet to freely choose to love her, yet his ability to choose also allows him to reject her. This incites a desire to control which negates her original need to be freely loved. Hence at the very moment she wants Bajazet to choose, she employs violence, thus eliminating any possibility of choice.

In this final confrontation with Bajazet in V, 4, love and power are at last separated and Roxane finally forced to recognise the limits of her power. However, even in this final meeting, it is not until the last word that the two realms become distinct. At the outset Roxane *seems* resigned to having failed to conquer Bajazet:

> Je ne vous ferai point des reproches frivoles
>
> [...]
>
> Malgré tout mon amour, si je n'ai pu vous plaire,
>
> Je n'en murmure point. (1469, 1473-74)

Yet these statements are empty of meaning. The key phrase in this speech, indeed in the play as a whole, is the tragic cry 'Malgré tout mon amour' (1473), an echo of line 317 at the beginning of the play; we have come full circle. Indeed this cry could be the woeful, heart-rending reproach of many a Racinian lover. It is a clear indication of Roxane's quest for the absolute which is reflected in the infinite quantity of the passion: 'tout mon amour', 'tant d'amour', 'tant de confiance'.[47] The initial tone of Roxane's speech is deceptive, for we do not simply have a last expression of bitterness and resentment here, but what could be conceived as the ruler's last attempt at seduction: 'je n'ai pu vous plaire', 'mes faibles attraits'.[48] This is a final play on the power of sexuality that had proved so potent with Amurat, in lines that are crying out for a reaction, for a contradiction from the listener. Like Néron, Roxane is here employing *soupirs* and *menace* (*Britannicus*, 404). The scene begins with her using the *tu* form to address Bajazet, reflecting a complex mixture of love, anger, resentment, seduction, but it ends with a resort to the cold, detached *vous* form in the final knell of doom, *Sortez*, which at last seals Bajazet's fate, the final expression of might over right, the final farewell to the role of lover and a return to that of ruler.

It is perhaps in the character of Bajazet that we see most clearly the way in which the ruler / lover conflict incites emotions which determine the movement of the plot. As we noted, Roxane assigns Bajazet a key role in the drama: 'Il faut de nos destins que Bajazet décide' (258). His potential to adopt the dual role of ruler / lover is essential to the development of the tragic action. Like Britannicus, Atalide believes she could lose her lover to the attraction of an empire. She fears the seductive appeal of political power, the fusion in Bajazet of the ruler and the lover:

> D'un mouvement jaloux je ne fus pas maîtresse.
>
> Ma rivale, accablant mon amant de bienfaits,
>
> Opposait un Empire à mes faibles attraits. (378-80)

She suspects that the prospect of his 'prochaine gloire' (382) will be the ultimate temptation. The cause of her fatal jealousy is not simply the marriage of Bajazet and

Roxane, or the temptation of an empire, but the gnawing suspicion that Bajazet may love her. Atalide's reproaches in III, 4, after the false *récit* from Acomat, demonstrate that she shudders at his possible acceptance of that tantalizingly elusive dual role, the ruler / lover:

> Vous pouviez l'assurer de la foi conjugale;
>
> Mais vous n'auriez pas joint à ce titre d'époux
>
> Tous ces gages d'amour qu'elle a reçus de vous. (966-68)

These lines offer an interesting insight into Racine's titles: the *titre d'époux* is acceptable but only if it has no real meaning, it must not be validated with any significance. The use of the conditional perfect followed by the perfect here underlines the confusion of fantasy and reality in Atalide's mind, the inability to distinguish true and false feelings. The use of the conditional (965, 967, 970) may render the attack indirect, but it is nevertheless just as devastating. The subtlety of her reproaches, the violent blows inherent in the *sous-entendus* will have a crushing effect on Bajazet. Atalide must ensure the separation of the worlds of politics and love if she wants to leave Roxane a *ruler*, not a *lover*:

> Et j'aurais en mourant cette douce pensée
>
> [...]
>
> Ce n'est point un *amant* en vous que je lui laisse. (970, 974)

Just as the word *amant* in Acomat's 'récit infidèle' (977) excites the fatal jealousy of Atalide, so here the same word sparks off a furious reaction from Bajazet. He seizes upon this term: 'Moi, j'aimerais Roxane, ou je vivrais pour elle...' (978). The telling juxtaposition of *aimer* and *vivre* again reveals how life depends on loving for Bajazet. However, more importantly with regards to the dramatic action, Atalide's use of this term propels the action inexorably toward the final catastrophe by provoking Bajazet's decision to reveal all. The ruler / lover conflict is therefore fundamental in driving the action forward.

Clearly therefore, in both *Bajazet* and *Britannicus*, the fact that the ruler / lover dichotomy dominates the tragic action is not simply attributable to the ruler's confusion of two domains. Ironically, we find Atalide and Britannicus expressing fears which reflect that same erroneous belief, shared by Roxane and Néron, that love is a product of power, something to be bartered, a piece of merchandise to be traded at will. They firmly hold that the price of love is power. If Narcisse tells Néron that Junie will be won over by 'l'éclat dont vous brillez' and by 'ce dégré de gloire', it is clearly something which Britannicus himself comes to believe: '... l'éclat d'un empire ait pu vous éblouir ...'.[49] If Roxane turns on Atalide with stabbing questions which demonstrate that she sees love almost as a reward of power,

> [...] Qu'a-t-elle fait pour lui?
>
> Qui de nous deux enfin le couronne aujourd'hui? (1083-84)

then Atalide, as we noted above, in her reproaches to Bajazet is equally guilty of the confusion. However, it is perhaps Roxane, who, in her description of her relationships with both Bajazet and Amurat, best illustrates the schism between defining love in terms of power on the one hand, and recognising the distinction between the two on the other. When, after reading the fateful letter, she eventually acknowledges Bajazet's love for Atalide, when there are no more dark corners of *mauvaise foi* left to hide in, she declares, 'Ainsi donc mon amour était récompensé' (1271). She is clearly measuring love against power here. Significantly the imbalance is expressed in economic terms, reflecting the notion of entitlement. She decides that the deficit must be balanced, they must 'payer les plaisirs que je leur ai prêtés' (1328): repayment must be made, the debt must be collected. Yet almost simultaneously we find the excruciating recognition that love has its own empire, that it exists in another domain outwith the realm of temporal power:

> Mais, hélas! de l'amour ignorons-nous l'empire?
>
> Si par quelque autre charme Atalide l'attire,
>
> Qu'importe qu'il nous doive et le sceptre et le jour
>
> Les bienfaits dans un coeur balancent-ils l'amour? (1085-88)

On the scales of power *le couronne* and *le sceptre* are weighed against *quelque autre charme* and found wanting. It is the harrowing recognition that the balance is tipped against *les bienfaits* (1088) in favour of *l'amour* (1088). This tragic acknowledgement is reinforced by her rhetorical question, 'Ai-je mieux reconnu les bontés de son frère?' (1090), recalling her words in I, 3:

> Mais ce même Amurat ne me promit jamais
>
> Que l'hymen dût un jour couronner ses bienfaits.
>
> Et moi, qui n'aspirais qu'à cette seule gloire,
>
> De ses autres bienfaits j'ai perdu la mémoire.
>
> Toutefois, que sert-il de me justifier?
>
> Bajazet, il est vrai, m'a tout fait oublier. (303-08)

Roxane clearly separates love and power in her relationship with Amurat. Power was the goal, 'cette seule gloire'. Any love Amurat may have felt for her has been conveniently forgotten. Her claim that she need not 'couronner ses bienfaits', and her dismissive 'que sert-il de me justifier?', have an ironic ring for they both reject the idea of repayment, of levelling the accounts that she demands of Bajazet. These two relationships present reverse sides of the same coin: we witness in one the recognition that power and love are irreconcilable, while in the other we confront an obstinate and persistent attempt to combine the two.[50]

The resolution of *Bajazet* is somewhat disquieting in that the order pertaining at the end is the same as at the beginning. With the final *Sortez* we are aware that Roxane is still exercising the physical power of life and death she has over Bajazet, and, as in *Britannicus*, we seem to have simply come full circle.[51] Yet we have through this movement discovered something about human relationships that the order was suppressing. The opening lines of *Bajazet*, with their abundance of exclamations and interrogatives, the repetition of terms such as *parler*, *entendre*, *instruire*, *récit*, places the emphasis very much on discovery. This discovery is an essentially moral one, connected with finding limits, the limits of physical power. Power cannot extend to

controlling the hearts and minds of others, it must function within a closed political system. Any attempt to break out, any encroachment of the ruler into the territory of love will have destructive consequences.

In *Bérénice* the iniquitous dichotomy is internalised, the battle between the ruler and the lover is fought entirely within Titus.[52] In this respect the situation differs from what we find in *Britannicus* and *Bajazet* in that there are no amorous or political pretenders hovering in the wings (Antiochus is no threat to Titus), there is no Other to overcome and conquer except the Self.

> J'aimais, je soupirais dans une paix profonde:
>
> Un autre était chargé de l'empire du monde.
>
> [...]
>
> Mais à peine le ciel eut rappelé mon père,
>
> Dès que ma triste main eut fermé sa paupière,
>
> De mon aimable erreur je fus désabusé:
>
> Je sentis le fardeau qui m'était imposé. (455-56, 459-62)

As the above quotation so poignantly exemplifies, when the play begins we are in a situation of change: Titus the lover has become Titus the emperor; ripples have immediately appeared on the calm surface of the water. The swift transition from the timeless imperfect tense to the harshness of the past anterior and the past historic signifies the sudden divorce of the lover from his newly acquired role as ruler. The tragic action of *Bérénice* centres on the forlorn hope of combining these two roles. The conflict between the two is engaged again with a remarkable urgency, but the focus has shifted, the situation is conceivably even more appalling here since the love of Titus for Bérénice is reciprocated, the possibility for happiness greater, our pity is intensified as we behold how such potential is so lamentably vitiated.

Love and power are immediately separated, highlighting the schism between the roles of ruler and lover:

> C'est ici quelquefois qu'il se cache à sa cour,
>
> Lorsqu'il vient à la reine expliquer son amour. (5-6)

The pertinent rhyme of *cour* and *amour* instantly brings into relief the clash of politics and love.[53] This marks the start of a battle that will rage within Titus until the denouement and ultimately destroy him. His attitude to love is revealed in the first few lines of the play. The verb *se cacher* in the quotation above is significant in that it implies not only a desire for privacy, but an inherent sense of shame which becomes a marked characteristic of love in the play. Love is viewed by Titus as a weakness, a humiliation. This is apparent in his anguished words to Bérénice in V, 6:

> Je croyais ma vertu moins prête à succomber,
>
> Et j'ai honte du trouble où je la vois tomber. (1373-74)

and the opening lines of V, 7:

> Venez, prince, venez, je vous ai fait chercher.
>
> Soyez ici témoin de toute ma faiblesse ...

The sense of disgrace and dishonour inherent in such terms as *succomber*, *honte*, *tomber*, *faiblesse* recurs as he imagines the horror of giving in to love:

> Que je suis prêt pour vous d'abandonner l'empire,
>
> De vous suivre et d'aller, trop content de mes fers,
>
> Soupirer avec vous au bout de l'univers.
>
> Vous-même rougiriez de ma lâche conduite:
>
> Vous verriez à regret marcher à votre suite
>
> Un indigne empereur sans empire, sans cour,
>
> Vil spectacle aux humains des faiblesses d'amour. (1400-06)

The abstract moral terms like *lâche*, *indigne*, *vil*, *faiblesses*, highlighting the despicable, ignoble side of love, are balanced and substantiated by the more definite *soupirer* and *rougiriez*, external manifestations of shame, *à regret* which captures the unwillingness to succumb, *suivre* and *à votre suite* which evoke the image of an abject, indigent figure,

no longer a leader of men, and finally *abandonner* together with the repetition of *sans* stressing deprivation. The overwhelming sense of shame and humiliation conveyed by Titus in these lines corresponds to the degraded portrait of Mark Antony in Act II:

> Antoine, qui l'aima jusqu'à l'idolâtrie,
>
> Oublia dans son sein sa gloire et sa patrie,
>
> Sans oser toutefois se nommer son époux:
>
> Rome l'alla chercher jusques à ses genoux
>
> Et ne désarma point sa fureur vengeresse
>
> Qu'elle n'eût accablé l'amant et la maîtresse. (391-96)

The word *idolâtrie* confirms that love is again being presented from a strikingly negative perspective. It suggests an *image*, something shallow, which stands in stark contrast to the solid reality of *gloire* and *patrie*. The portrait of Antony is far from flattering. He is clearly being defined here in the role of lover, depicted in the demeaning position of kneeling. It is an image which clearly elucidates the irreconcilability of the ruler and the lover. The ruler must clearly relinquish the role of lover if he is to be a potent head of state; the alternative, as the portrayal of Mark Antony so forcibly demonstrates, is a dreadful ignominy, an image of impotence and humility.[54]

In this ethos, Titus, unsurprisingly, sees love almost as an enemy, and in a striking reversal of the traditional warrior conquered by love cliché, the lover here assumes the role of warrior to conquer love:

> ... un héros *vainqueur de tant de nations*
>
> Saurait bien tôt ou tard *vaincre ses passions*. (497-98)

It is interesting that Antiochus should describe his conquest of Bérénice in similar terms: 'Titus [...] vint, vous vit, et vous plut' (194), a crisp reminder of Suetonius"s famous inscription celebrating Julius Caesar's victory over Pontus; *veni, vidi, vici*. Titus himself frequently employs the vocabulary of battle when talking about love. He tells Paulin in II, 2:

Bérénice a longtemps balancé la *victoire*;

Et si je penche enfin du côté de ma *gloire*,

Crois qu'il m'en a coûté, pour *vaincre* tant d'amour,

Des *combats* dont mon coeur *saignera* plus d'un jour. (451-54)

Similarly in his soliloquy in IV, 4, he talks of *'combat* [...] *barbare* [...] ces yeux *armés* de tous leurs charmes' (991-95). Love is an adversary that must be vanquished if Titus is to be a worthy statesman. Yet paradoxically, it is this precise inability to combine the roles of ruler and lover that manifestly shatters his *toute-puissance* and kickstarts a process of dehumanizing until all that remains of Titus at the denouement is an empty shell, a figure barely human.

It is clear from Titus's first interview with Paulin in II, 2, that the need to renounce love has a debilitating effect on him. We hear how he confesses his weakness in the presence of Bérénice:

J'ai voulu devant elle en ouvrir le discours;

Et, dès le premier mot, ma langue embarrassée

Dans ma bouche vingt fois a demeuré glacée. (474-76)

This confirms the image of him we glean from Bérénice:

Muet, chargé de soins, et les larmes aux yeux ... (157)

We are reminded here of Néron's description of how he felt as Junie was escorted into his palace: 'J'ai voulu lui parler et ma voix s'est perdue' (396). Yet Titus is both like and unlike Néron here. Silence in both cases signifies a certain powerlessness. In Titus it is powerlessness with regard to the Roman state, but he remains the image of sovereignty before the Roman people. However, the silent, solitary figure of Néron hiding and watching in the shadows, unable to speak, depicts a weak, impotent ruler far removed from the majestic image of Titus idolized by the masses. This image of Titus will be reinforced and developed in several tableaux, each one depicting him as less human, a devitalised figurehead, until we confront a metamorphosis as startling as those of Ovid or Kafka.

In the first of these tableaux it is ironically Bérénice's inability to divorce the roles of ruler and lover which implicitly invites us to do just that. We listen as she describes the night of Vespasian's apotheosis and her lover's acquisition of power:

> De cette nuit, Phénice, as-tu vu la splendeur?
> Tes yeux ne sont-ils pas tout pleins de sa grandeur?
> Ces flambeaux, ce bûcher, cette nuit enflammée,
> Ces aigles, ces faisceaux, ce peuple, cette armée,
> Cette foule de rois, ces consuls, ce sénat,
> Qui tous de mon amant empruntaient leur éclat;
> Cette pourpre, cet or, que rehaussait sa gloire,
> Et ces lauriers encor témoins de sa victoire;
> Tous ces yeux qu'on voyait venir de toutes parts
> Confondre sur lui seul leurs avides regards ...
> [...]
> Parle: peut-on le voir sans penser, comme moi,
> Qu'en quelque obscurité que le sort l'eût fait naître,
> Le monde en le voyant eût reconnu son maître. (301-16)

As John Campbell points out, the repetition of the demonstrative adjective here has an immobilising effect: 'It functions as a pointer to scenes in a painting, its movement fixed for ever.'[55] And how easily one could paint the picture: the light of the flames against the darkness of the night spotlighting a lonely figure ('lui seul') surrounded by hordes of people. It is a scene of sacrifice, the ruler is almost Christ-like, transcendental and transient at the same time.[56] All eyes are on Titus as the abundance of vocabulary of vision stresses: *témoins*, *yeux*, *voyait*, *regards*, *voyant*.[57] Gone are the days when he 'passait les jours attachés sur ma vue' (114), now the *regard* is collective, this is Titus the ruler, not Titus the lover, a fact Bérénice clearly fails to recognise: 'Qui tous de *mon amant* empruntaient leur éclat'. She refuses to accept that *mon amant* (306) and *son maître* (316) must be forever divided, a fact underlined here by the possessive adjectives

stressing the divorce of the private and the public. Ostensibly she sees Titus first as her lover and secondly as ruler of the Roman world.

Paulin's words of encouragement to Titus, once he has apparently made his decision to leave Bérénice and his report on how Rome is rejoicing at the news of his leaving her, prepare us for the second tableau:

songez, en ce malheur
Quelle gloire va suivre un moment de douleur,
Quels applaudissements l'univers vous prépare. (1209-11)

Rome, qui gémissait, triomphe avec raison;
Tous les temples ouverts fument en votre nom;
Et le peuple, élevant vos vertus jusqu'aux nues,
Va partout de lauriers couronner vos statues. (1220-24)

Here the idea of sacrifice is strengthened. Temples, statues, smoking altars, all imply that Titus is being isolated, removed from the world of mortals and transformed into a godhead.[58] The decoration of the statues gives us a foretaste of the next tableau, Arsace's report to Antiochus in V, 2, where Titus has become as cold and inanimate as the statue:

Le peuple avec transport l'arrête et l'environne,
Applaudissant aux noms que le sénat lui donne;
Et ces noms, ces respects, ces applaudissements,
Deviennent pour Titus autant d'engagements,
Qui, le liant, seigneur, d'une honorable chaîne,
Malgré tous ses soupirs, et les pleurs de la reine,
Fixent dans son devoir ses voeux irresolus.
C'en est fait: et peut-être il ne la verra plus. (1271-78)

The words *avec transport*, *applaudissant* and *applaudissements* seem to project a contrast between the noisy Roman mob and the silent, solitary figure of Titus in their midst. They are also a rather ironic echo of Paulin's words quoted above (1209-11) in

that his predicted exaltation has become a devitalising, shocking abasement of Titus the man. He is being raised above ordinary mortals here, yet there is a suffocating sense of restriction and confinement. Terms such as *engagements*, *liant*, *chaîne*, *fixent*, *devoir*, all suggest immobility. It is as if Titus is rooted to the spot, a mere effigy. These words suppress and stifle the human element signalled by *soupirs* and *pleurs*. Rome's victory is announced by the final *C'en est fait* with its inherent tragic fatality. In this apotheosis-cum-sacrifice, Titus is being stripped of his very selfhood, robbed of his humanity.[59]

The final tableau definitively purges the public of the private, the icon of what remains of his humanity. We feel the sense of despair and desolation as Titus describes the same scene to Bérénice:

> J'ai vu devant mes yeux Rome entière assemblée:
>
> Le sénat m'a parlé; mais mon âme accablée
>
> Ecoutait sans entendre, et ne leur a laissé,
>
> Pour prix de leurs transports, qu'un silence glacé. (1375-78)

Interestingly, he retains the power of sight ('J'ai vu...') indicating that he is aware of his degeneration, but his ability to hear is robbed of all meaning ('Ecoutait sans entendre...'), thus confirming this relentless process of dehumanisation. The pattern of contrasts between Titus and the Romans is now established, reinforcing the radical change: *leurs transports* are pitted against *un silence glacé*, the adjective *glacé* suggesting an unemotional, lifeless, statuelike figure. Titus now no longer has 'les larmes aux yeux' (157), the process of dehumanization is complete, the ruler and the lover distinct.[60]

This notion of dehumanization (or devitalisation), of a hollow icon, of a non-being almost, is further underscored by frequent allusions to a loss of identity. Titus tells Paulin that acquiring power meant that,

> Il fallait, cher Paulin, renoncer à moi-même (464)

and he later confesses to Bérénice,

> Moi-même à tous moments je me souviens à peine

Si je suis empereur, ou si je suis Romain.

Je suis venu vers vous sans savoir mon dessein:

Mon amour m'entraînait; et je venais peut-être

Pour me chercher moi-même et pour me reconnaître. (1380-84)

Richard Parish uses these lines to point out how the repetition of the word *même* with the emphatic personal pronoun implies what he vaguely labels as an 'integrated' or 'authentic self'.[61] However, I would suggest that these lines, far from indicating recognition of an 'authentic self', on the contrary, elucidate a confused and divided self, far removed from Titus's true identity which has been gradually eroded.[62] Indeed it is as if the shadow has come in search of the substance which gives it both meaning and being. Various phrases such as 'âme étonnée' (1395) implying a trance-like, glazed state in the face of existence, reveal that life seems empty, insipid, devoid of purpose. Indeed this state is stressed by Titus's inane question 'sais-je si je respire?' (1240), which in turn is echoed by Antiochus 'Et je respire encor!' (1301). It is a play ringing out with *Pourquoi?* Indeed this question occurs thirteen times in all conveying the quest for meaning, the particularly human need to justify the suffering they endure, the anguish of despair.

If *Bérénice* seems to offer a contrast to *Britannicus* and *Bajazet* in that the emotional and political are separated, this is ironically confounded by the language employed by Bérénice. She frequently views love from the perspective of power. We noted above how, as she reflects on Titus's acquisition of power, her definition of him as *mon amant* (306) jars with her subsequent reference to him as *son maître* (316). He is clearly cast as lover first and as Emperor second, but the two are nevertheless confused in Bérénice's mind. This is prevalent in her furious repudiation of Antiochus:

Seigneur, je n'ai pas cru que, dans une journée

Qui doit avec César unir ma destinée,

Il fût quelque mortel qui pût impunément

Se venir à mes yeux déclarer mon amant. (259-62)

The talk is of love, wanted and unwanted, yet the frame of reference is undeniably political power. The places of both Titus and Antiochus within Bérénice's affections are presented here in terms of their status within the power-structure. Titus's importance as her lover is conveyed by the title *César*, while her lack of amorous interest in Antiochus is mirrored in her demeaning reference to him as *quelque mortel*. The use of the rhyme *impunément / amant* poignantly underlines this confusion and recalls Néron's threat, 'Néron impunément ne sera pas jaloux' (445). In both cases power is the context within which love is defined. In a manner reminiscent of Narcisse's 'Commandez qu'on vous aime et vous serez aimé', Paulin tells Titus that 'Vous pouvez tout. Aimez, cessez d'être amoureux', which in turn is echoed as Bérénice insists, 'Votre heureux amour peut tout ce qu'il désire'.[63] These are rigid statements which betray a stunning refusal to acknowledge that political power cannot govern the world of emotion. The tragic irony of Bérénice's confusion of power and love is expressed by Titus:

> Je lui dois tout [...] Récompense cruelle!
>
> Tout ce que je lui dois va retomber sur elle. (519-20)
>
> Rappelez bien plutôt ce coeur qui tant de fois
>
> M'a fait de mon devoir reconnaître le devoir. (1049-50)

By failing to dissociate love and power, by persistently viewing love from the perspective of power and thereby reminding her lover as his duties as Emperor, Bérénice ironically opens his eyes to the irreconcilability of the two roles.

This portrayal of love in the context of power is apparent too in Paulin's reminder to Titus of how two queens of Bérénice's race married a freed Roman slave:

> Ces deux reines étaient du sang de Bérénice.
>
> Et vous croiriez pouvoir, sans blesser nos regards
>
> Faire entrer une reine au lit de nos Césars,
>
> Tandis que l'Orient dans le lit de ses reines
>
> Voit passer un esclave au sortir de nos chaînes? (408-12)

Clearly a hierarchy of power is delineated here which determines appropriate sexual relationships. The sexual connotations of the word *lit*, carefully positioned between terms denoting rank, *reine(s)*, *Césars*, *esclave*, indicate that the erotic must function within a rigorously defined power structure. The repetition of *lit* signals that Bérénice's marriage to Titus is viewed not as her acquisition of political power, but as her assumption of an erotic identity. The line, 'Faire entrer une reine au lit de nos Césars', in particular reveals that there is no suggestion of a change of title. On the contrary her status as *reine* seems static; the only transition is on the erotic plane, that is, her entry to the imperial bed.[64]

In *Bérénice* therefore we find a strikingly complex dramatisation of the convergent pressures of eroticism and politics. It has become a commonplace to simplify *Bérénice* by describing it as a play about the ruler's conquest of his passions, but this elementary separation of power and love in no way conveys the subtlety and complexity of Racine's presentation of the conflict. This play differs from *Britannicus* and *Bajazet* in that this time the ruler, of his own resolve, separates the two domains; there is no transgression of political boundaries. However, instead we find the protagonist, denied access to power, paradoxically defining love in terms of this power which ultimately subverts and destroys it. The apparently simple dissociation of the political and the emotional is therefore not so unequivocal as some critics would have us believe.[65]

'Pourquoi suis-je empereur? Pourquoi suis-je amoureux?' The opening question of this chapter reverberates throughout the three plays. We have seen how the ruler / lover opposition is very much a two-edged sword in that it is presented both as an exterior clash and an interior conflict. We have witnessed, too, how Racine's manipulation of the nuances of language reveals the paradoxical simultaneous distinction and fusion of the worlds of politics and love. In the end, however, there can clearly be no happy union of the ruler and the lover: the dichotomy is glaringly exposed each time. The entire movement of these dramas has been towards the discovery of the incompatibility of the

two roles and thus towards the inherent limits on the ruler's *absolute* power.[66] The loss of limits, the transgression of the boundaries of political power in the case of Néron and Roxane, or their acknowledgement in the case of Titus, shockingly uncover the meaningless of the term *absolute.*[67] The ruler's superiority is challenged each time: the instant they are no longer simply defined by their relationship to the state, we see behind the pageant of power as they become divorced from their office. In the end, the political and the emotional are like oil and water; the compound never really gels. Closely connected to the jeremiad of the ruler / lover is the co-existence of two distinct powers which interfuse: politics and sexuality. Despite the success of sexuality in gaining political power, the linking of the two remains a derogatory affair, associated with murderous ambition (Agrippine, Roxane). In addition, we are constantly reminded of the precariousness of the political power that is gained by sexual domination.

Hence in Chapter Two, through examination of the ruler's transgression of the boundaries of his/her political power and the intrusion by subjects into the realm of politics by means of sexual seduction, we begin to transcend the political power structure. This chapter thereby reveals something fundamental about the nature of human relationships which the trappings of power attempt to suppress and conceal. Those in power are shown to be just as vulnerable, perhaps even more so, than those who are not. This heightened awareness of the transience of power raises questions about the nature of those personal relationships which appear to undermine political ones. These questions will be addressed in the following chapter.

[1] Ernst Hartwig Kantorowitcz, *The King's Two Bodies: A study in medieval political theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

[2] John E. Jackson, *Eros et Pouvoir* (Neuchâtel: Baconnière, 1988), p. 8.

[3] Of the two principal themes of Racinian tragedy, passion and politics, it is the former which has been subjected to the greatest scrutiny. Jules Brody, *'Bajazet*, ou le Jeu de l'Amour et de la Mort: Paratexte', in *French Forum*, 2 (1977), 110-20 (118), goes as far as to invent a new cogito: 'J'aime, donc je suis. Je désire, donc je vis'. See also J. P. Short, 'Passion: source of action in the tragedies of Racine?', in *Racine: théâtre et poésie*, ed. by Christine Hill (Leeds: Francis Cairns, 1991), pp. 93-106; Claude Ranger, 'Fureurs Raciniennes', in *Racine: théâtre et poésie*, pp. 59-80; Chapter Two, 'La passion en jeu', of Emy Battache-Watt's *Profils des heroïnes raciniennes* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1976); Chapter Three, 'Tender Racine', of Albert Cook's *French Tragedy: The Power of Enactment* (Ohio: Swallow Press, 1981).

[4] Cook, p. 7, asserts, 'The spheres of love and government are kept discrete to test the characters' ideals [...] the ideal of each sphere is an absolute'.

[5] Nelson, 'The Tragedy of Power in Racine and Shakespeare', either sees love as providing a background or vice versa.

[6] Philip Butler (ed.), *Britannicus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).

[7] Harriet Stone, *'Bérénice*: les voiles du pouvoir', in *Ordre et contestation au temps des classiques*, ed. by R. Duchene and P. Ronzeaud, Biblio 17 (Tübingen: Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature, 1992), pp. 225-33. In a previous article, 'Authority and Authorship: Néron's Racine', in *Re-Lectures Raciniennes* ed. by Wolfgang Leiner, Biblio 17 (Tübingen: Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature, 1986), pp. 161-73 (pp. 172-73), she reflects on Néron's personal and political revolt, illustrating this puzzling notion of a double identity within one person, and highlighting how one conflicts with the other: 'If it rewards the collectivity, it deprives the individual. It allows one to establish one's identity within a group, but hinders one's establishment of an identity distinct from the group'.

[8] John C. Lapp, *Aspects of Racinian Tragedy* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1955); Richard Parish, *Racine: the limits of tragedy*, Biblio 17 (Tübingen: Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature, 1993), p. 114.

[9] Jean-Marie Apostolidès, *Le Prince Sacrifié*, p. 92.

[10] Mitchell Greenberg discusses the dichotomy in terms of 'the body royal and the body private', *Canonical States, Canonical Stages: Oedipus, Othering, and Seventeenth Century Drama* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), p. 140; Louis Marin, *Le portrait du roi* (Paris: Minuit, 1981).

[11] Paul Kelley, 'Ontological Pessimism in Racinian Tragedy: An Overview of the Profane Plays' (unpublished master's thesis, University of South Carolina, 1989), p. 67.

[12] For a discussion of the ferocious undertones of the vocabulary of love in Racine, see Chapter Three.

[13] Serge Doubrovsky, 'L'arrivée de Junie dans *Britannicus*: la tragédie d'une scène à l'autre', in *Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature*, 10 (1978-9), 223-66 (245-46), interestingly unites the political and the sexual by locating political power in the voice and then sexualising the art of communication. Seeing the voice as symbolic of the phallus, he associates aphasia and castration: 'Cette "voix", impérieuse, impériale, est, dans le contexte romain, le lieu même d'où parle le pouvoir, sa source directe [...] Pour le Rome néronienne, la voix est précisément le *phallus*, et sa perte, la castration'. However it is a correlation which has been vehemently rejected by Constant Venesoen in a sardonic response, 'Le Néron de Racine: un cas curieux d'impuissance verbale', in *Information Littéraire*, 31 (1981), 130-36 (130-31): '... ou l'on parle de la voix [...] ou l'on parle du phallus qui a, si je ne me trompe, une fonction spécifique dans un cadre érotique, que l'on soit verbeux ou muet! L'impuissance verbale [...] n' point besoin d'analogies génitales pour être analysée et comprise ...'.

[14] Jackson's comment, p. 93, on how Racine captures the conjunction of *éros* and *pouvoir* through Narcisse's words is particularly pertinent: 'L'habilité de l'argumentation de Narcisse est frappante. En insistant sur la prestance impériale de son maître, il focalise la scène en plaçant Néron au centre de tous les regards et surtout il fait coïncider sur l'objet de ces regards la double majesté de la puissance de l'amour'.

[15] *Britannicus*, 553, 554, 645, 657.

[16] Some critics prefer to interpret these opposing terms not as a dramatic clash between the ruler and the lover within Néron, but as a dramatic replay of his relationship with his mother. Jackson, p. 91-92, defining *Britannicus* as a 'structure de pouvoir renversée', remarks that the development of Néron's relationship with Junie, that is, his movement from the submission of the abduction scene to the cruelty of the spy scene, mirrors his relationship with Agrippine: 'L'impuissance de Néron en face de Junie, manifeste dans son incapacité à parler, a pour sens son impuissance à soutenir le pôle dominateur d'une relation oculaire dont il a trop longtemps occupé [...] Ce qui compte en effet dans ces "soupirs", dans cette "menace", c'est qu'ils s'exercent sur une image. Alors même que Junie est effectivement en son pouvoir,

Néron se délecte à la torturer *in absentia*, en révélant par là combien son action présente constitue la réponse à un vécu intérieur passé.' Barbara Woshinsky, *Signs of Certainty. The Linguistic Imperative in French Classical Literature* (Saratoga: Anma Libri, 1991), pp. 73-74 remarks that Néron's monologue here performs a function of 'poetic pre-enactment: it serves as a blueprint for future dramatic action'. She also draws a similar parallel to Jackson by pointing out that Néron's *soupirs* and *menace* echo Agrippine's avowed plan of action, 'J'essaierai tour à tour la force et la douceur' (423). Parish, *Racine: the limits of tragedy*, also insists upon the importance of Agrippine, maintaining that these swings between power and impotence, signified by *soupirs* and *menace*, are dependent upon her absence or presence.

[17] *Britannicus*, 578, 580.

[18] The word *lieu(x)* often signifies a place of entrapment signalled by the repetitive use of the verb *retenir*. One recalls Néron's sardonic retort to Britannicus as the latter declares his love to Junie, 'Ce lieu le favorise, et je vous y retiens / Pour lui faciliter de si doux entretiens' (*Britannicus*, 1029-30); Britannicus's view of Néron's palace as first and foremost Junie's prison, 'ces lieux où vous la retenez' (*Britannicus*, 1033); Roxane's order 'Toi, Zatime, retiens ma rivale en ces lieux' (*Bajazet*, 1319); Andromaque's view of Pyrrhus's palace as her son's prison, 'aux lieux où on garde mon fils' (*Andromaque*, 260); and Athalie's reference to 'tout le peuple enfermé dans ce lieu' (*Athalie*, 669). Consequently it is not surprising to note that the word *lieu(x)* is frequently juxtaposed with verbs signifying escape: *fuyer*, *La Thébaïde* 1311, *Phèdre* 28; *sortir*, *Alexandre* 246, 1363; *quitter*, *Mithridate* 1559, *Phèdre* 151; *s'arracher*, *Britannicus* 437, *Phèdre* 1156; *se sauver*, *Andromaque* 1380, *Bérénice* 781, *Athalie* 1264.

[19] This is not confined to *Britannicus*. We see the restricting effect of locus in Roxane's definition of herself as 'Maîtresse *du Sérail*' (*Bajazet*, 1529); in Xipharès's reassurances to Mithridate, 'Vous avez *dans ces lieux* une entière puissance' (*Mithridate*, 164); in Athalie's arrogant declaration, 'Il me laisse *en ces lieux* souveraine maîtresse' (*Athalie*, 483). Power is thus implicitly fixed to specific confines.

[20] *Britannicus*, 1025, 1029-30.

[21] *Britannicus*, 1051, 1052, 1036, 1042.

[22] *Britannicus*, 1125; *Bajazet*, 293.

[23] *Britannicus*, 1125, 1137.

[24] *Britannicus*, 888, 1180.

[25] It is interesting to note that many critics, relating the subject matter of the play to Racine's Preface, claim that the play is as much about the *decline* of Agrippine's power as it is about Néron's quest for liberation. Few, however, have concentrated on Agrippine's prior success at achieving power, or how the means she employs function within the tragic structure of the play. Philip Butler, p. 24, provides an obvious example: '[...] in fact the whole tragedy could be read as the gradual decline of Agrippine's power, slowly eaten up from the inside, until it is but an empty shell that collapses into dust'. I would also dispute his claim that Agrippine is in fact powerless at the end of the play. See my comments in Chapter One, Section C, pp. 56-58.

[26] *Britannicus*, 1721, 1759, 1762, 1760, 1757, 3.

[27] See Chapter Three for a more detailed discussion of this.

[28] *Bajazet*, 251, 255; 252, 257, 253, 257.

[29] Maurice Descotes's comments on power and love in *Bajazet* therefore seem misleading in that they imply a simple separation of the two as opposed to a complex interplay, 'L'intrigue politique dans *Bajazet*', in *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire da la France*, 71 (1971), 400-24 (403-04): '... l'intrigue amoureuse apparaît commme secondaire, tout entière commandée par les nécessités qu'impose la conduite d'un Etat ...'.

[30] Mary-Jo Muratore, 'Racinian Stasis', in *Re-Lectures Raciniennes: Nouvelles approches du discours tragique*, ed. by Richard Barnett (Tübingen: Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature, 1986), pp. 113-25 (p. 113). Jules Brody, '*Bajazet*, or the Tragedy of Roxane', in *Romanic Review*, 60 (1968), 273-90 (273-74), seizes upon these two lines to elucidate the paradoxical relationship between the apparently static nature of the action and the impression of haste conveyed by the vocabulary. His pertinent remarks also highlight the circular effect of the movement of the tragic action: 'The juxtaposition of these ultimata, which bracket the action at either end, suggests that during the interval between them, time, from Roxane's point of view at least, has literally been standing still. It is as if in the 1200-odd intervening lines, nothing of consequence had happened. And yet, a great deal has happened. [...] The symmetry between her two ultimata suggests that Roxane alone, however, has not moved with it. Her immobility contrasts sharply with the bustling resiliency of a particularly energetic and enterprising cast of characters'.

[31] *Vous*, 262, 263, 264, 267, 269, 270, 272; *votre*, 264; *vos*, 271, 273.

[32] Significantly Brody, '*Bajazet*, or the Tragedy of Roxane', p. 282, explains this interaction of life, love and death in terms of Roxane's confusion of empires: 'Where she had insisted on seeing but one empire unified in the service of her happiness, there had all the while been three working in dogged interference with one another: *l'empire de l'amour* (1085), her *empire suprême* over Bajazet (509), and the political *Empire* which she had offered for his love'.

[33] Roxane's love / death *choice* is not unique to *Bajazet*, it is echoed in Hermione's shockingly blatant 'Qu'il périsse! aussi bien qu'il ne vit plus pour nous', in Pyrrhus's repeated threats to Andromaque, 'Le fils me répondra des mépris de la mère', 'Allons aux Grecs livrer le fils d'Hector', 'il faut ou périr ou règner' (*Andromaque*, 1408, 370, 900, 968), in Phèdre's guilty silence at Thésée's damnation of Hippolyte after his revelation of Hippolyte's love for Aricie, 'Hippolyte est sensible, et ne sent rien pour moi!' (1203), and in her subsequent appalling resolution to eliminate Aricie, 'Non, je ne puis souffrir un bonheur qui m'outrage, / [...] / Il faut perdre Aricie' (*Phèdre*, 1203, 1257-59). Similarly Mithridate threatens to kill his son Polynice when he thinks he has won the affections of Monime. He tells her '...vous l'avez vu pour la dernière fois'. His reaction is the same when his suspicions turn to Xipharès, 'Tu périras', then he decides to kill all three, 'Immolons, en partant, trois ingrats à la fois' (*Mithridate*, 594, 1119, 1386). The choice each time is stark and negative, love or death: When the Racinian character finds him / herself unloved, either the Other or the person they love must die.

[34] *Bajazet*, 326, 340, 510, 511-12, 1087, 1122.

[35] *Bajazet*, 439, 445, 447, 450.

[36] *Bajazet*, 1092, 1150.

[37] Timothy Scanlan highlights this fusion of marriage and death in his discussion of the ambiguity of the term *noeud*. 'Racine's *Bajazet*: *Noeuds* and *Dénouement*', in *South Atlantic Bulletin*, 42 (1977), 13-20. See also J. Anne Chapman, 'The Effacement of the Racinian Image', in *French Studies*, 15 (1961), 122-33.

[38] For a development of this notion of marriage as sacrifice, see Véronique Desnain's recent article, 'At the Altar: Marriage and/or Sacrifice in Racine', in *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 18 (1996), 159-66.

[39] *Bajazet*, 702, 709, 717, 605.

[40] *Bajazet*, 809, 814.

[41] *Bajazet*, 421, 423.

[42] *Bajazet*, 423, 426, 427, 428, 429.

[43] *Bajazet*, 505, 506, 507, 508, 509, 510.

[44] *Bajazet*, 534, 536, 530.

[45] *Bajazet*, 1040, 1455, 1529.

[46] This false assumption that power entitles them to love is echoed more forcefully in Mithridate's blatant declaration to Monime: 'Songez que votre coeur est un bien qui m'est dû' (1281).

[47] *Bajazet*, 1473, 1478, 1478.

[48] *Bajazet*, 1473, 1476.

[49] *Bajazet*, 450, 455, 973.

[50] See Chapter Three for a more detailed analysis of how Racine's characters try to balance the emotional accounts.

[51] Salwa Elias Mishriky's interpretation of the final *Sortez* as a triumph for Bajazet and a defeat for Roxane seems paradoxical. Bajazet may force Roxane to do what she has sought to avoid, but her order still sends him to his death. 'La Transcendance de Bajazet', in *Romance Notes*, 15 (1973), 306-13.

[52] I would disagree with Jean Audet and Milan Kovacovic, '*Bérénice* à l'endroit', in *Romance Notes*, 19 (1979), 352-57, who see the conflict between love and power essentially as a clash between Bérénice and Titus, the former personifying love, the latter power.

[53] The rhyme *cour / amour* is recurrent in Racine's tragedies highlighting the clash of the public and the private, the ruler and the lover: *Britannicus,* 417, 1213, 1581; *Bérénice,* 5, 58, 153, 534, 1405; *Bajazet,* 99; *Mithridate,* 898; *Esther,* 78.

[54] It is interesting to note that Hippolyte too experiences this profound sense of shame and guilt as he confesses his love for Aricie: 'Qu'aucuns monstres par moi dompté jusqu'aujourd'hui / Ne m'ont acquis le droit de faillir comme lui' (*Phèdre*, 99-100). The verb *faillir* indicates how love is defined in terms of moral laxity and helps explain Hippolyte's contrition.

[55] John Campbell, 'Playing for Time in *Bérénice*', in *Nottingham French Studies*, 32 (1993), 23-28 (24).

[56] Jean-Marie Apostolidès explains: 'Le geste sacrificiel du prince lui permet de quitter l'univers des hommes pour celui d'Histoire [...] tout devient public chez lui, tout est offert en spectacle', 'Image du Père

et Peur du Tyran au XVIIe Siècle', in *Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature*, 10 (1978), 195-208 (199-200).

[57] Mitchell Greenberg's remark, p. xxv, on the spectacle of sovereignty is particularly poignant here: 'The representation of the prince [...] is inextricably bound to a politics of spectacle (illusion), to the imaginary scenario that empowers. The very essence of a court, of a king, is "parade", an ornamentalism that enhances what is mundanely universal and, with all the attributes of artifice, with all the protocols of rank, of dress, of *dépense*, with all the prodigality of financial and sexual largesse, raises it beyond the general and into the empyrean of the unique'. The language Greenberg uses here, *illusion, imaginary, scenario, parade*, places the emphasis very much on the staging of a fantasy. Christopher Pye, in his study of Shakespeare's kings, *The Regal Phantasm*, provides an interesting discussion of the effects of placing monarchy, literally, centre-stage and explores in general terms how the very notion of spectacle in the staging of sovereignty immediately debases sovereign power.

[58] J Tans, 'Un Thème-Clef Racinien: la rencontre nocturne', in *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France*, 65 (1965), 577-89 (587), likewise underlines the symbolism of the statues: 'L'empereur reste empereur, mais il ne sera plus homme, il sera dieu. Il perdra, ici-bas, sa personnalité dans les statues, dans les images fixées qui le représentent, images qui ne contiennent que sa grandeur impériale, qui sont dénuées de vie, qui constituent la négation de tout désir personnel'.

[59] For a discussion of the theme of sacrifice in *Bérénice* see Françoise Siguret, *'Bérénice / Impératrice*: lecture d'une rime', in *French Forum*, 3 (1978), 125-31. Siguret tries to show how the notion of sacrifice is central to the development of the tragic action by looking at Racine's timely use of rhyme. However, given that the crucial rhyme only occurs twice in Act I, her argument seems somewhat tenuous. See also Christian Delmas, *'Bérénice* Comme Rituel', in *Racine, théâtre et poésie*, ed. by Christine Hill (Leeds, Francis Cairns, 1991), pp. 191-203.

[60] Gérard Defaux, 'Titus ou le héros tremblant', in *French Forum*, 10 (1985), 271-94 (277-78), talks in terms of a 'désappropriation de soi' from the first tableau: 'Cet "éclat" qui est désormais le sien, "cette poupre" et "cet or" dont il est revêtu, l'ont à jamais séparé de son être. Titus n'est plus Titus, il ne s'appartient plus'. However, I would suggest that this fails to capture the sense of gradual loss which the series of portraits convey. Nor does Jacques Morel's conclusion that 'Titus, tout à la fois, ne renonce à

rien et ne garde rien: son amour pour la reine Bérénice demeure intact, mais sa gloire lui impose une mortelle séparation' and his insistence that at the end Titus is still 'pleinement empereur et pleinement amoureux', does not appear to take account of the radical transformation that has occurred. 'A propos de *Bérénice*: le thème du mariage des Romains et des reines dans la tragédie française du XVIIe siècle', in *Travaux de linguistique et de littérature*, 13 (1975), 229-38 (237-38).

[61] Parish uses lines 464, 1380 and 1384 in particular to make his point. *Racine: the limits of tragedy*, p. 187.

[62] Stone too, '*Bérénice*: les voiles du pouvoir', p. 230, explains the loss of identity and the inherent sacrifice which result from Titus's acquisition of power: 'Titus ne peut concevoir son pouvoir impérial qu'en termes qui le soumettent à l'autorité de l'Etat. Il devient l'agent, ou l'acteur, qui en prononçant le discours romain, s'avère être victime. Respectant la loi contre la royauté, loi établie pour corriger les excès du passé, il n'exerce de pouvoir qu'en tant que servent de cette culture dominante qui, tragiquement, le prive de son identité en le nommant empereur'.

[63] *Britannicus*, 458; *Bérénice*, 349, 1083.

[64] It is also interesting to note Pierre Han's comments on the theme of power and love in *Bérénice*: 'Adieu: Raison d' Etat as Dramatic Motivation in *Bérénice*', in *Nottingham French Studies*, 22 (1983), 1-14 He draws our attention to the way in which Antiochus in particular enunciates his feelings in terms of his political status.

[65] It seems too simplistic to categorise *Britannicus* and *Bérénice* as opposites. I would disagree with Marie-Odile Sweetser, who, in her article on *Britannicus* and *Bérénice*, 'Néron et Titus vus par Racine', in *Historical Figures in French Literature*, French Literature Series VIII (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1981), pp. 21-30 (pp. 21-22), portrays the former as a play where passion and politics are inextricably linked, while the latter is defined as 'un idéal de simplicité'. Yet it must be noted that despite drawing this apparently stark opposition, she does claim that certain similarities exist between the two plays, 'Des liens évidents unissent *Britannicus* et *Bérénice*'. However her argument becomes all the more intricate since what she calls 'traits communs' consist ultimately of contrasts.

[66] Greenberg, p. 140, draws the same conclusion, but uses the historical anecdote of Louis XIV's dismissal of his mistress Marie Mancini, niece of his cardinal prime minister Mazarin, as a point of

comparison with Titus's dismissal of Bérénice. The analogy is particularly pertinent in terms of the ruler / lover dichotomy and what this ultimately signifies for royal absolutism. Like Titus, Louis was forced to renounce his love for a marriage of political convenience upon which depended the general peace of Europe. Greenberg explains: 'For what does the anecdote do but exhibit, under the guise of "doomed love"[...] the conflict between the public and the private, between *raison d'Etat* and desire? The anecdote not only teaches us that the king, absolute ruler that he may be, must renounce his pleasure, his chance for happiness, his body, but, on a higher, more political plane, it also teaches us (perversely) that the king is *not* absolute; he is not above the very laws that his body embodies, he is not free to give in to his pleasure.' [67] Jules Brody's definition of *Bajazet* as 'ce drame de la toute-puissance impuissante' is particularly poignant here, '*Bajazet*, ou le Jeu de l'Amour et de la Mort', p. 113. Sweetser, 'Néron et Titus vus par Racine', p. 25, widens this claim to include Racinian tragedy as a whole: 'Racine crée la tragédie de l'impuissance au sein de la toute-puissance'.

CHAPTER 3

POWER RELATIONSHIPS

This chapter will focus on power relationships from the Sartrean perspective of *pour autrui.*[1] In Section A we will look at the crisis of communication, the limitations of language, how it betrays, deludes and creates a conflictual relationship between Self and Other, forcing characters deeper into the darkness of duplicity in their quest to acquire knowledge of the Other's innermost thoughts. In Section B we will see how the politics of thought-interpretation gives way to the development of techniques of manipulation and suppression. In this section the focus will be less on the discernment of thoughts than on how the dark desire to control the Other's mind manifests itself in dramatic and repressive power relationships. At certain points it will be useful to draw comparisons with Sartre's *Huis Clos*, since the compelling need to know the Other's mind which underpins Sartre's work is also fundamental in the three plays under examination.[2] The existentialist concept of *The Other* will be useful, too, in that it conveys the sense of separation and estrangement intrinsic to Racinian relationships which is brought about by the anxiety inherent in, what is often, essentially ambiguous and radically inadequate discourse.

SECTION A. RACINE'S HALL OF MIRRORS

Language has traditionally been perceived as the embodiment of thought and hence as one of the fundamental premises of our existence with others. Barbara Woshinsky points out that the critical theory prevalent at the time Racine was writing his tragedies pivoted on the association of language and thought: 'It was in the seventeenth century that the close connection between language and thought, and the identification of thought with truth, became the foundation for linguistic theory.' She quotes Hobbes's *Leviathan*, 'The general use of speech is to transfer our mental discourse into verbal; or the train of our thoughts into a train of words', and the opening line of the 1660 Port-Royal Grammar, 'Parlez, est expliquer ses pensées par des signes, que les hommes ont

inventez a ce dessin'.[3] Racine does not challenge this notion of thought as truth. On the contrary, as we shall see, the truth lies hidden in the mind. However he does question the capacity of language as an adequate medium of communication. Three centuries later Sartre writes along similar lines: 'le langage n'est pas un phénomène surajouté à l'être-pour-autrui: il est originellement l'être-pour-autrui, c'est à dire le fait qu'une subjectivité s'éprouve comme objet pour l'autre.'[4]

It has become an established practice for commentators on seventeenth-century theatre to emphasise the importance of the spoken word in terms of the origin and development of the tragic action.[5] Eugene Vinaver makes the point succinctly when he talks of the 'cult of speech as action'.[6] D'Aubignac's famous dictum 'Parler, c'est Agir' has been echoed, for example, by the 'Parler, c'est faire' of Barthes and more recently by the 'Entendre, c'est faire' of Phillips.[7] The emphasis in each formulation clearly rests on the impact of the spoken word. In his analysis of the thematics of speech and listening in Racinian tragedy, Phillips writes that 'Speech in Racine, even at the level of text, advertises itself as action. [...] The word becomes spectacle.'[8] Maya Slater is equally unequivocal, 'Racine's theatre is *a theatre of words*. There is almost no stage action, *no meaningful silences*. The characters exist only as a function of what they *say*'.[9] However, in Racine it can be shown that it is often the *non-dit* which triggers reactions. In his tragedies, the power of *thinking* constitutes a remarkably eloquent expression of what in existentialist terms could be expressed as the struggle with the Other.

Despite its importance, however, the thought-process has not received much critical attention, undoubtedly because of its apparently undramatic nature.[10] It can be argued, of course, that 'feelings are nothing if they are not spoken',[11] but I would question this claim that emotions must be enunciated; the feelings which remain hidden, the suspicions they arouse, the misinterpretations they give rise to, all combine to form a central part of the tragic experience. With this in mind, this chapter seeks firstly, in Section A, to highlight the tension and conflict created during the *delay* in the revelation

of secrets. We shall see how language distorts and conceals the truth, functioning as a source of anguish and discord. I intend here to elucidate that Racine's is a theatre where language often ceases to express the reality of the Other's thought, where instead of finding what one would expect, that is, a clear reflection of the thought in the word, we find ourselves in a hall of mirrors, turning and twisting as we confront a myriad of distorted reflections.[12]

> Dans le secret des cœurs, Osmin, n'as-tu rien lu?[13]

This question strikes at the heart of the power relationships that shape *Britannicus*, *Bérénice* and *Bajazet*. We witness the protagonists in these plays endlessly trying to penetrate the Other's consciousness. They live in constant fear that the Other is concealing secret thoughts, masking his true feelings: and they are invariably right.

There is no shortage of evidence to support this claim. From the very beginning of *Bérénice* there is a sense of mystery rendered in terms such as *solitaire*, *secrets*, *se cache* (3-5). Similarly from the moment the curtain goes up in *Bajazet* there is an atmosphere of mistrust and concealment as Acomat urges Osmin to, 'Instruis-moi des secrets ...' (11). Néron talks of 'des secrets que je cache à ses yeux', while Bérénice wants to 'cacher mon trouble'; Acomat, as he ponders the putative secret love of Bajazet and Roxane, talks of 'Soupirs d'autant plus doux qu'il les fallait celer', Bajazet refers to his 'trouble caché', Atalide tells herself 'Cache tes pleurs', for emotions must be suppressed.[14] Praise, love, hate, sorrow, shame, remorse: a whole host of emotions are kept carefully concealed from the Other. Characters more often than not have 'des desseins secrets'.[15] From this perspective, to take what people say at face value is to commit an enormous error of judgement, a fact of which Hermione's notorious 'Qui te l'a dit?' is the classic example:

> Ah! fallait-il en croire une amante insensée?
>
> *Ne devais-tu pas lire au fond de ma pensée?* (*Andromaque*, 1545-46)

This second question is charged with a piercing irony, for this is exactly what the Racinian character exists to do. The Other's eyes are invariably 'chargés d'un feu secret' (*Phèdre*, 134) and in the words of Achille 'C'est un secret qu'il leur faut arracher' (*Iphigénie*, 755).[16] In what could be seen as the deployment of a skilful and sinister 'Thought Police', Racine's characters set about discovering, capturing and controlling the Other's mind.

The playwright's use of the verbs *penser* and *croire* is particularly illuminating in this respect. Firstly, there is the opposition of *penser* with the vocabulary of speech, *dire, voix, parler, serments, discours.* This reflects the discrepancy between exterior appearance and interior reality and thus a character's inability to see into the hearts and minds of others. The Janus-like Narcisse tells Néron that 'Burrhus ne pense pas, Seigneur, tout ce qu'il dit'; Junie remarks on the court 'Combien tout ce qu'on dit est loin de ce qu'on pense!'; she tells Britannicus, 'Ah! seigneur! vous parlez contre votre pensée'.[17] Clearly one cannot believe everything one hears; Antiochus asks 'Dois-je croire, grands Dieux, ce que je viens d'ouïr?'; Bérénice is clearly wavering as to the verity of what she has been told, as seen by the repetition of *si* '... si de mes amis j'en dois croire la voix / Si j'en crois ses serments...'.[18] When she learns the truth of Titus's intentions she expresses incredulity at such shameless prevarication,

> Après tant de serments, Titus m'abandonner!
>
> Que cette même bouche, après mille serments
>
> [...]
>
> M'ordonnât elle-même une absence éternelle. (906, 1105-08)

Tant de serments, mille serments: the hyperbole reflects the extent of the gulf between thought and speech.

Significantly, in Racinian tragedy in general, it is extremely rare to find the verbs *penser* and *croire* used in the affirmative. These terms occur most frequently in the

interrogative which remains haunted with despair, anxiety and doubt: 'Que faut-il que je pense?',[19] 'Puis-je croire...?',[20] 'Dois-je croire...?'[21] When not in question form, the conditional *si* is employed, thus accentuating the underlying sense of uncertainty. The second person singular, 'tu penses', occurs eight times in the course of the tragedies, and each time in the interrogative: one never sees the affirmative 'tu penses que...' but rather an anguished, pleading 'Que penses-tu?' Similarly the second person plural occurs twenty-six times, nineteen in the interrogative form 'Pensez-vous...?', the remainder in the negative form 'plus que vous ne pensez'. In the imperfect tense *penser* usually refers to a past thought which the present has now contradicted.[22] One is scarcely ever thinking along the right lines in Racine, one rarely has a true measure of the Other's thoughts.

With the noun *pensée* the emphasis is again on the inquisitive. Burrhus quizzes Néron 'Quelle est votre pensée?'; Agrippine conspires, 'Surprenons [...] les secrets de son âme'; Roxane desperately tries to uncover Bajazet's thoughts 'Lisons, et voyons sa pensée'; when Atalide faints, she orders Zatime to 'observez ses regards, ses discours', and a fearful Atalide in turn wonders of Roxane: 'Quels desseins maintenant occupent sa pensée?'[23] One must strive to 'déguiser' one's own thoughts, but 'découvrir' those of the Other, force him to 'expliquer' his cogitation.[24] It is a relentless hunting, searching, probing into the soul of the Other, the quest often for an elusive grail. The aim invariably is to deceive, to keep secrets, to betray.

The words associated with *bouche* are equally revealing in this respect: *infidèle*, *perfide*.[25] Britannicus asks the perfidious Narcisse, 'Puis-je sur ton récit fonder quelque assurance?'; Acomat's 'récit fidèle' is ultimately revealed as 'ce récit infidèle', 'récit menteur'.[26] Speech is baffling, like an insoluble enigma: Bajazet cries out in the confusion, 'O ciel, de ce discours quel est le fondement?'.[27] *Les discours* in Racine are *vains*, *frivoles*, *superflus*, *inutiles*.[28] Words become distorted, meanings twisted. Speech is deceptive, it betrays and deludes. Acomat tells Roxane,

> Madame, quel regard, et quelle voix sévère,

Malgré votre discours, m'assurent du contraire? (1341-42)

and Atalide finally confesses to Roxane, 'Je n'ai dans mes discours songé qu'à vous trahir' (1580). Thought and speech are presented not as two inextricably linked concepts, but as alternatives.

The act of promising accentuates the spurious nature of discourse. Titus tells Antiochus 'je viens dégager ma promesse'; Antiochus finally reveals to Bérénice that his pledge was worthless, 'Lorsque vous m'arrachiez cette injuste promesse, / Mon coeur faisait serment de vous aimer sans cesse',[29] while Agrippine's promise to put Britannicus on the throne, turns out to be no more than an empty threat. Compare the following:

J'irai, n'en doutez point, le montrer à l'armée,
Plaindre aux yeux des soldats son enfance opprimée,
Leur faire, à mon exemple, expier leur erreur.

Moi, le faire empereur, ingrat! L'avez-vous cru?
Quel serait mon dessein? Qu'aurais-je pu prétendre?
Quels honneurs dans sa cour, quel rang pourrais-je attendre? (839-41, 1258-60)

Albine tries to reassure Agrippine in the opening scene 'qu'a-t-il dit, qu'a-t-il fait / Qui ne promette à Rome un empereur parfait?' (25-26), but the question is not rhetorical, on the contrary, the interrogative stresses the schism between appearance and reality in a world of deception and betrayal.

Betrayal is the norm. For example, Bajazet is repeatedly urged to make promises to Roxane and then not keep them:

Promettez: affranchi du péril qui vous presse,
Vous verrez de quel poids sera votre promesse.
[...]
Et d'un trône si saint la moitié n'est fondée
Que sur la foi promise et rarement gardée. (641-50)

Atalide proposes the same solution (V, 2). The significant rhyme of *promesse* and *bassesse* in Bajazet's response signals an awareness of the iniquity of deceit:

> Et j'irais l'abuser d'une fausse promesse?
>
> Je me parjurerais? Et par cette bassesse ... (753-54)

However such moral censure is rare. Promises are usually given then retracted with no remorse or guilt. Junie's remark on Néron's court reveals a malevolent glee hidden at the heart of deception: 'Avec combien de joie on y trahit sa foi' (1525).

Pledges can also be designed to dazzle, to blind the Other to one's real intentions. Agrippine's 'sincère aveu' (IV, 2) consists of a catalogue of veiled intentions and blatant lies. It is with a sinister relish that she relates how she paved the path to power with false assurances, 'Mes promesses aux uns éblouirent les yeux' (*Britannicus*, 1153). The vocabulary associated with promises leaves no ambiguity; 'une fausse promesse', 'des promesses feintes', the rhyme of 'promis' with 'mensonge ennemis'.[30] These words underline the discrepancy between thought and deed that exists in Racinian tragedy and the problems that ensue. Things are constantly said and done 'contre toute apparence' (*Bajazet*, 913). The aim is clearly to distort reality, to appear other than one is. 'Dissimulons' is the Racinian character's cry (*Mithridate*, 1126).

In this world where no one can be trusted, it seems ironic that, characters continue to have faith in one another. Narcisse tells Néron, 'Britannicus s'abandonne à ma foi', Atalide tells Zaïre, 'Roxane, se livrant toute entière à ma foi'.[31] Characters repeatedly reassure themselves of the Other's sincerity in vain. Assurances are worthless. Agrippine ironic ally fails to see that Néron's guarantees are empty, 'Il m'a renouvelé la foi de ses promesses'; Bérénice patiently awaits a final assurance to support all the others, but to no avail, 'Il m'en viendra lui-même assurer en ce lieu'. Roxane's bold statement, 'Je crois sa promesse' is ultimately deflated, 'Voilà sur quelle foi je m'étais assurée'.[32] She pressurizes Bajazet by emphasising her trust in Amurat, 'je m'assure encore aux bontés de ton frère' (533), but the irony of course is that he has already dispatched the order for

her execution. As Atalide backs Bajazet's decision to deceive Roxane, 'Que sa bouche, ses yeux, tout l'assure qu'il l'aime', it is ironic that she should be deceived by his very act of deception, 'L'une a tendu la main pour gage de sa flamme; / L'autre [...] a de ses feux, Madame, assurée à son tour'.[33] This is a world confounded by mistrust and lies.

Gestures of reassurance, like their verbal counterparts, are unreliable. Loving gestures in particular present the dynamics of deceit in a seductive light. This is particularly true of *Britannicus* where words such as *embrasser/embrassements*, *caresser/caresses* contain undercurrents of betrayal and perfidy, for this apparent sign of affection generally masks evil intentions.[34] We recall how Agrippine reproaches Néron: 'Dès vos plus jeunes ans mes soins et mes tendresses / N'ont arraché de vous que de feintes caresses' (1271-72). It seems fitting therefore that her fall from power should be initiated by a Judas-like kiss:[35]

> L'ingrat, d'un faux respect colorant son injure
>
> Se leva par avance, et, courant m'embrasser,
>
> Il m'écarta du trône où je m'allais placer. (108-10)

This makes her subsequent statement of trust in Néron all the more astounding,

> Ah! si vous aviez vu par combien de caresses
>
> Il m'a renouvelé la foi de ses promesses!
>
> Par quels embrassements il vient de m' arrêter!
>
> Ses bras, dans nos adieux, ne pouvaient me quitter. (1587-90)

These lines abound in words of trust yet conceal a secret betrayal. The poignant rhyme of *caresses* with *promesses* and the telling juxtaposition of *embrassements* with *foi*, root these loving gestures in a context of deceit. The term *bras* reinforces the dreaded image of the embrace, while the repeated use of the plural and *combien* stress the recurrence of the action. Néron's chilling words to Narcisse, 'J'embrasse mon rival, mais c'est pour l'étouffer' (1314) reveal his true design, but they are ironically foreshadowed by Agrippine's account of how her own embraces likewise concealed her murderous intentions. She describes how Claude during his final days was '*chaque jour* caressé dans mes bras' (1130). Again we are struck by the deliberation and ruthlessness signified

by the bold repetition of the act. Ultimately the Racinian embrace, a gesture which should symbolise comfort and compassion, represents the paradigm of deceit.

This deception, however, is not simple Even the stark confessions of betrayal are themselves underpinned by layers of duplicity: those who find themselves deceived in turn set out to deceive as the agony of suspicion gives way to the comfort of retribution. In their search for truth, they descend deeper into deception. A lie for a lie, revenge for betrayal... Néron orders Narcisse 'Dis-lui qu'en sa faveur on me trompe moi-même' with the result that Britannicus unwittingly tells Junie under the watchful eye of Néron, 'Nous sommes seuls. Notre ennemi trompé, / [...] est ailleurs occupé'; Roxane mercilessly sets about hunting her deceivers and trapping the elusive truth as she dissimulates in her quest to pin down Bajazet's thoughts, 'Pour le faire expliquer, tendons-lui quelque piège [...] Ah, les traîtres! Allons, et courons le confondre', for ultimately it must be that 'le traître une fois se soit trahit lui-même'.[36] Paradoxically therefore the movement towards the truth is one of deepening duplicity.

Racine's characters thus constantly incite the Other to speak, to break a perfidious silence that is steeped in ambiguity and mystery and penetrate the hidden depths of another consciousness in terms such as 'il faut parler / faire parler',[37] 'il faut rompre le silence',[38] 'Parlez',[39] or 'Dites / Dis-moi'.[40] They perpetually strive to be *éclairci(e)s*: Britannicus pleads with Junie: 'Eclaircissez le trouble où vous jetez mon âme'; Bérénice begs Titus: 'Eclaircissez le trouble où vous voyez mon âme'; Roxane insists: 'il faut maintenant m'éclaircir', 'Je vais savoir'; Atalide cries, 'Je veux savoir'.[41]

Knowledge of the Other's thought, however, is simultaneously sought and feared. We recall how Thésée at the denouement is crushed and grief-stricken as he confesses to being 'de mon erreur, hélas! *trop éclaircis*' (*Phèdre*, 1647). Similarly Titus, realising the possible pain of the truth, begs Antiochus 'Epargnez à mon cœur cet éclaircissement' (*Bérénice*, 742). For *if* the Other's thoughts are uncovered, it often proves a torment not

to be endured. The forceful interrogatives *Parlez, Dites*, quickly give way to despairing exclamations. Agrippine, when she is finally forced to confront the fact that her place in Néron's affection has been usurped by Junie, cries out in distress: 'Ah! je ne puis, Albine, en souffrir la pensée' (*Britannicus*, 892). After Acomat's false report of Bajazet's meeting with Roxane, Atalide fears the convergence of speech and thought, the possibility of that rare fusion of appearance and reality: 'Tout ce qu'il a pu dire, il a pu le penser' (*Bajazet*, 916). Hence the Other's *pensée* often becomes something to *étouffer*, to *bannir*.[42] Titus asserts 'N'y songeons plus', Bajazet declares, 'il n'y faut plus penser', Roxane tells herself 'fermons plutot les yeux'.[43]

Similarly, characters try to wipe certain thoughts from their mind, they want to efface the awful truth, yet are relentlessly reminded of what they would sooner forget. If Néron appears to act to 'Le mépris de sa mère et l'oubli de sa femme', then Agrippine is there to remind him of all he owes her, 'C'était beaucoup pour moi, ce n'était rien pour vous', and Burrhus in turn his of obligation to Octavie, '... Seigneur, rappeler la mémoire / Des vertus d'Octavie ...'.[44] If Bajazet is ever in danger of forgetting that his life is in Roxane's hands, then she frequently reminds him of the power she has over him, 'Ne te souvient-il plus de tout ce que je suis?', 'Songez-vous ...'.[45] If Titus loses himself in the pleasures of love, '... mon coeur, hors de lui-même, / S'oublie, et se souvient seulement qu'il vous aime', then Paulin repeatedly calls to mind the reality of government, 'De vos nobles projets, Seigneur, qu'il vous souvienne'.[46] If Bérénice tries to escape the rigorous demands of the present by seeking refuge in the pleasures of the past, '... où m'emporte un souvenir charmant?', then Titus's conduct serves as a reminder that things have changed, 'Il n'avait plus pour moi cette ardeur assidue. And if Antiochus initially resolves 'Allons loin de ses yeux l'oublier ou mourir', he is ultimately forced to confess his failure at the denouement 'Je n'ai pu l'oublier'.[47] One is reminded, in *Huis Clos*, of Estelle's inane attempt to alleviate Garcin's pain, 'qu'importe ce qu'ils pensent. Oublie-les', and his stark and eloquent reply, 'Ils ne m'oublient pas'. Similarly we recall Inès's poignant question to Garcin as he tries to assign to oblivion the awful reality of his

actions in the arms of Estelle, 'Que vas-tu chercher sur ses lèvres? L'oubli? Mais je ne t'oublierai pas.' Both statements illustrate the impossibility of forgetting while another exists who remembers. Just as the agony of Sartre's characters in *Huis Clos* is that they cannot stop themselves from thinking, so the same is true of Racine's. Again we recall the words of Inès, 'Vous pouvez vous clouer la bouche, vous pouvez vous couper la langue, est-ce que vous vous empêcherez d'exister? Arrêterez-vous votre pensée?'

Characters often then withdraw into the realm of fantasy, they flee to the world of the *comme si* when confronted with the appalling, excruciating reality of the *pensée de l'Autre* and resort instead to believing what they want to believe. This is reflected in the frequent juxtaposition of *vouloir* with verbs of belief. Osmin informs Acomat that, 'Amurat est content si nous le voulons croire'; Roxane explains her credulity thus, 'Moi-même j'ai voulu m'assurer de sa foi'.[48] The verb *vouloir* serves to underline the precariousness of credence, intimating as it does a belief-system vexed and beleaguered by nagging doubts, with the use of the conditional *si* merely stressing this tenuity still further. In their desperate flight from the truth, Racine's characters demonstrate the ironic relationship between the desire to see and the refusal to look, long recognised as part of the tragic experience.[49] Antiochus acknowledges his folly as he tells Arsace: 'Ah! que nous nous plaisons à nous tromper tous deux!'; Bérénice admits 'pour me tromper je fais ce que je puis'; Roxane talks of 'des soupçons dont je suis tourmentée' but of a heart 'Qui lui-même craignait de se voir détrompé', for the truth strikes the consciousness like a dagger, its exigence unendurable.[50] Atalide realises, 'Je donne à ses discours un sens plus favorable', and Roxane fears 'un discours trop flatteur'. She reproaches Bajazet, saying 'Vous ayez si longtemps, par des détours si bas / Feint un amour pour moi que vous ne sentiez pas', yet the deception is preferable to the excruciating torment of the truth.[51] Her pitiful 'ne pouvait-il feindre encore un moment?' is echoed in Hermione's emotive reproach to Oreste after the murder of Pyrrhus: 'Il m'aimerait peut-être, il le feindrait du moins.'[52] Roxane's piquant declarations capture the essence of this chimera, this fool's paradise: 'Hélas, pour mon repos que ne le puis-je croire?', 'Quel penchant,

quel plaisir je sentais à les croire.'[53] This is a clear example of what, since Sartre, we have learned to call *mauvaise foi*. These statements are analogous with Estelle's question in *Huis Clos* when she refuses to accept why she is in Hell: 'Est-ce qu'il ne vaut pas mieux croire que nous sommes là par erreur?'

At this stage, however, a strange paradox emerges. On the one hand, the Racinian character writhes in the torment of knowing he is in the Other's thoughts and either not knowing what those thoughts are (that is, his identity in the eyes of the Other), or striving to snuff them out because they are so intolerable. Yet at the same time the thought that he might *not* be in the Other's thoughts is equally intolerable. In *Huis Clos* this contradiction is captured both by Garcin and Estelle. Garcin, tortured by the knowledge of his identity in the eyes of others, tells his two fellow inmates, 'Vous avez de la chance vous deux; personne ne pense plus à vous sur la terre'; Estelle, on the other hand, as she watches Pierre dance with Olga, expresses the need to be in the thoughts of others in what constitutes a desperate plea for continued existence, 'Pense à moi ... ne pense qu'à moi.' Significantly, the lives of these characters end when they cease to be remembered by the living.

In Racine, we find Bérénice, after tormenting herself with thoughts of what might have been going through Titus's mind, finally asking him, 'Etais-je au moins présente à la pensée?' Her real grievance is not simply that they must separate, but that Titus might forget her, 'Avez-vous bien promis d'oublier ma mémoire?' Her statement that he is 'un ingrat qui me perd sans regret' is of particular importance: the key phrase, *sans regret*, reveals her anxiety that he will not feel her loss *mentally*.[54] Bérénice can proclaim 'Je vivrai' at the denouement and accept the separation only because she has been reassured that Titus will always remember her: 'J'ai cru que votre amour allait finir son cours. / Je connais mon erreur, et vous m'aimez toujours'.[55] Britannicus is thrown into disarray when in the notorious spy scene he encounters an apparently detached and unfeeling Junie:

Ma princesse, avez-vous daigné me souhaiter?

[...]

Parlez. Ne suis-je plus dans votre souvenir? (705, 741)

He sees her apparent disregard of him as the final blow, 'Madame: il me restait d'être oublié de vous' (982). It is as if Agrippine ceases to exist when she suspects that her place in Néron's thoughts has been usurped by Junie, 'Ma place est occupée, et je ne suis plus rien' (882). Acomat in turn dreams of reviving a past identity through the thoughts of others:

Quoi! tu crois, cher Osmin, que ma gloire passée

Flatte encor leur valeur, et vit dans leur pensée? (49-50)

Ultimately all of this comes down to the jeremiad propounded by the question of identity. Racine's characters are as much the prisoners of the Other's judgement as those of Sartre are three centuries later. Mithridate is tortured by the knowledge of how others see him, a fact emphasised by the emphatic repetition of the word *vaincu* throughout the play: 'Tout vaincu que je suis, et voisin du naufrage', 'Je suis vaincu', 'Vaincu, persécuté, sans secours, sans Etats.'[56] He struggles in vain against the shame of seeing himself unmasked in the eyes of the Other. In the style of Sartre's Garcin he tries to wipe out this tarnished image as he pleads with Monime:

Ne me regardez point vaincu, persécuté:

Revoyez-moi vainqueur, et partout redouté. (*Mithridate*, 1293-94)

Mithridate displays the wonderful and ineradicable human talent for self-deception; the fearful conqueror image he endeavours to portray is overtaken by the reality he has become: a feeble and all but vanquished old man. He, like many of Racine's protagonists stand before us shaken and condemned when confronted with the reality of how others see them.

A further paradox is that there can be no refuge from the Other's judgement in silence. One recalls Garcin's solution, the pact of silence, 'Se taire. Regarder en soi, ne jamais lever la tête', but it proves to be no more than an illusion of escape for he cannot prevent

himself from thinking, and Inès and Estelle cannot forget that he thinks. Once again Inès's words come echoing back, 'Votre silence me crie dans les oreilles [...] Arrêterez-vous votre pensée? Je l'entends, elle fait tic tac, comme un réveil.' The doubt, the suspense inherent in a silence proves too oppressive to bear. We hear Bérénice's anguished pleas to Phénice, listen to Agrippine's fretful speculations on Néron's silence, witness Britannicus's distressed exclamations to Junie, and observe Roxane's distress at Bajazet's enigmatic silence:

> Qu'ai-je fait? Que veut-il? Et que dit ce silence?
>
> [...]
>
> Ah! qu'il m'explique un silence si rude. (*Bérénice*, 627, 643)
>
> Que veut-il? Est-ce la haine ou l'amour qui l'inspire?
>
> Cherche-t-il seulement le plaisir de leur nuire? (*Britannicus*, 55-56)
>
> Vous ne me dites rien! Quel accueil! Quelle glace! (*Britannicus*, 707).
>
> Vous avez des secrets que je ne puis apprendre?
>
> Quoi! de vos sentiments je ne puis m'éclaircir? (*Bajazet*, 562-63)[57]

This suppression of speech simply retains and emphasises the agony of suspicion.[58] An array of anguished characters writhe in torment searching frantically for ways to penetrate and capture the secret domain of another consciousness while at the same time struggling against the implacable freedom of the Other to conceal the reality of his thoughts. Tormented by suspicion, Roxane's turmoil is unequivocal, 'Que faire en ce doute funeste?', Burrhus's reproach to Agrippine is poignant: 'toujours soupçonner son respect? / Ne peut-il faire un pas qui ne vous soit suspect?'. The answer of course is sadly and appallingly 'no'. In this world of deception and betrayal one can only follow Junie's simple rule of thumb, 'Tout (m') est suspect'. Bérénice's words capture the essence of the stifling, claustrophobic world of doubt, 'Je ne respire pas dans cette

incertitude' and invites comparison with Garcin's 'Plutôt cent morsures, plutôt le fouet, le vitriol, que cette souffrance de tête'.[59]

The silence inherent in the Other's thought remains menacing and unnerving; in *Andromaque*, Cléone tells Hermione 'Ah! que je crains, madame, un calme si funeste!', and Pyrrhus professes 'Je crains votre silence, et non pas vos injures'. In *Britannicus*, Agrippine declares 'Ah! l'on s'efforce en vain de me fermer la bouche', providing a striking contrast to Néron, whom Venesoen viewed as 'un curieux cas d'impuissance verbale'.[60] Yet it is this silent Néron who incites our terror. Firstly the mute figure at the abduction scene, 'J'ai voulu lui parler et ma voix s'est perdue'; then the still, watchful being of the spy scene, 'Caché près de ces lieux je vous verrai'; then the silent tableau at the death of Britannicus, 'D'aucun étonnement il ne paraît touché';[61] and finally the eerie silence hanging over the final image of Néron:

> Il rentre. Chacun fuit son silence farouche
>
> [...]
>
> Il marche sans dessein, ses yeux mal assurés ... (1755-57)

This is not the silence of a relaxed, soothing tranquillity, it is the perturbed, troubled calm concealing the raging storm, Jekyll disguising Hyde. The situation is similar in *Bajazet*: the 'auguste silence' of the *sérail* creates an atmosphere of tension, actions are carried out 'sans bruit' in a place where the Sultane's power rests on 'cette foule de chefs, d'esclaves, de *muets*' who have 'vendu dès longtemps *leur silence* et leur vie'.[62] It is significant that Racine chose a band of mutes as the arm of Roxane's power for it creates a strange paradox in that the very fact that they are unable to express themselves verbally, the very fact that the power of language has been taken away, immediately imbues them with a greater, more sinister power. The enigmatic nature of a conscience, of thoughts that can never be voiced, charges their silence with an electric current. These are thoughts that for evermore will prove elusive, minds that can never be possessed.

Sartre reminds us that 'Personne ne peut savoir ce qui signifient au juste les paroles d'autrui'.[63] We can now perhaps begin to comprehend the complexity behind these words. Given the deceit at the heart of discourse, given that one can never really know the truth of the Other's thoughts, it is hardly surprising that the Racinian thought-process is imbued with an inherent sense of daring signified by the verb *oser*: '... je n'ai pas dû penser'; 'Et serez-vous le seul que vous n'oserez croire?'; 'Et je ne puis encor ni n'oserais penser'; '[Je] n'ose qu'en tremblant en croire mon oreille'; 'Et moi, par un bonheur où je n'osais penser'; '... l'osez-vous croire?'; 'Peut-être des malheurs où vous n'osez penser'; 'Un bonheur où peut-être il n'ose plus penser!'[64] Thinking is a negative activity fraught with anxiety and doubt, and structured with crisscross layers of danger.

'Dans le secret des cœurs, Osmin, n'as-tu rien lu?' Acomat's question thus reverberates throughout Racinian tragedy. For we have seen that there often exists an effective connection between the *pensée* and the reaction of another character, thereby constituting an essential foundation of the power relationships that dominate Racinian tragedy. The strange power inherent in the silent thought-process exemplifies the ferocious intensity of the struggle with the Other.[65] By systematically challenging the traditional notion of speech as a creature of thought, by allowing us to distinguish, as Yeats felt unable to do, the dancer from the dance, Racine elucidates the startling power of his Thought Police. The discrepancy between speech and thought forces characters to interpret and reinterpret the Other's words. Racine's characters seek first and foremost to be the possessors of minds as they attempt to journey to the inner recesses of the Other's consciousness, searching for faithful reflections in a deceptive hall of mirrors.

SECTION B. RACINE'S MERRY-GO-ROUND

So far in this chapter the emphasis has been on how the truth is difficult for characters to attain, how deception and betrayal characterise relationships and how reality is constantly denied and deferred. We have seen how this sense of a failure of

communication, this powerlessness to interpret thoughts, leads to desperate attempts to drive those thoughts into the open where they can be hunted and trapped. However once trapped, they must be crushed; if the truth is unbearable then it must be obliterated. This leads to the development of techniques of manipulation and suppression. The metaphor of the merry-go-round seems an apt way to convey the cycle of dominance and submission which these techniques impose on Racinian relationships. In this light, it seems natural now to turn to the question of truth. For ironically, this elusive grail of truth which should end the torment of uncertainty and suspicion, is transformed into one of the principal means of repressing and gaining ascendancy over the Other. We thus become aware of a significant shift in emphasis; the stress is now not so much on acquiring knowledge as being subjected to it. Inevitably the truth is finally spoken. In Racine's tragic scenes of avowal, the internal world of thought is offered up for the inspection of the Other and used against him.

The Racinian *aveu* seems to signal the stripping away of falsehood; Agrippine talks of 'le sincère aveu', Zatime of Atalide's 'aveu fidèle', and Titus of his 'aveu véritable'.[66] Confession implies revelation, understanding, and reconciliation. The evidence, however, shows that the positive aspects of confession disappear; the truth does not improve the relationship between Self and Other, but rather represents and confirms the sense of profound alienation fostered by duplicity. Moreover, this dark epiphany evokes many ironies and ambiguities. Confession means a cancellation rather than a reaffirmation of moral values. Agrippine's *aveu* in IV, 2 is essentially an act of vengeance which is aimed at regaining her control of Néron. It is intended not to relieve pain, but to increase it. The shame and regret normally associated with confession are noticeably lacking here. The acknowledgement of sin is made not in the traditionally subdued, self-effacing, deferential mood of the confessional, but in an arrogant, proud, remorseless invective. Agrippine vaunts her sins, emphasising with the frequent repetition of the first person pronoun *je/moi* and the possessive adjectives *mon/ma/mes* that she alone was responsible for committing them. The tone becomes increasingly

boastful. Each deception is recounted with pride: 'Ce n'était rien encore', 'Je fis plus'. There are no honourable motives for her *aveu*, it springs from provocative malice, from the pernicious desire to humble the Other/Néron: 'C'était beaucoup pour moi, ce n'était rien pour vous'.[67] Thus in a startling reversal of the traditional confessional, we witness an attempt by the confessant to humiliate the confessor. Care is needed however regarding Agrippine's statement of fear at the death of Claudius, 'Mille bruits en courent à ma honte' (1183); the word *honte* could be misleading, Agrippine is sorry not for her sins but for their detection. She might well have uttered the defiant words of Inès and Garcin in their respective *aveu* scenes, 'Je ne regrette rien'. Moreover, the *penitent* demands not punishment but reward: 'Voilà mes forfaits. En voici le salaire' (1196). The wages of sin is Néron's eternal servitude. Terms such as *reconnaissant* and *respect* are pitted against *infidelité*, *mépris*, *injures*, *ingrat*, *affronts*, *perfidies*, revealing that Agrippine sees herself not as the wrong-doer but the wronged. Frank Rutger Haussman's comments on Racinian language in general are particularly poignant considered within the context of this *aveu*: 'La langue, chez Racine, est un instrument de domination. [...] Celui qui parle se donne l'apparence de respecter la liberté de l'autre, de prendre en compte ses sentiments et ses intentions [...] Le point de vue de l'autre est ainsi accepté en apparence, alors que l'objectif poursuivi est de capter sa liberté et de disposer de lui.'[68]

In *Bérénice* the action is entirely geared towards a confession: Titus's *aveu* that they must separate. Whereas Agrippine uses the *aveu* to manipulate and torment, for Titus it becomes an instrument of torture both for the Other and for the Self. Yet the difference between Titus's confession and that of Agrippine is that while Titus tells Bérénice 'il faut vous faire un aveu véritable', Agrippine talks of 'le sincère aveu que je voulais vous faire', the key verbs *falloir* and *vouloir* illustrate the clash of necessity and will and thus the disparate functions of the confession. While Agrippine uses it deliberately, for Titus it is enforced, the *aveu* is a terrifying ordeal, not a calculated act of volition. Like Sartre's Garcin, Titus must endure the torment of the enforced self-statement. When

Garcin enters Hell he realises that the stakes and grills have all disappeared and ironically the real instrument of torture is initiated by Garcin himself, 'Tant que chacun de nous n'aura pas avoué pourquoi ils l'ont condamné, nous ne saurons rien ... commence'. In *Huis Clos* Hell is not simply *les Autres*, it is *l'aveu.* There is a clear parallel with *Bérénice*. For Titus Hell is being forced to state one's thoughts. Antiochus, before he knows of the emperor's final decision to leave Bérénice, envies him 'Le plaisir de lui faire un aveu si charmant' (706), but Titus's reply reveals the nature of this chimera. The Keatsian world where beauty and truth fuse has no place in Racine:

> Ah! qu'un aveu si doux aurait lieu de me plaire!
>
> Je serais heureux si j'avais à le faire! (711-12)

The use of the conditional *aurait* and *serais* emphasises the phantasmagoric nature of such an *aveu*. The positive vocabulary, *plaisir/plaire*, *charmant/doux*, must ultimately give way to the harshness of the 'aveu véritable' (1363).

The confession itself in Act IV of *Bérénice* presents an initial paradox of power: it is the ruler who must adopt the humble stance of confessant. This dichotomy is captured by the strange mixture of ferocity and submission in the confessional scene; the imperatives *Rappelez, Forcez, fortifiez, Contemplez*, reflect Titus the authoritative ruler, but they are juxtaposed with terms normally associated with war, *vaincre*, *retenir*, *commander*, *barbare/barbarie*, *cruel/cruauté* and verbs like *agiter*, *dévorer*, *déchirer* which convey the destructive consequences of the confession for both Self and Other.[69] As we noted in Chapter Two, the sense of the shameful here is not brought about by the cruelty of the *aveu*, but is inherent in love itself: 'J'aimais, je le confesse' (1343).[70] Racine is also careful to stress the alienating effect of the confession with the repetition of terms such as *abandonner*, *se séparer*, *désunir*, *s'éloigner.* Confessional discourse in *Bérénice* therefore does not so much function to establish a relationship of power in the way that it does in *Britannicus*, but rather destroys existing relationships isolating not just Self from Other, but Self from Self: Titus tells Bérénice that he has come 'Pour me chercher

moi-même, et pour me reconnaître' (1384).[71] Confession therefore, far from consoling the confessant, results in a dramatic alienation from his very self.

Related examples are Bajazet's and Atalide's confessions to Roxane: these present a curious blend of shame, self-vindication and supplication. Atalide's first words to her confessor, 'Je viens mettre mon coeur et mon crime à vos pieds', contrast sharply with Agrippine's first words to Néron, 'Approchez-vous, Néron, et prenez votre place'.[72] Bajazet's 'J'aime, je le confesse' (1493) and Atalide's juxtaposition of *coeur* and *crime* are immediately revealing not just because they highlight the traditional *mea culpa* stance of the confessional, but also because they recall Titus's attitude to love: the shameful is once again rooted in love itself. Yet the shame is mitigated in these confessional scenes in a way that it is not in *Bérénice*. The sin is repeatedly justified,[73] responsibility ostensibly shifted to the confessor.[74] But this justification in turn sits uneasily with the idea of just desserts reflected firstly in the rhyme *mon crime / courroux légitime* (1557-58) and then in *mon crime / mort légitime* (1609-10). It seems that Racine is proffering an unfathomable paradox.

Yet here again the truth does nothing to heal the wound between Self and Other; on the contrary it pours salt in the wound. Roxane clearly intends to use confession to torment the confessant: 'Laissez-moi le plaisir de confondre l'ingrat. / Je veux voir son désordre et jouir de sa honte' (1360-01), but the situation turns out to be one of checkmate. Bajazet's and Atalide's confessions merely aggravate their 'sin'. By stressing their love for each other, they underscore Roxane's rejection, thus simply intensifying her vulnerability and isolation. Her reaction reveals her feelings of dejection and separation, 'comble de gloire', 'indigne honneur', 'vil rebut', 'De mon rang descendue' (1533-37). This sense of alienation is further emphasised by the shift from *tu* to *vous* which indicates distance, an assertion of otherness. Bajazet is given the chance to repent, 'ta grâce est à ce prix', but the word *prix* informs us that forgiveness is not freely given, it must be bought. The penance meted out is a cruel vengeance which results in the

paradoxical situation where the confessant declares he will do penance only as a means of punishing the confessor: 'Je ne l'accepterais que pour vous en punir' (1548). Shockingly, confession, the traditional means to reconciliation, becomes simultaneously a means of manipulating and suppressing the Other, and the means by which one is manipulated and suppressed.

Confession thus intensifies rather than attenuates antagonisms. It implies reconciliation, salvation, even forgiveness, but these become curiously perverted in all three plays. After the *aveu* scene in *Britannicus* we do not find reconciliation, but rather heightened conflict and a return to deception. Néron's apparent concession to Agrippine, 'Avec Britannicus je me réconcilie' conceals his 'horrible dessein', 'J'embrasse mon rival, mais c'est pour l'étouffer'.[75] At the end of *Bérénice* there is no salvation, but condemnation. The dream of eternal life together is transformed into the nightmare of never dying. There will be no blissful reunion in heaven, but an eternity of anguish and alienation. The vocabulary of death, *il ne s'agit plus de vivre, m'arracher la vie, mourant, expirer,* while highlighting the notion of destruction and separation, does not convey any real sense of an end to life; phrases such as 'une absence eternelle', 'Pour jamais', 'd'éternels chagrins' present a vision of a future of everlasting torment, an existence attuned to hell.[76] After the confessions in *Bajazet* there is no forgiveness, only revenge. Roxane wants Bajazet to witness the horrific death of her rival at the hands of the *muets*, and his refusal to participate in this sickening retribution means that he himself is inexorably punished.

The act of confessing is thus stripped of all consolation; it is presented as a wretched, destructive act, an alarmingly effective instrument of mental torture.[77] In plays driven by the desire to acquire knowledge and control of the Other's mind, confession accurately expresses something of the complexity of Self/Other relations. In *Britannicus* Agrippine employs confessional techniques to humble and gain mastery over Néron; in *Bérénice* Titus's obligatory confession means that he is governed and punished by his own verity,

he destroys himself as well as Bérénice; and in *Bajazet* confessional communication serves to mock and afflict both confessant and confessor alike. The confession therefore provides a fundamental discourse which helps us gain an insight into the inner movement of the merry-go-round, that is, the intricacies and ironies of Racine's power relationships.

However the plays under examination portray even more direct attempts to govern the inner space of the Other's conscience. We witness a series of sadistic actions designed to bring about the surrender of the Other's mind and reduce the capacity for free thought through the ruthless exercise of power.

The spy scene in *Britannicus* presents the most chillingly vivid enactment of this dark desire to acquire control of the Other's mind. Here we witness the sadistic staging of a mock confession, the theatricalising of Junie's thoughts as Néron *wants* to see them:

> Il vaut mieux que lui-même
>
> Entende son arrêt de la bouche qu'il aime.
>
> [...]
>
> Caché près de ces lieux, je vous verrai, Madame.
>
> Renfermez votre amour dans le fond de votre âme
>
> Vous n'aurez point pour moi de langages secrets ... (667-68, 680-81)

It is interesting to compare Estelle's vehement objection in *Huis Clos* to the words *mort* and *damnés* as a description of their situation: 'Je vous défends d'employer des mots grossiers'. Her objection reflects her own refusal to accept the truth, her own *mauvaise foi*, but here in *Britannicus*, the suppression of words is much more sinister, its goal stretches beyond mere self-deception. In effect this scene demonstrates the unprincipled manipulation of language to gain mastery over the Other. Néron successfully narrows the range of discourse: Junie abandons the vocabulary of love and adopts the language of power, *lieux*, *puissance*, *l'Empereur*, *Rome*, the imperative *Retirez-vous*. By depriving her of words in this way, he deliberately attempts to eliminate feeling, to prevent

connection, both mentally and emotionally. For Britannicus the end result is an effective form of mind control: Néron gloats at his malign success in manipulating his rival's thoughts, 'Je l'ai vu douter du coeur de son amante'. His subsequent words to Narcisse demonstrate that this tyranny of the mind once begun must continue, 'Par de nouveaux soupçons, va, cours le tourmenter'. However, Néron clearly fails to capture Junie's mind. The suppression of a word or a range of words does not make the corresponding thought unthinkable. Her dry 'Vous êtes obéi' signals submission only in the realm of action. Néron's own reluctant admission in the following scene, 'Elle aime mon rival, je ne puis l'ignorer' reveals his realisation that submission is not possession.[78] The mental torture of Junie represents a certain kind of possession, but the pleasure of *absolute* possession, that is mind control, remains unattainable.[79]

Given the limited nature of such possession, we find characters seeking to impose a certain image or thought on the Other's mind which *cannot* be erased. This explains the importance attached to the moment of death in Racine. There is a curious emphasis on the manipulation of the Other's last or dying thought for clearly it is a thought which cannot alter, a thought which will remain fixed forever, a final seal on the Other's mind. Racine's preoccupation with the dying thought is apparent from his first tragedy. We recall Polynice's last words to Etéocle, 'Traître, *songe en mourant* que tu *meurs* mon sujet' (1364). In *Bajazet* the same fixation with the final thought is evident in Atalide's desperate attempt to convince herself that Bajazet does not love Roxane: 'Et j'aurais *en mourant* cette douce *pensée* / [...] / Ce n'est point un amant en vous que je lui laisse' (970, 974). Roxane highlights this too, but in a more sinister way. Her initial attempts at mind control pivot on an appalling abuse of power. We recall in particular her dialogue with Bajazet in II, 1:

> Songez-vous que sans moi tout vous devient contraire? (505)
>
> Songez-vous que je tiens les portes du Palais? (507)
>
> Songez-vous, en un mot, que vous ne seriez plus? (512)

The twice-repeated interrogative resounds like a thundering imperative each time, mirroring the desire to control, to transfix, to immobilize the Other's consciousness.[80] However, if these thoughts are temporarily frozen, there is always a danger that the ice will melt. This is rectified by her elaborate torture plan for Bajazet, 'Qu'il n'ait en expirant que ses cris pour adieux' (1320), and for Atalide,

> Quel surcroît de vengeance et de douceur nouvelle
>
> De le montrer bientôt pâle et mort devant elle,
>
> De voir sur cet objet ses regards arrêtés ... (1325-28)

Roxane is clearly imagining the two scenes as though they were tableaux: *en expirant*, *mort*, *arrêtés*, the vocabulary reflects a desire to freeze the thought-process and focus the victim's attention on one image, an image which because it is the last one can never change. Whereas Néron remains nervously aware of the ephemeral nature of his control in that the pleasure of his possession depends on keeping Junie and Britannicus apart, Roxane seeks the ultimate mind arrest, the immutable thought. We have already seen this desire at work in *Andromaque*, reflected in Hermione's words to Cléone,

> Quel plaisir de venger moi-même mon injure,
>
> [...]
>
> Et pour rendre sa peine et mes plaisirs plus grands,
>
> De cacher ma rivale à ses regards *mourants*!
>
> Ah! si du moins Oreste, en punissant son crime,
>
> Lui laissait le r*egret de mourir* ma victime!
>
> [...] ma vengeance est perdue
>
> S'il *ignore en mourant* que c'est moi qui le *tue*. (1261-70)

These lines could be quoted to illustrate the speed with which love thwarted by sexual jealousy turns to hate in Racine, but they also highlight the totalitarian desire to possess the Other's mind, notably at the moment of death. Andrew Hiscock's comments are particularly poignant: 'The will to destroy is a superlative example of self-assertion, and destruction is itself a manifestation of the desire to contain and to possess'.[81] In this

respect, Racine's perception of death is remarkably similar to that which we find in *Huis Clos*. Death for both Racine and Sartre, far from being a solitary experience, on the contrary becomes a major facet of *pour autrui* in that it represents the triumph of the point of view of the Other. In *Huis Clos* this is apparent in the numerous flashbacks when those in Hell are tormented by the knowledge that their identity has been sealed in the eyes of the living. For both playwrights the image of the Self in the eyes of the Other, the desire to control another conscience, becomes as much a feature of death as of life.

Death has traditionally been considered central to the concept of tragic drama. I would like to continue with this contingent theme of violence to examine the way in which Racine uses the spectacle of violence and death, and in particular of violent death as a technique of mind control. (For example, even the mere perspective of a bloody end is often sufficient to bully characters into submission.)[82] We saw in Chapter One how power is based on fear and force in *Britannicus* and *Bajazet* and how this undermines and erodes the very foundations of political power. Both of these plays present very powerful evocations of violence which not only demonstrate something of the nature of the political world, but also focus on the fierce battle for control of the inner world.[83]

The atmosphere of the *sérail* is unrelievedly grim and chilling; it is immediately portrayed as a violent place, terrorized by the ever-vigilant *muets*, themselves condemned by violence to eternal silence. This state of fear created by Amurat is deliberately maintained by Roxane. Despite the persistent re-occurrence of the word *prompte* in relation to death in *Bajazet*, dying is very much a prolonged process.[84] The inhabitants are constantly threatened with elimination, a fact reflected in the abundance of terms denoting death: *mourir*, *périr*, *perdre*, *expier*, *expirer*, *assassiner*, *sacrifice*, *trépas*, *supplice*. Even the vocabulary of life is used negatively, it too in effect becomes a synonym for death.[85] We are constantly reminded of the precariousness of life which is always in someone else's hands: 'J'ai sur votre vie un empire suprême', 'arbitre de ta vie,

'Du pouvoir qu'Amurat me donne sur sa vie', 'Je vous dois tout mon sang; ma vie est votre bien', 'Dans ton perfide sang je puis tout expier'.[86] *La vie* is something the Other has to *donner*, to *offrir*, or alternatively to *trancher*, *arracher* or *abondonner* at will.[87] Life is lived in a violent context; characters either fear for their own life or that of another. The repeated use of the sinister, threatening phrase 'en un mot' reminds us of the uncertainty of continued existence for the life or death of the characters in this play depends literally on one word: 'D'un mot ou d'un regard je puis le secourir', 'Seigneur. Dites un mot, et vous nous sauvez tous', '... en un mot vous vivez', 'Songez-vous, en un mot, que vous ne seriez plus', 'S'il m'échappait un mot, c'est fait de votre vie'.[88] All are baleful forecasts of the final *Sortez* which sends Bajazet to his death, the sublime illustration of the exercise of an arbitrary, despotic power.[89] Moreover, the bloodletting is presented as endless, Atalide asks 'Quel sang pourra souffire à son ressentiment' (1447). Roxane is portrayed as a rapacious, primitive beast with an insatiable lust for blood: Atalide warns Bajazet that 'Elle aura plus de soif de mon sang que du vôtre', and later paints a gruesome picture of her own death at the hands of the Sultane, 'Couverte de mon sang, par vos mains répandue'.[90] The *sérail* is clearly a place where death is piled upon death: Bajazet's death is immediately followed by that of Roxane whose execution in turn is immediately succeeded by that of her assassin, 'Nos bras impatients ont puni son forfait / Et vengé dans son sang la mort de Bajazet' (1691-92). The merciless nature of the vocabulary highlights the brutality and ferocity of the retribution: *puni*, *vengé*, *sang* and *mort*.

These death scenes, however, are not gratuitous. Their importance lies in the impact they are expected to have on the Other's mind. In *Bajazet* Racine invites us to experience the horror of violent death for ourselves. Various senses are engaged; we are invited to taste blood, to hear the dying cries of the victim, and to feel the murderous blows:

> Et *goûter*, tout sanglant, le plaisir et la gloire ... (121)
>
> Elle aura plus de *soif* de mon sang que du vôtre. (765)

Qu'il n'ait en expirant que ses *cris* pour adieux. (1320)

J'aime mieux en sortir sanglant, couvert de *coups*. (631)

Catherine Brosman in her analysis of the *regard* in Sartre's work, remarks that of all the senses, sight in particular captures the notion of Otherness because it involves distance: 'Whereas taste and touch require direct contact with the body, sight, at the opposite extreme, spans distance. Unlike hearing, moreover, sight is very precisely orientable, directed.'[91] It is therefore all the more interesting that in *Bajazet* we find taste, hearing and touch, the senses which normally construct bonds between people, being portrayed as negative and divisive, bound up in the antagonistic interrelation of which sight is simply the most prominent. The main emphasis remains on how the executions are observed. Death is externally presented. The frequent occurrence of *sang* and *sanglant(e)* presents vivid and macabre images of the brutality of the executions (121, 557, 631, 768, 1395, 1686); the stress is ultimately on the visual. The victims' suffering becomes the object of someone else's speculation:

Et je pourrai donner *à vos yeux* effrayés

Le spectacle sanglant que vous me prépariez. (766-68)

Quel surcroît de vengeance et de douceur nouvelle

De le *montrer* pâle et mort devant elle,

De voir sur cet objet *ses regards* arrêtés ... (1325-37)

Dans les mains des muets viens la *voir* expirer ... (1544)

The aim of this disturbing voyeurism is to produce an alienating effect on Bajazet (and the audience). This is brought home particularly by the second quotation: it is hoped that the victim will become an *objet*, depersonalised in the eyes of the lover who will, in turn, cease to identify with him. However, while the effect is alienation, it alienates him (and us) from Roxane, not Atalide.

A final example of Racine's use of these death-scenes comes in the closing scenes of *Bajazet*. Here we are invited to visualise Roxane's own death at the hands of Orcan as we hear how he was seen to 'Retirer son poignard tout fumant de son sein' (1676). Note

the macabre, sordid realism in the image of fresh blood signified by the adjective *fumant*: it almost seems as if Racine has captured the very moment of transition between life and death. However again this death scene does not simply offer such bloody imagery for melodramatic effect, the cruelty is not an end in itself.[92] Orcan's execution of Roxane is immediately followed by an order, 'Adorez [...] l'ordre de votre maître' (1682). The nature of the imperative is all-important: the characters are not being told to *act* in a certain way, but to *think* in a certain way. The frenzy of killing is to be succeeded by ecstatic worship of the leader. Violence and fear of violence are employed as a technique to suppress unorthodox thoughts.

Hence paradoxically, although the deaths are externally presented, their purpose is to produce an internal outcome. The enforced voyeurism is to ensure the manipulation of the thought-process; the grim realism of the spectacle is supposed to suffice to *change* the Other's mind.

In *Britannicus* the image of violence is once again a technique employed to achieve mind control. Néron is clearly intent on establishing an atmosphere of fear which will prevent any uneasy questioning of his power. A contrast is drawn between violent and non-violent methods of execution. Narcisse points out that 'le fer est moins prompt, pour trancher une vie, / Que le nouveau poison que sa main me confie', and later Burrhus remarks that 'Le fer ne produit pas de si puissants efforts'.[93] A slow brutal death by beating is thus opposed to a swift death by poisoning. However this does nothing to alleviate the horror, the brutality or the ultimate impact of Britannicus's death. Firstly, the extinction of life is conveyed through terms which imply suffocation. Néron tells Burrhus, 'J'embrasse mon rival, mais c'est pour l'étouffer' (1314). In his subsequent justification, 'Tant qu'il respirera je ne vis qu'à demi' (1317), the asphyxiating effect of the juxtaposition of *respirer* with *à demi* leaves us almost gasping for breath. Secondly, we are struck by the marked repetition of *coup* in the lead-up to the murder lending this essentially non-violent death violent undertones (1455, 1464, 1511, 1545). The violence

inherent in *coup* is then translated into the onomatopoeic thrust of the noun *coupe* - the instrument of death:

> César prend le premier une coupe à la main. (1622)
>
> Ma main de cette coupe épanche les prémices ... (1624)
>
> La coupe dans ses mains par Narcisse est remplie. (1628)

One should note the gradual progression from the vague to the specific: '*une* coupe', '*cette* coupe', '*la* coupe'. In this way, Racine, with the precision of a modern film director, gradually focuses our attention solely on the instrument of death. Only those parts of the body in close proximity to the goblet are mentioned: 'une coupe *à la main*', '*Ma main* de cette coupe', 'La coupe *dans ses mains*', and finally '*ses lèvres* à peine en ont touché les bords'.[94] Each time the direction of our gaze is meticulously controlled as the goblet becomes sharply defined. The effect is an intensification of our revulsion and horror; a testimony to the deadly accuracy of Néron's mental tyranny.

The death of Narcisse is equally illuminating. In V, 8 we are given a telling account by Albine of his attempt to prevent Junie's escape, the event which triggers his brutal execution:

> Le peuple cependant, que ce spectacle étonne,
>
> Vole de toutes parts, se presse, l'environne,
>
> S'attendrit à ces pleurs, et, plaignant son ennui,
>
> D'une commune voix la prend sous son appui.
>
> [...]
>
> César les voit partir sans oser les distraire.
>
> Narcisse, plus hardi, s'empresse pour lui plaire.
>
> Il vole vers Junie, et, sans s'épouvanter,
>
> D'une profane main commence à l'arrêter.
>
> De mille coups mortels son audace est punie;
>
> Son infidèle sang rejaillit sur Junie.
>
> César, de tant d'objets en même temps frappé,

La laisse entre les mains qui l'ont enveloppé. (1739-42 [...] 1747-54)

It is interesting that strikingly similar terms are used to describe both Narcisse and the Roman people, terms which dehumanise both. The Romans 'Vole de toutes parts, se presse, l'environne', the image is one of a flock of birds gathering; Narcisse '... s'empresse / Il vole vers Junie', the vulture makes for its prey. The only reminder that they are human are the references to 'la profane main' of Narcisse and 'les mains' of the people. Yet paradoxically, these allusions to body parts also have the effect of depersonalisation. Our attention is no longer focused on the victim or the executioner, but rather on the effect of the murder scene on the mind of those who witness it.

Just as in *Bajazet*, the beating which brings about Narcisse's death is presented externally. The brutality of the murder is conveyed through the gruesome image of his blood spraying over his intended victim, 'Son infidèle sang rejaillit sur Junie'. However, again the principal concern is on how the physical blows are translated into the thought-process of the spectator - in this case Néron. The dramatic point of Albine's account is not Narcisse's death, but that Néron *sees* it: 'César de tant d'objets en même temps frappé' (1753). The physical beating, the *mille coups* which kill Narcisse become the mental equivalent in Néron, *tant d'objets*, *frappé*. Hence if the description of the execution is dominated by physical action, the outcome once again is internal. Racine immediately elaborates on Néron's state of mind after what he has seen: his 'silence farouche' signifies that we are in the inner world although his distressed train of thought manifests itself in physical reactions, 'Il marche sans dessein', 'yeux mal assurés', 'regards égarés', his discourse limited to one word, 'Junie', and his thoughts ostensibly of suicide (1756-60). Thus in the end the savage killing of Narcisse presents a form of poetic justice; Néron, the man who began his quest for control over hearts and minds by restricting Junie's range of expression, then by using the threat of death, and finally death itself to instil fear and force others to acknowledge his power, finds that in a bizarre twist, his techniques of manipulation and suppression have rebounded.

Perhaps, however, the final and most daring instance of thought-manipulation through images of violence in this play is performed on us. The image Racine imprints on the minds of the spectators as they leave the auditorium is clearly one of impending carnage and the feeling is unequivocally one of fear. A harrowing picture is painted for us by Burrhus. He firstly asks Néron, 'Songez-vous dans quel sang vous allez vous baigner?' (1329), and warns how in the future he will have to 'laver dans le sang [ses] bras ensanglantés' (1346). Both statements contain a curious image of cleansing signified by the jocund and carefree connotations of *baigner* and *laver*. Both also shock us by the juxtaposition of these terms with the gruesome imagery evoked by *sang*. In this way, these positive terms acquire negative connotations which create a lasting effect. The repetition of *sang* in *ensanglantés* leaves a grim impression of a future defined in terms of endless bloodshed. Albine's description of Néron in the final scene exudes a fearful energy: 'Chacun fuit son silence farouche. / [...] / Et l'on craint' (1755, 1759). Her account intensifies our horror and sharpens the mental image of the brutality yet to come. It seems therefore that the last minds to be manipulated by the perspective of violence and death are our own.

When considering the question of violence, we confront a double paradox when we turn to *Bérénice*. Ostensibly there is none, yet an atmosphere of cruelty suffuses the play, an atmosphere sustained by the recurrence of words like *cruel (le)(s)/cruauté, barbare/barbarité*. Indeed it is suggested that new levels of cruelty are attained, 'Néron, tant détesté, / N'a point à cet excès poussé sa cruauté' (1214). Secondly, no one in the end dies, but there is a sense of death throughout signified by the prevalence of words like *fatal, adieu(x), jamais*. This paradox is essential for understanding Racine's dramatisation of the battle for thought control.

In criticisms of *Bérénice* it is now a commonplace to denounce the play as slow-moving, even as an anti-tragedy.[95] The absence of bloodshed has caused particular concern; critics have found it difficult to accept a tragedy without the expected fatality.[96]

However, with no visible signs of cruelty, I would suggest that Racine is inviting us to look elsewhere for the violence. Antiochus's opening word as the curtain goes up, 'Arrêtons', immediately halts the physical action and initiates a drama rooted in the hidden world of thoughts. Antoine Adam has suggested that in *Bérénice* Racine was taking to the limit one aspect of Aristotle's theory of tragedy, that of simplicity of action,[97] but I would argue that this play represents an attempt to highlight even more incisively that it is not power over the physical world, but rather power over the inner world which ultimately dominates our relations with others. Death, violence and cruelty are all internal in *Bérénice*.[98]

Death is present from the start of the play, but unlike in *Bajazet* where it is feared and avoided, in *Bérénice* it is actively sought to end the eternity of life. Antiochus tells us, 'J'espérai de verser mon sang après mes larmes', then reports on Bérénice, 'Elle implore à grands cris le fer et le poison', while Titus declares, 'J'espérais de mourir à vos yeux'.[99] However, more importantly, death is used as a method of manipulating the Other's thought-process, but this time the means is not murder but suicide. Antiochus hopes that a heroic death will at least ensure him a place in Bérénice's thoughts and stir the emotions that he failed to in life, 'Le ciel sembla promettre une fin à ma peine: / Vous pleurâtes ma mort ...' (215-16). Titus warns her thus:

> Et je ne réponds pas que ma main à vos yeux
>
> N'ensanglante à la fin nos funestes adieux
>
> [...]
>
> Vous voilà de mes jours maintenant responsable.
>
> Songez-y bien ... (1421-22, 1424-25)

By offering her the bloody spectacle of his own death, Titus tries to manipulate Bérénice's sense of guilt and responsibility and thereby gain control not only of her actions, but more importantly of her thoughts, a fact hammered home by his final command, *Songez-y bien*, which temporarily suspends the action and sharpens the

mental image of his death. In this way his initial order, 'Forcez votre amour à se taire' (1051), is now executed through adept thought control.

Bérénice too realises that death is a potent weapon against another consciousness, 'Si ma mort toute prête enfin ne le ramène' (976). There is an oppressive atmosphere of cruelty as she imagines inflicting the most refined torture on Titus:

> Si devant que mourir la triste Bérénice
> Vous veut de son trépas laisser quelque vengeur,
> Je ne le cherche, ingrat, qu'au fond de votre coeur.
> Je sais que tant d'amour n'en peut être effacée;
> Que ma douleur présente et ma bonté passée,
> Mon sang, qu'en ce palais je veux même verser,
> Sont autant d'ennemis que je vais vous laisser:
> Et, sans me repentir de ma persévérance,
> Je me remets sur eux de toute ma vengeance. (1188-96)

There is a clear desire to balance the accounts in this speech. Bérénice had believed Titus to be indulging in 'cette cruelle joie' (1315) and was convinced that the Senate would 'applaudir votre cruauté' (1329). Now we are reminded of that Shakespearian sense of justice, 'Like doth quit like, and Measure still for Measure'; mental cruelty will be met with mental cruelty, her death will provide tragically impressive retribution for his crime.[100] Indeed Bérénice's view of the effect her death will have is not dissimilar to that of Agrippine in that she envisages an afterlife of grotesque vitality in punishing the living.[101] The repetition of the verb *laisser* here highlights her own demise but by no means gives the impression of complete absence. It also conveys the notion of bequeathing, of inheritance almost, but what Titus will inherit is essentially the mental anguish he inflicted; her bequest is an eternity of regret, guilt and self-loathing. We shudder at the violence when she believes herself betrayed by Titus. Her 'sans me repentir' reminds us of Roxane's 'sans songer [...] Sans consulter', while the adjective *toute* stresses the extent of her feelings of betrayal and the depth of the corresponding

desire for revenge. Most importantly, however, these lines demonstrate a skilful manipulation of Titus's conscience. We note the key lines, 'Je ne le cherche, ingrat, qu'au fond de votre coeur / Je sais que tant d'amour n'en peut être effacée', and observe the unusual confidence of the *Je sais* as the weakness is identified, the target marked, the inner world brought under seige. Her *bonté passée*, her *douleur présente*, and the *sang* she is about to spill will combine to form the assault on Titus's psyche. These terms are interesting in that together they could be seen to represent Bérénice's consciousness: her past love for Titus, her present feelings of dejection, and the revenge she is about to reek. Yet significantly, these emotions are perceived as quite distinct from Bérénice herself, it is as if they will take on a life of their own after her death, thus magnifying her sense of isolation and rejection. These convergent pressures of past, present and future lend intensity to the assault on Titus's conscience and are underpinned by the barbed sounds of *ennemis*, *vengeur* and *vengeance* respectively.[102]

In the closing stages of the play Racine draws our attention to the lack of death with Bérénice's words, 'Je ne vois que [...] de sang prêt à couler' (1473-74). The rejection of a bloody denouement results in the creation of a sombre atmosphere suggestive of a time and place somewhere between the living and the dead. The characters die in themselves, existence has become a living death. The denouement is the most unsettling aspect of all; the absence of death means that there is no satisfying sense of completion at the end of *Bérénice*. Again we are reminded of Garcin's final word in *Huis Clos*, 'Continuons'. In the last few lines of the play we find the repetition of words like *dernier* and *adieu* which emphasise an ending juxtaposed with a succession of verbs in the future tense, *suivrai*, *vivrai*, *verrai*, which project us forward and clearly imply continuation. Finality and infinity thus appear to collide, a collision which has been foreshadowed throughout the play; we recall Titus's profession that 'Mon rang ne sera qu'un long banissement' (754), and how he dreads the thought of 'une longue vie' (756). Similarly we remember Bérénice's bleak vision of the future,

> Dans un mois, dans un an, comment souffrirons-nous,

[...]

Que le jour commence et que le jour finisse

Sans que jamais Titus puisse voir Bérénice (1113-16)

Terms which signal the isolating effects of death, *banissement, finisse*, sit uneasily with terms which denote infinity, *long(ue), jamais*, to highlight the joyless nature of future existence. It is therefore odd that Phillips should talk of the characters proceeding into 'the *non-existence* of silence' when the emphasis is clearly very much on continued existence, even if speech is at an end.[103] Indeed just as at the beginning of the play when the word 'Arrêtons' signalled a move away from physical action and a retreat into the internal world of thought, so the absence of speech at the end merely accentuates this interiorization. There can be no more words to express love, regret, suspicion, shame or anger. In a twisted version of tragic destiny, the characters must now live on, trapped within their own minds, always remembering, always longing for the Other, playing out an endless drama of *pour autrui*.[104]

In this discussion of violence, cruelty and death we have noted how the intricate and often perplexing dynamics of the infernal merry-go-round of power are revealed in ironic reversals of dominance and submission. We have seen how the undeniable power to inflict pain does not necessarily correspond to mind control. Indeed, on the contrary, such power often rebounds, revealing the complexity of the struggle for control. The futility of the resort to violence as a means of controlling the Other's thoughts is eloquently expressed in *Huis Clos* by Inès as Garcin begins to make threatening moves towards her: 'Ha! elles s'ouvrent, ces grosses mains d'homme. Mais qu'espère-tu? On n'attrape pas les pensées avec les mains [...] Je te tiens.'

If the spectacle of violent death reveals the way in which physical violence translates into mental anguish, this evidence is sustained and accentuated by the terms *larmes, pleurs/pleurer* which signify overtly the infliction of mental pain and betray the same ironies of power through dramatic reversals of intention. Firstly it must be noted that, on

the whole, tears, as a symbol of emotion, are kept hidden from the Other; characters usually shed tears *en secret*,[105] or simply repress them.[106] However, the tears which are not hidden exert a tremendous power revealing the complexity of the struggle for control. They represent the power of the Other either to relieve suffering[107] or to inflict it.[108] And it is this ability to torment that is closely connected with the power of the *regard*[109] for ostensibly great stress is laid upon the fact that one is seen to cry.[110] Tears, as an (involuntary) externalising of emotion, mean that characters can no longer hide behind the duplicity of speech: tears reveal where language conceals. Under the gaze of the Other, characters are reduced to the status of an object with the emphasis often on shame and humiliation. However, as we noted, this is very much a two-edged sword since just like the spectacles of violence, the cruelty can rebound. Not only are tears a symbol of the Other's power, they can also expose his weakness. Néron cannot sit back in amused delight at the visible effects of his power to inflict pain for Junie's tears simultaneously confirm and deny his power. His capacity to torment is permeated with a sense of limits. The boundaries blurred when Néron the ruler endeavours to become Néron the lover now redefine themselves. Paradoxically his very power elucidates his weakness. Néron suffers the excruciating knowledge that the tears he has caused to flow are not for him, 'à mes yeux on le pleure, on l'adore' (755).[111] Similarly Antiochus as he contemplates life with Bérénice after Titus has ordered her departure, talks of

> ... le nouveau tourment
>
> D'apprendre par ses pleurs à quel point elle l'aime

and he is painfully conscious of his future role:

> ... j'aurai le triste emploi
>
> De recueiller des pleurs qui ne sont pas pour moi. (810-14)

The final key phrase here captures the essence of the otherness of the Other, that is, their fundamental inaccessibility and separateness. The power to possess hearts and minds is not a power enjoyed by Racine's rulers. Tears, therefore, do not always signify a triumphant conquest of the victim's mind, but rather backfire and reinforce the agony of rejection.[112]

We have seen how characters are divided by deceit and betrayal, how they try in vain to protect themselves by seeking refuge in ignorance or silence, but clearly the principal problem remains, relentlessly gnawing away at them: they cannot possess other minds. Yet despite this, there exists a mutual interdependence related to this preoccupation with their existence in the thoughts of others and their inability to impose certain thoughts and images on the minds of others, all of which anticipates a major Sartrean theme in *Huis Clos*. The problem of identity in the eyes of the Other, what Francis Jeanson calls 'cette menace de jugement', underpins Racinian power relationships in the same way that it does Sartre's, revealing an essential facet of *pour autrui*.[113] Jacques Guicharnaud summed up its importance in *Huis Clos*, 'This image of Hell is a metaphor of the hopeless suffering of individuals in search of their definitions in the eyes of others, yet constantly brought back to themselves'.[114] While Racine may not offer us an image of Hell, the characters in the plays under examination exhibit the same concern with their worldy image as Garcin, Inès and Estelle do three centuries later. Garcin tries to promote understanding between himself and his fellow inmates by telling them, 'Aucun de nous peut se sauver seul', yet the prospect of mutual assistance is ultimately and tragically confounded by the liberty of each character to impose an identity on another. Inès's words of comfort to Estelle, 'tu te trouveras au fond de mes yeux telle que tu désires', is the ultimate temptation and the ultimate illusion. In her subsequent malign taunt, Inès reveals the implacable power of the mirror: 'Je suis le miroir [...] je te tiens!' In the same way, a significant part of the tragic interest of *Britannicus*, *Bérénice* and *Bajazet* lies in this tension between the self-image the characters try to project and the freedom of others to reject this image.

In the course of *Britannicus* Néron's obsession with self-image becomes a determining factor in the progression of the action. We are immediately aware that he has to make a choice regarding his style of government; he can either continue his hitherto virtuous rule, or descend into tyranny. This stark choice is evoked by two opposing images of his

reign which pivot on his fixation with personal identity. Both Burrhus and Narcisse shrewdly home in on Néron's preoccupation with his reputation in the eyes of others. Firstly Burrhus proffers a utopian vision of his reign:

> Quel plaisir de penser et de dire en vous-même:
>
> "Partout, en ce moment, on me bénit, on m'aime;
>
> On ne voit point le peuple à mon nom s'alarmer,
>
> Le ciel dans tous leurs pleurs ne m'entend point nommer,
>
> Leur sombre inimitié ne fuit point mon visage,
>
> Je vois voler partout les coeurs à mon passage!" (1359-64)

The quixotic nature of this description is immediately conveyed by the extraordinary union of *penser* and *dire*. The customary antagonism appears to have disappeared. It is interesting, too, in this respect that Burrhus depicts Néron's reign by using a series of negatives; he presents it not as it is, but how it is not in order to convey simultaneously the heights to which Néron can aspire and the depths to which he can sink. Neither however portrays the actual situation. The emphasis is very much on the ideal: terms such as *plaisir*, *bénit*, *aime*, *coeurs*, together with the fact that the people are markedly the focal point, their emotions and desires a central concern, present the image of a utopian rule.

Yet despite the fanciful nature of Burrhus's account, he is successful, albeit temporarily. This becomes apparent as Néron later relates to Narcisse his fears of how Britannicus's murder would be viewed:

> Mais de tout l'univers quel sera le langage?
>
> Sur les pas des tyrans veux-tu que m'engage,
>
> Et que Rome, effaçant tant de titres d'honneur,
>
> Me laisse pour tous noms celui d'empoissoneur?
>
> Ils mettront ma vengeance au rang des parricides. (1427-31)

We witness in Néron here the same fear of being categorised that we will see in Sartre's Garcin who tardily strives against being branded *lâche*. Narcisse's initial reassurance to

Néron ('Non, non, dans leurs discours ils sont plus retenus', 1438) is soon contradicted by his presentation of a mirror image of Néron's rule where the Roman people are far from restrained in their mockery of him. It is an image which effectively launches the most devastating assault on Néron's identity:

> Quoi donc! ignorez-vous tout ce qu'ils osent dire?
> "Néron, s'ils sont crus, n'est point né pour l'Empire;
> Il ne dit, il ne fait ce qu'on lui préscrit:
> Burrhus conduit son coeur, Sénèque son esprit.
> Pour toute ambition, pour vertu singulière,
> Il excelle à conduire un char dans la carrière,
> A disputer des prix indignes de ses mains,
> A se donner lui-même en spectacle aux Romains,
> A venir prodiguer sa voix sur un théâtre,
> A réciter des chants qu'il veut qu'on idolâtre,
> Tandis que des soldats, de moments en moments,
> Vont arracher pour lui les applaudissements."
> Ah! ne voulez-vous pas les forcer à se taire? (1467-79)

Significantly, 'dans leurs discours ils sont plus retenus' has rapidly transformed into 'tout ce qu'ils osent dire'. This time the description rings true. The juxtaposition of *ignorez* and *dire* in the first line and then of *si* and *croire* in the second signals that thought and speech are once again dissociated. The idyllic fusion of *penser* and *dire* which lends a touch of the chimerical to Burrhus's account has now reverted into the accustomed antithetical clash. The offensive is merciless and unremitting from the outset. Narcisse's ostensibly innocuous opening question is in reality shockingly provocative. The apparently inoffensive *ignorez-vous* strikes the first severe blow: once again the relentless play on knowledge and ignorance proves crucial. Narcisse is clearly aware that the agony of not knowing is as unbearable as the truth. His calculated use of the verb *oser* strikes the second blow. Its inherent sense of moral wrong, of overstepping limits, is clearly intended to increase Néron's sense of outrage. It is significant that

Narcisse like Burrhus uses direct speech to increase the impact, but whereas Burrhus reports what Néron *could* say to himself, Narcisse, with consummate skill, strikes a raw nerve by reporting what others *are* saying of him: Burrhus's 'Quel plaisir de penser et de dire en vous-même' is translated by Narcisse into the critical 'tout ce qu'ils osent dire'. Hence, in one line alone, Narcisse has already hit his target with remarkable accuracy.

It is not just this one line which is significant. Narcisse's account overall constitutes a systematic destruction of Néron's self-image. In his confrontation with Junie in II, 3 we saw how Néron tried to set himself apart from the rest of humanity. The repetition of *seul* and of *digne*, combined with statements like 'Si j'en savais quelque autre au-dessus de Néron' (574) and the frequent use of his title *César* to impress upon her his superiority, illustrate that he is constructing an identity for himself based on his status in the power hierarchy.[115] However, this image of himself as self-sufficient, majestic and dignified that he tries to project is promptly shattered by Narcisse's shamefully demeaning portrait of him as a puppet emperor with Burrhus and Sénèque pulling his strings. It is an image which inspires ridicule rather that awe. Significantly, Narcisse does present him in isolation from the rest of mankind, but this time he is distinguished by his *vertu singulière* which consists not in his exaltation, but in his degradation. The greatness of his rank is countered by a catalogue of frivolous activities, their meaninglessness conveyed by the pejorative connotations of their corresponding verbs: *disputer* signals that the man who is the 'maître du monde' (180) is reduced to inane squabbling; *réciter* implies mindless repetition with no hint of intelligent comprehension; *prodiguer*, in this context, suggests effusive ranting and contains undertones of the unrestrained and unrefined. The scarcely concealed sarcasm inherent in words like *ambition*, *vertu*, *excelle*, reveal a pernicious twisting of the knife in the wound. Moreover, the accent is firmly placed on display reflecting the sham nature of Néron's power: *spectacle*, *théâtre*, *idolâtre*. The verb *arracher* reinforces this notion of mock sovereignty by revealing that even the adulation is false. This is not only a virulent indictment of Néron's reign, it constitutes a crushing negation of his self-image. For

Néron power and identity are inextricably bound together and now when the mighty, awesome *César* holds the mirror up, the reflection he confronts is an impotent, ineffectual puppet. In the words of Estelle, 'le cristal est en miettes'.

It seems, however, that Néron's dilemma is ultimately resolved by the contradictory images projected by the final words of the first and last lines of this portrait: *dir*e and *taire*. These evoke two possible states of speech, judgement and silence, with two corresponding, implicit images of Néron, one the figure of ridicule and victim of derisory comments, the other the fearful tyrant before whom the world falls silent. It is this which in the end influences Néron's course of action. He must now suppress the audacious insults and coerce the world into the silence brought about by a ruler who is feared. We can almost hear him utter what Garcin will say to Inès three hundred years later when the door of Hell flies open and he refuses to leave: 'Je ne pouvais pas te laisser ici, triomphante, avec toutes ces pensées de moi dans la tête'. This is the prime motivation behind the murder of Britannicus. Only by such violence can Néron burn an acceptable and ineradicable self-image onto others.

In *Bérénice*, critical discussion of the issue of identity appears to have been stifled by the predominance of another, but related, area of concern, that is, the fierce debate over why Titus leaves Bérénice. While Roland Barthes and Roger Planchon insist that he leaves her because he no longer loves her, Raymond Picard and Lucien Goldmann maintain that his actions result entirely from his sense of duty towards Rome.[116] Not only does this polemic demonstrate the elusiveness of thoughts, for clearly even in the privileged position of spectator, we cannot be sure Titus's thoughts and feelings, it also raises the complex and problematic question of motivation. Gérard Defaux sums up the impact of the Barthes / Planchon, Picard / Goldmann debate, 'ils nous ont redonné conscience de l'ambiguïté fondamentale de toute action en générale'.[117] However, it seems that neither explanation of Titus's actions is sufficient. Titus leaves Bérénice first and foremost to establish an identity in the eyes of the world.

The importance of identity in the play is brought to the fore by the emphasis placed on the vigilance of Rome. In Chapter One we noted how Rome is forever present and inescapable.[118] It effectively represents the Other who is always there, watching and judging. Bérénice talks of 'Tous ces yeux qu'on voyait venir de toutes parts / Confondre sur lui seul leurs avides regards' (309-10). Significantly the eyes are disembodied. Through this curious imagery which in effect isolates the power of sight, Racine focuses our attention on the intensity and tyranny of the *regard*.[119] When we first meet Titus he is aware that he is under scrutiny, '... les secrets de son coeur et du mien / Sont de tout l'univers devenus l'entretien' (341-42). His anguished interrogatives to Paulin betray the impact of these prying eyes as he expresses his concern with his public image, 'De la reine et de moi que dit la voix publique? / Parlez: qu'entendez-vous?' (344-45). Moreover, various statements indicate that Titus is a man obsessed not only with his present identity in the eyes of Rome, but with his posthumous identity. He asks himself 'Sont-ce là ces projets de grandeur et de gloire / Qui devaient dans les coeurs consacrer ma mémoire?', and he tells Bérénice that he wants to 'laisser un exemple à la posterité'.[120] The problem of establishing a satisfactory self-image is therefore as exquisitely painful for Titus as it would be later for the tormented characters of *Huis Clos*.

Interestingly, Titus is also intent on preserving the image he has of Bérénice:

> Demain elle entendra ce peuple furieux
>
> Me venir demander son départ à ses yeux.
>
> Sauvons de cet affront mon nom et sa mémoire
>
> [...] fuyons un spectacle funeste. (733-35, 747)

Significantly the stress here is very much on Bérénice's actual presence, *elle entendra, à ses yeux, un spectacle*. Under the gaze of Rome her sense of shame, *affront*, will be intensified. This is testimony to how the *regard* functions as a major instrumentation of *pour autrui*. The look entails judgement; observation is possession. The emphasis on her

presence also indicates that Titus is conscious of how Bérénice's humiliation will come both from being forced to see herself as she appears for others, to recognise herself in the image Rome imposes upon her, and yet being powerless to control it. Titus knows that Bérénice will thus become fixed in an identity which will be established forever. Moreover, he clearly fears adopting Rome's perspective of Bérénice. 'Sauvons [...] sa mémoire' is the principal, tortured cry of this speech. It expresses Titus's desire to refuse the judgement of Rome, to reject the tarnished image it seeks to confer upon Bérénice; in short, it is an afflicted supplication to ward off any contamination of his mental perception of the woman he loves, and to retain instead the present unsullied image of her. It is interesting in this context to note the similarity between Titus's fear of seeing Bérénice as Rome sees her, and how Inès, when she was alive, forced Florence to adopt her judgement of her lover: 'Je me suis glissée en elle, elle l'a vu par mes yeux'. Likewise, in Hell, she threatens to manipulate Estelle's view of Garcin, 'Je l'aurai, elle vous verra par mes yeux'. The way in which Bérénice's departure, her final act, will be viewed by others is therefore clearly of paramount importance. Titus tells Antiochus:

> Que l'Orient vous voie arriver à sa suite
>
> Que ce soit un triomphe, et non pas une fuite. (759-60)

These lines are echoed in V, 2 as Arsace explains to Antiochus why Bérénice wants to leave, '... avant que Rome instruite / Puisse voir son désordre et jouir de sa fuite' (1267-68). Again the vocabulary of vision is significant. Titus is attempting to control the judgemental look by limiting its scope to an image which he finds acceptable. This kind of manipulation of course is no longer an option for the characters of *Huis Clos*. One recalls Garcin's obsession with how his final act was interpreted. Shot for desertion, he insists he was making a stand for the pacifist values in which he believed. Yet however much he rages against the label *lâche*, he cannot alter it. His comment on Gomez highlights his powerlessness to access other minds and reform their opinions of him: 'il ne parle plus, ce qu'il pense de moi est rentré dans sa tête'. In the minds of others, Garcin's identity is sealed forever.

Reactions to the character of Antiochus also help us discern and understand problems of image within the play. He has attracted a great deal of criticism, most of it negative. Goldmann declares simply that 'Antiochus a trop peu de poids dans la pièce' and talks of 'la pâle figure d'Antiochus';[121] Picard sees him as a glorified confidant, 'Antiochus peut bien essayer de se faire prendre pour Oreste, et jouer les parfaits héros tragiques, il ne parvient pas à détourner notre attention de ce grand amour condamné, et il reste un simple médiateur dramatique, un confidant monté en grade';[122] Audet and Kovacovic insist that, 'il assume le visage d'un pusillanime irrémediablement installé dans la faiblesse';[123] Gossip is equally pejorative, referring to him as a 'born loser'.[124] Such criticisms are largely due to the apparent non-activity of Antiochus.[125] The arresting power of Bérénice upon him is apparent from the moment the curtain rises on the action.[126] This play paradoxically starts with a stop, 'Arrêtons'. This notion of postponed action is maintained at various intervals: Arsace tells him 'elle arrête vos pas' (82), and warns him '... depuis si longtemps la reine Bérénice / Vous arrache, Seigneur, du sein de vos Etats' (80-81). Antiochus is portrayed as always leaving, but never quite managing it. However, far from detracting from Antiochus's tragic status, this non-action serves to accentuate an interesting variation on the theme of identity, that of non-identity.

The ruler / lover division is immediately evident. He is defined as one of the Orient's 'plus grands rois' (14) and as Bérénice's 'amant autrefois' (13), the term *autrefois* indicating an identity which has gone forever, but Antiochus nevertheless spends five Acts trying to regain it. His opening self-interrogation, 'es-tu toujours le même?' (19) instantly reveals this crisis of identity. His internal agitation is emphasised by the phrase *coeur agité*, and the frequent recurrence of the verbs *trembler* and *craindre*.[127] Arsace's question, 'Quel caprice vous rend ennemi de vous-même?' (99), reinforces this notion of a split identity. Curiously however, the ruler and the lover seem to cancel each other out, for Antiochus is generally perceived as not having an identity of his own. Indeed even in his confession of love to Bérénice he portrays himself as merely emulating Titus, 'Son malheureux rival ne semblait que le suivre' (224).[128] His tribute to Titus contains

suffocating and nullifying undertones, 'Titus m'accable ici du poids de sa grandeur: / Tout disparaît dans Rome auprès de sa splendeur' (793-94); *accable, poids, disparaît,* these are terms which signify oppression, where one identity is being established, another is being suppressed. It is not surprising, therefore, that he repeatedly attempts to establish an independent identity:

> J'espérai de verser mon sang après mes larmes,
>
> Ou qu'au moins, jusqu'à vous porté par mille exploits,
>
> Mon nom pourrait parler, au défaut de ma voix. (212-14)

Yet the identification with Titus is relentlessly underscored. Bérénice tells him that, 'Cent fois je me suis fait une douceur extrême / D'entretenir Titus dans un autre lui-même' (271-72). His reply is a forceful rejection of this non-identity:

> Et c'est ce que je fuis. J'évite, mais trop tard,
>
> Ces cruels entretiens où je n'ai point de part.
>
> Je fuis Titus: je fuis ce nom qui m'inquiète,
>
> Ce nom qu'à tous moments votre bouche répète.
>
> Que vous dirais-je enfin? Je fuis des yeux distraits
>
> Qui, me voyant toujours, ne me voyaient jamais. (273-78)

He is neither heard nor seen; he is simultaneously there and not there, a non-being. *Je fuis* is repeated four times underlining the urgent need to escape this oppressively shallow existence. His express desire to avoid Titus's very name renders all the more ironic Titus's later entreaty as he relinquishes Bérénice, 'Que mon nom soit toujours dans tous vos entretiens' (762). His hope for an independent identity seems futile for he must subsequently become the voice of Titus who asks him to break the news of the separation from Bérénice, 'Voyez-la de ma part / [...] / il faut que pour moi vous lui parliez encore' (701, 703). The ensuing rage of Bérénice further reinforces the association, 'Je me verrai puni parce qu'il est coupable' (932).[129]

It appears therefore that despite the negative perception of Antiochus's role, the dramatic interest of his character lies in the way in which he illustrates with poignancy

the tensions underlying the question of identity, a major facet of Racinian theatre and one which would later become almost a hallmark of Sartre's.[130]

Just as *Bérénice* begins with a radical concern for self-image, so it ends in the same way, as Titus cries out for judgement: 'Voyez / Jugez-nous', a cry which echoes long after the curtain has descended upon the action.

In the character of Bajazet we are made very aware of the discrepancy between the self-image he wants to project and the reality of what he is. He presents an incisive self-portrait to Roxane:

> Que suis-je? J'attends tout du peuple et de l'armée!
>
> Mes malheurs font encor toute ma renommée.
>
> Infortuné, proscrit, incertain de régner ... (481-83)

The reality he confesses to Roxane, contrasts sharply with the ideal he later discloses to Atalide:

> Mais enfin je me vois les armes à la main;
>
> Je suis libre; et je puis contre un frère inhumain,
>
> Non plus, par un silence aidé de votre adresse,
>
> Disputer en ces lieux le coeur de sa maîtresse,
>
> Mais par de vrais combats, par de nobles dangers,
>
> Moi-même le cherchant aux climats étrangers,
>
> Lui disputer les coeurs du peuple et de l'armée,
>
> Et pour juge entre nous prendre la renommée. (947-54)

These lines signify a search for a new identity. *Non plus* indicates a break with the past. The despairing 'Que suis-je?' in the previous quotation is answered here, 'Je suis libre'; the affirmative *je puis* and terms like *armes*, *combats*, *dangers*, now emphasise action where there had been passivity, 'ne précipitons rien'; *silence* gives way to *disputer*. The use of the dramatic present tense here together with the breathless punctuation creates the effect of movement. However there is a dream-like quality underpinning this speech.

The effect of movement, of change, is no more than a tragic illusion. The telling phrase *je me vois* uncovers the reality: Bajazet is casting himself in the role of hero. The image of himself engaging in *de vrais combats* in the end is just that: an image.

In the same way that Garcin fights against being branded a *lâche*, and Titus fights against the label *ingrat* (526), so Bajazet too struggles against an identity that will be imposed upon him:

> J'aime mieux en sortir sanglant, couvert de coups,
> Que chargé malgré moi du nom de son époux. (631-32)
>
> Mais sans cesse occupé des grands noms de ma race,
> J'espérais que, fuyant un indigne repos,
> Je prendrais quelque place entre tant de héros. (738-40)

Personal identity is therefore portrayed as a function of characters' interaction with each other and posterity. Paradoxically it highlights a tormenting interdependence in that characters need to define themselves in the eyes of others, and at the same time it demonstrates the isolating effects of the merry-go-round in that, once again, we see characters endeavouring to possess minds which are permanently out of reach.

In this world where relationships are defined in terms of endless hostility, where characters persistently seek to exert power over each other, one may be tempted to look to love as a solution. Love is the fundamental relation which binds people together, the supreme exemplification of *pour autrui.* Significantly, however, the language of love is rarely used positively. Henri Peyre has pointed out the fatalistic significance of the vocabulary of love in *Phèdre*, but the same holds true of the other plays.[131] The simple verb *aimer* clearly contains ferocious undertones throughout Racinian theatre. We find the stark, but fatal 'J'aime' of Oreste, of Néron, of Junie, of Pharnace, of Phèdre, of Aricie, of Hippolyte, of Bérénice; we find too Antiochus's simple yet ominous

description, 'L'aimable Bérénice', Acomat's grim declaration, 'Bajazet est aimable'.[132] Racine's words of love therefore embrace the tension, the terror and the fury of passion. Even when love is reciprocated, the stress is either on a character's suspicions about the infidelity of the lover,[133] or on extreme emotion signalling the turmoil of the relationship.[134] We find those in love constantly require reassurance of the Other's love.[135]

Love relationships, whether reciprocated or not, whether familial or sexual, aim at total possession. This is conveyed linguistically by the use of the term *objet* which expresses unequivocally the desire to ensnare the Other and reduce him / her to the status of a thing which can be controlled. Agrippine demands an explanation from Néron of how Junie 'Devient en une nuit l'objet de [son] amour'; Junie reminds Néron of how she was promised to Britannicus, 'Son père me nomma pour l'objet de ses voeux'; Bajazet, talking of Atalide and Roxane, laments how 'Des coeurs ... / M'avaient pris pour objet de toutes leurs pensées'.[136] We often find that this stifling embrace is expressed by the restrictive *ne ... que:* Acomat tells us of Roxane's obsession with Bajazet, 'La Sultane éperdue / N'eut plus d'autres désirs que celui de sa vue'; Roxane wants to be 'Souveraine d'un coeur qui n'eût aimé que moi'; Titus insists upon the undivided nature of his love for Bérénice, 'Sans avoir, en aimant, d'objet que son amour', and knows of Bérénice 'Que son coeur n'a jamais demandé que le mien'.[137] All of these lines elucidate a terrifying singleness of desire which presents a sombre testimony to the relentless drive to capture and assimilate the Other.

It is perhaps in *Bajazet* however, that we find the finest expression of the relation of dominance and submission. Significantly, Bajazet's suggestion that his death may allow Roxane to regain her place in Amurat's heart provokes a telling reaction:

> Dans son coeur? Ah! crois-tu, quand il le voudrait bien,
>
> Que, si je perds l'espoir de régner dans le tien,
>
> D'une si douce erreur si longtemps possédée,

Je puisse désormais souffrir une autre idée,

Ni que je vive enfin, si je ne vis pour toi?

Je te donne, cruel, des armes contre moi,

Sans doute; et je devrais retenir ma faiblesse:

Tu vas en triompher. Oui, je te le confesse,

J'affectais à tes yeux une fausse fierté.

De toi dépend ma joie et ma félicité. (547-56)

These lines convey a disparagingly accurate portrait of Self / Other relations in the realm of love. This is not simply a revelation of Roxane's shameful surrender to desire; this speech conveys simultaneously her need to possess Bajazet, signified by the verb *régner*, and also presents a confession of sordid enslavement to the Other. The adjective *possédée* here significantly contains the notion of subjugation which is in turn accentuated by terms such as *faiblesse*, *confesse*, *dépend*, all indicating submission.

The language of love therefore reveals the same desire to possess the Other which underpins Racinian relationships in general. Far from providing a possible escape route, love paints a depressingly sombre portrait of human relations. The difficulty with both reciprocated and unreciprocated love in Racine is that characters see love as something to which they are entitled. The love they give *must*, indeed *ought* to be returned in equal quantity. We saw in Chapter Two the way in which love is viewed in terms of power, but here we must add that emotions begin to take the form of a financial transaction. Any assumptions we may have of altruism underlying love are stripped away as we promptly find ourselves entering the world of emotional *economics*.

Apostolidès's comments on the nature of the origins of Amurat's power in *Bajazet* are significant in that they point to the notion of reparation, an essential feature of Racine's power relationships in general: 'On sait en effet que le pouvoir naît d'un don auquel rien ne peut être rendu, un don qu'aucun contre-don ne viendra abolir'.[138] Sylvie Romanowski describes this kind of exchange in terms of circuits of power: 'Amurat's

form of exchange is governed by the following code: the leader bestows a gift that is one-sided in that it can never be completely repaid. [...] As a "chiefly" ruler, he can give much more than he receives and still not be depleted. His gifts do, however, give rise to obligation on the part of the receiver; thus a circuit of power is set up, controlled by Amurat's code'.[139] The Sultan's power is thus founded on the fact that no repayment can ever match his original gift. However, these statements must be broadened for in general we find that this kind of power relationship evolves into one determined by recompense. Characters, as noted above, demand reciprocation of their feelings, emotions must equate, a fact best illustrated by Roxane's chill warning: 'Quand je fais tout pour lui, s'il ne fait tout pour moi ...' (320). The sense of magnanimity inherent in the frequently referred to *bienfaits* and *bontés* is deceptive; these are only ever a loan and the debt will invariably be called in, a fact underlined by the repetition of the terms *payer* and *prix*.[140] The key to these relationships founded upon this notion of balancing the emotional accounts, lies in the terms *reconnaissance* and *récompense*, for it is the form of repayment which is crucial. Despite the sustained branding of characters as an *ingrat*, gratitude itself is never enough to balance the accounts.[141] Even maternal love is not freely given. Agrippine persistently bemoans her reward for placing Néron on the throne: 'Néron jouit de tout; et moi, pour récompense ...', 'Voilà mes forfaits. En voici le salaire'. Albine asks the all-important question as to what form repayment should take in the opening scene, 'Quels effets voulez-vous de sa reconnaissance?'.[142] The answer of course is that Néron's repayment for his power should take the form of political impotence. Burrhus's question to Agrippine captures this irony, '... et sa reconnaissance / Ne peut-il éclater que dans sa dépendance?' Indeed Néron himself sums up the paradox in his own reiteration of what others are asking, 'Est-ce pour obéir qu'elle l'a couronné?' and in his subsequent mockery of this mandatory transfer of power where the rhyme of *reconnaissance* and *puissance* points to their synthesis: '... je veux que ma reconnaissance / Désormais dans les coeurs grave votre puissance'.[143]

Yet such power relations are rarely effective; the requisite balance more often than not is never restored. Consequently, if the emotional *debt* is not paid in full, then it will be called in by means of retribution. While Agrippine threatens to expose Néron as a usurper, Roxane's wrath erupts on both Atalide and Bajazet as she acknowledges their mutual love: 'Ainsi donc mon amour était récompensé'.[144] Clearly the accounts have not been balanced, 'Après tant de bonté, de soins, d'ardeurs extrêmes, / Tu ne saurais jamais prononcer que tu m'aimes!' (1305-06). If Bajazet will not reciprocate her love, then he must pay with his life. The *debt* is therefore called in as she imagines presenting Atalide with the dead body of Bajazet for they must now, 'Me payer les plaisirs que je leur ai prêtés' (1328). The key word here, *prêtés*, indicates a perverse justification of cruelty, a cruel levelling of the emotional accounts. In the words of Charles Péguy, 'Tout est adversaire, tout est ennemi aux personnages de Racine; ils sont tous ennemis les uns des autres [...] les cruautés qu'ils exerceront sur lui, comme lui-même a déjà justifié les cruautés qu'il exercera sur eux'.[145] Here the past deception of Atalide and Bajazet is balanced by a future of vengeance and retribution. The idea of accepting the past as it is proves unbearable, therefore it is restructured and projected in a distorted mirror image into the future. Bajazet's repeated statements of debt, 'je tiens tout de vous', 'je vous dois tout mon sang; ma vie est votre bien', and his frequent references to his *reconnaissance*, are insufficient for Roxane; recognition of indebtedness does not in itself constitute satisfactory compensation.[146] What Roxane requires of Bajazet is not dissimilar to what Garcin requires of Estelle. We recall Estelle's elementary misjudgement as she tells Garcin, 'tu as ma bouche, mes bras, mon corps entier, et tout pourrait être si simple ...' Yet the situation is far from being *simple*. Garcin does not require physical possession. His question, 'Auras-tu confiance en moi?' reveals a different kind of need; it is Estelle's mind he must capture. The same is true of Roxane. Her physical power over Bajazet is insufficient, she must assimilate his thoughts. Her failure to achieve this can only manifest itself in violence, that is, the desire to suppress the Other. It is almost as if there has been an accumulation of interest for by the time we reach the final Act, Bajazet must

not only marry Roxane, but deny his love for Atalide, 'ta grâce est à ce prix' (1547). However, it is a price Bajazet cannot afford to pay:

> Je verrai la Sultane; et, par ma complaisance,
> Par de nouveaux serments de ma reconnaissance,
> J'appaiserai, si je puis, son courroux.
> N'exigez rien de plus: ni la mort, ni vous-même
> Ne me ferez jamais prononcer que je l'aime. (1139-43)

Even in *Bérénice* where love is requited, there is a recognition of imbalance and a corresponding threat to redress it. Titus concedes, 'Je lui dois tout', and knows that marriage would 'payer en un jour les voeux de cinq années'.[147] Yet he remains painfully aware that his repayment is not only inadequate, but a devastatingly harsh reversal of what Bérénice had expected, 'Récompense cruelle / [...] / Pour prix de tant de gloire et de tant de vertus, / Je lui dirai: "Partez, et ne me voyez plus"' (519-22). With this recognition of imbalance comes the inevitable demand to rectify it. Bérénice insists that amends be made for the *injustice* of the *ingrat* by means of a bloody and calculated vengeance - her own suicide.[148]

> Si je forme des voeux contre votre injustice,
> Si devant que mourir la triste Bérénice
> Vous veut de son trépas laisser quelque vengeur,
> Je ne le cherche, ingrat, qu'au fond de votre coeur. (1187-90)

Clearly therefore one cannot evade antagonistic and oppressive relations by seeking refuge in love (familial or sexual). In the end the principles of economic exchange applied to *goods* over which characters can have no control allows us to see the insecurity and vulnerability underpinning relationships as well as the desire to ensure that the Other has no advantage in the emotional stakes. For if the Other does not love with equal intensity, then clearly he/she has gained ascendancy. The self-sacrifice and generosity we traditionally associate with love fade as the ultimate human bond

becomes simply another, perhaps even the quintessential expression of the need to control the Other's thoughts and feelings.

Racine's power relationships, especially when seen from the Sartrean perspective of *pour autrui*, seem dark and pessimistic. We have seen how he explores the tension between our assumption of language as the principal means of engagement with others and the reality of language as a source of conflict and disunity. By emphasising the limits of language in this way, Racine draws our attention to the existence of the existential world that makes discourse possible, that is, the thought-process. With the emphasis on the anguish created by the gap between what is said and what is thought, we find ourselves in a bewildering hall of mirrors as a relentless process of seeking, watching and discovering is set in motion. However we are well and truly in the Racinian fairground for when the mirror ceases to lie, when characters finally find a true reflection of the thought in the word, we exit the hall of mirrors and are promptly led to the merry-go-round where a diversity of techniques of manipulation and suppression are developed to channel and control thought. We see how the truth is used not to improve relations, the truth which tortures in turn becomes an instrument of torture. In the famous spy scene in *Britannicus*, we shudder at how Néron simply attempts to stamp out the truth of Junie's thoughts through the reduction of language. Violence and violent death are employed either to leave a final imprint on the minds of the dying, or to blazon images of brutality on the minds of the living. Perhaps, however, it is the question of identity which ultimately best elucidates the tension between this need to possess the Other's mind and his freedom to resist such possession. The problem of personal identity as we have seen, dramatises the otherness of the Other. Finally, any temptation we may have to look to love as a bond to unite is quickly overcome. We find that for those in love the merry-go-round whirls ever faster as the need to possess becomes greater.

It may seem paradoxical to suggest that the image of the merry-go-round is the most positive one that Racine leaves us, but while it reveals the pain of being separate, of

being other, it is an image which ultimately highlights the failure to control. Garcin's comment in *Huis Clos* captures the essence of the repeated futile attempts to gain possession of another conscience, 'Nous nous courrons après comme des chevaux de bois, sans jamais nous rejoindre'; the Sartrean merry-go-round is startlingly similar to that of Racine. It is essentially a whirl of power and impotence, a perpetual hankering after a power which is ultimately unattainable. Racine's characters seek to possess hearts and minds, yet the subjectivity of the Other refuses such possession. It seems appropriate, given Racine's equivocal portrayal of power, that he should leave us with a final ambiguity, that is that the endless cycle of the infernal merry-go-round provides the only glimmer of light in the anguish of the Hall of Mirrors.

[1] See footnote 25 of the Introduction for an explanation of how this term will be understood.

[2] We will again deal principally with *Britannicus*, *Bérénice* and *Bajazet*, but other plays which exhibit similar characteristics will generally appear in the footnotes. Quotations from Sartre's *Huis Clos* are taken from scene 5 unless otherwise indicated. An earlier version of Section A may be found in *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 18 (1996), 133-44.

[3] Woshinsky, p. 4.

[4] Rhiannon Goldthorpe, p. 106.

[5] The notion of language as performance has elicited a great deal of comment, particularly in relation to Racinian / classical tragedy where the banishment of physical action only seems to emphasise its importance.

[6] Eugene Vinaver, 'Action and Poetry in Racine's Tragedies', in *Racine: Modern Judgements*, ed. by Roy C. Knight (London: Macmillan, 1969), pp. 147-60 (p. 152).

[7] D'Aubignac, *La pratique du théâtre*, p. 282; Barthes, p. 60; Henry Phillips, 'The Theatricality of Discourse in Racinian Tragedy', in *Modern Language Review*, 84 (1989), 37-50 (45). For an interesting discussion of Barthes's speech / act theory see Stephen Fleck, 'Barthes on Racine: A Different Speech Act Theory', in *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 14 (1992), 143-55.

[8] Henry Phillips, 'Text as Theatre', in *Racine: Appraisal and Reappraisal*, ed. by Edward Forman (Bristol: The University of Bristol, 1991), pp. 25-37 (pp. 31-33).

[9] Maya Slater, 'Racine's *Bajazet*: the language of violence and secrecy', in *Themes in Drama*, 13 (1991), 141-50 (141, my italics).

[10] A variety of critics have pointed out the significance of silence in Racine. See in particular, Yves Pihan, 'La Poétique du silence chez Racine', in *Cahiers Raciniens*, 16 (1964), 42-55; Richard Parish, '"Un calme si funeste": some types of silence in Racine', in *French Studies*, 34 (1980), 385-400. Phillips alludes to the importance of silence in his article, 'Theatricality of Discourse', but his analysis still pivots on the importance of the enunciation of feelings, the effect upon the listener, and what he calls, 'the irrevocable nature of words' (p. 41). For an alternative view, see Muratore's 'Racinian Stasis' where she puts forward the thesis that speech is not action, but a stance. Muratore then continues by exploring the way in which language hinders the progression of the dramatic action.

[11] Phillips, 'Text as Theatre...', p. 29. Phillips continues: 'Thoughts are not telepathically communicated on the stage; [...] they are enunciated to a listener.' This viewpoint is supported by Parish, *Racine: the limits of tragedy*, p. 203: 'the articulation of a feeling reinforces its power.'

[12] Phillipe Hourcade's comments on *Bajazet* hold true for all three tragedies under examination, 'Racine et le goût du spectacle dans *Bérénice* et *Bajazet*', in *Jeunesse de Racine*, Revue publiée avec le concours de la Diection Générale des Arts et des Lettres (1968), 66-82, (79): 'Les personnages, quand il va de leur intérêt, s'attachent à se tromper les uns les autres par des attitudes qui masquent leurs véritables sentiments. Bien plus, ils cherchent à se prendre en défaut et prononcent des paroles qui cachent toujours un piège'.

[13] *Bajazet*, 31.

[14] *Britannicus*, 1050; *Bérénice*, 871; *Bajazet*, 159, 1516, 1193. It is interesting too to note how Hippolyte refers to Phèdre's 'horrible secret' (*Phèdre*, 720), Axiane to 'un secret si fatal' (*Alexandre*, 976), Monime to her 'secrets sentiments' (*Mithridate*, 246, 286), Agamemnon to his 'funeste secret' (*Iphigénie*, 144).

[15] *Britannicus*, 1661; *Bajazet*, 368; *Iphigénie*, 655; *Esther*, 53.

[16] Peter Nurse, 'Towards a Definition of "Le Tragique Racinien"', in *Symposium*, 21 (1967), 197-221, (200), quotes Georges Le Bidois whose words capture this relentless quest to know the Other's thoughts

and feelings: 'Les personnages de Racine ont sans cesse les yeux ouverts. Il y a toujours quelqu'un plus maître d'eux qu'eux-mêmes et de qui dépend leur destinée. C'est à capter sa bienveillance, à surprendre les secrets mouvements de son coeur, à chercher par où s'insinuer, qu'ils dépensent tous leurs soins.'

[17] *Britannicus*, 1461, 1523, 724. It is interesting also that in *Andromaque* when Oreste asks Pyrrhus, 'Oserai-je, seigneur, dire ce que je pense?', there is a double deception involved, a Machiavellian strategy being played out: for what Oreste says is far from what he is thinking as we remember from Pylade's advice, 'Pressez: demandez tout pour ne rien obtenir' (*Andromaque*, 165, 140).

[18] *Bérénice*, 777, 173-74.

[19] *Bajazet*, 1065; *Iphigénie*, 597, 1333.

[20] *Alexandre*, 361; *Bajazet*, 274; *Iphigénie*, 1341; *Phèdre*, 511.

[21] *Bérénice*, 27, 369, 777.

[22] We recall Créon for example as he talks of his fruitless plans to place himself on the throne, 'Tu sais que je pensais lors à m'y placer' (*La Thébaïde*, 853); or Phèdre's mistaken belief that Hippolyte was immune to love, 'Je pensais qu'à l'amour son coeur toujours fermé' (*Phèdre*, 1207).

[23] *Britannicus*, 1331, 127; *Bajazet*, 1266, 1207, 1445. Pyrrhus asks himself despairingly of Andromaque 'Quelle est sa pensée?' (*Andromaque*, 655).

[24] *Bajazet*, 1010; *Mithridate*, 1135; *La Thébaïde*, 1003; *Britannicus*, 548; *Bérénice*, 292, 740.

[25] *Bérénice*, 1107 and *Bajazet*, 1289; *Bajazet*, 1485..

[18] *Britannicus*, 928; *Bajazet*, 897, 977, 1151.

[27] *Bajazet*, 976. Eriphile likewise tells us 'à ce discours je ne puis rien comprendre' (*Iphigénie*, 661); Thésée is left floundering in the dark after his conversation with Aricie, 'Quelle est donc sa pensée? et que cache un discours / Commencé tant de fois, interrompu toujours?' (*Phèdre*, 1451-52).

[28] *Alexandre*, 137, *Bajazet*, 1539, *Athalie*, 1641; *Iphigénie*, 1077; *Bajazet*, 8; *Iphigénie*, 1535.

[29] *Bérénice*, 1287, 207-08. Note also that Pyrrhus is reproached time and time again for renouncing the promises he once made (*Andromaque*, 69-70, 1313-14).

[30] *Bajazet*, 753, 1514; *Bajazet*, 743-44.

[31] *Britannicus*, 513; *Bajazet*, 347. Other plays provide similar evidence of misplaced trust: Porus bemoans 'la foi d'un amant infidèle et parjure' (*Alexandre*, 274); Hippolyte informs us of Thésée's infidelity, 'Sa foi

partout offerte et reçue en cent lieux' (*Phèdre*, 84); Thésée in turn finally doubting Hippolyte's guilt, reproaches Phèdre, 'c'est sur votre foi que je l'ai condamné' (*Phèdre*, 1620); Pyrrhus recognises that his word is worthless, 'Je vous ai promis la foi que je lui voue' (*Andromaque*, 1282).

[32] *Britannicus*, 1588; *Bérénice*, 177; *Bajazet*, 626, 1210.

[33] *Bajazet*, 1157, 886-88.

[34] See John Campbell's 'The Tragedy of *Britannicus*', in *French Studies*, 37 (1983), 391-403 (401); see also Maskell's analysis pp. 77-79, which captures the tension but not the perfidy underlying the act of embracing.

[35] The Judas-like kiss was foreshadowed in *La Thébaïde*: Jocaste's pleas to Polynice, 'Commencez[...] embrassez votre frère' (999), precede their deaths, 'Ils s'étouffent[...]en voulant s'embrasser' (890). This customary warm gesture is often cold and calculated; Xipharès is aware that 'Il feint, il me caresse, et cache son dessein' (*Mithridate*, 1189); for Mithridate it represents an unfeeling goodbye to his son, Polynice, 'Dans cet embrassement recevrez mes adieux' (*Mithridate*, 958); Thésée complains of Hippolyte, 'Ses froids embrassements ont glacé ma tendresse' (*Phèdre*, 1026). An embrace can result in the most excruciating torment: Oreste agonises at the image before him, 'Mais que vois-je? A mes yeux Hermione l'embrasse?' (*Andromaque*, 1633); Antiochus informs Bérénice of the concealed irony in an embrace which only accentuated his suffering, 'Titus en m'embrassant m'amena devant vous' (*Bérénice*, 242).

[36] *Britannicus*, 524, 709-10; *Bajazet*, 1229, 1633, 1274. Note too the words of Mithridate 'Trompons qui nous trahit' and 'Par un mensonge adroit tirons la verité' (1031, 1034).

[37] *La Thébaide*, 162, 302; *Bérénice*, 448, 621; *Bajazet*, 771, 919, 1152; *Mithridate*, 290, 291; *Iphigénie*, 907; *Phèdre*, 1088; *Athalie*, 165.

[38] *Alexandre*, 978; *Andromaque*, 895; *Bérénice*, 484; *Bajazet*, 225; *Phèdre*, 526; 1450, 1617; *Esther*, 697.

[39] *La Thébaide*, 617; *Alexandre*, 669, 1499; *Andromaque*, 135, 1227; *Britannicus*, 709, 741; *Bérénice*, 183, 345, 367, 623, 1153; *Bajazet*, 728; *Iphigénie*, 1161; *Phèdre*, 246, 979; *Athalie*, 1011; *Esther*, 683, 1044, 1151.

[40] *Alexandre*, 1499; *Andromaque*, 123, 325, 729; *Bérénice*, 1153; *Britannicus*, 427; *Bajazet*, 1126, 1640; *Mithridate*, 390.

[41] *Britannicus*, 740; *Bérénice*, 879; *Bajazet*, 1219, 260, 841. Similarly, Mithridate, frantic and forlorn, begs in three anguished interrogatives: 'Qui m'en éclaircira? quels témoins? quel indice?' (1023); Thésée asserts, 'Je veux de tout le crime être mieux éclairci' (*Phèdre*, 1459).

[42] *Phèdre*, 825; *Esther*, 35.

[43] *Bérénice*, 574; *Bajazet*, 550, 1236. Mithridate too tries to block out the truth by preventing himself from thinking, 'Je ne le croirai point. Allez, loin d'y songer...' (1005).

[44] *Britannicus*, 820, 1138, 784-85.

[45] *Bajazet*, 1528; 505, 507, 512.

[46] *Bérénice*, 1135-36, 555.

[47] *Bérénice*, 317, 155,34, 1446.

[48] *Bajazet*, 33, 279; Athalie attests with reservations, 'Je le *veux croire*, Abner; je puis m'être trompée' (583); Cléofile in *Alexandre* remarks:

> Quelque brave qu'on soit, *si nous voulons la croire*,
> Ce n'est qu'autour de lui que vole la victoire (85-86)

while Hermione tells Oreste:

> Je *veux croire* avec vous qu'il redoute la Grèce;
> Qu'il suit son intérêt plutôt que sa tendresse;
> Que mes yeux sur votre âme étaient plus absolus (*Andromaque*, 813-15).

[49] Eric Bentley, *The Life of the Drama* (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 260, aptly summarised this quintessentially tragic paradox: 'The natural wish to know is generally thwarted by the absence of any corresponding wish to face reality, the contradiction being the source of one of the archetypal tragic conflicts, classically presented by Sophocles in his *Oedipus Rex*.'

[50] *Bérénice*, 798, 918; *Bajazet*, 1225, 1300.

[51] *Bajazet*, 394, 284, 1479-80.

[52] *Bajazet*, 1080; *Andromaque*, 1560.

[53] *Bajazet*, 274, 1297.

[54] *Bérénice*, 584, 1332, 1354

[55] *Bérénice*, 1493, 1481-82. Ruth Sussman, '*Bérénice* and the Tragic Moment', in *Esprit Créateur*, 15 (1975), 241-51 (245), concludes that because Bérénice knows her ultimate fate, 'the uncertainty [...] of which [she] complains so bitterly, is illusory.' However, while Bérénice may secretly know the inevitable outcome, Sussman fails to realise that the play offers more than a simple refusal to confront reality. Such a comment overlooks the agonising suspicion that Titus no longer loves her and that he will soon forget her.

[56] *Mithridate*, 431, 439, 562.

[57] Similar examples abound in other plays. We hear Hermione's painful yet rhetorical questions, and witness a wretched Thésée left agonising in the dark :

> En ai-je pu tirer un seul gémissement?
>
> Muet à mes soupirs, tranquille à mes alarmes,
>
> Semblait-il seulement qu'il eût part à mes larmes? (*Andromaque*, 1400-02)
>
> Vous ne répondez point! mon fils, mon propre fils ... (*Phèdre*, 983)

[58] I therefore disagree with Audet and Kovacovic's interpretation of silence in *Bérénice* as consolitary: 'Dans *Bérénice*, le silence protège: il est espoir ...', p. 353. Gérard Defaux likewise seems to deny the power of silence, 'The Case of *Bérénice*: Racine, Corneille, and Mimetic Desire', in *Yale French Studies*, 76 (1989), 211-39 (227): 'In this universe that is at once public and private, this universe of politics and passion, speech is a two-fold power: the power to say and to do, evidence and sign of a mastery, a power capable of exerting its effects on minds and bodies as well as on others and on oneself. Inversely, silence is a symptom of impotence or weakness ...' While this may be true of Néron at the abduction of Junie, it must be recognised that silence, as the supreme exemplification of the inaccessibility of the Other, can just as easily be an instrument of torture, be it intentional or not. I would also dispute Sussman's assessment of the characters of Bérénice, p. 245: '[...]they act out of a need to exteriorize their emotions, play them out before the others as though their attitudes and feelings have no authenticity unless they are duly witnessed by another.' Sussman also talks of 'their insistence on public display and declaration of emotion.' On the contrary, the drama of *Bérénice* is provoked by the concealment of thoughts and emotions. J. A. Dainard, 'The Power of the Spoken Word in *Bérénice*', in *Romanic Review*, 67 (1976), 157-71 (166), rightly emphasises the urgency of communication in this play: 'Bérénice has the role of supplicant, the one who

must hope for enlightenment, and dread the worst. [...] Titus is the veritable incarnation of the power of the word.'

[59] *Bajazet*, 1225, 1117; *Britannicus*, 261-62, 1537; *Bérénice*, 644. It is interesting too to note how Hippolyte talks of 'le doute mortel dont je suis agité', how Œnone pleads with Phèdre 'Délivrez mon esprit de ce funeste doute', how Thésée is tormented by 'un doute qui m'accable' (*Phèdre*, 3, 245, 985), and how Monime reveals that 'Mille soupçons affreux viennent me déchirer' (*Mithridate*, 1130).

[60] *Andromaque*, 1141, 1306; *Britannicus*, 832. Venesoen, 'Le Néron de Racine ...'.

[61] *Britannicus*, 396, 679, 1638.

[62] *Bajazet*, 881, 879, 435, 438.

[63] Quoted in L. Knapp, 'Language and Politics in the Works of Sartre', in *Texts, Contexts and Concepts. Studies in Power and Politics in Language*, ed. by Sakari Hänninen and Kari Palonen (Jyväsklä: Finnish Political Science Association, 1990), pp. 108-09.

[64] *Britannicus*, 641, 1436; *Mithridate*, 473, 1556; *La Thébaïde*, 997; *Alexandre*, 197; *Bérénice*, 890, 1258.

[65] It is significant that Germaine Brée, 'Le Thème de la Violence Dans le Monde Tragique de Racine', in *Romanic Review*, 38 (1947), 216-25 (216), should talk of 'la puissance calme qui accompagne l'inaccessibilité aux sentiments', for clearly non-articulation of feelings and thoughts is a mighty weapon available to all of Racine's characters.

[66] *Britannicus*, 1195; *Bajazet*, 1569; *Bérénice*, 1363. Hermione likewise talks of 'cet aveu depouillé d'artifice' (*Andromaque*, 1309). Richard Barnett, 'Sur une scène de *Bérénice* (V, 6). Etude générative', in *Les Lettres Romaines*, 31 (1977), 144-66 (147), asks why Titus must make an 'aveu véritable', since the *aveu* alone contains the idea of sincerity: 'Pourquoi le besoin d'un tel qualificatif?'. The adjective, it seems to me, is an eloquent statement about the nebulous nature of speech in Racine, signalling as it does the dichotomy between speech and thought.

[67] *Britannicus*, 1143, 1159, 1138.

[68] Frank Rutger Haussman, 'Soupirs, larmes et pâleur, Aspects non verbaux de la "langue de l'amour" dans la littérature française des XVIe et XVIIe siècles', in *Travaux de Littérature*, 3 (1990), 407-16 (409).

[69] *Bérénice*, 1049-54.

[70] See Chapter Two, pp. 105-06 which outlines the occurrence of terms such as *honte, faiblesse(s), lâche, indigne*, in relation to love.

[71] Michel Foucault's comments on the Christian obligation to confess are interesting in that they reflect this repudiation of the self: 'As everybody knows, Christianity is a confession [...] everybody is obliged to tell [...] things to other people, and hence to bear witness against himself [...] The more we discover the truth about ourselves, the more we have to renounce ourselves.' Foucault cited by Matthew Senior, *In the Grip of Minos. Confessional Discourse in Dante, Corneille, and Racine* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1994), p. 225.

[72] *Britannicus*, 1576, 1115.

[73] See lines 1495, 1501-02, 1503, 1507, 1581, 1583-84, 1598.

[74] Maurice Baudin, 'The Shifting of Responsibility in XVIIth Century French Tragic Drama', in *Modern Language Notes*, 49 (1934), 152-58 (154, 158), gives what seems to be an over simplistic view of responsibility in classical tragedy: 'The theater of the classical period re-affirms the maxims: "Préserver nos héros du crime tant qu'il se peut", "Faire aimer nos principaux acteurs". Its apportionment of responsibility is arbitrary. [...] The shifting of responsibility [...] is a matter of etiquette'. Such an interpretation fails to take account of the nature of the Racinian *aveu*. The shifting of responsibility is not simply a matter of 'etiquette', nor is responsibility shifted solely to the confidant(e). On the contrary, as we have seen, it is an integral part of the struggle to gain ascendancy over the Other.

[75] *Britannicus*, 1300, 1325, 1314.

[76] *Bérénice*, 1102, 1176, 1186, 1125, 1108, 1111, 1150.

[77] Senior, p. 163, relates the disturbing nature of Racine's *aveu* scenes to the Jansenist theology of confession, 'A Jansenist never left the confessional feeling reassured; even the power of the sacrament left him worrying about the state of his soul. [...] the confessant was not supposed to be relieved but rather reduced to a state of total culpability and confusion, trusting only in the inscrutable truth and mercy of God.'

[78] *Britannicus*, 752, 754, 745, 749.

[79] Elizabeth Macarthur's remarks in 'Trading Genres: *Britannicus* and *Les Liasons Dangereuses*', in *Yale French Studies*, 76 (1989), 243-64 (258), on the ambivalence of this enforced theatricality are particularly

pertinent here: 'Theatricality may start out being a desire to manipulate and control, but it never rids itself of the danger of the unexpected, of tragic *peripeteia* or reversal ...'.

[80] Similarly Pyrrhus constantly tells Andromaque 'Songez-y', (367, 384, 973).

[81] Andrew Hiscock, *Authority and Desire: Crises of Interpretation in Shakespeare and Racine* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), p. 49.

[82] Michael Hawcroft, 'Racine, Rhetoric, and the Death *Récit*', in *Modern Language Review*, 84 (1981), 26-36, points out the way in which Racine's death *récits* differ from the conventional death *récit* in that they neither praise nor evoke pity for the victim. On the contrary, he highlights, with specific reference to *Andromaque*, the way in which these reports of death are employed for dramatic effect to incite negative emotions towards the victim in the listener's mind.

[83] It is significant that Brée, p. 221, pinpoints two key questions which she claims initiate and resolve the tragic action in Racine's theatre: 'Ferai-je violence?' and 'Me fera-t-on violence?'

[84] *Bajazet*, 5, 1281, 1293, 1354, 1362, 1408, 1737.

[85] Slater, p. 145, points out that out of thirty-four occurrences of the word *vie* in the play, the context is one of death in all but three cases.

[86] *Bajazet*, 509, 1529, 314, 519, 535.

[87] *Bajazet*, 285, 1497, 266, 1729, 323.

[88] *Bajazet*, 399, 620, 1471, 512, 542.

[89] Brody, '*Bajazet*, or the Tragedy of Roxane', p. 290 points out the particular significance of this final command as an illustration of the destructive nature of Roxane's power and more importantly of its limits: 'This terse order resolves a reckless experiment with power that began when Roxane waved open the harem doors on what seemed to her a brave new world where the formidable prerogatives of her station would earn her a once undreamt of felicity. But of all the imperatives that punctuate Roxane's style - and they are legion - *Sortez* is the only one to issue in decisive action. For this command alone carries with it full awareness of the limits and the vanity of power. Resigned now to the impossibility of bending people and circumstances to her private vision of the world, Roxane is at last ready to use her power for its assigned - perhaps its inherent - purpose: to destroy'.

[90] *Bajazet*, 1447, 766, 1612.

[91] Catherine Brosman, 'Seeing Through the Other: Modes of Vision in Sartre', in *South Central Review*, 4 (1987), 61-73 (62).

[92] Nor is it simply to retain his audience's attention as suggested by Slater p. 148.

[93] *Britannicus*, 1395-96, 1630.

[94] *Britannicus*, 1622, 1624, 1628, 1629.

[95] This apparent lack of movement in *Bérénice* has been well documented. James Supple focuses our attention on the debate in his critical guide to *Bérénice* by adopting the famous phrase from Racine's preface as the title of his first chapter, 'Faire quelque chose de rien', *Racine. Bérénice* (London: Grant and Cutler, 1986). See also Richard Parish's article on '*Bérénice*: tragedy or anti-tragedy?', in *The Seventeenth Century: Directions Old and New*, ed. by Elizabeth Moles and Noël Peacock, (Glasgow: University of Glasgow French and German Publications, 1992), pp. 98-107. Defaux's comments, 'Titus, ou le héros tremblant', p. 276, are particularly disparaging: 'il ne s'y passe en fait pour ainsi dire rien - rien en tous cas d'extraordinaire. C'est une pièce dont les rois ne semblent certes pas avoir à craindre de malheur plus grand que la perte de leur maîtresse ...'. John Campbell in his article 'Playing for Time in *Bérénice*', pp. 23-26, acknowledges that critics have on the whole viewed the play 'more as a static lament than a dramatic action' and comments on the 'sense of suspended time' and 'fostering an atmosphere which seeks to defy the laws of motion'. However, in '*Bérénice*: The Plotting of a Tragedy', in *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 15 (1993), 145-55 (145-46, 150), Campbell takes those critics who maintain that nothing happens in the play to task by elucidating how Racine builds dramatic suspense through the unpredictability of characters and ironic twists in the plot: 'From the beginning the term *élégie* has stuck to *Bérénice*. Whether said admiringly or with a curl of the lip, the implication is that the play has not much of a plot [...] Such interpretations can fix the characters as flies in amber [...] The plot of *Bérénice*, far from being static or transparent, is [...] an invisible compound of changing and conflicting emotions [...] The incessant fluctuations, vacillations and hesitations are the very stuff of this play just as surely as of *Andromaque* and *Britannicus*'.

[96] Greenberg, p. 135, remarks that '*Bérénice*'s rejection of blood and death [...], of the intense, perhaps masochistic, pleasure of the dramatic spectacle, would seem indeed to condemn it to being but a timid

reflection of its dramatic siblings. [...] *Bérénice* seems destined to a melancholia that can only "faire triste figure" when compared to the fury and passion of the other great tragedies of Racine'.

[97] 'Racine a voulu pousser à l'extême limite non pas exactement sa doctrine de la tragédie, mais un aspect particulier de cette doctrine, la simplicité de l'action' Antoine Adam, *Histoire de la littérature française au XVIIe siècle*, 4 (Paris: Domat, 1948-54). Significantly Adam bases his argument on Racine's Preface to the play written one year after the play itself.

[98] It is interesting that Greenberg, p. 136, associates the absence of death with a process of internalization, 'the creation of a "mental space", an interiorized sense of self based not exclusively on physical difference, but on metaphysical angst'.

[99] *Bérénice*, 212, 1230, 1093.

[100] *Measure for Measure*, V, 1. 414.

[101] See Chapter One, Section C, pp. 57-58.

[102] Jacques Scherer's assessment of the play as 'une *Andromaque* non sanglante où tous les personnages sont vertueux', therefore seems unfair and oversimplified. 'Les Personnages de *Bérénice*', in *Mélanges d'histoire littéraire (XVIe - XVIIe siècle) offertes à Raymond Lebègue* (Paris: Nizet, 1969), pp. 279-91, (p. 280).

[103] Phillips, *Racine: Language and Theatre*, p. 124, my italics.

[104] Greenberg, p. 144, suggests an alternative explanation by drawing a parallel between the absence of death and the impossibility of sexual fulfilment: 'Racine's first radical move in *Bérénice* was the elimination of the body, of death. When we consider the implications of this gesture, especially in terms of the "passionate" history the play purports to represent, we cannot but be struck by one further aporia this gesture implies. In a perverse interpretative move on our own part we can take this elimination of "death" from the scene of tragedy as implying, at one and the same time, the impossibility of "sexuality", the desexing of the theatrical scenario'.

[105] *Alexandre*, 493; *Andromaque*, 130, 1127; *Bérénice*, 36; *Bajazet*, 675, 1193; *Iphigénie*, 1710.

[106] *Mithridate*, 1648; *Bérénice*, 965, 1056; *Phèdre*, 184, 311, 1250; *Iphigénie*, 136.

[107] *La Thébaïde*, 679; *Andromaque*, 278, 1021; *Bérénice*, 480, 1033; *Bajazet*, 672, 700, 715; *Iphigénie*, 592.

[108] *La Thébaïde*, 1298; *Andromaque*, 949; *Britannicus*, 402, 1006; *Iphigénie*, 1097, 1726.

[109] Since Starobinski's compelling article, 'The Poetics of the Glance', the theme of the *regard* has featured prominently in many commentaries. See for example Louis van Delft, 'Language and power: eyes and words in *Britannicus*', in *Yale French Sudies*, 45 (1970), 102-12; Jules Brody, 'Les yeux de César: the language of vision in *Britannicus*', in *Studies in Seventeenth-Century French Literature presented to Morris Bishop*, ed. by J. J. Demorest (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962) pp. 185-201; Robert Emory, '*Bérénice* and the Language of Sight', in *Romance Notes*, 19 (1978), 217-22; James Doolittle, 'The Eyes of Athalie', in *Esprit Créateur*, 8 (1968), 149-59.

[110] *La Thébaïde*, 1237; *Alexandre*, 1006; *Andromaque*, 114, 129, 526, 1410; *Britannicus*, 448, 466, 746, 755, 1554; *Bérénice*, 745, 965, 1473, 1483; *Mithridate*, 389, 582; *Phèdre*, 1490; *Esther*, 282; *Athalie*, 1641.

[111] Starobinski notes, p. 98, 'The more visible the misery he causes, the greater will be for Néron the certainty that he is not loved'. Albert Thibaudet, 'Les Larmes de Racine', in *Nouvelle Revue Française*, 38 (1932), 890-900 (893), draws our attention to a similar paradox of power by highlighting the erotic charge of tears in Racine's theatre and the way in which 'ces pleurs aphrodisiaques' reduce those in power to a state of impotence.

[112] Starobinski, p. 97, remarks that, 'The tears he makes flow will prove to him that he exists in the eyes of her he loves. He holds now a certainty he lacked before: but the certainty is only that of being more than ever rejected'.

[113] Francis Jeanson, *Sartre par lui-même* (Paris: Seuil, 1955), p. 29.

[114] Jacques Guicharnaud, *Modern French Theatre: from Giraudaux to Genet* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 145.

[115] *Britannicus*: *seul*, 565, 579, 580; *digne*, 579, 600, 601, 602.

[116] Barthes, pp. 94-95, insists that Titus no longer loves Bérénice, which leads him to conclude that the play is a failed tragedy: '[...] c'est au nom de Père, de Rome, bref d'une legalité mythique, que Titus va condamner Bérénice [...] En fait, Rome est un pur fantasme [...] *Bérénice* n'est donc pas une tragédie du sacrifice, mais l'histoire d'une répudiation que Titus n'ose pas assumer'; Roger Planchon, '*Bérénice*', in *La Nouvelle Critique*, 41 (1971), 56-59 (59), writes along similar lines: 'Titus croit qu'il aime toujours

Bérénice, il ne sait pas encore qu'il ne l'aime pas'; Raymond Picard, *Oeuvres Complètes*, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1950-66), I, p. 460-61, on the other hand insists, '*Bérénice* est une tragédie de la raison d'Etat, ou les destinées individuelles sont sacrifiées à des nécessités politiques [...] Titus et Bérénice vont rejoindre Tristan et Iseult, Roméo et Juliette, Antoine et Cléopâtre des Amants'; Goldmann, p. 377, writes, 'Son amour pour Bérénice est absolu et il reste jusqu'à la fin de la pièce [...] Mais, d'autre part, la règne est, lui aussi, essentiel à son existence et il a ses exigences inexorables'. Barnett, 'Sur une scène de *Bérénice*', pp. 150-51, firmly in the Barthes / Planchon camp, discusses the way in which Titus betrays his duplicity through his choice of words. He talks of 'une renonciation relativement facile' and defines Titus thus: '... un beau parleur, un homme plus habile que sincère ou authentique et qui ne se comprend même pas bien'. See also William Evans's contribution to the debate, 'Does Titus really love Bérénice?', in *Romance Notes*, 15 (1974), 454-58; Noemi Hepp, 'Le Personnage de Titus dans *Bérénice*', in *Travaux de linguistique et de littérature*, 18 (1980), 85-96.

[117] Defaux, 'Titus, ou le Héros Tremblant', p. 281.

[118] See Chapter One, p. 67.

[119] Again see my comments in Chapter One, p. 67.

[120] *Bérénice*, 1027-28, 1173. Muratore, *Mimesis and Metatextuality*, p. 59, notes that 'Identities are forged across the continuum of history rather than in isolated immediacy, and consequently, not unlike the repeated behaviour patterns of principal characters, the execution of glorious deeds becomes part of an anticipated scenario, the predictable confirmation of expectation.' This is echoed by Defaux, 'The Case of *Bérénice* ...', p. 217, who emphasises the mimetic nature of Titus's role: 'Scrupulously mimetic, his discourse abounds in sublime sentences, which have all been heard elsewhere. Titus has become the Other, the Model, the captive of that Voice which, within him, speaks for him and in his place.'

[121] Goldmann, pp. 371-72.

[122] Picard, *Oeuvres complètes*, I, p. 458.

[123] Audet and Kovacovic, p. 356.

[124] Christopher Gossip, 'The language of confidence in French Classical Tragedy', in *Voices in the Air: French dramatists and the resources of language*, ed. by John Dunkley and Bill Kirton (Glasgow: University of Glasgow French and German Publications, 1992), pp. 14-28 (p. 23).

[125] One must of course point out that not all critics are as harsh on Antiochus. Laurence Mall, 'Dire le Départ, ou comment faire quelque chose de rien: Etude sur *Bérénice*', in *Neophilogus*, 75 (1991), 41-55 (43, 53) sees him as the most tragic figure of the trio at the denouement: 'le silence qui l'entoure est sans écho, sans amour partagé [...] La parole de séparation implique le rapprochement; le mot de l'absence eternelle, une présence violemmenr affirmée'. For a thorough analysis of the importance and ambiguity of the role of Antiochus within the context of the dramatic action, and a convincing discussion on the way in which he is distinguished from Racine's other rejected lovers, see James Supple's 'The Role of Antiochus in *Bérénice*', in *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 86 (1989), 151-62.

[126] Campbell, 'Playing for Time in *Bérénice*', p. 23, points out that, 'The role of Antiochus has always been singled out as emblematic of the play's immobility. [...] Action for Antiochus is one of suspended activity.' For a development of the sense of time in *Bérénice*, see Georges Poulet, 'Notes sur le temps racinien', in *Etudes sur le temps humain* (Paris: Plon, 1950), pp. 104-21; Sandra Soares and Claude Abraham, 'Time in *Bérénice*', in *Romance Notes*, 15 (1973), 104-09.

[127] *Bérénice*, 21; 20, 21, 783, 785, 865, 1282; 22, 49, 183, 868, 874, 881, 1283, 1300.

[128] E Sienaert's remarks on Antiochus underline this, '*Bérénice* de Jean Racine ou la vocation tragique', in *French Studies in Southern Africa*, 13 (1984), 27-38 (34): 'Reflet de Titus, il essaiera en vain de se trouver une identité propre, d'exister pour lui-même aux yeux des autres [...] mais il ne parvient à aucun moment à devenir agent, il reste confiné dans son rôle de témoin'. It is a view shared by Sussman, pp. 246-47: '... he allows Bérénice to use him as a listening ear, and Titus to use him as a voice. If he did not serve as an extension of both of them mediating in turn the needs of one and the other, he would have no function at all.' Defaux, 'The Case of *Bérénice*', p. 239, puts forward his own interesting slant on the doubling: '... the game of mimetic appropriation that links Antiochus to Titus and transforms him into Titus's double is [...] nothing but the eloquent figure of Racine's own fate and feelings in respect to Corneille'.

[129] Defaux, 'Titus, ou le Héros Tremblant', pp. 284-85, reinforces the Antiochus / Titus doubling by revealing the symmetrical structure of the first two Acts of the play: 'tout, dans ces deux actes d'exposition, en fonction du couple Titus / Antiochus, et [...] le jeu qui génère le sens y est indiscutablement celui des symétries, des parallèles et des oppositions qu'autorise l'existence des doubles'.

[130] Most criticisms of Sartre deal with the problem of identity in the eyes of the Other. See for example Goldthorpe, pp. 84-96; Mary Warnock, *Existentialist Ethics* (London: Macmillan, 1969), pp. 27-28; Chapter five, 'Le thème de l'autre' of Emmanuel Maunier's *Introduction aux existentialismes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946), pp. 109-32; Richard Kearney, *Modern Movements in European Philosophy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp. 62-64.

[131] Henri Peyre, 'The Tragedy of Passion: Racine's *Phèdre*', in *Tragic Themes in Western Literature*, ed. by Cleanth Brooks (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), pp. 77-106.

[132] *Andromaque*, 99, *Britannicus*, 384, 643, *Mithridate*, 993, *Phèdre*, 261, 262, 673, 441, 443, 1122, *Bérénice*, 1500; *Bérénice*, 836, 1227, *Bajazet*, 155.

[133] For example, Narcisse torments Britannicus, 'Elle reçoit les voeux de son nouvel amant' (954); Atalide reveals her fears that Bajazet will yield to Roxane, 'D'un mouvement jaloux je ne suis pas maîtresse. / Ma rivale, accablant mon amant de bienfaits / Opposait un Empire à mes faibles attraits' (378-400).

[134] Atalide talks of the 'fureurs des amants' (687), portraying Bajazet as 'mon amant furieux' (763), and herself as 'une amante éperdue' (1745); Roxane describes herself as 'une amante en furie' (541), a description later echoed by Osmin (1694); Junie refers to Britannicus as an 'amant jaloux' (1070); Antiochus sums up his own acute feelings of dejection and despair when he defines himself as 'un amant sans espoir' (49).

[135] We recall Bérénice's plea for 'Un soupir, un regard, un mot de votre bouche' (576), and Roxane's declaration, 'Je veux que, devant moi, sa bouche et son visage / Me découvrent son coeur sans me laisser d'ombrage' (329-30).

[136] *Britannicus*, 1214, 558; *Bajazet*, 618. Again this is not restricted to the three plays under examination. One frequently finds the language of love disturbingly juxtaposed with the word *objet*: Mithridate talks of 'Un fils, le digne objet de l'amour de son père' (*Mithridate*, 1060); Clytemnestre refers to Hélène as 'Cet objet de tant de jalousie', while Iphigénie describes herself as 'Ce malheureux objet d'une si tendre amour' (*Iphigénie*, 1277, 1640); Phèdre meanwhile seems to accept her downgrading to the status of a *thing*, 'Je suis le seul objet qu'il ne saurait souffrir' (*Phèdre*, 1212).

[137] *Bajazet*, 142, 1532; *Bérénice*, 533, 530.

[138] Apostolidès, 'Image du Père et Peur du Tyran au XVIIe siècle', p. 198.

[139] Sylvie Romanowski, 'The Circuits of Power and Discourse in Racine's *Bajazet*', in *Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature*, 10 (1983), 849-67 (852). See also Timothy Reiss, 'Classicism, the Individual, and Economic Exchange in Racine's *Iphigénie*', in *Esprit Créateur*, 13 (1973), 204-19.

[140] References to *payer*: *Bérénice*, 444, 659, 1144; *Bajazet*, 1328, 1524. References to *prix*: *Britannicus*, 890; *Bérénice*, 521, 662, 1378; *Bajazet*, 726, 812, 834, 866, 1031, 1347, 1478, 1547.

[141] References to *ingrat*: *Britannicus*, 22, 108, 149, 894, 1209, 1258, 1270; *Bérénice*, 960, 1119, 1176, 1190, 1312, 1354, 1357; *Bajazet*, 276, 323, 523, 527, 1089, 1238, 1311, 1355, 1360, 1536.

[142] *Britannicus*, 67, 1196, 87.

[143] *Britannicus*, 195-96, 1234, 1295-96.

[144] *Britannicus*, 839-54; *Bajazet*, 1271.

[145] Charles Péguy cited in *Racine: Bajazet*, ed. by Eugène Berest (Paris: Bordas, 1965), p. 91.

[146] *Bajazet*, 513, 516; 519; 989, 1030, 1522.

[147] *Bérénice*, 519, 444.

[148] *Bérénice*, 1187, 1190, 1196. See above pp. 156-57 for a detailed analysis of the way in which this suicide threat forms a devastating attack on Titus's conscience.

CONCLUSION

At the end of this study, the word 'conclusion' seems inappropriate, given that Racine's presentation of power seems to generate questions rather than answers. Ambiguities and ironies are more frequent than resolutions and certainties. The analyses in the foregoing chapters have shown that it is difficult to impose any one, over-arching view of Racinian power which would not need considerable qualification when considered in the light of the texts themselves. Such approaches lead inevitably to generalisations and over-simplifications which by their very nature fail to do justice to the complexity of the power relations which determine the dramatic movement in the three plays examined.

In Chapter One we saw how Narcisse's simple question to Néron, 'qui vous arrête...?' (460), disguises a fundamental irony. It appears to imply supremacy of control, yet the use of the interrogative form implicitly undermines that supremacy by inviting us to look behind the pageant of power and the many statements of *toute-puissance*. In forcing us to confront the poignant issue of limits, this ostensibly modest question becomes tantalisingly provocative. An examination of the moral and political foundations of power, its nature and operation, and the ambiguity surrounding its locus undermines our traditional assumption that it presupposes an underlying system of order. We discover that power and authority, generally perceived as interrelated, are presented as stark antitheses. Two possibilities seem open. Either authority is eroded by a lack of political or moral legitimacy, which in turn is confounded by the 'brute force' aspect of its operation (*Britannicus*, *Bajazet*), or else, in the opposite process, the insistence upon the moral foundations of power culminates in an ironic reversal, revealing the shocking degradation inherent in authority without power (*Bérénice*). There is an uncertainty and confusion over where power actually lies, that is, a dramatisation of the discrepancy between real and imagined power. The resulting 'double vision' merely stresses the ambiguous presentation still further: as well as being challenged in terms of political and/or moral legitimacy, we find that the acting ruler

cannot, in the end, be said to wield any effective political power. Ultimately the view of power that emerges is neither positive nor simple.

In Chapter Two we observed how the ruler's desire to establish an erotic identity involves the attempted fusion of two conflicting domains: power and love. Through Racine's use of language we saw how the roles of ruler and lover simultaneously concur and jar. Paradoxically, these two roles seem to merge only to elucidate their irreconcilability. Closely linked to the ruler / lover pairing is the political / sexual focus. This offers a mirror image of the ruler / lover dichotomy: while the latter dramatises the workings of power in the realm of love, the former dramatises the workings of erotic power in the field of politics. In the end, however, we saw how the brazen statements of power we find sprinkled throughout the plays are further undermined in this chapter. Because power ceases to function within a closed political system, its confines are relentlessly spotlighted. The ruler / lover dichotomy focuses sharply on the limited nature of power: the crossing of boundaries ultimately and ironically only accentuates them even more sharply.

In Chapter Three we saw what the power structure would conceal, that is, how in their relations with others those in power are subject to the same anxieties and fears as those who are not. The first section (Hall of Mirrors) began by questioning the established practice of emphasising the spoken word in Racine's theatre. The evidence produced, however, showed the extent to which discourse is ambiguous and inadequate. Characterised by deceit and betrayal, it gives rise to suspicion, tension and conflict. By focusing instead on the *non-dit*, this section demonstrates how an apparently non-dramatic activity becomes the fuel in the engine driving the tragic action forward. Since language ceases to express thought and the truth of the Other's feelings lies hidden in his mind, the struggle to discern and control the Other's thought-process becomes paramount. The conflictual relationships which result are seen to mirror those we find in Sartre's *Huis Clos*, where an endless process of frustrated seeking is played out.

In the second section of this chapter (Merry-Go-Round), we saw how the quest for control over hearts and minds is dramatised by techniques of manipulation and suppression. It is once more apparent that language, the ultimate symbol of our bond with others, accentuates the alienation and discord by establishing oppressive and repressive relationships. Confessional discourse, stripped of any underlying moral code, becomes a twisted means of gaining ascendancy over the Other. In a series of alarming ironies which confound our traditional perception of the truth, such discourse provides a sublime example of the ambiguous function of language within the tragedies. In addition, if the attempt to control the Other's dying thought, together with the way in which the spectacle of violence and death is employed as a technique to bully others into submission and to suppress unorthodox thoughts, stress the urgency and intensity of the battle for this ultimate power, then the question of identity serves to underline the implacable freedom of the Other and hence the utter futility of the attempts to capture his conscience. The language of love is one final reminder that there can be no respite. It merely illustrates that the characters seem doomed to reel round on the infernal merry-go-round, in an endless cycle of desire and frustration, power and impotence. Finally, the analyses in this chapter demonstrated both the complexity of the fierce battle for control of the inner world, and the ironic reversals of power which ensue.

The examination of relations between the characters of these tragedies from the Sartrean perspective of *pour autrui* thus further continues that undermining of the structure of political relationships which we saw in Chapters One and Two. Power relationships spring up regardless of rank. However, the placing of Racine's theatre in the light of Sartrean thought also offers a counterpoint to those who would confine the world of Racine to the seventeenth century. A process of *rapprochement* was initiated by Starobinski with his analysis of the *regard*. This thesis has also shown, particularly through examination of the unequivocal tensions underpinning Racine's use of language, that he has modern resonances. The inability to exert control over other

minds, the discovery of a domain that cannot be controlled, has a dauntingly familiar ring for modern audiences and readers.

It has self-evidently not been the concern of this thesis to 'update' Racine. On the other hand, what is constantly revealing is the extent to which the plays we have examined portray the kind of anxieties which characterise our relations with others in our own century, and by the same token anticipate what Sartre was later to dramatise in *Huis Clos*. The points of comparison with Sartre are one modest contribution to the general thesis that Racinian theatre transcends the period in which it was produced. Without wishing to deny the interest of the many works which have sought to see Racinian tragedy as an emanation of the society and ideology of the playwright's own time, this thesis has attempted to show that his plays express something fundamental about human relationships which cannot be fixed to one particular time or place. Perhaps the only certainty is that Racine generates questions which are as relevant and challenging in the twentieth century as they were in the France of Louis XIV.

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